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All photographs were taken by Anthea Martin unless otherwise acknowledged.
Abstract

The African Art Centre (AAC) has survived for sixty years, against all odds. Initiated during the darkest days of apartheid South Africa, the AAC supported and promoted black artists who were deliberately disadvantaged by government legislation. The AAC was established as a programme of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), an organization itself under continuous government surveillance, as were the organisations it partnered - the Swedish Mission at Rorke’s Drift and the Zululand Council of Churches under whose auspices the Vukani Association flourished.

The AAC reinforced many artistic initiatives at a time when such activities were regarded as subversive. A partner initiative, the Abangane Open School, was run informally when black students were denied entry to mainstream campuses. Concerned Natal Technikon artists and lecturers admitted them through the backdoor for Saturday workshops, thereby contributing significantly to fine art development amongst local artists who otherwise would not have had exposure.

The AAC has survived because of its adaptability, demonstrated by the fact that it has been housed in seven different premises during its 60-year history. During my period as director, the emphasis shifted to institutional fundraising as well as development projects and training. Outreach and development projects were organized as part of the AAC mission, and funding was accessed to run projects. These reached a huge number of art and craft people in rural KZN, many of whom went on to teach others their skills.

Throughout its sixty years, the AAC shop and gallery has been the hub of many artistic initiatives. During my tenure at the AAC (1996-2009) fine art and craft exhibitions were held monthly, contributing significantly to the marketing and sales of art and craft work.

Through all its trials and tribulations, the AAC might be facing its darkest hour. Currently its very existence, and the livelihoods of the artists it supports, is threatened due to the coronavirus pandemic. We hope that with continued efforts from the directors and staff we will find ways to continue.
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iv
Over the last sixty years the African Art Centre (AAC) in Durban has survived against all odds. It was initiated during the darkest days of apartheid South Africa, when lack of educational and artistic opportunities threatened to keep the talents of black artists out of sight. Despite many obstacles, the AAC persevered from the 1960s through to the 1990s and became the hub of many artistic initiatives in KwaZulu-Natal, supporting and promoting black artists who were deliberately disadvantaged by apartheid legislation. Despite the obstructive constraints, a climate of optimism, expectation and excitement prevailed in the world of African art in the province.

Originally established in 1959, since 1984 the AAC has operated as a non-profit organization. The AAC was guided initially by Jo Thorpe, who virtually single-handedly put Durban on the map as an important centre of black artistic development. Jo became Regional Secretary of the Natal Branch of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) in 1959, a post she held for 26 years. The shop

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1 Anthea Martin is a practising artist, living in Durban. She was Director of the African Art Centre from 1996 to 2010. At present she is a trustee of the Board of Directors of the AAC.
had small beginnings in a spare SAIRR office in Colonization Chambers in West Street, then in Syfret House. After the SAIRR moved to 8 Guildhall Arcade, off Gardiner Street in 1967, it became known as the AAC shop. In 1984 the AAC became autonomous and registered as a non-profit organization (NPO).

The SAIRR repeatedly published facts about draconian laws that led to forced removals, detentions, suicides in prison, murders and other human rights violations, and was often threatened with closure. Despite these challenges, many people tried to make a difference to the circumstances and opportunities of the people of South Africa oppressed under the apartheid regime. Jo saw the AAC as providing an opportunity for artists to be recognized and sell their work.

During her time as de facto Director in the SAIRR’s Durban offices, Jo worked tirelessly to keep the AAC viable, with marketing of craft and fine art through the organization of exhibitions, competitions and development workshops. Following her retirement in 1991 she wrote It’s Never Too Early, the only book written about the AAC. The AAC had a committed and stable board of trustees, which provided vigilance and helped keep the AAC viable over the years. Duchesne Grice, a lawyer with Shepstone and Wylie and chairman of the AAC board, provided initial surety for the venture. Dick Breytenbach, Libby Ardington and Chris Yuill were founder members. Dr TS Pillay, Carl Roberts and Marianne Meijer were on the board for many years. Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Archbishop Denis Hurley and the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) supported applications for funding.

Since its inception, the AAC has successfully facilitated and implemented relevant developmental and mentorship programmes and showcased opportunities for hundreds of artists and crafters from rural and urban KwaZulu-Natal. It is recognized as one of the longest-running South African organizations involved in the development and marketing of works produced by disadvantaged artists and crafters. Through various marketing initiatives, every attempt has been made to assist artists and crafters to tap into domestic, provincial, national and international markets.

