

BRITISH MUSEUM – ABSA SUPPORTS CREDO MUTWA

A collection of more than 5 000 South African artefacts, some more than 130 years old, lies unseen in the British Museum of Mankind Depository in London.

Credo Mutwa visited the Museum in December 1996 to help identify some of these priceless pieces.

Embedded in these artefacts are stories that contain our origins, the essence of our history, our present and our future.

To retrieve what has been forgotten, it is necessary to reactivate this "database" which was once so active in the minds of the people.

Credo Mutwa believes that the identification of these items could set South Africans dreaming again, for these stories, which were forgotten by the people, are indisputably pointers towards increased knowledge and new areas of investigation.

Through partial sponsorship during the preliminary investigation, ABSA has contributed towards the attempt at converting these historical values into contemporary knowledge.

Some of the items in the Depository are being reproduced by the African Cultural Heritage Trust and will be on display during the ABSA exhibit.

CREDO MUTWA MEETS WITH ABSA IN LONDON

During a recent visit to London, Credo Mutwa, whose trip was sponsored by ABSA, met with Peter Donnelly, general manager of ABSA Bank in London, to discuss the forthcoming exhibit planned in South Africa at the ABSA Gallery.

Mr Donnelly was fascinated by Mutwa's interpretation of Africa's symbols, which will comprise the first exhibit of its kind in March 1997.

Credo Mutwa will be returning to the United Kingdom in April 1997 to discuss various aspects of African culture at a private gathering hosted by ABSA.

The London office is temporarily housing artefacts which will be on exhibit in the UK early in 1997.

ABOUT THE ABSA "LIVING SYMBOLS OF AFRICA" EXHIBITION

Featuring an assemblage of approximately 70 framed works of art, **The ABSA Living Symbols of Africa Exhibition** combines stunning artwork and handicraft with illuminating explanations and detailed captions to explore the fascinating culture, history and psychology that lie behind African symbols and the symbol system.

African symbols have been stripped of their context and need to be discovered afresh. This unique exhibit will deepen the understanding and appreciation of symbols and their place in art, literature and the complex workings of the human psyche.

The object of this exhibition is to convey an aspect of African symbolism which, although as important as the textbook signs around us, relates to the inner psychological and spiritual worlds of the indigenous people of South Africa. Within this inner world a symbol can represent some deep intuitive wisdom which eludes direct expression, but which has implicit moral values, made visible in order that they may be a constant reminder to the wearer or beholder.

The aim of the exhibition is to respond to and stimulate this interest and, drawing upon primitive African psychology, spirituality, anthropology and history, provide western viewers with easy access to the symbolic world and the symbolic vocabulary of the African culture.

ABOUT SYMBOLOGY

Symbols are profound expressions of human nature. They have occurred in all cultures at all times, and have accompanied the development of civilisation. However, symbols are more than cultural artefacts: in their correct context, they still speak powerfully to us, simultaneously addressing our intellect, emotions and spirit. Their study is the study of humanity itself.

Symbols are representations of reality - consciously made and recognisable echoes of objects, actions and concepts in the world around us.

Because of an intuitive awareness of the part symbols have played in the lives of the peoples of South Africa, and the way in which they resonate with our emotions, people tend to be drawn to symbols and readily develop an interest in them.

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THE WORLD OF SYMBOLS

Symbols, unlike written words, are not limited by practical concerns; their abundance and variety are constrained only by the limits of the human imagination. They appear in every conceivable form - in pictures, metaphors, sounds, gestures, odours, myths and personifications - and draw on all sources, material and non-material, for inspiration. Jung argued that symbols constitute a universal idiom. Abstract shapes, which arise directly from the unconscious, are indeed encountered worldwide.

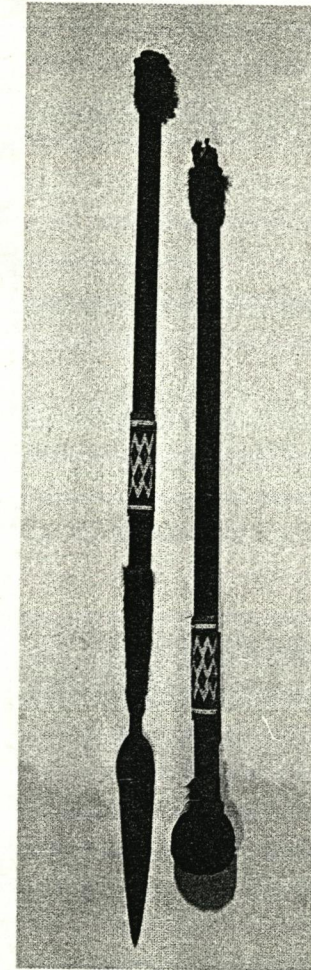
Symbols are more than just historical and cultural signposts. They help us towards an understanding of our own minds. The entries on the following pages in this catalogue explore the meanings, both esoteric and exoteric, of symbols. Representing a sample of the huge array of symbolic forms, they provide an entry into this fascinating world.

