ART, A MAGICAL MOTOR

Keeping People Together

SOKHAYA CHARLES NKOSI'S

PAINTINGS * COLLAGES * LINOCUTS * DRAWINGS

Bongiwe Hlekiso

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Foreword:
Dr. Same Mdluli

Editor:
Bridget Thompson

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Abdulcadir Ahmed Said

This monograph is based on interviews with Nkosi conducted by the writer in January 2022.
All quotes in the text are the words of Sokhaya Charles Nkosi unless otherwise attributed.

ART AND UBUNTU TRUST

Art and Ubuntu Trust Series: Artist's Speak

ART – A MAGICAL MOTOR, Keeping People Together
Paintings * Collages * Linocuts * Drawings

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Collage – details unknown

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Foreword

by Dr. Same Mdluli

In 2019 when I curated the exhibition, *A Black Aesthetic*, which was centered on the Fort Hare University Art collection comprising works by Black South African artists, there were three works by Charles Nkosi included in the exhibition. One of his works titled *Soweto at Dawn*, 1979 was originally featured on the cover of the publication, *Images of Man: South African Black Art and Artists* by EJ De Jager (1992), one of the few publications which feature the works from the collection. This work has become iconic in not only how it depicted the township landscape but also how in its imagining of the township there is an implied subversion of the representation of what a township is, both ideologically as well as pictorially. In some sense the work personifies the artist who created it in both its character as well as its metaphorical and literal meaning.

Bra Charles as he is affectionately known to many, was born on the 27th January 1949 in Durban, Kwa Zulu Natal to a musician father and a nurse mother. He has been living in Soweto since the 1980s and for most of those years he has been a teacher and the head of visual art at the *FUNDA Art Center*, which was established in 1984. During this time, he continued practicing as an artist and produced works ranging from painting to sculpture, prints and assemblage. His work is informed by his immediate environment, and this has influenced his aesthetic in particular ways which are discussed in this monograph. His work often incorporates found objects within traditional mediums such as painting and sculpture in which he creates assemblages that depict remnants of the township and its characteristics. At times it is also quite abstract, flat and insistent on being two dimensional. Although the township has influenced and informed Nkosi's work in particular ways, like other Black artists, his work has in many ways refused the label of 'township art' precisely because of its limitations in describing the complex existential reality of what the township represents to the Black psyche, which appears to be a concern in his work.

Nkosi thus represents a cohort of artists whose works do not necessarily form part of the 'official' South African art canon and whose work and practice as a teacher and mentor require further study particularly in relation to the role he has played in establishing and managing art centers in the townships during the early 1970s and 1980s until his retirement from *Funda Art Centre* in 2020. Although his work has featured in many exhibitions, books and other projects, like many other Black artists from his generation, the lack of theorisation and analysis of his work has limited a broader understanding of his overall practice and how this has impacted a broader lexicon of art practice from specific regions in South Africa. His teaching at *FUNDA* is an integral part of his artistic practice and raises a larger concern around the lack of documentation in the activities of the art centers in the townships and how the lack of this archive has created an indominable gap in the historical account of South Africa's art history. Bra Charles is instrumental in how the art center has survived instability, lack of funding and resources but also in how it has shaped and carved an identity for itself in the larger South African art historical narrative.

Bra Charles is someone one could refer to as a 'walking encyclopedia' in terms of his breadth of knowledge on the history and trajectory of Black South African artists. His institutional memory of the various 'art movements' which emanated from the kinds of socio-political conditions that affected the township reality, is in many ways tied to the way in which he embraces oral traditions in both his work and account of history. Nkosi's way of accounting for South Africa's art history thus highlights aspects that require a reconsideration of ways of looking at the telling of art history. That art history should perhaps be referred to as art histories given the multiplicity of views in how it was and is experienced by many during apartheid and in the 'post-apartheid' context. His role as a teacher and mentor to a generation of artists who have gone on to influence other artists is not only indicative of his legacy in art but also speaks to a particular kind of contribution to art making in the context of institutions with historical significance, such as that of the *Funda Art Center.* This monograph is an important step towards this, as it will contribute to the scholarly development of research centered on artists such as Nkosi whose lifetime's work has impacted many.

Ezekiel Budeli prepares paint for a workshop – watched by bra Charles (Ahmed 2010)

Introduction

by Bridget Thompson

19 years since I first met Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, who I know as Bra' Charles, I can only say that my life has been enriched by his humour, his generosity, his quiet, yet visionary guidance of our work at the *Art and Ubuntu Trus*t and the magic he creates in art workshops.

As head of *Funda Centre Visual Art* department for 35 years, he was at the coalface of art education in Soweto. From Soweto, through his former students and his own engagements with a wide community of artists and art teachers, his impact stretched across the country most especially in black communities. As the *Art and Ubuntu Trust* we met him in 2006 and then in response to his urging that we do something about the crisis more generally in art education in South Africa, we invited Bra Charles, along with other artists, to run art education workshops during *Funda* holiday times in peri-urban and rural areas of all the provinces of South Africa. It was this that allowed me to bear witness to his inspirational Ubuntu-based art teaching methods, which were thoroughly supported by his visionary development of methodologies and approaches suitable to the occasion and the context.

It's not possible to mention Bra Charles in this context without also mentioning Ezekiel Budeli (1965-2021), a former student who became his stalwart co-teacher and whom we also met in 2006. After the crisis, caused by the occupation of the premises by 'veterans', erupted at *Funda* in 2008 Ezekiel stayed by his side in deep solidarity as they weathered the center's disruption. Somehow, without salaries and materials, even sometimes without electricity and together with Tumelo Mokapakgosi, they kept art education going at *Funda* and were the only department which never stopped providing classes. In 2021, shortly before Ezekiel passed away, they facilitated the center's resurrection by rallying former art students to contribute to an auction which raised substantial funds for *Funda*'s ongoing work.

Ezekiel complemented Bra Charles' visionary leadership with meticulous preparation and unassuming practical guidance in the workshops. He was himself an artist of great skill, depth, and social commitment (see for example his work in the CCAC collection). Their collective, learner-centered art educational praxis, which - along with input from other artists including Grace Tshikuvhe, Avhashoni Mainganye, Lionel Davis and the late Peter Clarke - was fundamental to the success of the exhibition Widening the Circle, in the Spirit of Mancoba, representing art from every province of South Africa and exhibited in leading galleries in 6 provinces.

Ezekiel Budeli prepares paint for a workshop

Being the administrator in the background of the art making workshops led by Bra Charles allowed me to observe the atmosphere he creates. Usually starting with a warm, human and inspiring story often interspersed with a joke or two, he makes participants feel relaxed and at ease. His enthusiasm for the tasks and Ubuntu worldview generates a communal energy, sense of solidarity and focus so that the participants produce in a spirit bubble of joy in creativity and outdo their own expectations.

In our skill-ravaged society where, as artist Lionel Davis attests, you can find that a child does not know how to use a pair of scissors, Bra Charles is alert to the simplest things that will empower Arts and Culture teachers who are often also deprived of practical experience. He devised, for example, a simple use of stencils that would allow teachers to easily deliver some dimension of the practical side of their art teaching responsibilities, all the while ensuring the teachers enjoyed doing it themselves.

He shares his great love of colour as exemplified in his own work, by announcing it as you first encounter him in a marvelously patterned and colourful shirt. In teaching situations you can observe him devising many imaginative, seemingly playful ways to work with colour which result in kaleidoscopes, symbolically enhancing one's appreciation of the everchanging patterns of human life.

As we circled the country from province to province I learnt the meaning of isivivane (the placing of a stone on the memory pile to show that you were there and have contributed to the markers of a journey embracing a common heritage) from him. He also taught me about Ubuntu and anger management. Once when I was tense with anger at an in house curator who was blocking our efforts to mount an exhibition which had just three days to set up - it was one of those crazy situations where this curator's behaviour defied logic and his own professional interests - Bra Charles took me aside and spoke to me as an elder about anger, making me realise that there was another way to approach the problem.

He regularly introduced us to his artist friends and these too became friends and supporters of the Trust's work.

All the time he was giving of himself so generously to the *Art and Ubuntu Trust* and to *Funda* centre he had little time to devote to his own work. Despite this he kept up a career as a highly regarded artist and was continuously sought out for exhibitions, locally and internationally. It is a great pleasure for us to know that at last, he is devoted to his art and equally pleasurable to focus some attention on his work through this publication.

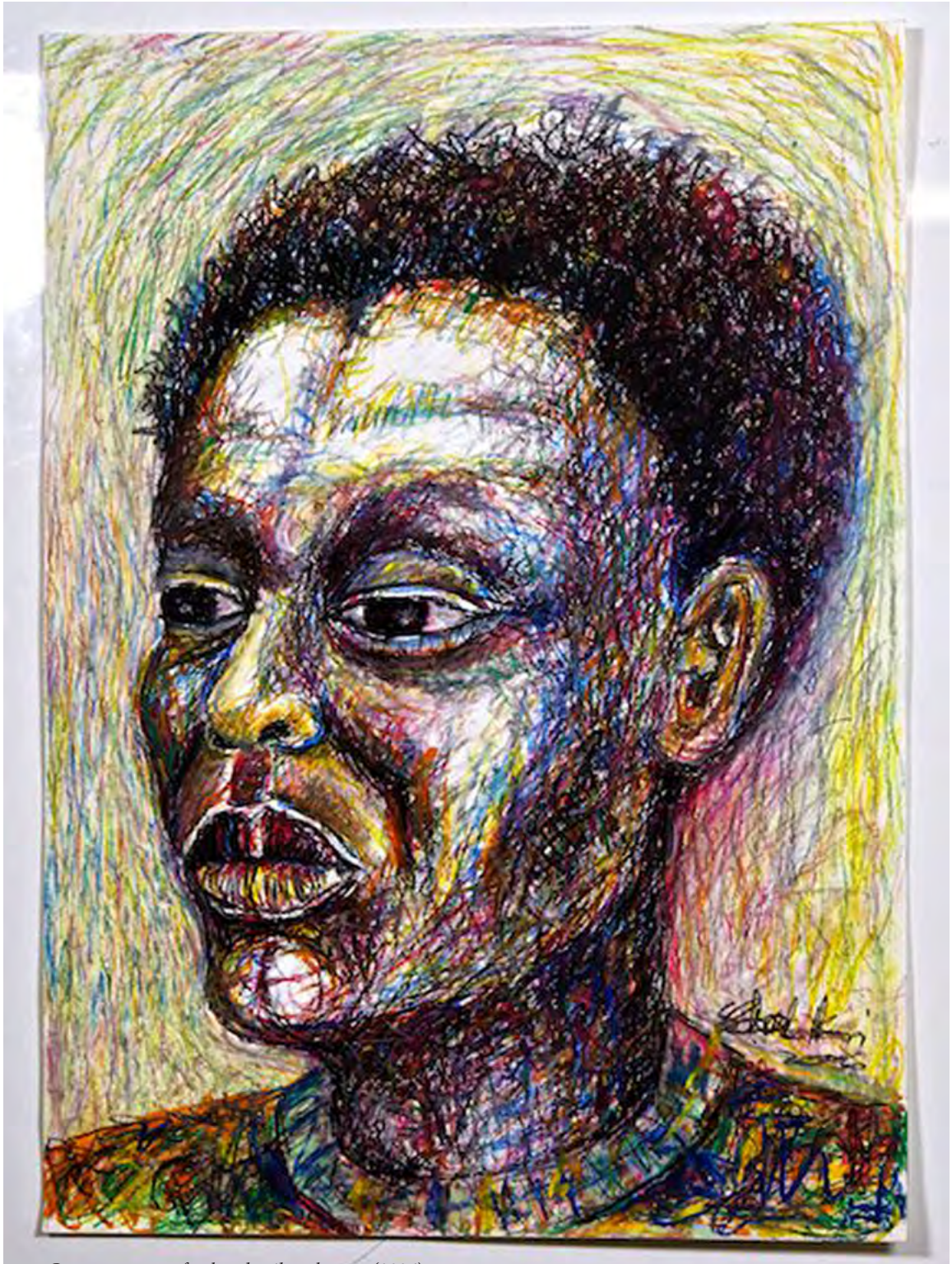
In January 2022 we were able to commission Bongiwe Hlekiso to interview Bra Charles about his work. Bongiwe wrote insightfully on Gladys Mgudlandlu for her master's thesis, bringing cultural understandings to her reading of Gladys' work. She is now doing a PHD on *Umbhaco* as displayed in art galleries and this background, together with her enthusiastic response to meeting Bra Charles in an online webinar seemed to make her the ideal person to interview him.

Bongiwe Hlekiso's insightful and refreshingly culturally rooted monograph on Bra Charles allows one access to the values and motivations informing his work, his processes and introduces the range of his oeuvre.

We are thrilled to have esteemed curator, Dr Same Mdluli, providing a foreword as she has written very cogently about Sokhaya Charles Nkosi's work in the past. No publication on art is complete without photographs. We are lucky to have Abdulcadir Ahmed's photographs of the magic Bra Charles has created/creates in his own work as well as his depictions of Bra Charles creating magic with others. Abdulcadir also contributed to the workshops and shared with Bra Charles a love of a quintessentially African approach to teaching, using anecdotes, proverbs and jokes.

Bra Charles exempliflies in practice the Senegalese environmentalist Baba Dioum's wise saying:

"In the end we will conserve only what we love.
We love only what we understand.
We will understand what we are taught."



Crayon on paper further details unknown (2006)

Getting to know Sokhaya Charles Basil Nkosi.

I met with Bab' (father) Nkosi at his lovely home in Chiawelo, Soweto. The atmosphere was lively, with the radio playing in the background. Interviewing him was a great experience; our interview was full of laughter and storytelling. The way he formulated the answers to some of the questions I asked was imbued with nostalgia as he went back to how he was introduced to art during his childhood. I found that each answer that he gave was part of a greater story and found it difficult to interpret this interview: What do I say? What do I leave out? What is important?

However, the interview left me with much insight and even more questions in terms of the art world, politics in the arts as well as the role of sound/music in art. It introduced me to Bab Nkosi's way of incorporating African values into his approach to teaching and art making. He spoke of an array of people and events which he remembered fondly and gave a hint of his sources of influence.

