

# ZAMAXOLO DUNYWA

Born Port Shepstone, 1977. Lives and works in Durban

**Selected solo exhibitions:** 2003, Cinema Nouveau, Gateway Shopping Mall, Durban; 2000, *Ubuntu Bami*, Menzi Mchunu Gallery, BAT Centre, Durban.

**Selected group exhibitions:** 2003, *Women's Day Exhibition – My Life*, Durban Art Gallery, Durban; 2002, *Heritage Day Exhibition*, Durban Art Gallery, Durban; 2002, *Women's Day Memorial Workshop Exhibition*, BAT Centre, Durban; 2001, *Ethwekeni*, BAT Centre, Durban; 2001, *Masked/Unmasked*, 37 Crart Avenue, Durban.

With the arrival of democracy, globalisation and the spread of technology have come certain side effects. We are now well into the new millenium and there is a voice of dissension. This voice was first heard in the 1980s, saying that things plural and multicultural are not always what they seem to be. This voice was reduced to a whisper after our first democratic elections, as most of us were swept up in the much-needed nationalist euphoria of "We are one". The late 1990s, however, have seen a rise in voices saying that terms like "multiplicity" and "pluralism" tend to hide the inequalities that "we" as a nation still face daily.

One of these voices is that of Zamaxolo Dunywa, a young, black, female artist from Durban. Dunywa's work involves her perceptions of her "vanishing" Zulu culture in terms of language, customs and belief systems. That traditional cultures morph, adapt and assimilate influences from other cultures is not contested. In fact, an acknowledgement of this rightfully helps negate Western ideas of an "authentic", "exotic" or "pure" African culture, people and art form. However, while assimilation is inevitable and can often produce interesting hybrids and localised forms, there are times when certain elements of a culture are traded in for less desirable ones, when "old-fashioned" notions are no longer in vogue. Dunywa's work is not a mere lamentation for the disappearance of traditional values and beliefs, but seeks to question what effect this has on her as a modern, Westernised female with a tertiary education. She questions how Western cultural hegemony is changing individuals and society at large.

Her body of work, which at times has both an illustrative and conceptual quality, is neither one nor the other. Her conscious choice of materials and media – red clay (*ibomvu*), beads, paint, white powder (*um'cako*), photographs and her own body – become the bond that connects her as an individual with her fading Zulu culture.

This is evident in the work *Maye Babo!* (2003), which depicts, in acrylic paint and *ibomvu*, the traditional custom of *lobola* being forsaken by young, modern females today, as many couples choose to live together as unmarried partners. Dunywa's work, like different forms of African or black feminisms, interrogates the linking factors of gender, race, space (boundaries and territories), education and economics. None of these factors is compartmentalised or dealt with in isolation, but all are questioned simultaneously as factors that intertwine with and affect her life and the lives of others she knows.