SYMBOLISM IN ART

Artefacts of all civilisations bear witness to the intimate relationship between religion and symbolism. Symbolism has continued to play an important role in art because of its close links with creativity itself. Both symbolism and creativity stem from unconscious processes, and some of the symbolic themes in visual and practical art are not apparent to the artists themselves until an outsider later analyses their work.

SYMBOLISM IN WAR

Weapons were often adorned with abstract forms in the belief that the intrinsic power of the symbol could be harnessed.

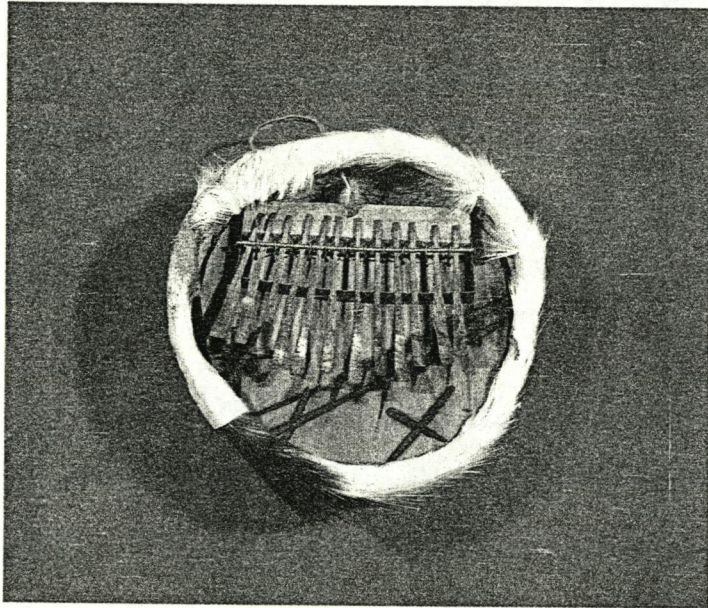


CEREMONIAL ZULU SPEAR AND KNOBKIERIE

These items are synonymous with Zulu life. At the beginning of the 1800s when Shaka Zulu moulded the nation, the people already had primitive foundries, smelted their own iron ore and made their own spearheads. A grisly legend has it that they used human blood in the forging process to improve the quality of the steel. A traditional ceremonial spear of this nature would be used to slaughter the sacrificial goat. The knobkierie is a symbol of power.

SYMBOLISM IN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Music symbolised the order and harmony behind creation, and it was natural to make use of music to invoke the gods.



MBIRA

A mbira was originally made by the Mbire people, a Sotho group who crossed the Zambezi River in the early 14th century. It consists of a calimba with a wooden base fitted into a calabash. It is hand-held and played with both thumbs. The keys are cut to different lengths for different sounds. A mbira is a personal instrument made, played and tuned by the owner for his enjoyment.

SYMBOLISM IN ANIMALS

Animals were seen as a source of wisdom and power, because they were privy to the secrets of nature in a way that humanity, hampered by intellect, was not.



PRAISE SONG TO THE ELEPHANT

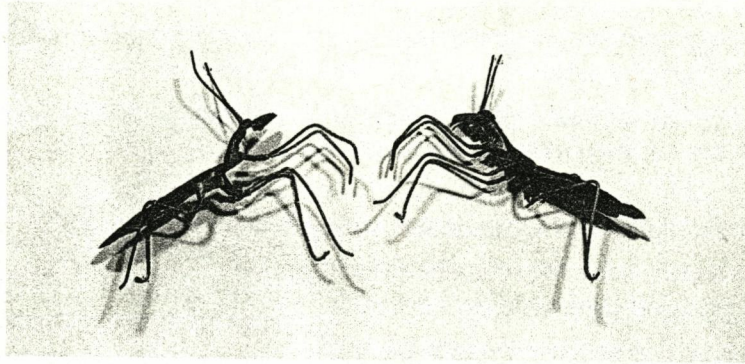
An original oil painting by Pretoria artist. Fred Rossouw, based on Credo Mutwa's *Praise Song to the Elephant* featured in his book ***Isilwane - The Animal**.

The painting features the elephant symbolised as "the angry one" **Uyizulu**, symbolised by the thunder of the skies. Depicted in the painting are the various aspects of life threatening the existence of the elephant, "the King of the Dawn".