'I love them all because they form an embodiment of one African muscle geared towards interpreting that it's not all about you. It's about a group of people who call themselves authentic South African artists.' – Sokhaya Charles Nkosi

Portrait of Sokaya Charles Basil Nkosi.

The importance of a name in African Culture

'The naming of a child is a village factor.
To grow an African child, constitutes the participation of an entire village'.

While we talk about family, I ask him about his name Sokhaya. I don't know why names are so sentimental to me; I guess it's because in African culture names have so much meaning. Naming a child in African culture is very important since it is where the child is given their identity. The name is also sometimes used as a form of a message or instruction. He laughs, before he answers, and poses the same question to me. I start explaining what my name means and how I got to be called Bongiwe.[1]

He continues, ***'You can never give birth to a child and not give him a name. People must know that I have parents, grandparents, brothers, and sisters.'***

He takes us through the meaning of the name Sokhaya and why his parents gave him that name. Sokhaya according to Bab' Nkosi means 'iso (eye)-leKhaya (home) - to father the domain of a home or to look after a home' - which also means '*ukwamkelwa*'. The attributes or meaning of his name are evident in how he welcomed us when we arrived at his home.

A name given to a child embodies those that gave birth to you and your ancestors who accompany you throughout your life. Hence when you start introducing yourself the next question becomes 'Sokhaya of who?' - From which clan?

Bab' Nkosi also emphasises that we should remember *singabaNguni* (literally 'we are Nguni', but he infers it to mean 'we are African'); therefore our clan names and the way we say our praises will be the same or similar. We must know where we come from and know our clan names. Bab' Nkosi believes that a clan name helps us a lot with our identity. He believes that a clan name is what builds Africa.

This is based on the fact that people can share the same clan name in different parts of Africa. As a result of sharing the same clan name, you become an extended family.[2] You can see why Bab' Nkosi sees the nation as the entire continent because when he lists his praises, those of the Nkosi clan, you find similarities in his clan with other parts of Africa, for example, in Zimbabwe, in the Eastern Cape, etc., Dlangamandla, Nkonyane yeNkosi. His praises include all these people.[3]

When I talk to Bab' Nkosi, the artist, I realise I'm talking to an artist who is rooted in his home, and one who is artistically inspired by his cultural home, which he conceives of as Africa. According to Bab' Nkosi, culture has many layers to it; it can be very complex yet appear as a simple beautiful thing like the naming of a child. He says:

'As human beings, we are constantly in search since culture plays games on us'[4], and uses a metaphor of a mirage when he explains what he means by culture playing games on us. Foreshadowing how he will explain the role of culture in his work as a source of inspiration in difficult times he says.

'[one's] culture is like a mirage on the road, it's almost like seeing this amazing apparition of an oasis on the road while thirsting for water.'[5]

1 My name Bongiwe comes from the fact that my mother was thankful for finally giving birth to me after a difficult pregnancy
2 Zulu's and Xhosa's have both surnames and clan names as do many other African language groups. Surname is derived from the clan founder's name, is derived from that of a singular leader
3 Mchunu, V. conversation "singabaNguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, Swazi, Matabele in Zimbabe and Ngoni in Malawi)"
4 Hlekiso, B Interview Sokhaya Charles Nkosi, 21 January 2022
5 Hlekiso, B ibid.

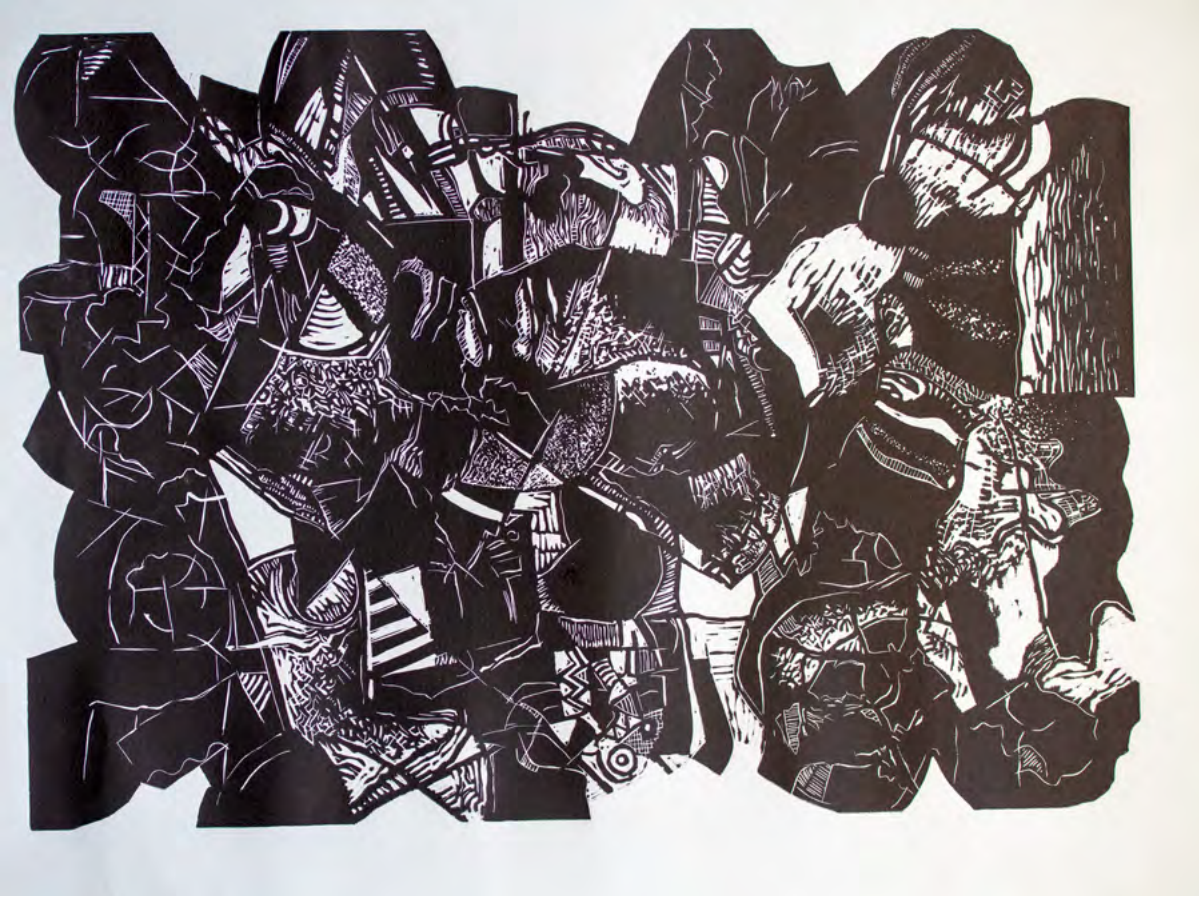


Fig. 20 Isibuko Semvelaphi 2005 linocut black and white 30 cm x 43 cm

Family

Bab' (father) Charles Sokhaya Nkosi was born in 1949 and brought up when apartheid was rife in the country. His parents were inspired by music and politics. His father, David Nkosi, was a well-known piano player in Durban and his mother, a nurse and hospital matron, born in 1922 while Charlotte Maxeke was overseas studying for her Undergraduate degree, 'loved the work of Mama Maxeke, a trained social worker and a gender activist'. His mother also studied for a degree and qualified as a nurse. Like Charlotte Maxeke, she encouraged others to study further especially those in the field of nursing.

He fondly remembers his father buying a piano and how he and his brother practiced the piano until they were very good at it. He says 'I could draw and play the piano. However, I eventually lost the gift of playing the piano. '

I found his laughter infectious as he narrated the story of how his father used to keep on playing the same song, *September in the Rain*, every day no matter what time of the day, until one day his mother could not take it and wanted to get rid of the piano. He further talks about his father not working during the apartheid period because of the socio-politics of that time. However, Bab' Nkosi remembers that even so, he was a great loving father and recalls that his mother also loved him. In the outreach programs his mother ran, she initiated dialogues with women about how they could take an active interest in working and politics.

Bab Nkosi's respect for women's role in leading to freedom is also indicated when he wonders why Hector Pietersen's sister is never remembered and it is reflected in his work.

Figure 1, *Free at last*, a watercolor, shows a man's body dominating the foreground, further away on the picture plane is a woman and a rainbow and in the bottom right-hand corner almost observing but seemingly fading into the distance there is a small image of a person behind bars. The man and woman seem ecstatic: both figures extend themselves upwards with lifted hands and the woman is dancing or jumping. The work could have focused only on the man, whose naked body powerfully dominates the foreground, but the woman, despite being in the background, is seen as an integral part of this moment. She is positioned at the beginning of the rainbow which symbolises renewal, adding a complexity to the composition, suggesting the woman created the renewal which the man celebrates. The painting expresses its title, *Freedom.*

'There is a magical spirit that happens when ukhuliswa ngumntu ongumama (when you are raised by a mother/female).'

Fig. 1. Free at Last 1979 watercolour and ink 46cm x 63 cm

Magicians 2022 pastel and scratching on paper 29cm x 47cm

Learning about Art and Artists

'I learn a lot because of the telepathy that happens when you meet another artist. You tend to engage as if you have known each other for years.'

As his words indicate, Nkosi's studies of art are rooted in collective experiences. His life's journey took him through many significant black institutions and he became part of a large network of artists with whom he still maintains contact.

Nkosi studied at *Rorke's Drift Community Art Center* from 1974 till 1976 where he focused on graphics, painting, ceramics, and weaving. From 1977 to 1980, he was based at Marianhill working full-time as an artist. From 1980 until 1981 he taught at the *Open School* in Durban, which was headed by his great friend from *Rorke's Drift* days, the renowned weaver Joseph Ndlovu (1953-2019). He then joined the SABC in Johannesburg as a graphic artist where he worked until 1985. Then for thirty-five years he taught at the *African Institute of Art* (AIA) and *Funda Community College* in Soweto. This is where he dedicated decades of his life to teaching art, first as a senior tutor teaching a diploma course specialising in painting and drawing and in 1995 becoming director of the Visual Arts Department until he retired in 2020. From 2006 to date, he has provided training at many of the *Art and Ubuntu Trust's* national art education workshops.

His dedication to art teaching is informed by his own struggles to learn art at school. He started his primary school at Sibonelo before attending Sibonelo High school for one year and then completed the rest of his high school at Ohlange High.

'In Sibonelo primary schools, we were not taught art – no teachers were teaching us how to draw even though we were told to buy art books and draw anything that comes to mind. There was no guiding educator to say "don't do like this, do that rather"; we were taught by our friends – older learners would ask us to draw something. If it was not a spitting image of what they asked they would send us back to draw these again. We were also not being informed about the importance of art while in primary school. However, at the end of the year, we were marked on what we have done in art classes. As a result, some would buy things to present in the art class.' [6]

When he arrived at Sibonelo High School, people took note of his drawings and commented on how good he was. He was entered into a competition for cartoonists. Since he was studying woodwork, he was forced to choose whether to continue making kitchen tables for his mother or become an artist. 'One teacher said how great I was in art that I should stop woodwork and concentrate on art. I chose art since it had a holier execution ground to search yourself'.

eSibonelo High school in Kwamashu was one of the first black schools that taught art. *'I was taught by the first black visual arts graduate from UNISA – my teacher, Eric Ngcobo… helped me a great deal'.* Eric Ngcobo was one of the people that taught him how to tone or shade his artwork. Ngcobo opened his eyes to the world of art. He was not only one of the few people at Sibonelo who had graduated in art from *UNISA*, but he also single-handedly guided students in making murals and continued his involvement with his student's careers after they left Sibonelo***. 'Even though he was no longer a teacher as he became a school inspector we kept in touch.'***

Bab' Nkosi makes a joke about how having a mom with the Nkosi surname helped him at school. *'One of the things that made me benefit a lot was being born of an Nkosi women. She became my mouthpiece, doors opened for me.'* [7] According, to Nkosi, his teacher, Eric Ngcobo was born to an Nkosi woman too and when his teacher met his mother it was easy for him to be accepted because of the Nkosi name.

6 Hlekiso, B ibid.
7 Hlekiso, B ibid.

His mother's work within the community, also enabled him to be regarded favourably by the community.

Ohlange was a well-known boarding school founded by John Langalibalele Dube and his wife Nokuthula Dube in 1900. Here Nkosi was mentored by artists such as Jordan Khoza. He further states that 'No institution beat *Ohlange* when it came to the arts.' Yet he regards Ngcobo, who gave him his first introduction to art at Sibonelo High, as one of the greatest teachers that South Africa ever produced because *wayengakhethi* (he did not have favorites). 'After finishing high school, Ngcobo was the one person who went and got me a bursary at Race Relations for R150.00'[8]

This was for his art studies in textile design and printing at Rorke's Drift. He was introduced to Rorke's Drift by his brother's friend, Duke Ketye, whose sculptures and illustrations inspired him. Bab Nkosi also cherished the idea that art was looking after Ketye', because Ketye made an income through his artworks.

At Rorke's Drift, he and Ketye consolidated a friendship and Ketye was a great influence on his work, teaching him about colour, form, quality, shape, and shading. This allowed Nkosi to work with pastel and pencil enabling him to 'provide a three-dimensional fill' in his work. Ketye would push him in his drawing and to apply the skills he taught him. As much as Bab' Nkosi held him in high esteem Ketye was also fascinated by how Bab' Nkosi worked with linocut and the way he did his cutting. Bab' Nkosi also taught him a thing or two about abstract form and collage. Their friendship grew and continued after Rorke's Drift and after Bab' Nkosi's brother died. When Ketye finished his studies and moved to Clermont Durban, Nkosi was fortunate to be given Ketye's studio at Rorke's Drift.

Rorke's Drift played a key role in developing his career in art. With the foundations provided by eSibonelo and Ohlange High schools as well as Rorke's Drift, he became proficient in sculpture, painting, printmaking, and mixed media. Rorke's Drift is also where he met his long standing friend and neighbour, the artist, Vincent Baloyi and another friend, the remarkable weaver, Joseph Ndlovu (1953-2019).