Art journalist Marianne Meijer with Jo Thorpe at opening of the head rests exhibition in 1994.

Anthea Martin, Raphael Magwaza and Lee du Plessis at the opening of Vuminkosi Zulu’s exhibition in 1991. (AAC archive / CAL)

Duchesne Grice with Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi at the opening of an exhibition in 1969. Photo U. Carlson 1969


2
Through my lens

Jo Thorpe\(^3\) recalled the origins of the AAC and her first-hand experiences working with local artists and craftspeople, but since then nothing has been written exclusively about the AAC. This article is compiled through my lens and deals specifically with the time I worked at the AAC, my current involvement as an independent curator of exhibitions, and as an AAC board member.

My early involvement with the AAC began after I returned from living in the USA and London in 1970-1971. I was enthralled by the creativity and artistry of the artworks at the AAC, which compared most favourably with the superb weavings, sculpture and jewellery of the Navajo people in New Mexico USA. I realized that we had a wealth of indigenous crafts in South Africa, especially in KZN.

I became enamoured with the AAC shop in 8 Guildhall Arcade, off Gardiner Street, Durban, visiting it often, becoming a volunteer, helping with window displays and assisting with exhibitions of art and craft. I often accompanied Director Jo Thorpe to collect baskets in the countryside or to buy rugs, tapestries, hand-printed fabrics and ceramics from the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Art and Craft Centre at Rorke’s Drift, or to Eshowe and Hlabisa, where the Vukani project was active.

In 1994 I opened an art gallery in my house in Westville, Durban, where I displayed the work of local artists as well as AAC artists. In May 1996 I was offered the position of AAC development officer. Many exciting years of expanding and developing the centre followed. I organized exhibitions and created biographies of artists and craftspeople. Museums and the public had started collecting examples of outstanding craft and fine art, plus pieces of antique beadwork and artefacts. In 1996, after sanctions against South Africa had been removed, there was international interest in art in South Africa, especially African art. Suddenly we were in demand. At the time we had a small community fine art project and some craft workshops.

During my period as Director the emphasis shifted to institutional fundraising as well as development projects and training, and to pass these skills onto others. In October 1996 I visited the Community Arts Project (CAP) in Chapel Street, Cape Town. Run by Mario Pissarra, this project was formed in aftermath of Soweto Uprisings. CAP played a prominent role in placing community arts on the agenda and defining future arts and arts education policies for the province and the country through the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG).

CAP had developed into a creative centre which offered an impressive programme in teaching visual arts, performance, dance and music with eleven classes running daily. Their message was to train the trainers. It was an eye

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opener for me to see what could be achieved using workshops to expand on traditional craft skills, to create new art forms and saleable products.

CAP was mainly funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). I was inspired by CAP and impressed with what they had achieved. Subsequently, I applied for funding from SIDA for the AAC, for development projects and for exhibitions.

I was amazed at the extraordinary ability of craftspeople who transformed mute materials into eloquent and useful forms. The transformation of ideas and raw materials was enabled by the numerous workshops we organised. These were usually inspired by ‘master’ craftspeople who had elevated their craft to a level of great skill. Elliott Mkhize, Zodwa Maphumulo, Ntombifuthi Magwaza were masters of telephone wire weaving; Nesta Nala and her daughters in ceramics; Reuben Ndwanwde and Beauty Nxongo in woven grass baskets. Innovative sculptors Henry Mshololo, Philemon Sangweni, Michael Mpongose and Timothy Mlambo shared their skills, as well as others too numerous to mention here.

The AAC had always had a good relationship with the American Consulate in Durban, which resulted in an early introduction to the Smithsonian Institute. This resulted in eleven artists being invited to attend the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC in 1999. Zodwa Maphumulo created wire baskets, Beauty Nxongo grass baskets, Nesta Nala ceramics, Philemon Sangweni and Henry Mshololo wood sculpture, Joseph Manana murals, Celani Nojiyyezwa, Dumiile Mathe, Sylvia Langa, Eunice Cele and Albertina Majola beadwork and dolls. There was a great deal of excitement, and fear, as none of them had flown in an aeroplane before.

In 2002 I went to the USA as a cultural visitor. I made valuable contacts, which resulted in invitations for AAC artists to attend the annual New Mexico Craft Fair and supply craft to the Santa Fe Craft Museum. This eventually led to funding from the Kellogg Foundation.