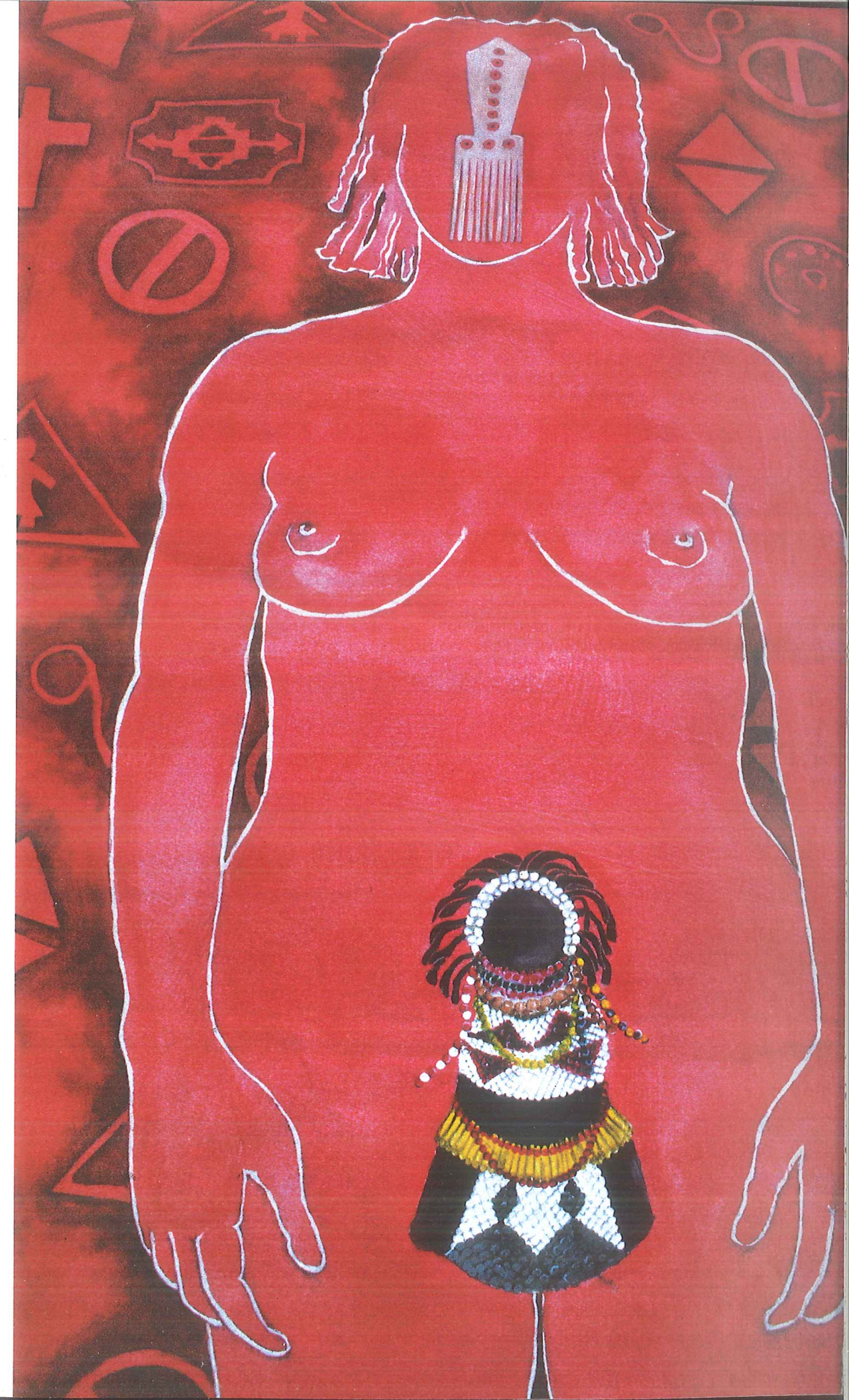
In *Wo(mb) Man* (2002) her interrogation begins with her own body, which forms the central icon in this work. All other images in the background are subsumed into this central form, as the empty vessel conveys a sense of person, the influences playing on and around her. At the same time, her rendition of herself in this illustrative way denies us a complete identity.

By contrast, the Dunywa in *Ngiyini Kume* gazes out strong and challenging. She does not look away as she is looked at. She is in command of how she is represented, traditionally or otherwise, demanding that we account for our perceptions of her. She and the other women in *Ufanani Kimi* and *Uthini Ngami* are no less Westernised, no less educated or modern or empowered for their choice to uphold certain traditional values.

Dunywa's questioning of self cannot be reduced to a self-absorbed individualism. Her self-reflexivity inspires in her an attempt to live out the ideal of *ubuntu* – I am because we are. Hence, her "fine art" work is supplemented by community projects and outreach workshops in which she participates and which she regards as fundamental to her practice. She does not believe in attaining fame and fortune as an independent African visual artist in a Western-dominated arena while her community remains deprived. It is in this spirit that she indulges in community-based projects, where she feels she is giving back as an individual to society which will one day be the better for her input.