Another significant moment of learning came years later in 1991 from printmaker, Kim Berman, at *Artist's Proof Studio* in Johannesburg. Artist's Proof Studio was designed to collaborate closely with artists working in print media and printing mediums such as etching, screen printing, and intaglio including lithograph. To facilitate these collaborations, *Artist's Proof Studio* make sure that they are able to provide high-end art equipment and materials that help artists to produce high-quality works.

At Rorke's Drift, Nkosi had been exposed to lithograph, linocuts, and etching; however, he required equipment that would assist him in fast-tracking the process of his linocuts. *Artist's Proof Studi*o, where along with his great friend and fellow *Funda Centre* teacher, Ezekiel Budeli, he was a founding member, also helped him in this regard. He states that 'for one to be embraced by viable studio practice one must have fans that keep out the acid fumes.'[9]

Until today he works with *Artist's Proof Studio.*

8 Hlekiso, B ibid.
9 Hlekiso, B ibid.

Mediation in blues 1994 1 colour monoprint

Nkosi - The teacher

'What would make my dreams achieved is when I can see people who are interested in upstaging the quality of pride of black people here in South Africa. We have been consumers for far too long. We need to be doers, doers of the magic.'

During the period Nkosi taught at *Funda Arts Centre* in Soweto, he managed to impart his knowledge to and mentored many students across South Africa. Here he was not just an art educator but was also able to encourage students to appreciate how important it is to be conscious of African values and culture and especially how to include this in their work. He talks about the magical moment he had when Ernest Mancoba visited *Funda*. Mancoba taught him that he should be able to interpret what some would describe as 'it just came spiritually'; He said 'we should decipher this and be able to depict it through our work. As a result, we should get to a point of understanding that we need to unpack these things that prompt us to paint what we paint.'

He explains how important it is to not only teach art but also to have conversations with your students. At *Funda* he encouraged students to converse with him and share their own views. He wanted them to feel they didn't have to accept others' ideologies and values. This developed non-linear thinking and freedom of thought in the students. This sharing of ideas was expressed practically in the collaborative artwork they did (see in figure 2.)
Nkosi's student's murals are found in different communities in Soweto and he refers to the murals as community-inspired art.

While at Funda, he taught painting, drawing, watercolour, and sculpture. He claims that 'all these things make you grow in stature, and you find yourself ending up helping a lot of people'. He further implies that leaving the SABC to teach at *Funda* was the best thing that ever happened to him. He contends that most of the people that he taught - such as Zwelethu Mtetwa (whom he taught at the *Open School*), Richman Buthelezi, Dominic Shabangu, Pauline Mazibuko and also Ponso Skosane, a printmaker, who is currently doing prints for William Kentridge - are more famous as artists than he is. He says with pride ***'You can never arrest the development of an individual.'***

Despite dedicating his life to teaching art, Nkosi's work as an artist has been recognised and he is part of a rich network of artists. He has shown his work in several exhibitions locally and abroad from 1974 to date. More recently he exhibited in Florida and New York, and he has been granted residencies in Switzerland inter alia.

In sum, the work and teaching of Nkosi has had a significant impact within the South African art world and been exhibited and collected in Europe and America. (see further Resume page 73).

Fig. 2 Nkosi, S.C & Funda Students, a timeline mural of protests in 76, 2004

Fig. 14 Linocut - further details unknown

The Art

Collage details unknown

Process

'One needs to speak to oneself, to one's innermost soul.'

I am always fascinated by the process of creation, whether from the artist's point of view or the person viewing the work. I believe we all create from a place of knowing and seldom create from a place of the unknown. Hence, I was very fascinated by how Bab' Nkosi spoke about his process of creation and why he chose to explore different mediums to express himself.

Linocuts were his first medium, and when speaking about the linocutting process he illuminates what he says about black people needing to be doers of magic. According to Nkosi when creating a linocut as an artist you must 'really cut'. The cutting should be unique, different from the norm, you should break barriers and show that a specific person was cutting here. Your work should be identifiable and be clearly differentiated from others. It should show who has worked on the piece. He refers to Azaria Mbatha's (1941-2018)[10] excellent lines in his linocuts saying, '[I]t is not an academic affair; cutting is more than something taught but is specific to each artist.'

Nkosi does not have a particular medium that he would call his favourite. 'I do not have one type of medium that I can say I like more than the other'. He draws, paints, prints, or collages according to how he feels and what motivates him on that day. His days start at his dining table listening to music, enjoying a cup of coffee while trying to get his creative juices up. He is very remarkable in how he can work in different styles and genres using what he has available in his house and what he can afford to purchase.

Many artists will describe the creative process as being enlightening, as they follow the process of remembering, and the process of birthing out what has been within them. Curiosity and love of art drive Nkosi. His curiosity is intertwined around the everyday stories, the music, the laughter, and the social ills surrounding his community, and the challenges he faces as an artist. Although artists may be influenced and inspired by their environment, in the words of Nkosi, his creative process begins from his innermost self/soul it is a 'matter of the soul':

'Work done with newspapers and magazines does not decrease in value because you have used cheap material. Instead, it might have a high value compared to someone else who used expensive material only to find out the expensive work has zero value .These dynamics make a creative person realise that these [found materials] are a gold mine.'

For his collages, Bab' Nkosi finds or buys cheap magazines and other objects that have been discarded. He puts the material that he uses in piles based on colours using the different colours that speak to him. Once he has all these ready, he starts cutting pieces and assembling the pieces that he has cut and presses them on the canvas using prestik. He continues this process until he gets the image that he wants from the artwork. The process takes some time since some of the pieces cut might not work so he needs to change them. Only when he is happy with the composition, does he start his gluing process. He then applies gel to the pieces of clippings and adds paint. He says, ***'I like working like this, the dynamics.'*** The technique and process allow for freedom. He never knows how the collages will turn out and is surprised by the end results.

Fig. 3 Nkosi, S.C. talking about his art to Bongiwe Hlekiso pic Bongiwe Hlekiso

10 Azaria Mbatha is a South African artist who trained at Rorke's Drift and lived in Sweden for many decades. He was celebrated for his printmaking

He insists that this process is flexible, he can start with any of the mentioned methods. The process depends on what he thinks is needed. As a result, the artwork keeps changing but he says that even though the process is malleable you must know when to stop.

According to Nkosi, a collage opens your horizons to many possibilities: 'You open windows of possibilities by taking something close to being discarded and underlined as being disposable'. As he works, he opens new windows that reveal creative options. These allow him to change the direction of the collage at any point, but as the process continues, a direction is confirmed and it creates the scope for the final look of the art piece. The windows help him come up with themes around his pieces: 'I can end up having a theme centred around one part of the collage', he says. Although he recommends that beginners start small so as not to confront themselves with too many challenges, he finds that 'it also helps to work big', as when you work big you are able to fix and correct errors that might appear within your process of thought. It is also possible to create different themes when working big.

We further understand that his use of color has to do with soul interaction. You can see this boldly displayed in his portraits and his abstract mixed media pieces. These pieces tie together a spiritual dimension that cannot easily be seen unless you start deciphering the different elements used, especially in his collages.

The colours that he chooses for each piece are not preconceived. They happen as he starts building up his drawings or painting or collages or prints. I prompt him as we speak about his method to find out if he associates colour with meanings. He answers that 'colours just form part of the drawing or the painting'. However, as our conversation continues, he starts comparing the use of colour in his artwork to how women dress, how they select outfits and make sure they match; how they look at which colour goes with which colour. With colour coordination he says his approach is very similar to that even though most of the time he doesn't know what the end-product will look like.

Clearly his creative process is supported by his love of music, sound and dance. He makes this love known several times through our interview referring me to the sounds of Thandiswa Mazwai talking about her soul and how in touch she is with her spirituality, how you can feel it in her music. There are several paintings where he showcases his love for music and dance. This work suggests some of the lively or sad sounds of jazz that he speaks of. *Songbird (*figure 24), *Blues Quartet* and *Umoya wempophoma epholisayo (Waterfall)* (figure 6) are examples of him explicitly referencing music, especially singers in his work.

He refers to how music evokes something in him and suggests that we should understand that music and art are one. He describes working at night when everything is quiet in the house, and the atmosphere is filled with a heavy forceful feeling of spirituality. He further states the music of Miles Davis becomes his go to music because it is softer to the ear and smoother to listen to. It also carries part of his heart as he feels that the more you listen to it the more it becomes emotional. (see further below, in section *Colours Inspired by Music* on page 22).

Although his art making process is intuitive and unconscious, Nkosi's well respected legacy in art can also be understood by looking at his values as they are expressed in his work as a teacher and mentor, together with an understanding of his community and culture and the political influences on his generation. These provide a window to who he is and the work that he has produced.

Fi.g 6 Umoya wempophoma epholisayo (Waterfall)1986 collage 40 cm x 33 cm

Main Themes:

'Art gave me a better definition of the global space that we live in.'

As we go through the pile of artworks lying on top of the table it is easy to see that Nkosi's diverse style and focus is unique. His work does not depict any of the common stereotypes of problems in the lives of African people as depicted by many artists.

Nkosi's work is consistently affirmative of African culture and also diverse in how he tells his visual stories. It challenges you to explore deeper and celebrates humanity. You can see the notion of spirituality, the notion of home, and political awareness in his work. He is also able to show his heart, his feelings towards his work.

This is apparent in how he creates artworks of the things he loves such as people dancing, singing, people being free and in the people that he honours.

His work is inspired by the everyday life of his community and surroundings. His work whispers tunes of Miles Davis to Thandiswa Mazwai and leaves trailing scents of stories about Tsietsi Mashinini [14] and others protesting and dying in school uniform in 1976; the year in which he produced the '*Black Crucifixion*' series.

Music and dancing speak to his soul and are what he loves. His works shows what he loves and what is dear to him. Whilst they reflect on black people's pain and struggles, they celebrate the beauty in African culture.

'South Africans are in a move to finding out their worth as a free country.'

14 A leading activist, a scholar, in Soweto in 1976

Fig. 13 Makoti 2 2002 collage 60cm x 42 cm

Colours Inspired by Music

Emotions can be seen in the different colours depicted in this work. We might argue that the blue and the black reveal the sadness of the work and some of the bright colours, the joyous moments. However, I fully understand that colours do not only deal with emotions but speak widely, suggesting varied meanings. For example, the use of red is associated with hurt, but it is also associated with warmth. You can still use bright colours when you are sad to show your emotions of pain.

As we continue talking about colours and their significance, Bab Nkosi refers to the sound of blues and what colour it depicts.

Fig. 5 Untitled , collage details unknown

He goes on to compare improvisation in music with his own colour selection process; 'In a blues laboratory, anything goes you try, you test, all this testing you are only able to see its product through the sound output, the sound infusions.

The sound outputs make you feel that up to the point of your satisfaction, you know this is ok. For that reason, the same applies to the use of colours in my work.

You'll find that some colours are gloomy, dark, some radiant, some warm, some cool, green, or blue because the metaphoric antithesis of that is that it is not blue. You get to understand that blues does not mean that everything is blue. Sometimes listening to the blues, you are able to get different colours such as dark and charcoal grey smeared with new stains of red, it's still blue because red can be blue because in blue there is red, and that red is a symbolical interpretation of blood that can be lost'.

As suggested below in the collage section (page 40) although Nkosi suggests that his work with colours is not pre-meditated his colours can also be interpreted culturally implying a sub-conscious source. His abstract work is informed by his cultural knowledge and has a universal uplifting message.

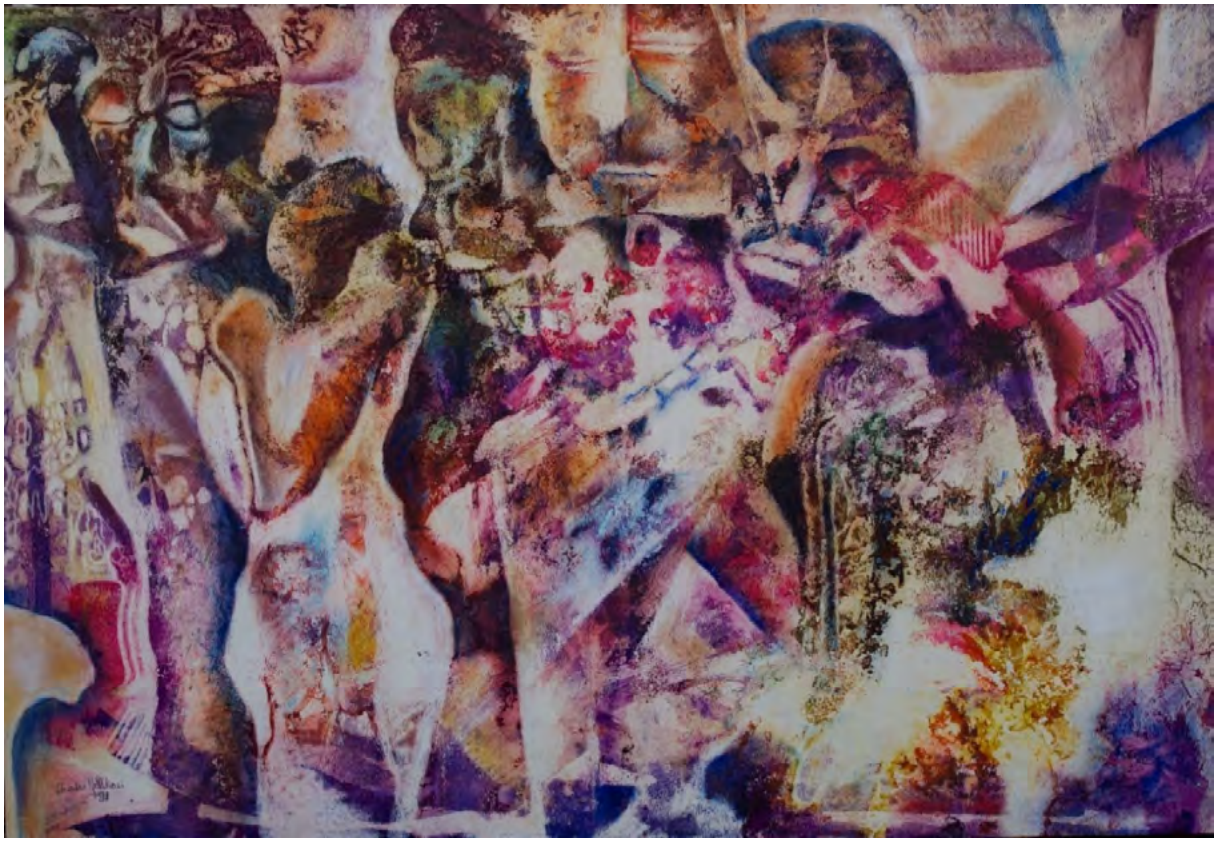


Fig. 6 Umoya wempophoma epholisayo (Waterfall) 1981 watercolour and ink 68 cm x 46 cm

Black People's Lives

What is clear in Bab' Nkosi's figurative work is that it depicts the lives of black people, the nuances, the aesthetics, the everyday and the intimate moments of life (see figures 7,8 and 9) His work shows the conflicts experienced by black people today and their concerns, which are key in his subject matter.