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The work of The African Art Centre is underpinned by the following principles:

- The right of all people to self-expression
- The right of all people to working opportunities in order to earn a living
- The right of all people to respect and dignity
- The principles of fair trade
- The principle of nation building through protecting cultural heritage

THE AAC undertakes to:

- Provide access to relevant markets
- Provide an outlet for the exhibition, sale and distribution of artists’ and crafters’ work
- Access funding for training, development and exhibitions
- Communicate, research and document traditional and contemporary trends in art and craft
- Preserve our cultural heritage
When I assumed the position of Director of the AAC in 1996, I applied for funding from SIDA for some development projects.

Whilst most of the local craft sold at the AAC was very good technically, some could be developed into more fashionable and saleable products. I asked some of the isiZulu craft experts to help small groups of crafters to expand their design skills, or teach new skills using telephone wire for weaving baskets. The late, highly-skilled Elliott Mkhize was one of the first to generously share his skills. The workshops created exciting new products which then led to the creation of exhibitions to show and sell this new work.

Traditional isiZulu beadwork was brought to the shop at distressingly low prices, way below their real worth. Colleague Hlengiwe Dube was an expert beader, with a wealth of knowledge of the tradition and meaning of the beads. She had learnt everything from her grandmother Mzenzisi Ma Dlamini Dube, a traditional isiZulu healer and an expert on beadwork. Together we put on many exhibitions of traditional beadwork and artefacts, and these sparked off a frenzy of collecting by local and international buyers. These became the Amagugu Treasures Exhibitions which lasted for four years until the supply of artefacts ran out.¹

The gallery area at Guildhall Arcade was small and cramped. We constantly moved items around, and built shelving, boxes and plinths to display the work and make it more appealing to customers. This resulted in the staff giving me the isiZulu nickname of bhokisi.²

Because of its growing popularity and interest in African art and craft, the shop became too small. In 1999 the AAC was invited to take up a space in the Durban Tourist Junction, which was situated in the renovated historic railway station building on the corner of Pine and Gardiner Streets in the centre of Durban, more accessible to visitors and artists alike.

¹ Dube, H. Personal Interview. August 2016, Durban
² The isiZulu nickname of umlungise wamabhokisi means arranging/putting right/tidying up the boxes.
We occupied a space with good lighting on the first floor overlooking the city. As sales increased, we expanded into office space next door which gave us a bigger gallery space and a venue for the continuing craft workshops. Many exhibitions followed the move, with more space to hang artworks and display craft. An outside balcony gave additional space for guests to move outside at exhibition openings. During the day, many craftspeople sat outside, finishing their work in time for purchasing.

With an influx of informal traders, the area became unsafe for our craftspeople and for visitors. We accepted an invitation from Janina Masojada of OMM Design Workshop architects, to move to their renovated office building at 94 Florida Road, Durban. Through this connection, in 2005 we received a huge commission to make a beaded South African flag for the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg. Beaders worked on the floor in the gallery space, as the panels for the beaded flag - to be displayed in the main courtroom - were enormous: 6 x 2.5 metres in size.6

Despite the small gallery space at the Florida Road premises, we continued to display fine art and craft, and had almost monthly exhibitions, which were documented with an illustrated catalogue and a full biography of each artist. Exhibitions and craft development had to be funded externally from the running of the shop. We approached and got support from the National Arts Council (NAC), National Lottery Board and many other funders. A big break came through the award of three million Rand in funding from The Kellogg Foundation in the USA for the development of art and craft. With careful management, this funding lasted for four to five years. We initiated a project called Artist of the Year, selecting an outstanding artist or craftsperson and giving them a monthly stipend for one year. They could concentrate on developing their work, culminating in a solo exhibition. Artists Reuben Ndwannde, Philemon Sangweni and Timothy Mlambo benefited from this project. From this American funding and connection, many crafters were invited to the prestigious craft fair in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA.

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6 Led by textile artist Leonie Malherbe six KwaZulu-Natal women - Agnes Mmatha, Sphindile Nkosi, Greta Nkosi, Zibuysile Zulu, Hlengiwe Dube) took around five months to finish the flag.
In 2018 Director Magdalene Reddy moved the shop to premises in the new precinct in Station Road in the Umgeni area. This move to a new urban precinct was unfortunate, as access was poor, and the expected urban development failed to materialize. Consequently, tourists and customers were lost.