In subtle artistic symbology, Rossouw captures Mutwa's words: "Be angry, Angry One! You, who are hunted by those who fear you. You are the Lord of the Trees. You are the Master of the Valleys. Shwele, forgive the people who kill you, not knowing whom they kill, who destroy you not knowing whom they destroy, who disrespect you, not knowing to whom they are speaking. Elephant, if I had my own way, no weapon would ever be lifted against you."

LESSER CREATURES

Insects, whose behaviour and life cycles were poorly understood by the ancients, developed particularly rich symbolic associations.



PRAISE SONG TO THE PRAYING MANTIS ***THE INSECT WHICH MAY NOT BE KILLED***

The praying mantis is considered to be one of the most sacred creatures in Southern Africa and may not be killed by anyone under any circumstances. In ancient times when women ruled many black tribes and communities, their symbol was the praying mantis, because it is the one insect that proves, or so they believed, the superiority of the female creature over the male.



PRAISE SONG TO THE TORTOISE ***THE ANCIENT ONE***

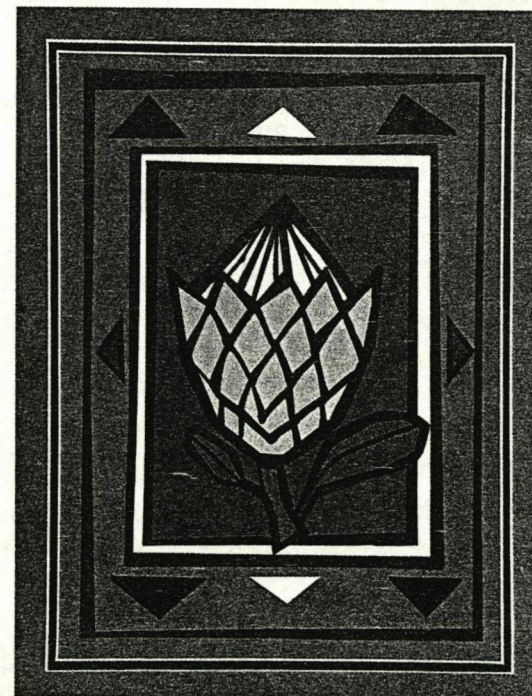
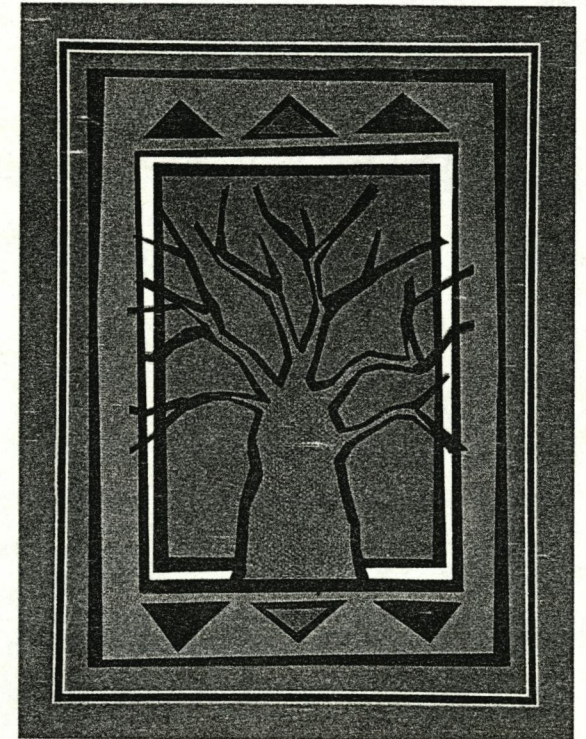
You are the one who carries your own hut on your back
The rain and the wind do not frighten you!
The sea and the sand do not frighten you!
You are the one who is always moving
You are the one who lives forever
You are the one who is blessed by the ancestors
You are the one who teaches us about the stars!

SYMBOLISM IN TREES AND FLOWERS

Trees are one of humanity's most potent symbols. They are the embodiment of life. Flowers are universal symbols of youth and vitality, while plants represent the cycle of life (fertility, death and rebirth).

THE BAOBAB ***SYMBOL OF NUTRITION AND LIFE***

Africans believe that the baobab is the oldest tree in the world and that when it becomes extinct the end of the world is not far away.



THE PROTEA ***SYMBOL OF PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING***

ABSA's purpose and mission, cardinal to its business philosophy and supported by staff at all levels, is as follows:

"To be partners in growing South Africa's prosperity, by being the leading financial services group serving all our stakeholders."