Fig. 7 A prayer, New Media 2002

Respect for the dead

In *abaNguni* belief systems the dead are bestowed the highest power and creation/rebirth is also a form of power since something new is coming to life. These beliefs are evident in how Bab Nkosi speaks about the importance of culture and in some of his works he makes the connection between the dead and the living. When we look at *Doors to Creation* (figure 30), *A Prayer* (figure 7) and *Submission to Death* (figure 9), we realise he uses the titles and the works as metaphors of loss and new birth. See also *The Resilient* (figure 19).

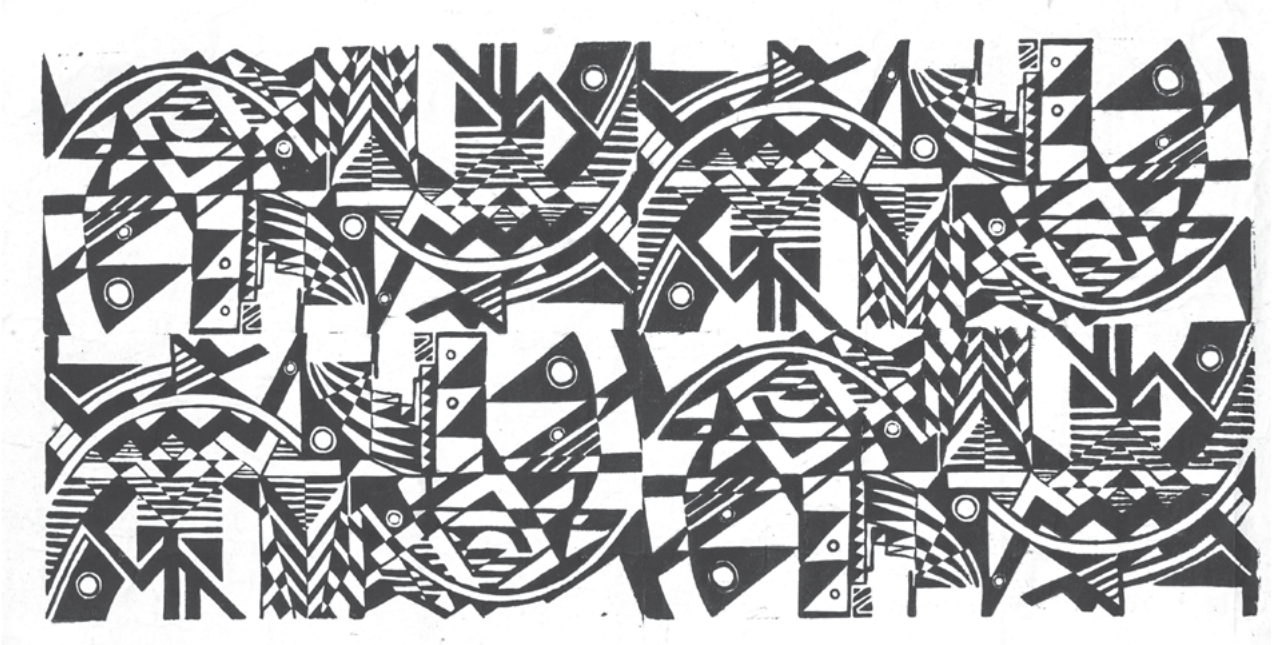
These metaphoric works also speak to spiritual birth and spiritual death. You can interpret the works as the birth of the new era and the death or loss of the old governing systems or the death of black bodies through the hands of the white government. The reading of loss and new birth in these instances is based on an individual take since Bab' Nkosi is adamant that the viewer should have their own interpretation.

A Prayer (figure 7) is a reminder that Hector Pieterson was not the only person who died in Soweto in 1976. It is a remembrance/memorial of others who also died at the hands of the apartheid government.

Paying close attention, you are able to see the posture of the two men is contradictory to each other. The first man has a slouched demeanour as if the person has lost strength or is giving up. Yet the second man's posture is almost upright we can't really confirm if he is looking at someone or facing up with his arms open. The image of the bull in this work can mean different things. It might be a reflection of how the 1976 students were confrontational in challenging the status quo.

The Spanish have their famous bull fights; in this case the bull fight is between the government and its people. The bull here in this case would be representing the people. So bull's fight is all about freedom of movement, freedom of economy, and freedom of expression including fighting for freedom of speech and against an oppressive language. On the corner of the work you see something that looks like the African National Congress (ANC) flag with a wheel and lines on top behind the bull's head.

The dead represent ancestors, those who are no longer living among us. This appreciation of ancestors can also be seen in his tributes to those that have passed on (see below in section on portraits, figure 21, *Nhlanhla Ngaba*).



Linocut details unknown

Home

Nkosi, explores the notion of home and refuge through his work. He explains that home is not just where you have created a four-walled house, but home is where you find yourself. He makes an example of people being forced to move around and settle in different places, making homes in new cities and building relationships in new communities.

'*Untitle*d' (figure 8), gives us insight into the pain of leaving a home and how black people had to struggle to have spaces that they could call home under the apartheid government and even now. He argues that 'we become resilient as occupiers of spaces because that is what we call home'. (See further below in discussion of *The Resilien*t, figure 19)

Fig. 8 Untitled - details unknown

African Values and Storytelling

'Isivivane is a participatory landmark created by the people that live in a certain community. They create it knowing that it can also protect those that are wanderers from the other parts of the same community who pass by. They will be directed using Isivivane: 'You will see the first Isivivane (pile of stones) when you walk'. Since Nguni languages are formed from the same roots it is easy for most of these language speakers to understand the meaning of the term Isivivane.

The concept then means '[Y]ou cannot hope to build a house without putting stones together. You cannot go past a path that has been used by many people without putting a stone where other people have left a pyramid of stones to indicate that this is the path where most people have walked'.[12]

Bab' Nkosi validates African values through his frequent use of African idioms when explaining his work. He talks about the concept of ***Isivivane (literal translation pyramid but meaning collective heritage)*** and further talks about ***umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*** (no man is an island – direct translation would be ***'a person is a person through other people')***.

These affirmations become central in his artistic content, form and practice in that some works show communities together; others refer abstractly to African culture and as a teacher he has been more than dedicated to sharing knowledge which leaves a mark on the student, an indication that the teacher has been there.

You also find that African stories can be embedded in his work as in the example below (figure 10) which suggests a scary night-time atmosphere and reminds me of stories I heard growing up. Stories are another form of ***Isivivane*** in that you normally grow up hearing them from your elders and some of these stories have become beliefs carved into your psyche.

Examples are that when it's raining you cover all your mirrors and switch off any electrical equipment or you are not supposed to borrow someone's salt at night or sweep out or throw out your dirt/garbage at night. The fear of doing these things is imbibed through stories, marking the listener.

[12] Hlekiso, B. ibid

Fig. 10 Untitled - linocut details unknown

Viewer's Freedom

'The thing of giving works titles is good, at the same time it is bad. It robes you, the beholder, of the participatory element towards the making of the art.'

Nkosi says he sometimes chooses not to give titles to his artworks because he wants the viewer to come up with their own interpretations - an idealistic approach to giving people a voice in how to interpret art perhaps. Or is it? He also says that ***'[W]hen I do give my work titles, I like to have them titled in both Isizulu and English.'***[13] Sometimes it is so hard to get the same meaning that is derived from one's own language in English, so I tend to agree with him. While interviewing him I think he was getting tired of me keeping asking for titles of his work. He said I could give titles to two of his abstract works, which I gladly agreed to and felt honored to do so. However, while writing this piece I started feeling the same way as Bab' Nkosi - that everyone should experience the works for themselves and make their own meanings out of them, so I didn't allocate any titles.

13 Hlekiso, B. ibid

Fig. 21 Umathunga (isibuko mvelaphi 2) 2019 linocut black and whute 47 cm x 71 cm

Fig. 11 Wedding 1978 Chalk Pastel 79 cm x 25 cm

Observing Life

Nkosi sees himself as 'an observer and critic' and expresses concern about the collapse of traditional ways of life. His figurative paintings express struggles in the lives of African people. He portrays society and political injustices, cultural conflict, and the pressures of modern life. This is seen in his portraits (see below) and other works.

(Figures 11,12, 13,14, 15) best evoke this notion of observer and critic. This can be seen in the jovial work in figure 10 of people having fun, braaiing, and dancing, while figures 12,13 and 14 show other more sombre yet powerful moods around the subjects of each work as well as revealing different mediums and methods of work.

Another distinguishing feature is that in the works above, representing different people in different settings, people are shown in scenes that seem to take place outside any obvious conception of time. Yet Nkosi's works also represent what is happening around him and how he is impacted by the everyday problems of life in South Africa.

Nkosi says that he is influenced by the music of his era especially the Jazz Music of Letta Mbuli, Miriam Makeba, and Hugh Masekela.

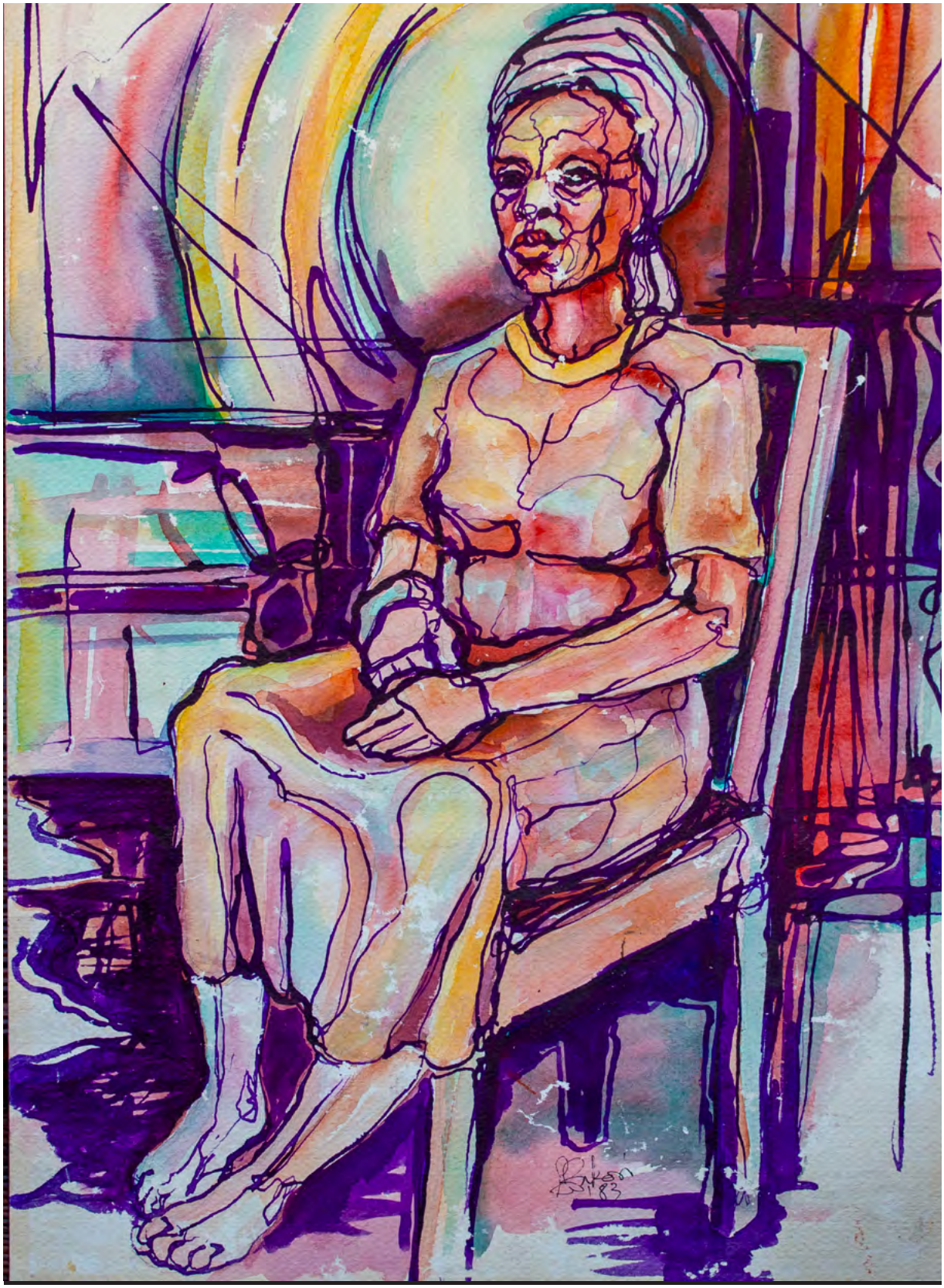


Fig. 12 Relaxing out in the sun, 1983 watercolour and ink 38 cm x 56 cm

Black Pain and Black Consciousness

When you look at Bab' Nkosi's work and converse with him it is easy to see and understand that his ideas are aligned with black consciousness. He has memories of the direct personal influence of Steve Biko. who was in his brother's class at school, two years ahead of Bab' Nkosi. At school they debated black consciousness ideas. This contributed to affirming Bab' Nkosi's own African and spiritual beliefs.This is further revealed when he gives a back story about his work explaining how some of his titles come from African languages (see section on *Viewer's Freedom*), page 30 and that different artworks show influenc-es from his spirituality and beliefs.

