

**Internationally-known playwright Zakes Mda has been appointed the Community Arts Project's new director. JUSTIN PEARCE asked him about his plans:**

## *Keen on change and Boland — that's Zakes*

**Z**AKES MDA TALKS with the animation of an artist and the chisel-like precision of an academic. Not surprisingly, he's both.

Mda has just been appointed director of Cape Town's Community Arts Project (CAP), a post which has been vacant since Mike van Graan resigned last year.

"My main interest is using art as a medium for development and for educating the community," says Mda from behind his round, horn-rimmed spectacles.

"I chose CAP rather than a university or college because I like dealing with grassroots organisations. In Lesotho I developed a number of cultural projects including theatre — taking theatre to people. I thought I could use CAP to develop such programmes.

Mda was born in South Africa but settled in Lesotho as a child when his parents went into exile.

"It is time for me to come back to South Africa with the changes in this country. And Cape Town is my favourite South African city — it is a very laidback place compared with Johannesburg. You find all the communality here that you find in a village, but with the advantages of a city." Mda believes that CAP requires a major independent assessment to determine its direction, but speaks with dedication of nascent plans of his own.

"One thing that I've observed is that CAP is very urban-based, and

I'm keen to change that. When we talk about human development we often forget that human beings live in rural areas. This attitude prevails throughout South Africa, even among the liberation movements.

"We must take CAP to the Boland. People in Crossroads are marginalised, but people in the rural areas are more so."

He is also eager to rethink how CAP is run.

"The focus has been on middle-class people trying to do good. We have had the notion of doing something for them. We in our infinite wisdom have tried to determine what other people's needs are.

"If an organisation is to serve a community, that community must be represented in its structures — and not just by means of a token representation. It must be a meaningful, active representation that will inform those of us who do not live in that community.

"I don't want CAP to be a charity organisation that dishes out aid. We must get rid of that dependence mentality that we have in South Africa." He recalls a theatre programme planned to educate people in rural Lesotho about how to stop soil erosion. "The first question the people asked us was 'how much will you pay us to do this?'"

CAP must find ways of generating its own income to get rid of the dependency mentality, Mda believes. Donors will be needed to

supplement this income until the government grants funding to cultural projects, as is the case in other countries.

While Mda's doctoral thesis dealt with theatre and development and he is best known as a playwright, his academic and artistic background is multi-disciplinary.

