

Art is Sharlene's calling

PRINELLA PILLAY

THE streets of South Africa are kicking and alive with vibrant colour and a kaleidoscope of everyday jostling and trading. And one of Durban's growing artists is leaving her mark with "street people" in a current exhibition at The Bag Factory, Fordsburg.

Miss Sharlene Khan, 25, of Parktown, Johannesburg, is reaping the fruits of a theme focusing on the streets of Durban and its vendors, *braai* vendors and beggars.

It started two years ago after she was awarded the Abe Bailey Travel Bursary to England, and lamented the little things she missed at home.

"I began missing things that I did not think I would. I missed kwaito music, Zulu dialects on the streets and the mingling of African and Indian people going on with their chores and lives. I missed that whole scenario and redefined my thoughts on culture and my ideas of home."

Leaving her Riverdene, Newlands West, home almost three months ago to take up a residency programme at the art studio that caters for artists from across the globe, the ex-New West Secondary matriculant, who is completing her masters in Fine Art at the University of



Bringing street life alive artist Sharlene Khan (seen with her two pieces *Nomsa* and *Tula Mama*) is bent on changing the preconceptions of street vendors. Pic: THE STAR

Durban-Westville, said her career choice was one that almost did not come about.

"I was going to become a microbiologist, but two weeks before I was to begin my first year of BSc studies, I went to school, and discussed it with my art

teacher, who later spoke to my parents and convinced them of my talent and ability to succeed. A lot of people were convinced that I would not make money, and I almost went down the wrong path, but it has turned out to be otherwise, as I

have already sold three of my small pieces for R2 700. Art is my calling."

With her first solo exhibition held last year at the Kwa Muhle gallery in Durban, Ms Khan described her present 29-piece oil painting collection (nine large works, 10 small paintings and 10 miniature pieces), at the State of Being exhibition with Zambian artist Edward Mbaio Mumba and South African artist Nkoali Eausibius Nawa, as an extension of street life, focusing on female street vendors.

"It's pretty difficult for women to get along - looking after their family, rising early, working till late and coping with making a living. I have used vibrant colours that create a sort of an irony, as we see the reality of hard life, while on the other hand they (the people) are happy. We all have these preconceptions about street life and my idea is to redefine the stereotypes and bring those things that we often ignore to reality."

A "down-to-earth person" whose creative spirit is part natural talent, and part living her strong Christian values, Ms Khan noted that her present project had earned her the opportunity of mingling with top South African artists and opened her to new creative styles and ideas.

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