The next move, to the Phansi Museum in Esther Roberts Road in May 2019, was made possible by architect Paul Mikula. The AAC hoped this move would bring tourists and visitors to the double attraction of the museum and the AAC shop. This was working until the onset of lockdown due to COVID 19 in March 2020. The future now depends on whether overseas visitors will travel to Durban in the foreseeable future; whether local visitors will continue their support of the AAC; and whether online sales can support the Centre.

At present the AAC is surviving against all odds, and even in these difficult pandemic times it continues to successfully promote artists. Despite lockdown, two exhibitions were held in 2020. In May, Enchanting Creatures of the Forest featured wood sculpture made by artists from Manguzi in northern KwaZulu-Natal. In July, Fragile Truths showed the work of 20 invited fine artists. Over half of the artworks from both exhibitions were sold.

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7 Architect Paul Mikula has served on the Board of Directors and has always been a supporter of the AAC. He is also the Managing Trustee of the Phansi Museum. During the 1980s he was involved with the BAT Centre, which became the focus for many fringe art activities. It was intended to offer training, rehearsal and practice space, as well as facilities for exhibitions, concerts and theatre, plus a restaurant and bar. The AAC partnered with the BAT Centre on workshops in doll making and telephone-wire baskets around 1996 to 1998, as well as workshops for students of the Velobala Group in ceramics and printmaking.
The AAC was crucial in the development of other fine arts and craft initiatives, starting in the 1960s, and continuing through the apartheid era. These associations are highlighted in the following pages.

Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Art And Craft Centre, and Ceramics Studio, Rorke’s Drift, Zululand

The AAC was essential for the early development of Rorke’s Drift during the 1960s. The AAC promoted and sold their rugs and tapestries, which enabled the ELC centre to build up the financial base for the fine art school in 1962/63. Jo Thorpe selected promising artists for the school and often found sponsorship for them. The success of the fine art and ceramics departments led to many subsequent exhibitions at the AAC and other venues in South Africa. In 1969 the SAIRR was invited to have three representatives on the Rorke’s Drift board: Prof. Walter Battiss, Dr Jack Grossert and Jo Thorpe. During my tenure I attended a few board meetings. The association between Rorke’s Drift and the AAC continued up to the time when Christiane Voith left Rorke’s Drift in 2014.

Vukani Association - Wake Up And Go, Eshowe

The relationship between the AAC and Vukani started in the 1970s. It flourished after the exhibition of baskets at the DAG Ukusimama Kwamasiaka – Cultural Survival 1993, when the AAC intensified the marketing of their baskets. Trips were made to select baskets and to meet the weavers. Jannie van Heerden was seminal in the development of the craft and interaction between the weavers and the AAC. After the collapse of Vukani, individual weavers marketed their own baskets.

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The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Art and Craft Centre at Rorke’s Drift was a seminal influence in the development of black art and craft, mostly due to the excellence of its instructors and students. It produced a number of legends in the history of South African art, and many former students became full-time professional artists, educators, writers and art administrators.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift was founded by the Church of Sweden Mission and established in 1962. The first art and craft instructors, Peder and Ulla Gowenius, had arrived from Sweden the previous year. Peder had specialised in art education and Ulla had majored in textile art and weaving. Their brief was to research the material culture of the Zululand area and consider viable opportunities for the encouragement and marketing of arts and crafts to assist local people, especially to provide an income for women.

They settled at the Ceza Mission Hospital under church protection and hospitality. They were admirably suited to begin their teaching at Rorke's Drift. Ulla successfully introduced spinning and weaving for male and female patients, who were convalescing from tuberculosis and other diseases. Peder experimented with painting and drawing, but found that the male patients were better at wood carving, which soon developed into linocut printmaking. Azaria Mbatha, recuperating from heart disease, became an outstanding printmaker. American art historian, Michelle Facos described this generation of art in its historical context:

Art was to express life, that is the spirit of the times and the culture in which it was produced. This it did by transforming the visible world according to the imagination and feelings of artists - those who could

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9 Rorke's Drift is the location of the Battle of Rorke's Drift (1879), a historic site in the Anglo-Zulu War. The nearby battlefield is a major draw for tourists. The original stone buildings date back to 1849 when James Rorke established a post office and a trading store. In 1878 it became the Oscarsberg mission station run by Otto Witt of the Swedish Lutheran Church. Helge Fosseus, a missionary for the Church of Sweden Mission in South Africa in the 1950s and 60s, had a longstanding interest in African culture and in the potential of the visual arts in mission work. (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:14).

