



Sharlene Khan is an artist, writer and curator originally from Durban. She received her BA (Fine Arts) and MA (Fine Arts) from the University of Durban-Westville. She now lives in Johannesburg and is currently completing her second Masters in Fine Arts degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. As a practising visual artist, Khan has exhibited in South Africa, Egypt, Holland and Switzerland. She has also participated in several international residency and workshop programmes in South Africa and abroad. She recently co-ordinated *The ID of South African Artists* in Holland, an exhibition of more than 100 artworks by 57 South African artists.

responsibility for everything that is wrong with the art world. But equally those on the periphery are tiring of excuses made by the art establishment. On the whole there is a deep sense of mistrust, and if the art world is going to thrive then radical changes need to happen. This applies not only to galleries but also to art schools in terms of content, aesthetic conventions and ideological grounding.

This project and the discussions that went with it have been useful in unpacking some of these concerns. So despite its shortcomings I think it will become a landmark publication because it dared curators and artists to look in the mirror and ask, who the hell are you?

## SHARLENE KHAN

SELECTED ARTISTS Zamaxolo Dunywa / Rookeya Gardde / Gabisile Nkosi / Sophie Peters / Berni Searte / Usha Seejarim

I know little about the South African art scene prior to 1995 except what I have been taught at school and university. What I do know is that even though there have been remarkable changes since the demise of apartheid, inequalities have persisted. For instance, the Outcomes-Based Education school system has served to further crush the arts at primary and secondary school levels, where the arts are taught by teachers who have no experience in or even appreciation for the subject. The situation is not much better at tertiary level – the majority of previously black universities have shut down their art departments while “previously white” tertiary institutions are still overwhelmingly white.

Racist legislation may be outlawed but racism still persists in all spheres of South African society – it is, however, much harder to talk about. One of the positive aspects of this project was the openness with which issues were discussed. Hats off to Colin Richards who, unlike many of his white counterparts, chose to tackle racial issues and accusations head on at the risk of much frustration and targeting. Even during this debate, many white curators still preferred to talk about international art trends and aesthetics rather than pertinent racial issues.

Another problem with the art scene is that there is currently no space that exhibits and allows interaction with foreign artists. The demise of the Johannesburg Biennale ended our brief exposure to international artists, curators and writers. The Fordsburg Artists Studios International Residency programme hosts three new artists from different places in South Africa or the world every three months; similarly the International Thupelo Workshop in Cape Town facilitates interaction between artists from South Africa and abroad. But initiatives like these are not given the exposure and funding they deserve. The result is that those who can afford to traipse off to biennials get more exposure than those who can't. Black artists continue to struggle to produce conceptual and installation-based pieces because this kind of production costs lots of money, while they struggle to buy basic materials. Now why does all of this sound familiar?

I am not a “glass-half-empty” person, though, and feel that there are many positive happenings in the art scene. Private patrons continue to support South African art. Many of our older, internationally renowned artists choose to live and work in South Africa, giving the art scene stability and providing guidance and instruction. Many artists continue to work in painting, printmaking, drawing and sculpture at the same time that boundaries in installation, video and digital work are being pushed.

For me, one of the most positive changes is one that was evident in this project – black curators unashamedly choosing to give exposure to black artists, based on historical reasons, subject matter or techniques. I chose my six black female artists based on their race and gender. When given the opportunity to participate in this project, I guessed that out of the 100 artists selected, the minimum would be black female artists. I hoped I would be proved wrong; I wasn't. The reason for this is the persistence of the myth that there aren't many black women participating in the visual arts field.

Wrong again. Here are six of them. Some of them may only be familiar in their own provinces, others are being given international art awards. The artists and their works speak of their own calibre. Some of the artists were afraid that they would be stereotyped as if their works were only relevant because of their race and gender. I hope this is not the case. I may have chosen them on the basis of their race and gender, but they make their art based on their individual inspirations and aspirations. And to those who continue to uphold the myth that there aren't many black female artists in South Africa, there are many more – you just have to look a little harder.

## DAVID KOLOANE

SELECTED ARTISTS Bongzi Bengu / Garth Erasmus / Kagiso Pat Mautloa / Samson Mnisi / Sam Nhlengethwa / Andrew Tshabangu.

In my selection of artists I was guided by the radical changes which have taken place since the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995. The biennale ushered in a diversity of expressions, including the conceptual-type installation and new media such as video, digital works and photography. South Africa's artistic expression became more diversified and culturally enriched as a result.

I must hasten to note that many black artists trained in the 1980s in segregated community arts centres. Among these are two artists I have selected for their historical role as torch-bearers during apartheid. They are Kagiso Pat Mautloa and Sam Nhlengethwa. Garth Erasmus was more fortunate as he was of “coloured” origin and thus able to study at Port Elizabeth Technikon. These three artists participated in the Thupelo Workshop programme which convened annual two-week workshops in Johannesburg in the 1980s. Their work provides a link between past and present. They have internalised lessons from abstraction often employed in these workshops to redefine urban expression.

Andrew Tshabangu studied basic photography at the Alexandra Art Centre in the late 1980s. He was recently a finalist in the DaimlerChrysler Award for Creative Photography, and is one of the few young practitioners who have taken up the challenge of photography as an art form.

Among the young artists who emerged in the 1990s, Samson Mnisi – also an art centre graduate – is one of those who are examining the past and adapting traditions into their practice. He employs paraphernalia from religious practices to recreate sacred spaces. The 1990s also brought a new breed of women practitioners, educated at tertiary level and conversant with international trends. Bongzi Bengu's collages present a new perspective, unapologetically feminist in approach and content.

The six artists I have selected occupy different periods in the history of South African art. The fact that I have selected black artists is not so much a racial issue but rather a perspective which encompasses the past history of the country. It is for me an essential perspective which relates to the existence of community art centres and their role in the development of art. In the 1970s and 1980s there were very few avenues for artists based in the townships. Rorke's Drift Art Centre, situated in rural KwaZulu-Natal, was one of the best centres for art tuition in the country. It was initiated in 1962 by the Swedish mission in KwaZulu-Natal. It provided boarding facilities, was situated in idyllic surroundings and has produced some of the most outstanding artists using linoleum prints. Nhlengethwa and Mautloa both trained there in the 1970s. Mnisi trained at the ill-equipped Federated Union of Black Artists Academy (Fuba) in Johannesburg, while Tshabangu was trained at the Alexandra Art Centre. Most of these art centres are presently defunct. While there have been positive changes in the education sector, with increased admissions of black students into technikons and universities compared to the quota system used under apartheid, I personally believe that in order to comprehend the present juncture of the state of South African art, it is imperative to be aware of the other side of the coin and its implications.



Artist and writer David Koloane was born in Alexandra township, Johannesburg. He trained as an artist at the Bill Air Studios from 1974 to 1977. From 1978 he was a founding member of The Federation of Black Artists (Fuba) in Johannesburg. He joined the Federation of Black Artists (Fuba) in 1979 as a tutor and later became head of department. He completed a diploma in Museum Studies at the University of London in 1985. He has held numerous positions subsequently, including founder of the Thupelo Workshop and the Fordsburg Artists Studios. He is presently the director. He has had numerous exhibitions of his work both in South Africa and internationally.