

Ntu-coe 3 006 | ~â\200\224gol bs {

A j@urneys: fram Fondwe ta Naledai Sthatian

It wage a penniless Thomas Nkuna who arrived from Venda at  
733.

Pe

Fuba Academy (Fubar Federated Union of Black Artiste) in  
Lack of funds prevented him from enrolling as an art student  
immediately.

Tramags Rulani Nkuna wae born in the village \*of Nierere near  
Sibagsa on 24 Seotember 1999. He was the second child of Albert  
and the late Modjadji Nkuna. In hig pre-sehool years he took  
part im puerile activities such as Swimming in the pools of  
the river which flows theough the village and gathering clay  
fram. these spots ta model a variety of ihages. Soon Lk was  
apparent that his clay figures were excephionally goaded. Only  
whem Thomas attended the Fondwe Primary School did he realize  
that he and his friends were producing â\200\234ark? in their pastime.

At gscehool his sketches drew the attention of his teachers  
who did nat always approve of his preference for drawing  
instead of the other echool subjects. He soon devised a way in  
whichâ\200\231 he could sketch unobtrusively cinder his desk. His  
childhood pastime became a passion and he was almost set oon  
hig way to become an artigh when in 1982 the government of,  
Venda awarded him a scholarship to pursue art at Rorkeâ\200\231s Drift  
Ark Centre in Natal.

Unfortunately far Thomas. the fine arts section of the  
Rorkeâ\200\231s Drift Art Centre had to close an that year because it  
did not generate income, This disappointment together with the  
French Governmentâ\200\231 s failure ta secure the three year bursary  
which he hac been pramisedd from September 1991 lefh a slur an

his short artistic career. He was brutally murdered an i?

Dube

body was identified by friends

government mort

Thame Neuna held his. first solo exhibition at the

of the Market Theatre. In 1992 he had

exhibitions at Fuba Academy in

final. He showed a keen interest in the work of South

African painters of the older generation, especially Pieter

Wenning (1898-1978) and Mag 2 Laubser. He made a

painting by Wenning in the

application of marks gained

in 1980 after an analysis of the relationship

between blank space and mark in that painting of Wenning. Et

idiosyncratic imagery

he embarked on his artistic career in 1990,

and oils which he showed on the occasion

exhibition in the Market Theatre bore the mark

of a work which was about to succumb

to township scenes. One of the learned visitors to the show

sighed, "Where are the industrial sites"? She did not perceive

that Nkuna's pastels which depicted the unkempt periphery of

gardens at railway stations, the blandness of

hostel where he lived and the trains were the

whence the dusty plants tapped human energy in monotonous job

creation. Every painterly stroke in that exhibition portrayed

existence of natural growth and systematic, pollution

which has become

1

Geuvirce 25 A record of his journey from the

of Lettie siding of Fondweil which he painted in rich

oy

are) mu  
the time of â\200\230s first jobrhunbing ain Johann  
i ook

at

ABPGAM Ce

weletter

ta the Ndaleni

had found out othat

le, made netic he 2 the arh cour

imple el or  
i@ known was ie

ferred â\200\234to the: Trar

Mabopane. }

niriphiri Haigh â\200\234heol in i984 where he Â†studied  
uiciaud 9, read about Fuba. Academy: an  
A dream was awakened. Tt came true when

mhudies there under the

Â» the lather

ta enrol as a: full

netant ofor him tk

job and gave money for his future studies: "Once again, I walked the streets of Johannesburg throughout the day and slept in a train at night. Eventually, I got a job at. Booyens and accommodation at the New Canada Hotel" (Fuba Newsletter, June/July 1991). It was at this time that he befriended the commercial artist Lovemore Sibanda who helped Nkuna to obtain 3068 as a signwriter. According to Sihlali these assignments proved valuable experience and gave Nkuna a deft hand when it came to mural painting.

On completion of Nkuna's studies at Fuba, Sihlali set themselves the difficult task to record on the spot in watercolour the Bustle and movement in the daily lives of the street vendors of Kliptown. The stalwart Sihlali, an excellent water-colourist, felt obliged to introduce Nkuna to the street dynamica, of plein air painting in Soweto. It was 1986 May: Friday-

what Nkuna was urged to in the Newtown precinct where Fuba

i

Academy was situated. This endeavour did not imply pitching

{

your eagle and start painting, but a sequence of negotiations with the vendors to win their approval. To secure positions from where Sihlali and Nkuna could record business on Freedom Square and adjoining streets also involved settlement in cash. During the course of their Kliptown painting excursion, Sihlali recalls that one of Nkuna's paintings was destroyed because he had painted the "shadow" of a passerby, implying that Nkuna had captured the guy's spirit by portraying Khim and therefore could harm him. Nkuna had already experienced the

senseless destruction of a portfolio of his work when the

sefield hostel where he resided in 1989 was raided

by gangsters.

ing in Section

Pye Ty

Nikun

backdrano. Dt also emphasises: the r  
fibalaity of the artist

who unarmed but for the

shiek packet

"My aim was to doacument everything  
around m@. DBodidnâ\200\231t want to cadd ar reduce what: 7