10 Facos, Michelle 1998:105
discern essential patterns and meaning in the vicissitudes of daily life and the shifting appearance of nature.

Peder Gowenius in later years wrote to Jo Thorpe, reminiscing about the early years¹¹:

_We were young, naive and unaware of the obstacles that lay ahead. Alternative languages are particularly important in any situation of oppression. The storytelling picture is only one of many languages. The reputation of our school still lives on today because vital stories emerged in tapestries and prints. The possibility of expressing oneself in art is like giving a language to the speechless. The first step towards freedom. Without language we are powerless.”_

Weaving studios were set up in vacated seminary buildings on Swedish mission land. The weaving workshop produced carpets and tapestries, plus carding, spinning and dyeing pure Namibian karakul wool. This became so successful and financially profitable that they were able to support the running of the Centre. The weaving studio was commissioned to make many tapestries for local and international clients. The AAC had been invited to become the marketers of art and craft produced at Rorke’s Drift.

Jo Thorpe¹² tells the story of how Peder Gowenius had arrived in 1965 with _five beautiful rugs that were a revelation, a completely new discovery of African art expression_. From 1965 to 1992, Jo organised 29 exhibitions to promote rugs, tapestries, ceramics and fine art. Rorke’s Drift fine artists, weavers and ceramic artists exhibited in prestigious national exhibitions such as Art South Africa Today, The Cape Town Triennial, South African National Gallery (SANG), Durban Art Gallery and the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg.

In 1994 Princess Ngcobo Tyler left the ELC Art and Craft Centre to take up a position at the Dakawa Centre in Grahamstown. This was a big loss, as she had built the Centre into an efficient organisation. Reverend Zulu was then appointed as manager by the Diocesan Council of ELCSA. In the following years the Centre was poorly managed and received little support or funding.

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¹¹ Vaxjo 2002: Hobbs and Rankin, 2003
¹² Thorpe, J. 1994. _It’s Never Too Early_. p.15

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Woven pure wool rugs. All carding, spinning and dyeing of the wool was undertaken at Rorke’s Drift.

(Photographs by Christiane Voith 2012)
Renaissance of the ELC Art and Craft Centre

Christiane Voith arrived at the Centre in 2006, just in time to prevent its total decline. Voith was employed to support the Art and Craft Centre by Bread for the World in Germany and was soon appointed as manager.

Voith studied Textile and Fashion Design at the Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design in Halle an der Saale, one of the oldest in Germany. She applied her skills in fine art, and applied and industrial design. Her study was based on practical studio work which enabled her to deal with the ELC’s problems. She also had a building construction degree with practical experience, which she used to good effect as the ELC buildings were in a state of collapse. She was also able to repair the water supply which continually gave problems to all people on the farm land.

13 Some former Burg students founded the Bauhaus during the Weimar area, later dissolved by the Nazi regime. Some teachers moved back to Burg Giebichenstein and made it the most influential school for art and design in East Germany. (Personal interview; Voith, Christiane 2010)
Voith tried to raise funds for the Art & Craft Centre – a near-impossible task since the land was neither community nor state-owned, but belonged to the Lutheran Church. Funds were raised for a Sector Education Training Authority (SETA) vocational training Learnership Programme. This competed with the income-generating work of the Centre’s existing crafters and artists, which required careful management. She also acquired funding from the German Embassy in Pretoria to reconstruct the collapsed showroom building and transform it into an exhibition hall, which displayed the best examples of rugs, tapestries, ceramics, textiles and art prints of past years.

Voith had a positive impact on designs, production and viability of the weaving, textile printing and ceramic studios. She reorganised and modernised the management, administration and marketing of the Centre. Together with German graduates and the support of the Senior Expert Services (SES) in Germany she digitalised the administration. She organised many exhibitions and fairs, established an international network, published artwork and articles about the Centre, and obtained commissions for the tapestry weavers. Capacity building of artists was supported by vibrant help of young volunteers, Weltwaerts - the Deutsche Gesellscaft für International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) programme - with additional support from the USA and UK.