Many of Bab' Nkosi's works reflect and explore the pain in black bodies most notably in the work, figure15, commemorating June 16 1976 and in the '*Black Crucifixion*' series, a 13-part array of linocuts which creates an allegory of black struggle through using the journey leading to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as inspiration where the cross is central to the depictions of pain inflicted on black bodies. See pages 37 to 49.

Fig. 15 1976 June 16 Riots 1978 pen and ink 29 cm x 42 cm

The Black Crucifixion series

Fig. 9 Submission to Death 1976 linocut black and white dimensions unknown

Tribunal 1976, linocut black and white 68cm x 46cm

Torture and Humiliation 1976, Linocut black and white 68cmx46cm

He Endured Pain and Weakness, 1976 linocut black and white

Tragic Blow To Christians 1976 linocut black and white 21cm x 32cm

Mary and Joseph 1976, Linocut

Premonition of The Hour", 1976, linocut blck and white

Pain on The Cross I, 1976, linocut black and white

Fig. 16 The pain on the Cross II 1976 linocut black and white

Pain on The Cross III, 1976 linocut black and white

Pain on The Cross V, linocut black and white

Fig. 17 Pain on The Cross IV, 1976 linocut black and white

Fig. 18 Resurrection, 1976 linocut black and white 23 cm x 33 cm

A Closer Look:

(from left to right): Fig. 16 The Pain on the Cross 1976 linocut black and white
Fig. 17 Crucifixion 1976 linocut black and white
Fig. 18 Resurrection 1976 linocut black and white 23 cm x 33 cm

Linocuts

'*The Resurrection* from the '*Black Crucifixion*' series seen in figure 18, is part of The *Black Crucifixion* series that put Bab' Nkosi on the map not just locally but internationally as well. It was done while conflict was very intense in South Africa during 1976. The series has been acquired by different museums including in its entirety in Germany. The *Weltkulturen Museum* in Frankfurt has exhibited the series, a complete set of which is with a private collector by the name of Rev Hans Blum, who is also based in Frankfurt.

With this series, produced in 1976, Bab' Nkosi interprets the conflicts that were taking place in the country because of the June 16 student protests in 1976. It was birthed out during this most horrific time in South Africa when protests by schoolchildren in Soweto against Afrikaans language instruction swept the country. After the brutality that was enacted against school children in Soweto, famously depicted in the photograph of Hector Pieterson's lifeless body carried in the arms of Mbuyisa Makhubo whilst Hector's weeping sister runs alongside, (figure 15), more children were gunned down by the apartheid government during these protests and also arrested and detained in prison.

Nkosi's 13-part series is an allegorical depiction of the sufferings and humiliations of black people. He uses the painful difficult journey of Christ carrying the cross to reveal the sufferings of and inhuman treatment of the Black people in South Africa. The cross becomes an uncompromising symbol in the linocuts he creates, which reflect on the ill-treatment that occurred during 1976, how students were arrested, the torture they endured and how some where blatantly persecuted and then executed in the course of 1976.

According to Bab' Nkosi, Biko emphasised that we should not be sleeping during the revolution. Bab' Nkosi further refers to his visit to Fort Hare University in 1972 where he went to apply to further his studies in art and saw how students at the priest seminary in the theology department were on fire, expressing black consciousness ideas.

When Bab' Nkosi speaks about his inspiration for this series he again mentions the teaching of Steve Biko and how he would say 'black man, you are on your own'[15].

According to Bab' Nkosi, this series of 13 prints was his interpretation of the struggle and expresses black consciousness. For him, the message is clear that no black person should be sleeping while there is a revolution taking place.

Therefore, the '*Black Crucifixion*' series becomes a symbol of crossing the path of pain, being crucified, like Jesus Christ, en route to freedom.

The *Submission to Death* (figure 9, see page 37 above), shows a person in pain and looking up with an expression of defeat. This work reveals how people in leadership were eliminated, something which was deeply felt by many people whenever a leader of the struggle and resistance died.

When viewing figure 18, which shows people as if they are crawling or walking up to some sort of a hill, which we might refer to as the *Hill of Golgotha*, note the cross on the side of the man with hands open and uplifted. Where you see the people seemingly struggling to walk up the hill, you also see one man facing the oncoming figures with his two hands lifted and one in the form of a fist almost as if indicating Amandla Ngawethu (power to the people). It is as if Nkosi was trying to communicate that there is hope at the end of the road; hence the two men that have already reached the top of the mountain have their hands in the air indicating some relief.

Jesus is seen as a sign of hope by Christians and through this reference to the cross and the *Hill of Golgotha*, Nkosi is using this work as a sign of hope to those who were suffering through the apartheid government.

The composition of the artwork forces one to start looking at it from the bottom and move your way up. Looking at the individual at the top we might say the person is indicating that they are free at last. It can also be a representation of someone calling out to heaven since the work does not really give us an indication of whether the individual is standing or on their knees.

The crucifixion series suggests that spiritual awareness will bring us into a consciousness that forces us to honour the moments of pain as being part of us, embedded in our story and history. This series is strongly associated with resistance art,[16] and stands out because of the stories that a viewer can read into each work. The series is starkly depicted in black and white suggesting a clarion call to resistance and endurance and symbolising the necessity of sacrificing for a cause.

When you view more of Nkosi's linocuts, you can see how they can also be differentiated by a play of colour from black and white to green, red, and shades of orange.

15 Hlekiso, B. ibid

16 Resistance art was an approach to art used by South African artists to rebel after the Soweto uprising

Fig. 19 The Resilience 2008 linocut 4 colour print 30 cm x 21 cm

Furthermore, the usual subject matter of resistance art is not as evident in the colourful example in figure 19, '*The Resilient*'. But that would be too simplistic an interpretation as something about cultural resistance is at play here even in the title. It can be taken together with another black and white linocut, figure 20, which can be read as a representation of how people see themselves and their outlook on things.

Fig. 20 Isibuko Semvelaphi 2005 linocut black and white 30 cm x 43 cm

Looking at figure 20,' *Isibuko Semvelaphi*' we can see how people view a reflection of their countenance whilst looking at a river. It is possible to read a strong cultural affirmation, a form of resistance, expressed in this work too.

This work refers to how when you look at your countenance in a puddle of water or river you are able to see that it is yourself. According to Nkosi, there was once an old woman that was at a store buying clothes. While fitting the clothes she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror and remarked how ugly the person she was seeing in the mirror was, not realising she was seeing herself. When she was told it was herself, she kept requesting that this person in front of her be removed. Nkosi says 'For this reason, with this work I was giving a reflection or offering people a space where they can reflect on what they are seeing around them'.

This work speaks to how people have different outlooks of who they are which is opposite to who they thought they were. Isibuko in Zulu refers to a mirror; Semvelaphi means where you come from culturally like the saying in isiXhosa 'Inyawo alinampumlo', meaning that a person can never remove or isolate themselves from where they come from. We have to always reflect on our origins since we do not know what tomorrow holds, since anything can happen. Hence it is important to look at ourselves in a mirror and remember who we are and where we come from.

Returning to figure 19, '*The Resilient*', it can be seen as a representation of the living and the dead. When we look closely at this artwork we can see a spear. Here Nkosi has juxtaposed the hut with the spear. In Zulu culture, the spear is used mostly in emcimbini (traditional work). Whenever there is ancestral work to be done at home or slaughtering of a cow you will also find *Umkhonto* (the spear). The spear is also a representation of those that have died at the hands of the white government. The spear could easily reflect what *Umkhonto Wesizwe* (the spear of the nation)[17] and *Poqo* (pure) were to black people. The art piece itself is divided into two by the line that signifies the spear and the Zulu hut.

However, the need for shelter drives us to fulfil the need to have a home. Not all homes are shaped as per the left side of the painting *iqukwa* (a hutlike house based on Nguni architectural houses), but here it symbolises any home. 'Home is what you call home according to your understanding.'

Mary and Joseph 1976, Linocut

17 We know uMkhonto we Sizwe as a military wing of the ANC. Its mission was to help fight against the apartheid government. Similarly Poqo was the military wing of the PAC

The Resilience represented by this piece is that it suggests that even if the house itself is messed up and leaking we would find a way of making it work. As a result, the different symbols used in this linocut indicate a person struggling for refuge.

Nkosi infers that whatever space you find yourself in, regardless of whether you face challenges there or not (such as pass laws or other similar difficulties), you have to find a way of making it work. You have no other choice but to resiliently occupy the space and it becomes home through familiarity regardless of the difficulties surrounding you.

'You can never get tired and say I am never going back there because these people bandidinile (are causing me an annoyance). You go there and the routine strikes a concurrent note of acceptance, that this is what I grew up understanding as home.'

Both these works speak to endurance and resistance, suggesting the struggle that African people had to simply exist after they had been made 'pariahs in the land of their birth', as Sol Plaatje put it when describing the impact of the 1913 Lands act in his classic 1916 book *Native Life in South Africa*.

The linocut '*Umathunga*' (figure 21) has been created in a similar fashion to a collage through using the stitching method, where Bab' Nkosi stitched together different illustrations. The title '*Umathunga*' correlates with the stitching method used which in this case represents a healing method, where broken parts are joined together to create a new pattern.

There is an African mixture called umathunga which is drunk by people and which helps heal the insides of those that drink it hence the title. It is to bring healing to the nation by acknowledging our past hurts and finding ways of stitching all of that together for a better and healed society.

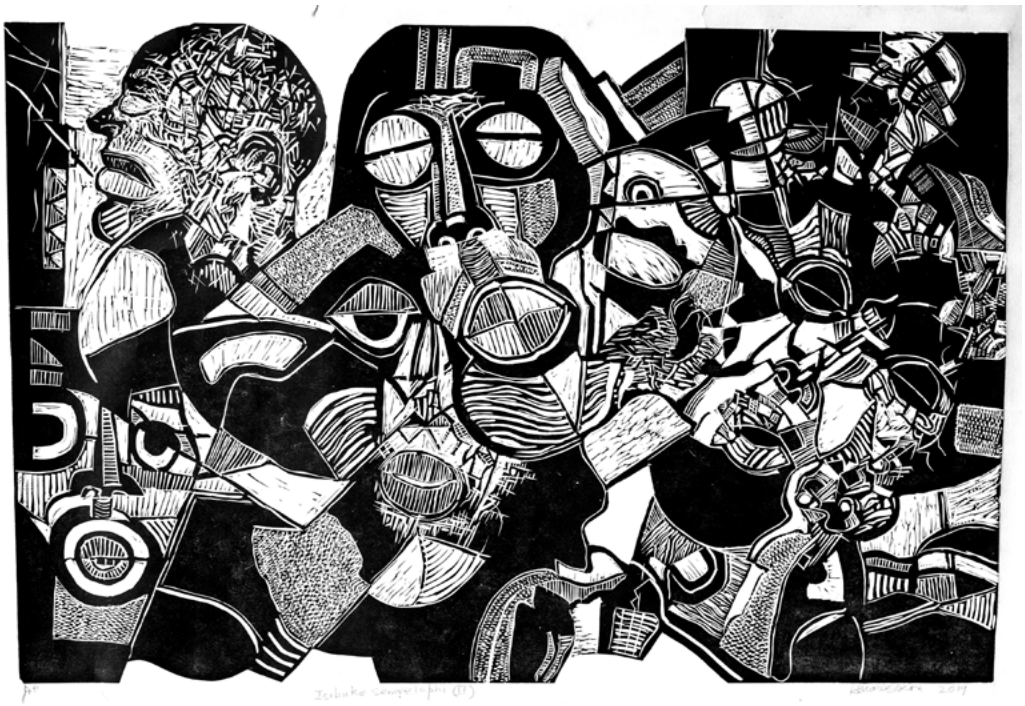


Fig. 21 Umathunga (isibuko mvelaphi 2) 2019 linocut black and whute 47 cm x 71 cm

Portraits

Bab' Nkosi's portraits reveal and evoke the layers that identify the people that he encounters and meets in his own 'hood', Chiawelo in Soweto, and many more that inspire him. His linocuts lead us to look at the black experience of resistance, resilience of African culture and endurance from a black consciousness angle. His portraits also allow for an angle which honours black people. They highlight the heroism of the black persona within black townships.

Figure 22, *Portrait of a Freedom Fighter*, is a tribute to Nhlanhla Nqaba who was born in Springs and died in his studio in 2005. Nhlanhla was a friend and a colleague to Bab' Nkosi and co-founder of Artist's Proof Studio where he was a studio manager. This portrait was Bab Nkosi's way of celebrating Nhlanhla's life and contribution to his country. As a result, this painting will continually serve as a reminder of South African history and the years Nhlanhla spent in exile sacrificing his freedom

The portrait has sharp lines that are very distinctive. When you look closely it is hard to miss that these lines are deep and thinly etched to help shape the face. The colour black adds the needed contrast to the white background which brings the image of Nhlanhla to life. The black and white colour that Bab' Nkosi has used also makes it easy to read and understand the portrait, the composition of which is simple yet very sound. It works well for a portrait image. The bold irregular strokes used by Bab' Nkosi allow for some light in the right spaces of the portrait design to create the contours of the face. These lines are created with careful thought to allow Nkosi to achieve a perfect shape of Nhlanhla's face that offers honour and acknowledges the hardship he went through and what he achieved whist in exile. It portrays Nhlanhla 's face as larger than life, with an almost ethereal, still, mask-like quality. There is a deep knowingness, an inner vision in his downward gaze of his eyes, which also suggests they are no longer seeing the material world.

Figure 23, *Breadwinner*, is made with pencil and different colours of crayon (pastel) on paper. The art piece shows an image of a female with two male figures in the background. According to him, women are pilots of this world. You can go to any corner of the world and you will find that a child left with a woman never becomes an orphan or destitute. She puts bread on the table which is not only destined for her tummy but for the whole family.

