

GABISILE NKOSI

Born Durban, 1974. Lives and works in Durban.

Selected solo exhibitions: 2003, *The Other Me*, Rolling Stone Press Gallery, Atlanta, US; 2001, *Unveiling*, Durban Institute of Technology, Durban; 2000, *My Child, My Son, Myself*, BAT Café, Durban; 1999, *Warm Wind from South Africa*, Durham Art Gallery, UK; 1999, Solo exhibition, Java Java, Morningside Café, Durban.

Selected group exhibitions: 2003, *My Life – Reflections of Women's Lives*, Durban Art Gallery, Durban; 2002, *Untold Tales of Magic: Abelumbi*, Durban Art Gallery, Durban; 2001, *Break the Silence – AIDS: Artists for Human Rights* print portfolio, Durban Art Gallery, Durban; 2000, *Baggage*, Gallery Chastain Hourglass, Atlanta, USA; 2000, *Jabulisa 2000*, Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg.

Selected publications: 2001, Elsa Miles and Chris Cozier (eds), *Baggage*, catalogue (Fulton County Art Council and Caversham Press Educational Trust, Atlanta); 2000, Brendan Bell and Jill Addelson (eds), *Jabulisa*, catalogue (Natal Arts Trust, Durban); 2000, Lyndsay Ord, 'Against All Odds' in *Daily News*, November 14; 1998, David Whetstone, 'Warm Wind of Friendship' in *Art Journal Newspaper*, January 12.

The art of storytelling is an old one. Stories can be complete fantasy or wholly factual but are usually a combination of both. The stories we are told as children (irrespective of our race or culture) inevitably teach a moral lesson. Gabisile Nkosi, a printmaker from Durban, tells such stories. Her stories, however, are meant for people of all ages.

Nkosi's work, mostly linocuts, woodcuts and silkscreens, is rooted in her daily life and experience. Images of people – of herself, her family, friends or neighbours – dominate her work. Animals and insects often appear as well, usually in a functional or metaphoric role. In *Unkulunkulu Unathi* (2003), Nkosi depicts God resting on her head to represent the blessings and favour she attests to Him. In *Inkumbulo Emtoti* (2003), the image of a gecko makes reference to its rhythmic movements that Nkosi associates with dancing. Here, the reptile represents her mother who had a fondness for them and would have been very gratified had she been alive to know that Nkosi was visiting the US when she made the work.

In *Ivele Lami?* (2003), Nkosi has portrayed herself with a frog on her head, both peeking out from beneath a veil. The amphibious nature of the frog represents the dual reality that Nkosi experiences on a daily basis. Umlazi, one of the largest townships in Durban, where Nkosi grew up and where her family lives, provides the setting for most of the stories she tells. Currently, however, she is employed at the Caversham Centre in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands where she lives during the working week. This area – an affluent, spacious farming area – stands in stark contrast to her family home which she visits on weekends. In Caversham, Nkosi has her own space to live and work, while her home in Umlazi is small, lacks privacy and is located in an area with high crime and unemployment rates. Nkosi identifies with the amphibian which has to negotiate two different terrains – the land (representing the township, with its challenges) and water (the safety of Caversham).

This is not to say that Nkosi doesn't appreciate her home life in the township. In several works like *Ngosuku LweSabatha* (2003) and *Ukubambisana* (2003), she speaks about the experience of family and community engendered by such living. In *Ubuhle Bentombi Busezinweleni* (2003), Nkosi explores a practice that has been infiltrating feminist and Afrocentric discourse – the social bonding and communication that occurs when women get together to style their hair and talk. It is a time of learning, sharing and validating each other. Nkosi says that her six sisters as well as their friends, neighbours and herself indulge in this ritual on weekends. *Izindaba Azipheli* (2003), reflects the intensity of her family's convergence upon the kitchen of their little house, where, according to Nkosi, "the news never ends". A sense of this experience is evident in the busy lines and textures of the silkscreens, a device she developed first in her lino- and woodcuts.

Nkosi's work also deals with issues and problems that affect her community and society at large. In *Sesifikile Isikhathi* (2003) and *Inkumbulo Emtoti* (2003) she addresses domestic abuse and poverty respectively, while she turns her attention to HIV/AIDS in *Asikapheli Isikhathi* (2003).

In today's society, where few are willing to learn from the actions of others, Nkosi continues to tell stories with morals and metaphors that correct and caution those who would listen, and she does this with more than a hint of humour.