NRunae one ocday @yewi tr killing on a railway  
station. AS soon asâ\200\231 he was safe he recerded what he sawâ\200\231 in the  
pencil .and charcoal drawing. Longdate  
by people armed with shie

commutators.. For

of defence

Wielding killers ane can find

ris in the earlier .accoun

been denmicted by dabulani Ntuli (1889-1968). Ntulaâ\200\231s

regimented form af combat..Nkuna on. the other

ee

hand generates

~ arich makes

form of

arts

pre

an cantemporary urban canfli

SEM

Tradition Exhibition, at â\200\234the Johanne

ouncdec d Nkuna and other Fuba students ta

leaC ame more praminent Â«in their

Sihlaliöhe

cid as a part-

& landrover. and

is

=

i

ia

bie:

-

time student at Fuba &



laws were in if90 Nkuna was credieved

i-treatment which he Rad often

i a AS

are ota poiec Leeeccoancerning the Ten

Commandmentee ai drawing and a painting. In-both cases

clearly read the commandments and the phrase

Sin owith a praminent cue

fark aâ\202-as Counterpart. The imagery

af chains and the coils of @ serpent together with the written

texts propounds that LS rewarded by the Lesuing of Laws  
and restriction. But haw does one. then account for. the doubt

which ifs implicated by the questianm mark? The latter echoes  
the colle of the snake sa that the punctuation mark relates toa

the gerpent. correspondence refer ta the Venda snake  
symbolism of ren@wal and therefore doubts the Mosaic  
regstedetions upheld by many South Africans who enforced the  
pass laws oan atl ah citizens? The Claustrophobic: nature of  
both the cdrawing anc the painting respond to the imagery af  
Helen Sibidai.

NEuina om hig journey freom Fondwe to Naledi was fully aware  
of the innerstapes <in manowhich fifts â\200\234tangibility if

predictiang permaondtians and dreams. A drawing of â\200\234a sangama -  
seer were ahowes hig fascination with the traditional  
sciences. Here the: unspoken.word finds language When the

gsangoana interprets far his patient the Secret language in the  
positian of the bonesâ\200\231 in frant af him.

ae

bee

HE

i

Cir journey Nkunma twice paid visits to Broederstradam  
where Nhe participated in the activities af the Thupels

workehopee LYS] and 2992. Sance the upliftment of the pags

laws Tham Nkuna blossomed ag an artists though he was mot

nominated for any of the prizes on the Vita Art Now Exhibition

(19919, he heldâ\200\231 his ground next to: the predictable nominees

ct  
}

and his three pastels were nmobticed. Noa longer did he have  
present the afficial doacument (he did moet have one) that  
stated that he could etay in Johannesburg. He wag free toa move

withaQut police harassment and paint whatever garden or scene

took His fancy. In his wark one sensed a maturity.

Fags laws were repeabed and artists could move freely. Yer  
Thomas Nkuna, shartly before hie death, was reprimanded by his  
arkist frienda for rendering the landscape of Broederaastroam at  
the cost of â\200\234experimentingâ\200\235 when he participated in the  
September 1992 Thupelo workshop. Nkuna admired the plein air

Painting of.Claude Monet (1840-1926)..and. he -lost â\200\230himself ih

pure landscape painting. Whilet his fellow artis Were  
expressing themselves according ta their experiments, Thomas

made peace with the primordial mather. A tarred road

punttuated by powerlines became his GShyx flowing through @r

along grass and undergrowth. In some instances im his last

pagtele the dry seagan taok on the appearance of a devastated  
land whitch uahods the wasteland of the drawings of Wilkiam  
Kenbtbreidag (1955-y.

By September 1992, Nkuna undeniably Aad reached maturity: of  
expression. His answer to his fellow artistsâ\200\231. calls for  
experimental painting was an enigmatic mixed media painting  
simulating his earlier selfportrait of 1998. Once more the  
GFOSss occupies a praminent position in the painting. He cuts  
up ane of his watercolour landscapes (the cross he was to  
bear?) and pastes it in a cruciform against a rural scene  
where a strange mimicry is enacted. The latter is reminiscent

of the warfaring men who appear in some of his mixed media

paintings of the late eighties. Above the cross appears the

menacing configuration of a and. a hand g

ticulating

of the teeth in the cranium is real-vand this

redemption.

a ym by the incorporal

of chinaberries embedded in the lower part of the painting.

rilmer conform to the

zinting which de  
sek of conventional aesthetics one was taught at art school,  
â\200\234S a@quish.

haunted by same

Other enigmatic Occurrences at the time are Nkunaâ\200\231

ift

â\200\234%

of two landscapes: 20 September 1992 and 24

September 1992. He was murdered on the 17 September. Both

lane could have been attempts at reconciling. lane

painting with the Thupela workshopâ\200\231s call for experiments. Yet

ect both em to reflect on an innerscape: the

unknown? region Nkuna was to enter. In the painting of 24

which he would have beached his

September, the day

birthday, two figures are wading away from the onlooker into  
of water

an inner

ew. The couple image (death and rebirth)  
could be a hint at the other realm Nkuna was to enter.

NRUMA WAS he carried out at the

exploring in the landscape

last Thupelo workshop he attended the confluence of road and  
would naturally slip into the water

Therefore the body is

and the journey takes on another dimension where the route from  
Fondwe to Naledi is irrelevant.

ines

ne

% PAPE