A recent piece, titled '*Songbird*' (figure 24) is inspired by actress Connie Chiume[18]. The portrait is made using colour crayons on paper. The piece started from just a face, with more layers of colour and design superimposed later. The spiral or inward eye is part of the composition, suggesting many ways of seeing and being. The bold colours and shape are a representation of the theme of this work which has everything to do with movement, dance and sound, since the woman that influenced the portrait is also a singer. According to Nkosi, as the painting progressed, he started refining it and adding more colour. This was to make the piece more substantial.

18 Connie Chiume is an actress and a singer

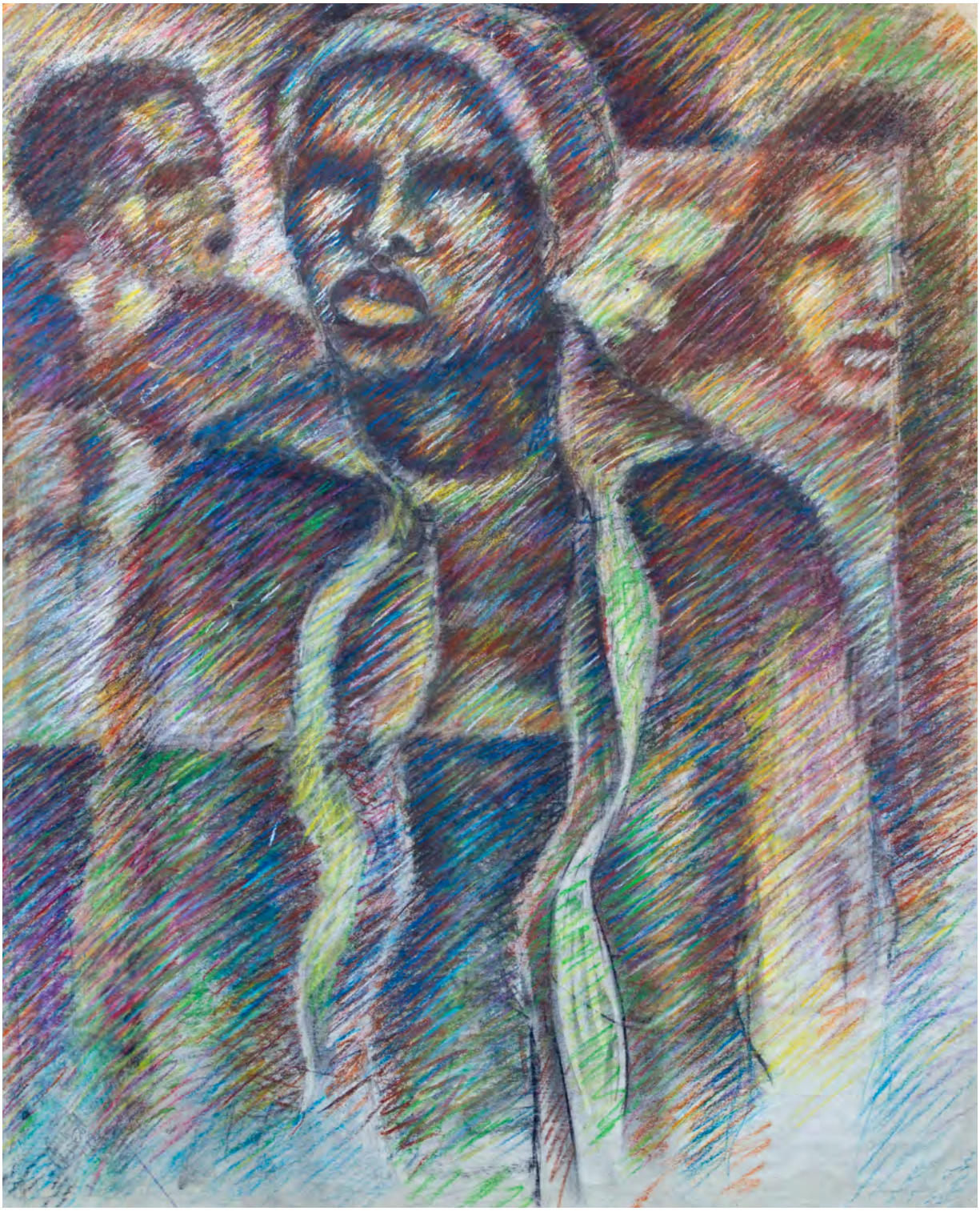


Fig 23 Breadwinner, 1978 Chalk Pastels on 53 cm x 54 cm

Fig. 24 Songbird 2012 oil Pastels on paper 42cm x 30 cm

Fig. 22 Portrait of a Freedom Fighter 2001, Linocut black and white 25 cm x 38 cm

Paintings

Nkosi's use of colour is distinctive, he often uses colour in a celebratory fashion which affirms life but he also uses it to suggest a sense of threat or uncertainty. In some works the definitions of the line in his use of colour shape his depictions of his community and people around him. These depictions are enhanced by his skills at rendering lifelike figures and his sharp eye for manipulating proportion and scale, which results in works which transform the standard notion of realism into a uniquely expressive form. Nkosi mixes acrylic and oil paint in his collages. Working with oils on canvas (see figure 25) and collages (figures 26 and 27), which are a mixture of oil paint and acrylic, he uses the rich tones that oils provide to give his works a strong physical presence.

Fig. 25 Fall 2000 - further details unknown)

Collages

'A collage is more about your mindset than anything else.' Nkosi

It is very evident when you read Nkosi's abstract collage work that the mixed media is not just there for its surface appeal, but that the colours and different images selected create a deeper meaning when reading the work.

Reflecting on the three collages in figures 26, 27, 28 and 30, there is no doubt that the colours and the shapes that Bab' Nkosi used are invigorating and pull one in for a closer look. It is impossible to miss the loud and bold colours that his collages boast of. With the use of colour in his collages, one can argue that they have replaced the light and shadows with deeper tones of blues, red, yellow, green, and black. You are also able to see through the colours of the images from the pieces of newspaper that he has chosen: how they take a form and then how they interplay with the theme of the paint colours used. The newspaper pieces do not look lost in the painting but blend in well with the forms and the colours used.

Although it would seem at first glance that Bab' Nkosi's abstract work is not about any theme, when the viewer further interrogates beyond the bold strokes of colour and the apparently simple form of the collage and pays close attention it becomes possible to see the vague human/animal-looking figures completed through the used paper and oil paint. The collages are pleasing to the eye yet imbued with subtle messages.

These three collages are all currently hanging at Bab' Nkosi's house and he only loans them out for exhibitions. The three collages exhibit a continuation of the past and the present through the depiction of the elements like water and fire, which also symbolises life and death (see figure 30 '*The Doors to Creation*'. This is evident in the use of water, fire, and colour which all symbolise life and death.

Fig. 28 Photograph of Bra Charles being interviewed at home by Athi Mongezeleli Joja with fig. 26 collage behind him

Fig. 29 Collage - further details unknown. Pic by Bongiwe Hlekiso

Fig. 26 and 27 Collage - further details unknown

Figure 30 is the only collage that Nkosi gave a title to. It is mixed media, paint, and paper (magazines and newspapers). It boasts vibrant blue ocean and crystal stone colours in different shades of blue, green, pinks, and orange. The '*Doors to Creation*' collage was started at a residency in Switzerland and finished in South Africa. A friend offered him his family house in Switzerland providing him with all the necessary equipment needed to paint and offering accommodation for a year. He states that the works were created with a mixture of Swiss paints, South African paints and included newspapers from the two countries. He explains this work is an open door to creation, an overture to creation through the word of God. Through his word, God made it possible for humankind to survive as this is described in the bible, where God created heaven and earth in seven days.

This work of Nkosi seems to be about perception becoming subject to the viewer's interpretation when he or she looks closely at the elements created from different magazine clippings and paint. This collage showcases the different moments that make up human life and one can see that the small magazine clippings are scattered in different intervals according to the number of days that it took God to create the earth. It asks questions about creativity and the role of the artist as a procreator in the world. It provides a unique perspective on the meaning of creation.

One can argue that the oral tradition of *Nkulunkulu* (the god of creation) and the colours that Bab Nkosi uses draw from within Zulu culture and form the basis of his work.[19] You can get a deeper meaning through his explanation of the concept of each work. His work makes cultural references while also revealing contemporary issues faced by everyone. As much as it may initially be hard to ascertain the influence of Zulu culture in his work it is quite clear to see once one starts deciphering his abstract work. The use of colour and the meaning associated with the colours that he has chosen to use in his work tell us that there is a link with African spirituality. This is revealed through the different symbols that can be seen upon a closer look at the images that he chooses, including the shapes and colours that are used in the abstracts. The repeated motifs such as the shapes, which are mostly square and coloured blue, are dominant in all three abstract paintings. This will then suggest that even though some recurrence of symbols and patterns might have been unconscious, the symbolism is still present (refer to figures 26, 27, 28 and 30).

Fig. 31 Close up on the Doors to Creation

Even though some of the elements visible in Nkosi's work might not have been deliberate they do tie in with Zulu/Nguni/African cultural beliefs. Looking at figure 30, 'The Doors to Creation', one sees that the colours used are part of the rainbow. Zulu people and other Nguni groups believe in *uNkulukulu, uQamata* which translates to God.

For that reason, they believe in what the rainbow signifies which is the restoration of things that have been out of order. The colours of the rainbow are also the colours that stand for each person's chakra. The same colours can be seen in Zulu beadwork, mostly used in Zulu love letters and bracelets.[20] The colours and patterns which are seen in figure 32 (page 66) will represent a specific clan.

19 The brightness of the colours is typical of the region and bright sunshine where Zulu speakers mainly live. In the Eastern Cape where there is often mist you will generally find more muted colours with, as Mchunu says in footnote 12, variations from clan to clan

20 Mchunu, in conversation relates that "[t]he choice of colours, the meaning, the design pattern, the combinations in beadwork, on ceramic pots, on grass mats, is very specific to a clan, a nation, a linguistic cluster, a tradition, a rite of passage and cannot be generalised."

Fig. 30 The Doors (overtures) to Creation,2004, Collage

In his collages Nkosi used rainbow[22] colours to signify that things will eventually change. There will be a new form of order after the destruction that came with the apartheid era. Nkosi has also used the sun in his collages which in Zulu and many other cultures is a symbol of life, hope, strength, and creativity: hence the verse of the bible stating that God spoke with a word and creation came to be.[23] 'You can never refer to the Zulu cultural community without referring to the sky. There is a story that is told that there were people who came from the sky to teach the people. For that reason, it is impossible to represent Zulu culture as nothing to do with God.'

In '*The Doors to Creation* (figure 30), we can see how Bab Nkosi included the constellations and also animals such as birds and different stones to pass his message on.

According to a Zulu myth there is a God called *Nokhubulwan*e who could shapeshift into any form of animal.

This God was also referred to as a God of fertility, of good harvest and rain. Not only do the Zulu people believe that the constellations of the stars have meanings, but every Nguni culture believes this. There are also a lot of myths in Nguni culture that the stars represent ancestors.[24] 'Zulu culture therefore has everything to do with stars iKhwezi (Morning Star) and constellations *Isilimela* (Pleiades or '*Time for Hoeing*' stars)'. You see in figure 30, the use of a star constellation by Bab' Nkosi.

Colours can awaken certain brain senses depending on the tones used. Using the same colours can tie a message together.

Art is not just for show or beauty, but art is a form of storytelling and that is exactly what Bab' Nkosi's collages do. They give you mixed emotions; feelings of happiness one moment and the next, a feeling of bursting into tears. All these feelings are evoked by the colours that he uses in his collages.

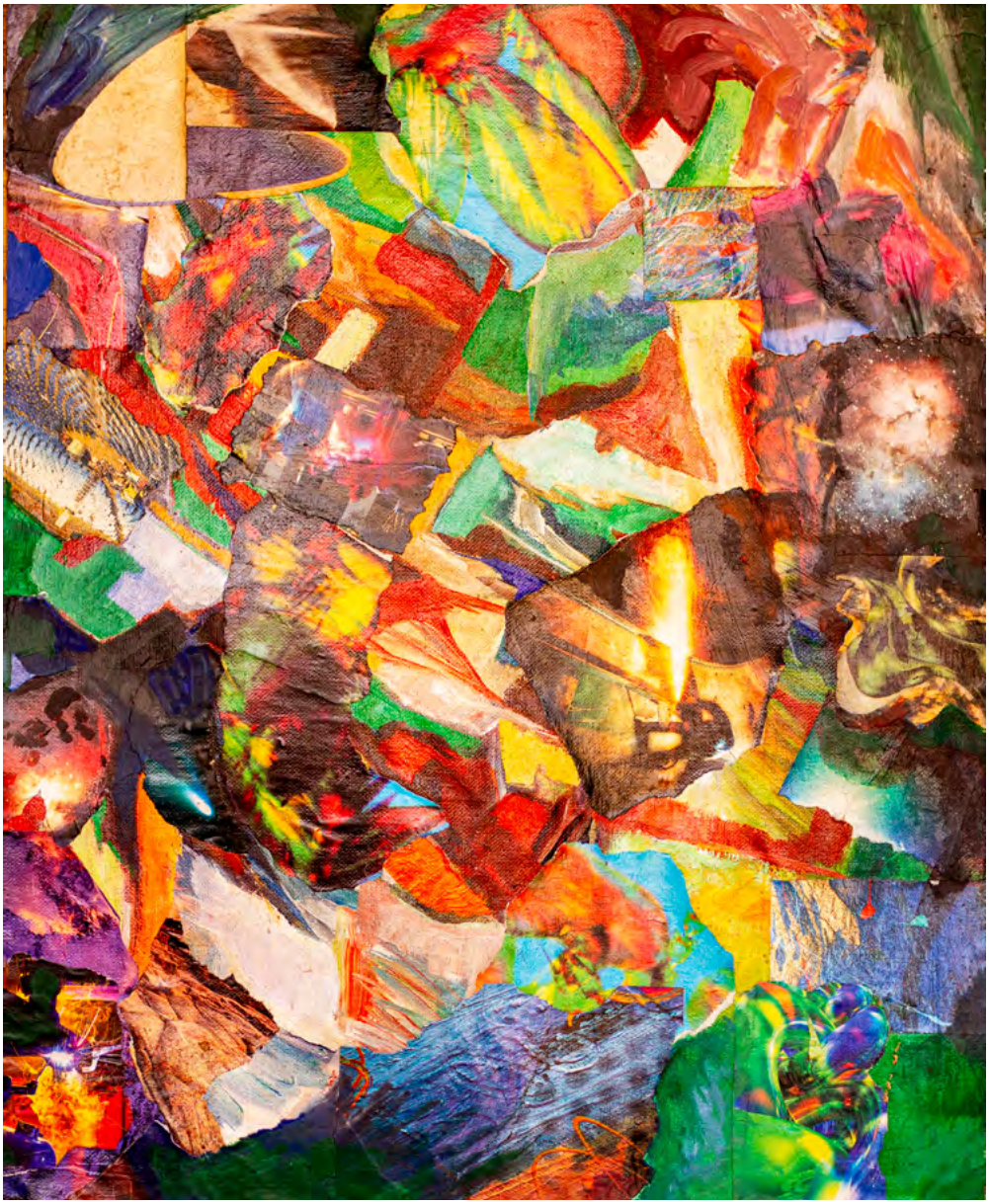
Fig. 32 A Zulu Bracelet, displaying rainbow colours.[21]