/ SHARLENE KHAN



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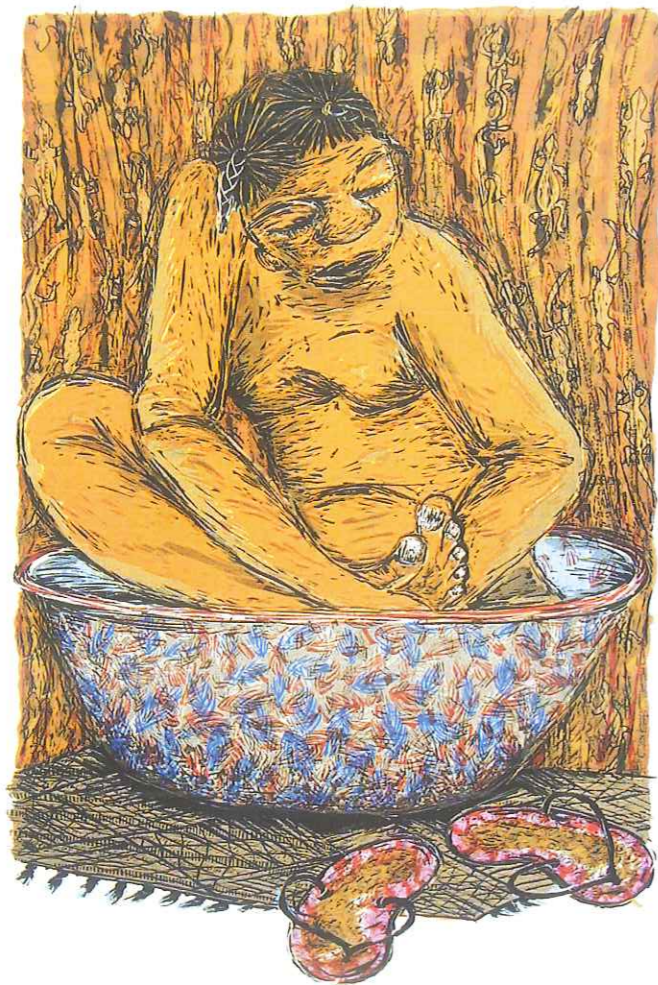
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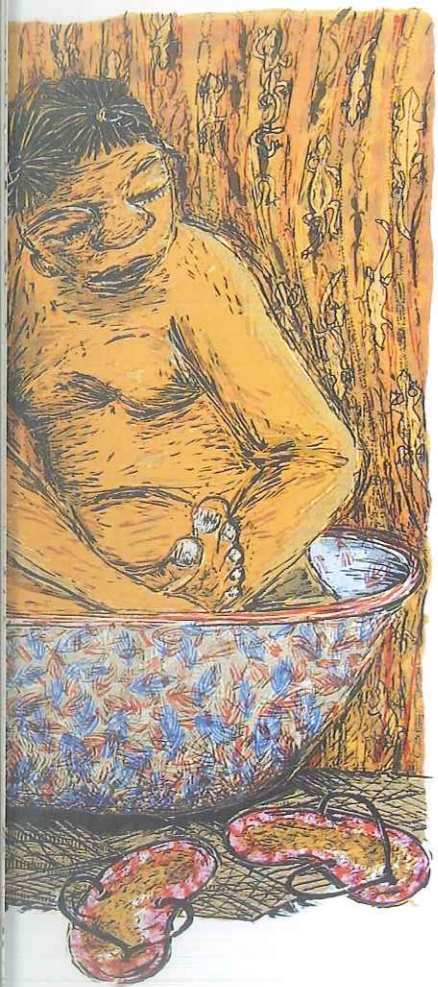
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This page, top left *Inkumbulo Emtoti (Sweet Memories)*, 2003, silkscreen on paper, 35.5 x 50cm; top right *Iwele Lami (My Twin)*, 2003, silkscreen on paper; bottom *Asikapheli Isikhathi (Never Too Late)*, 2003, silkscreen on paper
Facing page *Ngosuku lweSabatha (On the Sabbath Day)*, 2003, silkscreen on paper



Emtoti (Sweet Memories),
 x 50cm; top right Iwele Lami
 paper; bottom Asikapheli
 , silkscreen on paper
 (On the Sabbath Day).