This purpose and mission was given to Credo Mutwa and he designed an African symbol for us. This design was given to Gladys Xaba at the Katlehong Art Centre and she wove the tapestry.

The meaning of the symbol, "We stand secure and create a strong foundation and great future for our family," which is represented on the cover of this book, is as follows:

The pestle represents a strong foundation. Below, the mountains (tomorrow), trees (growth), water (eternity), and sun (energy), represent a great future. The unbroken circle around the kraal and person reflect the security of a family. The triangular gate protects this space.

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Consultant: Art & Functions, Logistical Support Services, ABSA Group
and

Mass Media Marketing

Printed by: ABSA Graphic Services

DR D C CRONJÉ, GROUP CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF ABSA,
CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO A COCKTAIL RECEPTION
AND AN EXHIBITION OF LIVING SYMBOLS OF AFRICA,
INSPIRED BY CREDO MUTWA.

DATE

TUESDAY 18 MARCH 1997

TIME

17:45 FOR 18:15

VENUE

ABSA GALLERY
GROUND FLOOR
ABSA TOWERS
160 MAIN STREET
JOHANNESBURG

DRESS

DAY SUIT

RSVP

CECILE LOEDOLFF
AT (011) 350-5793

OR

ESTELLE STONE

AT (011) 350-4644

BEFORE 10 MARCH 1997

GALLERY HOURS

MONDAY TO FRIDAY 10:00-16:00

THE EXHIBITION WILL CONTINUE UNTIL 15 APRIL 1997

PARKING CAN BE ARRANGED ON REQUEST (MAP ENCLOSED)



This beautifully beaded breast-plate was once worn by a great observer of the stars. The 12 diamond shapes represent the 12 months of the year, the red ones depicting those months of the year during which war was allowed to take place. Historically wars could only be declared during allocated months, and this is so even today.

You will observe that in South Africa in the last 40 years or so, violence only erupted during certain months and not in others. It is a well-known fact that the riots of 1976 erupted in June, and this was no coincidence. It is believed that there are certain months which are sacred to war, certain months sacred to peace and certain months which are sacred to celebration and ploughing. This tradition still persists in Africa to this very day.

On this breast-plate are also little clusters of colours, each one a little triangle. These are important aspects of the stars which the astronomer must look out for, and which the watcher of the stars must make it his or her duty to keep in mind whenever he or she is looking at the stars.

ABOUT CREDO MUTWA

True to his first name, **Vusamazulu** (awakener of the Zulus), and as a spiritual leader dedicated to caring for his people and preserving their cultural traditions, Mutwa has travelled extensively throughout the subcontinent and has become an acknowledged cultural historian, philosopher, mystic and visionary as well as an authority on traditional healing. He has also travelled widely beyond Africa – to Asia, Europe, the USA, South America, and most recently Peru and London – attending conferences on traditional healing/shamanism, or as a guest of philosophers, therapists and creative artists around the world.

This multi-talented man is also an artist, sculptor and author and believes that his profession encourages him to pursue art, writing and all forms of communication between human beings, enabling him to communicate with people at all levels and in all possible ways.

In the 1960s he wrote his major work, **Indaba, my Children**, reprinted internationally and translated into several European languages, followed by **Africa is my Witness** and **Let not my Country Die**.

Marginalised during the dark days of apartheid, Mutwa lived quietly for some years with his community of artists in Mafikeng. Now he is asserting his role of cultural historian and emerging as a critical source of knowledge of the cultures, traditions and beliefs that shaped the lives of ancient African people.

Mutwa lives at Shamwari Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape where a traditional healing centre is being built as a first phase of a cultural village complex dedicated to the preservation and promotion of African culture.

As an authority on the history, lore, legends and fables of tribes throughout the subcontinent, Credo Mutwa excels in story-telling, believing that the tales he learned from the elders gave direction to his life and motivated him to further his knowledge of his people's past and to share that learning.

He is aware of the literary importance and philosophic value of traditional folktales and is committed to preserving, promoting and reviving the ancient art of story-telling. In his own words:

"... there are names that have been forgotten, there are memories that have been swept away by the dust of events. We must bring the dream back to our souls and the memory back to our eyes.

In the ancient tradition of our people, we not only used medicine to heal, we not only used the gentle word and the even gentler touch, we also used Indaba - the story."

Credo Mutwa describes himself as "an ordinary man". In fact, he is an **extraordinary** person vested with much knowledge and exceptional wisdom; a gentle, sensitive man striving to be ethical in everything he does, considering himself accountable to the natural and supernatural worlds and also to the ancestral spirits of his people.