21 https://www.flickr.com/photos/43066879@N06/6175566767

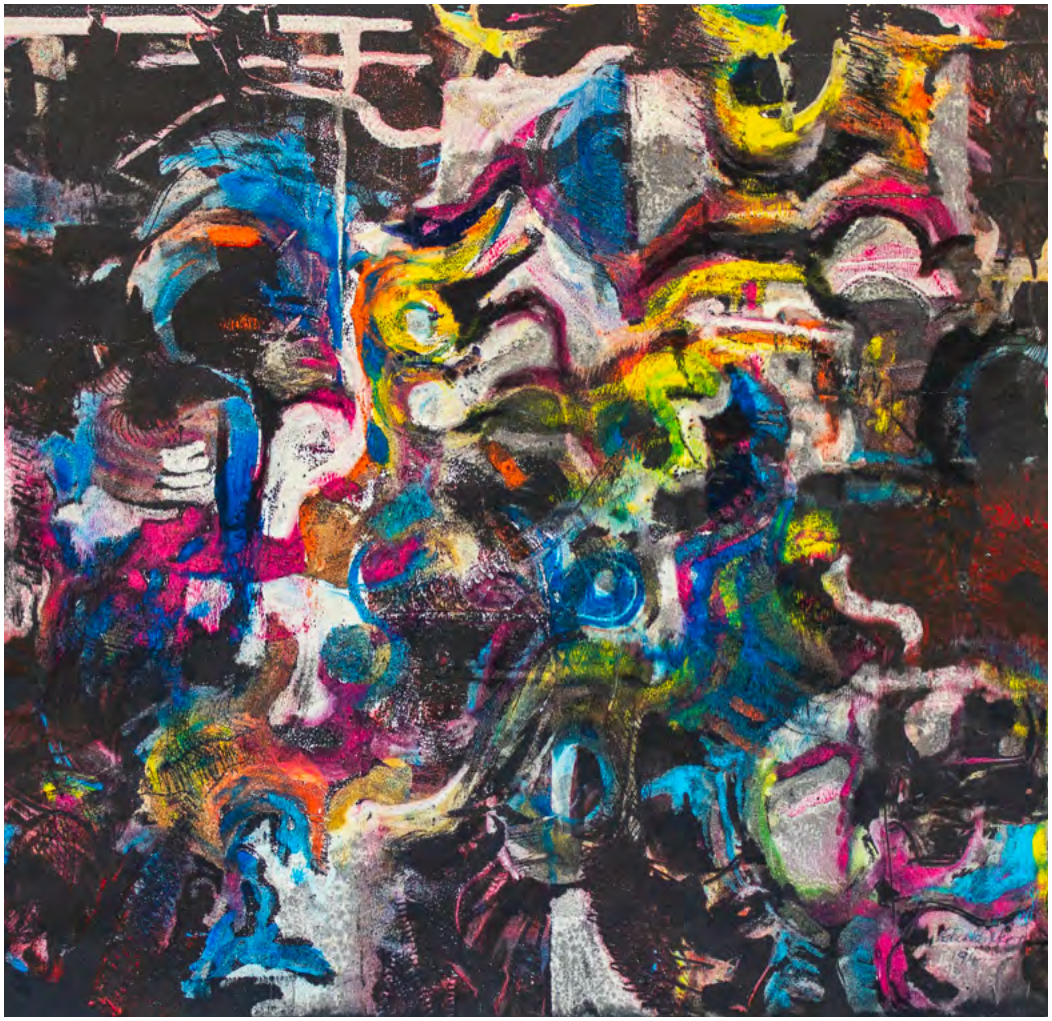
22 Mchunu, V. conversation "[T]he meaning of rainbow explained in an African essence, Nomkhubulwane - Speaker of the Council of the African Gods. Goddess of Planting, whose staff is the rainbow. Goddess of the Rains/Rituals of the Planting Season in August/September, the African New Year."

23 African independent churches accommodate Zulu creation beliefs.

24 Mchunu V., conversation: "The Nguni, Sotho-Tswana and Qhoisan cosmologies underpin the world view, the philosophy and wisdoms of Southern African people."



Collage – details unknown



Collage – details unknown

Visual Language

I try to reach beyond borders – language, religions or traditions.'

When I asked Bab Nkosi how he would describe his visual language, he struggled to answer this by saying that he does not have one. Then stated that his visual language would be to make his world visible through his art. However, the moment he starts talking about the work of Edvard Munch and Kathe Kollwitz he explains how they did everything with love and this also underlies his approach to his work.

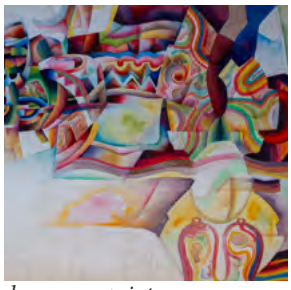
It makes a lot of sense why Bab' Nkosi would eventually in our discussion mention these two as being amongst the artists that influenced him since there are similarities between his work and theirs. Nkosi's work has similarities with the German expressionist movement and *Die Blaue Reiters* which preceded it. In Expressionism, colour and composition are mostly focused on being expressive more than trying to show identifiable figures. Expressionism can be define an ***'an expression of feelings or spirit which thereby gives an artist permission to distort the image or even dispense with image altogether, to better convey emotions or spirit.'***[25]

When Nkosi creates artworks that depict human figures and movement, you'll find that his approach and his style tend to lean towards the German Expressionist style of Kathe Kollwitz. Strong angular forms, with lots of black shapes, and a general somberness to the artwork as well as the subject matter, which depicts human suffering. This would be especially true of his linocuts. He shares how he loves the way printmaking talks to you.

When Nkosi uses colour, one could certainly compare his work with that of Edvard Munch or even Wassily Kandinsky, who founded *Die Blaue Reiter* movement; both artists were well known for their contribution to the development of German expressionism. Yet his use of colour is also unique and specific to his life story and draws on multiple influences.

It was moving for me to be exposed to an approach to art which is rooted in Nguni culture, indeed African culture, and expresses some foundational values in African culture, a culture which embraces all humanity. Within his work although you find suggestions pertaining to social and economic, class, culture, and national identity, it has the ability to transcend and cross borders. Nkosi's work has a distinctive aesthetc which achieves his goal of crossing boundaries.

The artworks below show how diverse Nkosi's work is.



lhs, Mediation in Blues 1994 1 colour monoprint 50 cm x 40 cm, rhs Unknown

lhs unknown, rhs Fig. 13 Makoti 2 2002 collage 60 cm x 42 cm

Same Mdluli describes Bab' Nkosi's work as '"healing time scripts", in that it is not only a record of time but also, more importantly, a depiction of a liberated era in Black expressive modes.'[26] As I probe further, asking Bab' Nkosi about his thoughts concerning his visual language, he migrates the conversation back to his inner world, saying that 'I first must speak to myself and have a telepathic dialogue'. He needs to reconcile with his innermost self, listen to his spirit and what it tells him. Once he gets a sense of what he wants to process, he starts an artwork and the process is completed when viewers show their appreciation; 'I also hear from people when they say *yantle lento* (this is beautiful), showing appreciation.'

'The aim of painting is not to reflect history, because this can be found in books. We have a higher conception. Through it, the artist expresses his inner vision.'
Henri Matisse

25 Michelle Gaugy, 'What's the difference between expressionism and impressionism (art/music)?' www.quora.com/Whats-the-difference-between-expressionism-and-impressionism (Accessed: 12.03 2022).
26 https://contemporaryand.com/fr/magazines/the-black-theology-in-sokhaya-charles-nkosis-paintings/

Conclusion

The more I engage Bab' Nkosi's work, the more I get to understand how his work is more than mimetic reproductions. From his images of everyday life and portraits it is possible to discern how he rarely paints people in their natural form. Hence his figurative work may appear awkward with distorted forms. But when he depicts the world in the way that he experiences it every day, whether figurative or abstract, it is expressive of his own vision. This is so evident through the stories he told in response to my interview questions - stories about people and life in general which affirmed black consciousness. Following his commitment to these empowering ideas he expresses his own inner world and consciousness, most often in a free intuitive flow of colour.

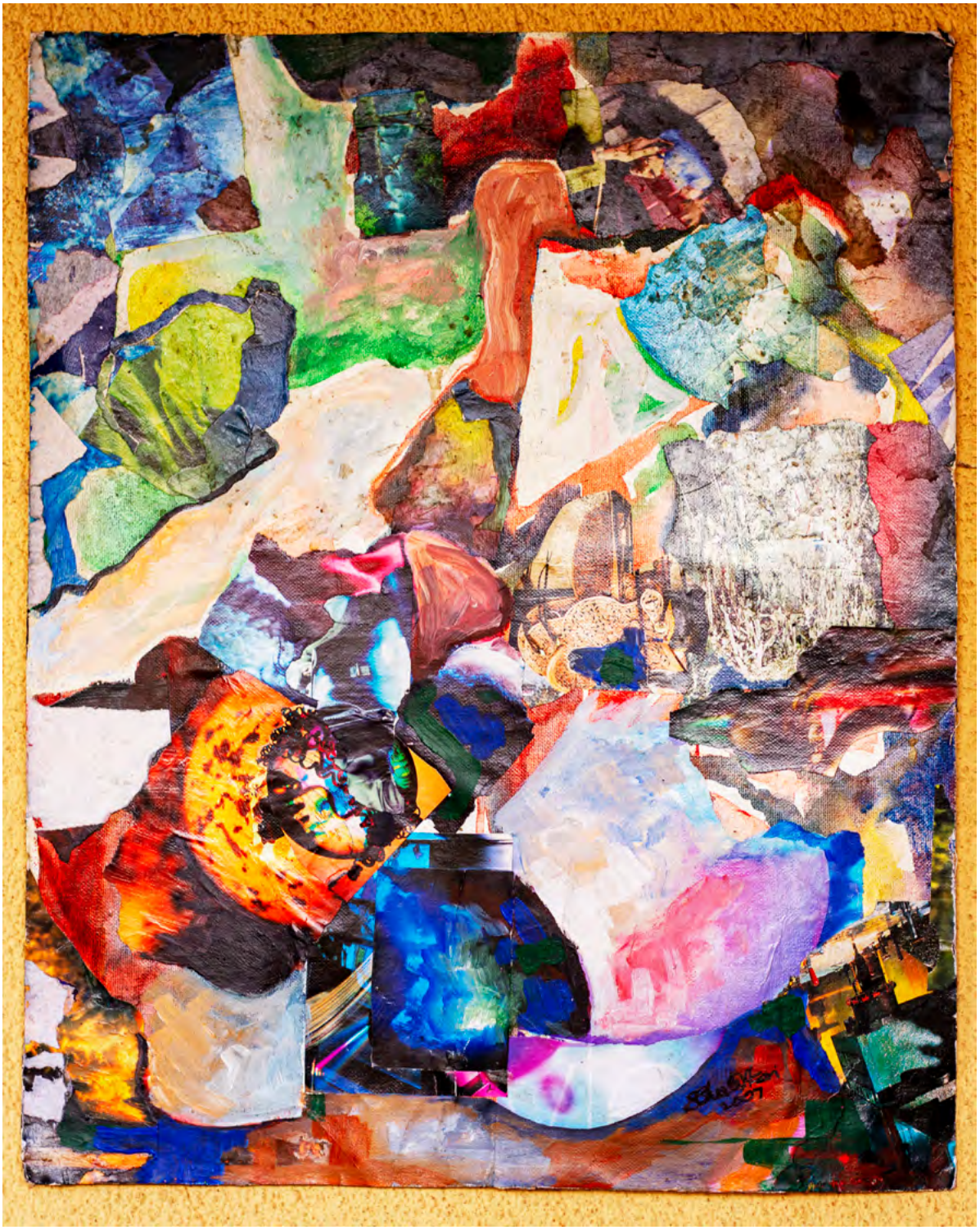
This was also evident in his friend, Joseph Ndlovu's work.[27] Whenever he wove people they would be in bright colours. According to Bab Jo's daughter he never wanted to show people suffering and rather wanted to show people from a place of power.

I know when spirituality is spoken of, it is very often said that a person should not be judged on their appearance but on those that he/she walks with, who may be very powerful. I guess it might be the same with these two artists who have both used colour to express the richness of the world they belong to.I started the interview with Bab' Nkosi having some preconceived ideas of what direction the interview would go in. I had all my questions penned down. However, the direction in which the interview ultimately evolved was totally unexpected. At some point, I felt I did not have all the necessary information needed to write this monograph. His approach was totally different, very African, and it was challenging to relate this knowledge to a traditional western or conventional art interpretation. Yet it was also familiar to me as growing up in an African home there was always storytelling. I remember during my school holidays when I stayed with my granny and how every night before bedtime, she will tell us *intsomi* (folktales).