/ SHARLENE KHAN

Facing page *Wo(mb) Man*, 2002, acrylic, *ibomvu* (red clay) on canvas, 180 x 80cm



# MAXOLO DUNYWA

1977. Lives and works

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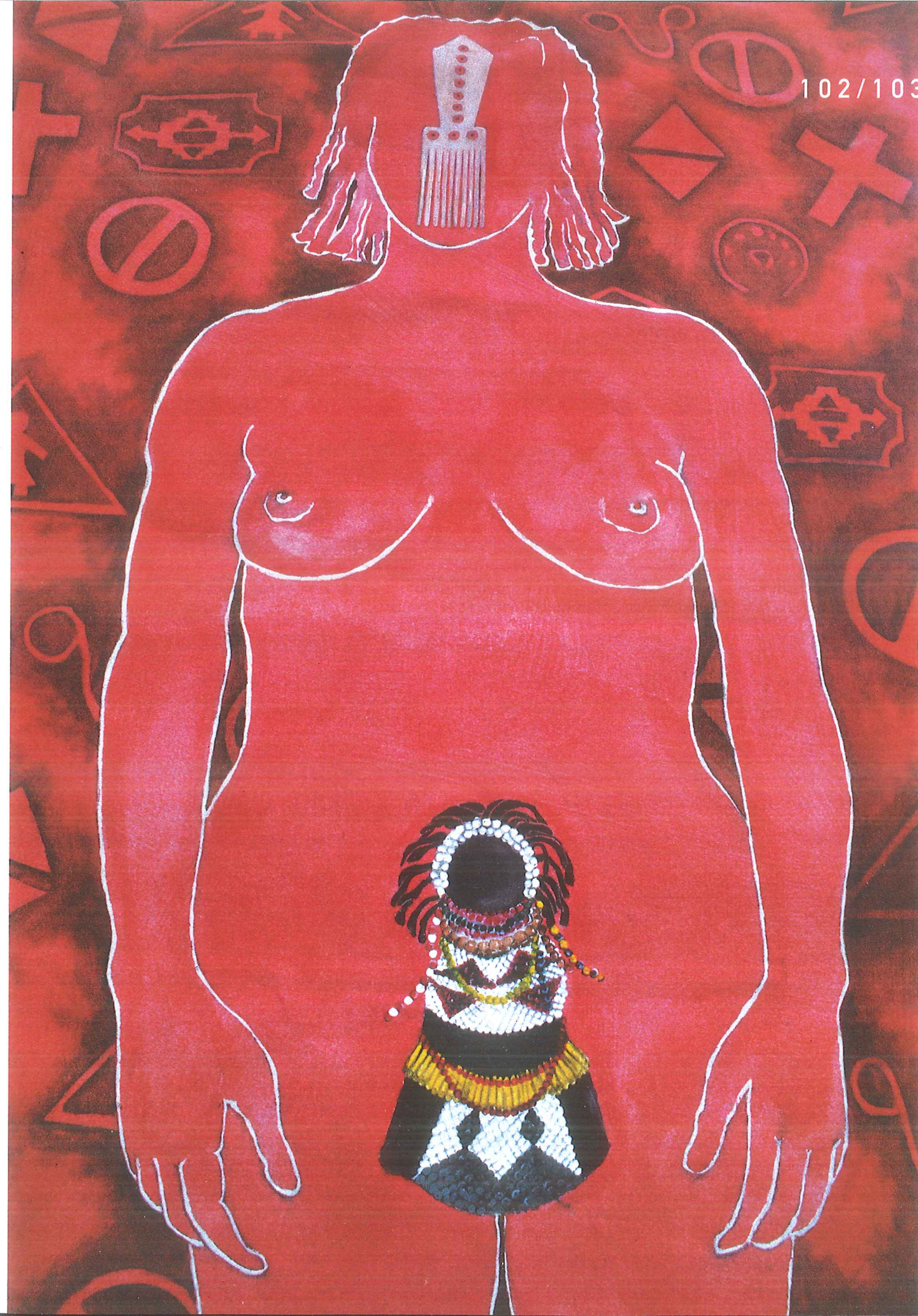
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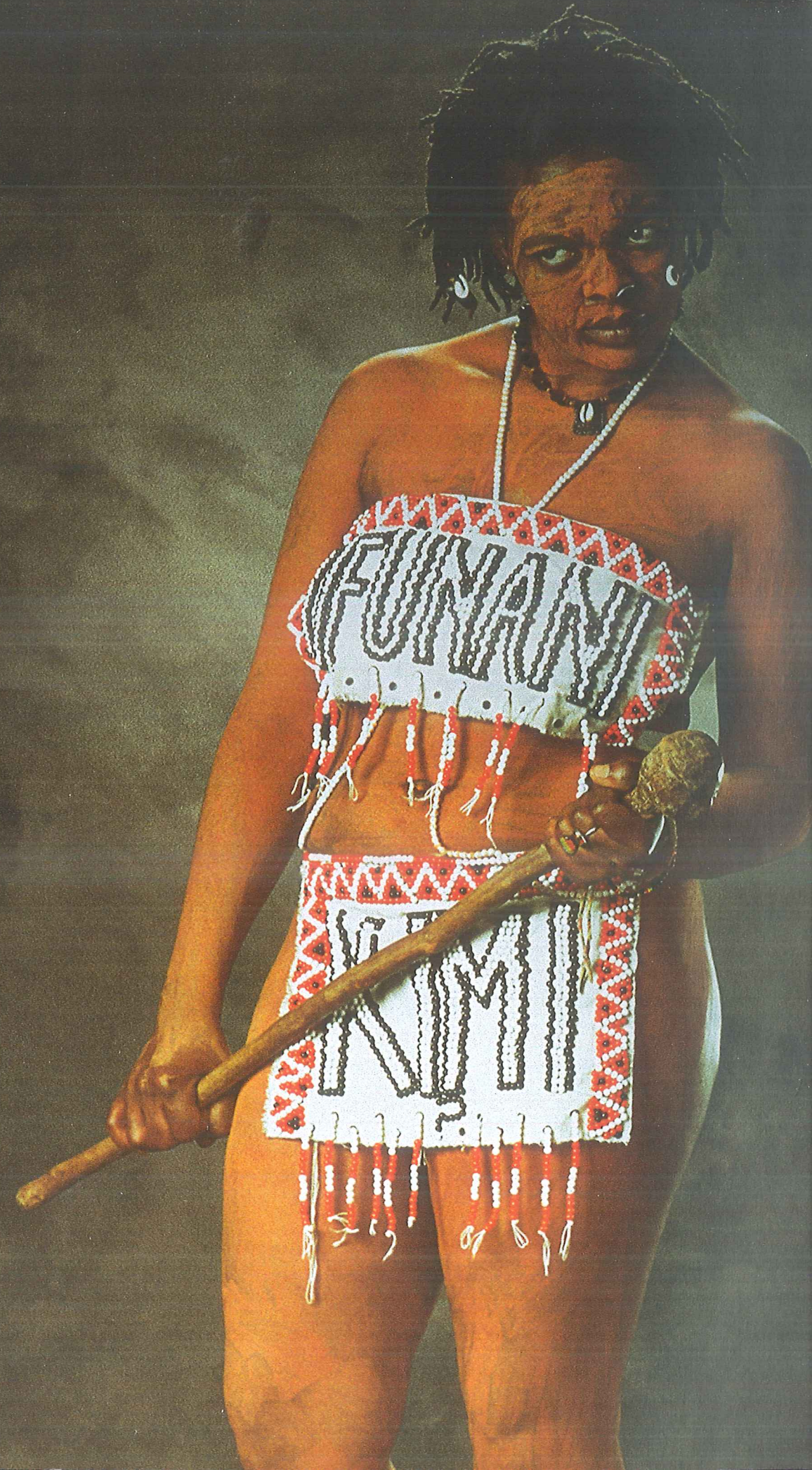
/ SHARLENE KHAN

