

# NORIA MABASA



Like her fellow Venda artist, Dr Seoka, Noria Mabasa dreamed her way into realising her creativity. Trained in the traditional methods of making pottery, her first attempts at figuration came in 1974, at the age of 36. 'I get sick, so I am sleeping. In my dream that old lady came to me and showed me what I must do and told me I must make just a little one.' That first small sculpture Mabasa modelled from clay was of a young girl hitting a drum. Others followed. 'Just small girls. My sculpture is not so much for men.

'I didn't want to sell them because I



UNTITLED  
CLAY, PAINT  
HT: APPROX. 80 CM

was shy. I put them nice in a big paper bag, and my cousin she came, she sell all those little ones. She brings back R20. I say, "You see!" Then I'm making sculptures every day.'

Mabasa lives in Tshino, in the troubled bantustan of Venda which received its 'independence' from the South African government in 1979. Before that, political authority had been vested in the traditional chiefs and headmen, who in turn were accountable to some degree to the people. The constitution given by the Nationalist





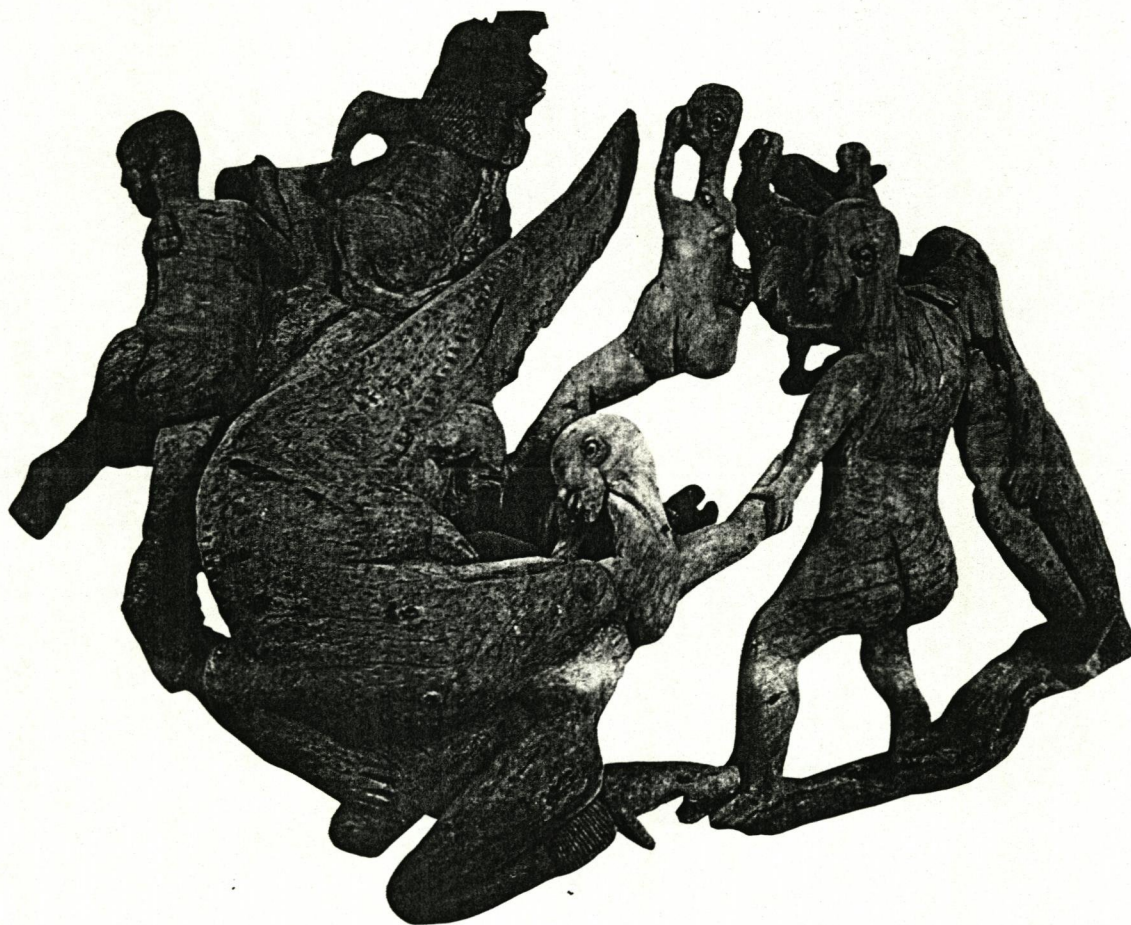
government to the fledgling state changed all that. Corruption and nepotism have become rife. The large and hitherto unseen tribe of bureaucrats, politicians, and the military which the new order brought to Venda, caught Mabasa's attention, and she first became known to the art world for her ironic and amusing painted clay figures of this new breed.

ing, Mabasa went down to the river and found the log she had dreamed about on the bank. Getting it home with some trouble, she began at once to work it, knowing already from her dream what the form was to be.

Mabasa's dreams were to lead her on from piece to piece. She is an intensely dedicated worker, and although physically slight, seems undaunted by mas-

sive pieces of wood, attacking them with sureness and vigour. She works at home, her studio one of a small complex of round thatched huts which surround a central courtyard of packed earth.

*Carnage II* is an extraordinary and powerful piece in which six people, a snake, a lamb, a lion and a crocodile surge forward locked in combat. The



But it is through her wood sculpture that Mabasa has really come into her full power as an artist. Wood carving is traditionally men's work in Venda, but once again Mabasa's dreams showed her the way. 'In 1976, I am sleeping in the morning. I see the river Luvuba, I see the wood rolling in the river like this . . . a big wood. I asked someone, "Is it yours?" He said "no." On awaken-



tensions are perfectly balanced, the strength of the loosely worked forms and the purity of line are breathtaking. With this seminal piece, the visionary Mabasa emerged as a major figure in South African art.

▲ CARNAGE II  
WOOD  
79 x 197 x 219 CM