This is exactly what Bab Nkosi's approach was. With every question I put to him, he would narrate a story. The story would sometimes be very sombre, or funny, and we would just burst out laughing enjoying it together. I have learned that we are all different yet through the stories that he told I could see a connection. That revealed to me that in some way or the other we are all connected as humans. I further learned that art is spiritual and very connected to our being. You can't separate our being, our soul from the expression of art, it is intertwined.

'Art becomes a magical motor that brings people together.'

27 Bra Joe was a great friend of Bab' Nkosi. They met at Rorke's Drift and both taught at Abangane open school in Durban where Bra Joe was co-ordinator.



Collage – details unknown

25 4'93

Resume of the Artist

Sokhaya Charles Nkosi was born on the 27th of January 1949 in Durban. He received his early primary education in Vryheid; high school education at St. Francis College at Marian hill and subsequently matriculated at Ohlange High school in Durban.

His ardent interest in visual art was inspired by the Fine Art Department of St. Francis' College; which was headed by Sister Pientia in 1964. His passion for art was further motivated by the late Mr. S. D. Ngcobo, former principal of Ohlange High School, who, besides the lack of Art education in his school, encouraged gifted students to pursue careers in music, drama and fine arts.

From 1974 to 1976 he studied at Rorke's Drift Art school, which was a private institution run by the Ecumenical Lutheran Church. He was mentored by the late Eric Ngcobo, who was an established artist from the 1950's period and former head of Fine Art department of Isibonelo and Mzuvele High School in Kwa Mashu in Durban from the early sixties to the late seventies.

Nkosi has participated in numerous group exhibitions locally and internationally from 1974 to date. After completing the fine art course at Rorkes' Drift in 1976, he assumed practitionership as a full time artist for four years. His linocut 'Crucifixion' series that was executed in 1976, has been acclaimed locally and internationally.

In 1977 he exhibited at the NSA (Natal Society of Arts) gallery with Michael Ntuli and the late Duke Ketye. In 1979 he had his first solo exhibition at the Stable Gallery in Durban. In 1980-1982 he taught drawing, painting and printmaking at Abangani Open School (Durban). From 1982 after relocating to Johannesburg he joined the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as a graphic artist in the Scenic Services Department. In 1981 he was invited to serve in the Durban Arts '81 committee, which focused on arts events taking place in Durban in the same year. He also exhibited at the landmark Culture and Resistance festival in Gaborone in 1982.

In 1986 he joined the African Institute of Art, an organisation that initially engaged his service as a tutor in painting, sculpture, printmaking and drawing for both part-time and full-time (3-year) programs from 1995 to date. From 1995 to 2020 he served the Fine Art Department of Funda Community College as a director.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

From 1979 to date he has held seven one-person shows. These were held locally and in Europe: at the Berman Gallery in 1997, The African Art Centre in Durban in 1994, the Shell Gallery in Johannesburg in 1988, at Lugano in Switzerland in 1992, at L'Atour Daigues Pertuis in France, also in 1992, and the Grahamstown Arts Festival History Museum in 2001. He also exhibited at the Ecole Cantonale D'Art duValais in Sierre, Switzerland in 2003 and finally in Berlin at an exhibition commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the June 16, 1976 student uprising in Soweto.

RESIDENCIES

In 1992 he was invited to attend two residencies, one in L'Atour Daigues, France and another in Lugano, Switzerland These residencies formed an integral part of Soweto Action which was organised by the late Matsemela Manaka, Theo Gerber (French Artist) and Luca Gansser (Swiss Artist).

In 2001 the Standard Bank Grahamstown Festival committee selected him for a residency at the Grahamstown History Museum. In 2003 he was invited to a residency by Ecole Cantonale d'Art du 'Valais, a school of Art which is based in Sierre (Switzerland). In 2003 he was selected for an MTN residency in Fairlands (Johannesburg) and conducted a printmaking workshop for youth at MTN.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Sokhaya Charles Nkosi has been a regular feature to a host of local and international exhibitions from 1974 to date. This includes Art South Africa Today (1975), a Rorke's Drift multimedia exhibition in Sweden (Stockholm) in 1975, Fort Hare University at George Meiring Art Gallery (1974-1981), Gaberone (Botswana) 1981, and University of Zululand (1977-1981), Marseilles in 1992. Other such exhibitions

have taken place in Germany (Munich), the USA at Rutgers University Mason Gross School of Art, Brooklyn (New York), England Oxford Museum of Modern Art, Birmingham United Kingdom, Tunisia Yahia Gallery at Tunis, Johannesburg Art Fair, Malaysia. In 2008/9 he exhibited at Umkhumbane Art Studios and subsequently at Durban Art Gallery. 21 years of Bag Factory Studios, Johannesburg Art Fair (2011). 21 years of Artist Proof Studio, Johannesburg Art Gallery (2012). Santa Fe Art Fair; USA (2015 and 2016).

COPORATE AND PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

His work has over the years been collected by various institutions including Funda Community College, the University of Johannesburg, Telkom, IZIKO National Art Museum, Standard Bank Foundation, Durban Art Gallery, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Reserve Bank of South Africa, University of Zurich, Killie Campbell Museum, Newark Museum (USA), Brooklyn Museum USA), Munich Museum (Germany) Fort Hare University, University of Zululand, University of South Africa. Ecole Cantonale d'Art du 'Valais (Sierre: Switzerland), Kimberly Museum. Spoornet (Mjantshi House). Vega School of Brand Communications. His collectors include the Museum of Modern Art in New York which in 2011(March) featured his linocut prints (from the crucifixion series) in an exhibition.

PRIVATE COLLECTION

His work has been collected by a broad cross section of patrons like Sibongile Khumalo, Spike Lee, David Lucie Smith, Clive Menell, Prof. E'skia Mphahlele, Matsemela Manaka, Prof. Pitika Ntuli, Rev. Hans Blum (Germany) and Theo Gerber, Luca Ganser etc.

PUBLICATIONS

His work is featured in the following publications:

- Echoes of African Art: Matsemela Manaka.
- Rorke's Drift Empowering Prints: Phillipa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin.
- Passion in Sud Africa: Rev. Hans Blum.
- Resistance Reconciliation and Reconstruction (catalogue): MTN (10 years of Democracy).
- Images of man: De Jager.
- Art and Artists of South Africa: Esme Berman
- The Dictionary of South Africa painters and sculptors: Grania Ogilvie.
- Volatile Alliance (catalogue): Johannesburg Biennale
- Neglected tradition: Steven Sack.
- A Decade of Democracy: Tumelo Mosaka.
- Art from South Africa.
- Soul of Africa, Development Bank of South Africa 2008.
- Johannesburg Art Fair 2009 (catalogue)
- 21 years of Bag Factory Studios, Johannesburg Art Fair (2011 catalogue)
- 21 years of Artist Proof Studio, Johannesburg Art Gallery (2012 catalogue)
- Visual Century South African Art in Context volume 3, 1973 – 1992.
- 85 de arte 2012
- Black Aesthetic, Same Mdluli.

COMMISSIONS

He has participated in several commissions some of those are:

Glebe Tarven (Durban) by Port Natal; 1978, record sleeve Design for Malopoets (music group); 1979, trophy design for Arts, Culture and Heritage Awards (Gauteng) and Sports and Recreation Awards; 1999. Life size glass panel; A Tribute to June 16, 1976, Soweto Heroes acre; 2012.

He developed the idea and played a guiding role in the Art and Ubuntu Trust's Commission of Joseph Ndlovu to make a tapestry of one of Ernest Mancoba's abstract paintings, which was then donated to the Constitutional Court's Art Collection.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRINT EXCHANGE PROJECTS

In 1995 he participated in an international print exchange program which featured established South African Artists and highly acclaimed internationals. In 1997 he worked with David Chamberlain on 'Duet session' as part of a project which also featured well known South African artists. In the year 2002 he participated in Artist Proof Studio print Exchange program which celebrated the Sharpeville massacre. Forty-five South African Artists took part in the portfolio.

ADJUDICATION (In Art competitions)

He has sat in panels of adjudication for Art competitions like the Vita Art NOW 1988-1991,

Santam Children Art competition (1987, Standard Bank National Drawing competition (1990) Skotaville (Betrams) 1993 Kempton Park Art competition, Inverstec Art and Craft Competition (2004) Sasko (Schools competition) 1998, Anglogold Jewelry Competition (2001).

AWARDS

In 1983 he was awarded 2nd prize award in a national painting competition for black artists, which was curated by J.D. Meiring Art Gallery of the Fort Hare University. In 1987 he was awarded a bronze Medal for a proactive role he played through teaching and participation of Funda youth in a national Art Competition Organised by Santam.

EXTERNAL EXAMINER

In 1980 the Fine Art Department of Durban Technikon invited him to serve as external examiner and thus evaluate works of first-, second- and third-year students. In 1990 and 1991 he was invited to serve as external examiner at Fuba Academy Fine Art Department. From 2006-2008 he served as a moderator of Visual Arts studies at George Tabor, a Further Education and Training College in Soweto.

COMMUNITY ARTS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES AS BOARD MEMBER

He is a founder member of Artist's Proof Studio (1992). He served on the board of this Institution from 1992 until June 2008. He has also served as a board member in the Curriculum Development Project (CDP). He also serves in MATEP-Mokhele Art Therapy Education Project Board. He has interacted with art Educators and students of various institutions and for advice and information sharing (e.g. Community Arts Project- CAP in Cape Town, Mmabana (Taung: North West) and Mpumalanga schools. He also served in the Funda Management Committee as well as in the Vega School of Brand Communications Council. (Johannesburg Campus)

WORKSHOPS

Besides attending and participating in numerous local and international workshops, eg., at Tufts University Boston in the USA in 1997, at Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of Arts, also in the USA, at the Netherlands Architecture Institute in 1998, at Pertuis in Southern France, and Lugano, Switzerland in 1992. In 2002 he was present in Switzerland and Seierre, Switzerland. In 1992 he also coordinated numerous workshops aimed at developing Visual Art making skills for present and former Funda students. Such workshops involved highly proactive bilaterals with Fordsburg Studios, Marseilles Academy of Arts in France and the Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais in Sierre, Switzerland, and St Paul and Peters High School in the UK in 2009, In 2006 he assisted at the Ernest Mancoba workshop, under the auspices of the Arts and Ubuntu Trust in Cape Town. Charles was invited to participate as both mentor and guest artist at Umkhumbane Art Studios in Durban 2010. He facilitated and designed from 2010 up until the present at various skills-development workshops in Maheking, Thaba Nchu, Polokwane, Thohoyandou, Emthonjeni, Grassy Park and Soweto under the flagship of the Art and Ubuntu Trust alongside with other leading artists. He also facilitated a workshop under Lufuno Mthetwa and associates (Soweto 2019).

PARTNERSHIPS FOR FUNDA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

He has played an important role in securing solid partnerships for Funda Fine Art Department with Artist Proof Studio (S.A) 1992, Morrisjones year (2000), Holland insurance year 2003, Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais year (2000)and Soweto schools from 1997 to date.

SERVICE-BASED ACHIEVEMENTS

His achievements as a leader and educator have been noted in products of Funda Community College from 1989 to date. Through his service Funda has produced nationally and internationally acclaimed practitioners in Visual Arts. Art Educators, Arts Administrators, illustrators and muralists. He has since 1994 contributed largely towards sustenance of operations and service delivery at Funda Community College through soliciting funding from the following institutions: Johannesburg Arts Alive, Gauteng Arts Culture and Heritage, National Arts Council, Arts and Culture Trust of the President, National Lottery, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Goodman Gallery, Department of Art and Culture (National), William Kentridge and Ackerman Pick 'n Pay Foundation

About the writer

Bongiwe Hlekiso, is currently working as a curator for Stellenbosch University (MMLC). She is a PHD candidate at the University of Western Cape. She has an MA degree in Museum and Heritage Studies, with a focus on Visual Studies. She is particularly interested in visual art, museums, and heritage as a medium for intercultural discourse. Her MA thesis on Gladys Mgudlandlu's artworks in association with working at IZIKO South African National Art Gallery (ISANG) as an assistant curator allowed her an opportunity to decolonise and reconfigure the normative reading and understanding of African visual art including the historical approaches associated with South African art in particular for African artists.

Thanks & Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to all who contributed to making this publication possible.

When in 2006 we asked Dr Elza Miles to invite the artists she had introduced to Ernest Mancoba in 1994 on his first return visit to SA after 56 years, to a workshop she introduced us to Sokhaya Charles Nkosi.

Bra Charles, as we came to know him, came to Cape Town with a contingent of others who had met Mancoba at Funda centre, Soweto in 1994.Participatign in the activities alongside our exhibition ' In the Name of All Humanity, the African Spiritual Expression of Ernest Mancoba, he urged the trust to pay attention to art education. From thsi moment he guided and supported our efforts often accompanying us to far flung parts of South Africa to run workshops during his holidays from Funda. Most often he was joined by the late Ezekiel Budeli, a warrior for art education without whom this book would have been impossible.

Bongiwe Hlekiso's insights, enthusiasm and dedication brought the monograph to life. She used her own as well as interviews conducted by Athi Mongezelei Joja.
We are especially grateful to Abdulcadir Ahmed Said whose photographs of Bra Charles work were taken meticulously over years. He and Bra Charles share an easy rapport and jocular teaching style much beloved by the participants in our workshops.

We thank Dr Same Ndluli for her insightful introduction and hope that, as she suggest is necessary, further scholarly work will unlock the myriad strands of Bra Charles contributions to art.

Thabsile Nkosi, bra Charles' daughter helped enormously with descriptions and measurements of the work and much else besides. We thank her and her mother who graciously welcomed us in their home. Regrettably we couldn't find full records of all the works but felt it was nevertheless necessary to include as many images as possible.

We gratefully acknowledge Yonelisa Jacobs, Lydia Dreyer and Wendy Smidt in the Art Ubuntu office and Art and Ubuntu Trust board members, Zubeida Jaffer (chair), Vusi Mchunu, Prof Mpako and Ziphozenosi Dayile as well as former members Ben Mokoena, and the late Nyanisile Jack.

Thanks too to Mongane Wally Serote and Shekesh Sirkar for inestimable assistance.

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Keeping People Together

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'We have been consumers for far too long. We need to be doers of the magic.'

Sokhaya Charles Nkosi

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