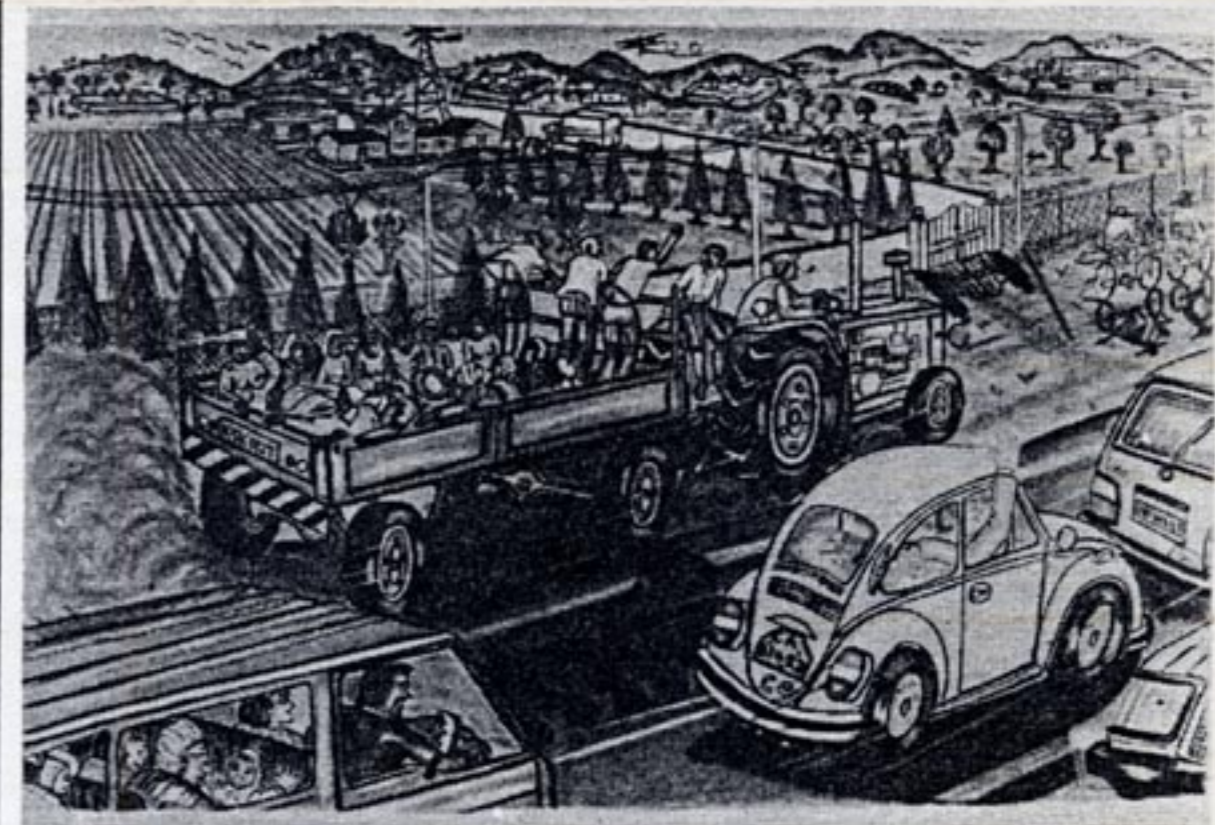
His paintings have been exhibited in Britain, Canada and the US as well as in Lesotho. In 1984 he became director of the Screenwriters Institute and has contributed several scripts to Lesotho television.

Mda also describes himself as a "mass communications person", an attribute that prompted his appointment by UNICEF as a consultant on social mobilisation, in the area of child survival and development programmes.

His work involves planning and advising UNICEF on its campaign strategies, as well as producing written material for its use.

Last year Mda held the post of Writer-in-Residence at Durham University in England. Schemes whereby a university pays a stipend to a resident writer or visual artist are common in Europe and the United States, he says, and recommends that South African universities adopt a similar scheme.

"It involved nothing but writing, and the odd seminar. It was the first time in my life that I was able to sit down without worries and write. I came back from Durham inspired."



**"THANK YOU FOR YOUR GOOD GESTURE": One of the works by Tommy Motswai, this year's Standard Bank Award winner**

## *Deaf artist wins coveted award*

DEAF ARTIST Tommy Motswai is the winner of this year's Standard Bank Young Artist Award.

Motswai won the coveted prize for his boldly coloured works which show shrewd insight into human behaviour, said the organisers.

Apart from the prize money of R8 000, the award also ensures an exhibition of his work at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. After the festival the work will be shown at major art galleries throughout the country.

"The keen attention he pays to human conduct is probably — as it was with the Spanish artist, Goya — the result of the deafness. As an artist he has no handicap because his deafness enabled him to see reality and not to be beguiled by pious, audible untruths," said Dr Marion Arnold, of the 1820 Foundation.

Motswai attended the Kutlwanong School for the Deaf, where he now teaches art and sculpture.

After leaving school he trained at the FUBA Gallery and the Johannesburg Art Foundation, and in 1988 he spent a year studying at the University of Bophuthatswana.

Motswai has been the recipient of several awards. In 1987 he received the Volkskas Atelier Merit Prize, the Sol Plaatje Graphic Art Award and the Excelsior Award.

In 1986 he was one of the artists chosen to represent South Africa at the SA Association of Arts Exhibition in Monte Carlo. And one of his works was chosen for the 1991 Cape Triennial currently touring South Africa.

Many of Motswai's works are exhibited in galleries around the country. **KAREN WILLIAMS**

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