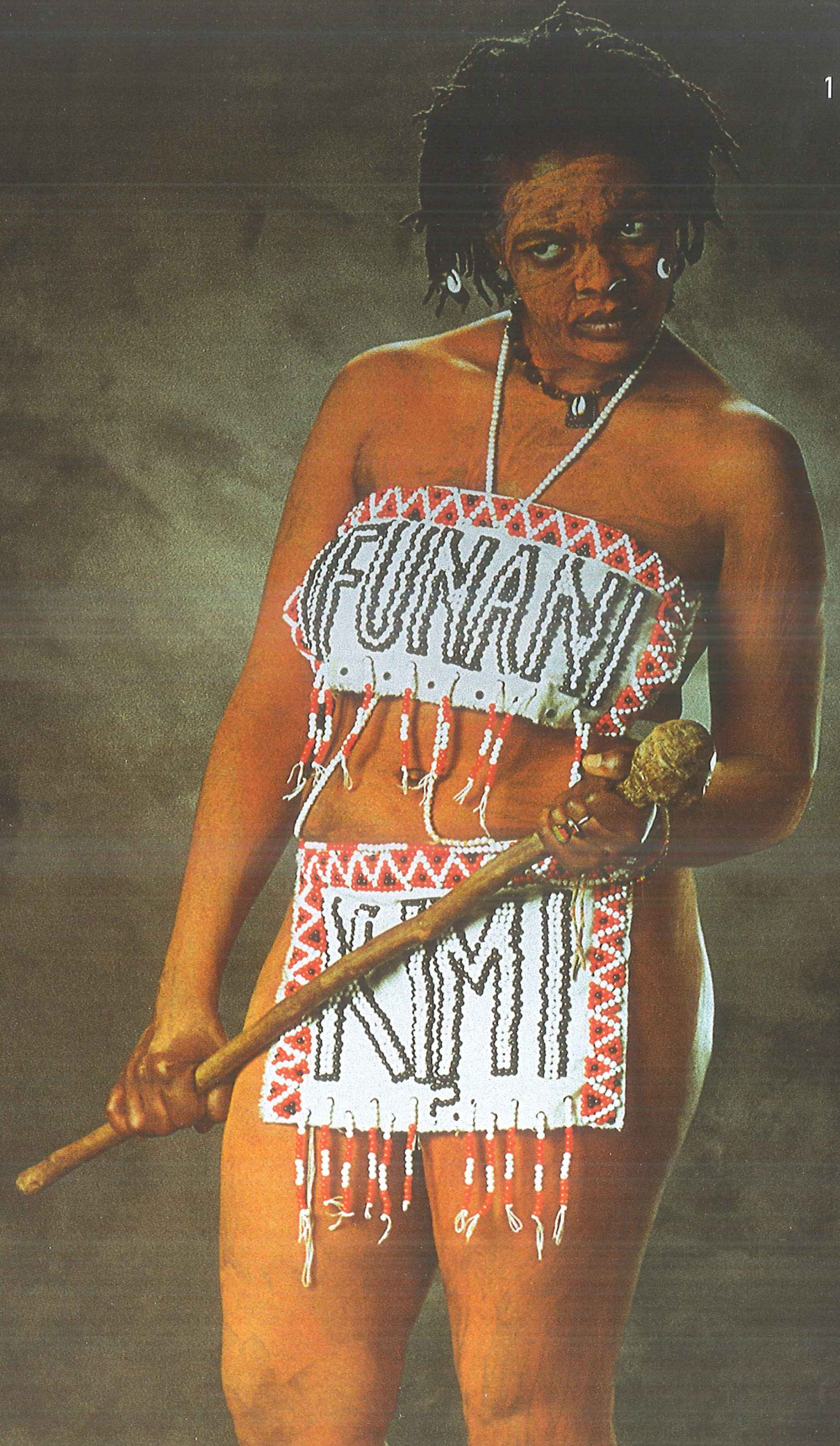
2002, acrylic, *ibomvu* (red  
clay)





This page *Uthini Ngami? (What do you say about me?)*, laminated photograph, 167 x 93cm  
Facing page *Ufunani Kimi? (What do you want from me?)*, laminated photograph, 167 x 93cm





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