Durban artist Cameron Platter ordered several huge tapestries using his paintings as the subject, which were exhibited in galleries in Europe. Based on the growing commercial success, the Centre was able to buy modern equipment and refurbish the studios. Most of the modernized activities were financed by the generated income of the Centre itself.
The ceramic studio at Rorke’s Drift flourished under Gordon Mbatha and Joel Sibisi, both fine art students and expert printmakers, as well as accomplished at ceramicists. Gordon Mbatha had trained as a weaver so understood the process for designing tapestries. Gordon, Joel and other fine art students such as Azaria Mbatha designed many of the early tapestries. Christiane Voith promoted the collaborative work of different art and craft work.

The first wood-fired kiln was built in 1968 by Peter Tyberg from Denmark, but all the ceramics exploded because the heat was raised too quickly. The next year a coal-fired kiln unfortunately gave the same problems. Gordon Mbatha, Joel Sibisi, Ephraim Ziqubu and Caiphus Nxumalo, from the Rorke’s Drift Fine Art School, experimented with bringing the heat up slowly, which finally achieved results. In 1970, a Swedish couple, the Nelsons, built a small oil kiln with drip burners. Despite their success, the Lutheran Church asked them to leave as they refused to attend church services.

In 1971 Cape Town potter Marietjie van der Merwe visited for two to three weeks at a time and introduced glazing and new shapes like mugs and bowls. She also built a huge oil-fired kiln with six burners which took up to six hundred pieces, firing at 1350 degrees. Experienced Durban potter Andrew Walford assisted with the oil kilns and introduced better drip burners. In 2000 Ian Calder from the ceramics department of University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, made a huge contribution by introducing electric kilns. He also brought new glazes which were fired at 1230 degrees. Calder visited many times and gave workshops to the local ceramicists.

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Clay and Glazing

From 1968 to 1998 clay was obtained from a farm at New Hanover. It contained a lot of iron, so it was mixed with throwing purchased clay in a half and half mix. Eventually the clay digging site was moved to another part of the farm. While the clay seemed good initially, problems later arose with bubbles, and the colours of the glazes went murky.

In 2000 Gordon Mbatha left the Centre due to problems in the studio and the management of the ELC Centre. He returned in 2004 and is currently the manager of the ceramic studio.

During my visits to the Centre to buy rugs and tapestries for the AAC, I witnessed the decline. Things became worse with the retirement of Elizabeth Tyler, the only person who knew anything about running the Centre at that point. In 2009 the roof blew off the showroom. This weakened the walls, which brought about the final collapse of the building in the next big storm.

Tile with incised black slip design

Stoneware vessels decorated with red and black slips

Elizabeth Mbatha bowl with sgraffito carved into a black slip

Lindemusa Mabaso vase sgraffito design on black slip. (Photographs Christiane Voith)
The Msinga valley is largely located in deep gorges of the Tugela and Buffalo Rivers, isolated from the immediately surrounding areas, with few economic resources and activity. In July 2001, on a buying trip to Rorke’s Drift for the AAC with Sylvia Shepherd, the contradictions were starkly highlighted.

The clouds were grey and heavy in the valley, as we wound our way down the road along the rocky mountain slopes. A small landslide had resulted in large rocks strewn across the road. A provincial truck stopped to remove the rocks. Bright yellow and orange aloe flowers pierced this gloom.

Women walked along the road wearing silky cloaks of purple and emerald green, which flashed against the dun earth and golden grass. I wondered if they took the colour from the emerald honey sucker bird that sips and dips into the blooming aloe flowers.

We passed the small settlements of Keats Drift, Tugela Ferry, Pomeroy and then Rorke’s Drift - names left by the English on their way to the battle of Isandhlwana in the Anglo-Zulu war.
At Elandskraal trading store, we stopped to purchase imbiza beer pots of fired red earth, with flashes of black where they touched the coals. The prices were very low - R30 to R50. I bought the most elegant, with a narrow base and flares out at the top. Only one fitted in the car, but the owner promised me a bakkie load. Next to the trading store a small primitive mill ground mealies into meal. Donkeys set off loaded with sacks of meal with their owners behind them. They knew their way home without leads or goading.

On the mill verandah two young girls were having their maize ground. Dressed in identical lime green towels and white sneakers they had scant protection against the cold. The mill operator and other men, all covered in white mealie dust, huddled around a small fire like ghosts trying to keep warm, in a weird archaic scene.

Compared to the swanky game and eco ranches across the hills, Rorke’s Drift was grey under heavy skies and biting cold. A bright mural on the showroom wall, and a newly built store painted bright glaucous pink, gave fine contrast to the gloom outside.

Inside the showroom of the ELC Centre the ceiling was buckled in a state of collapse. There were neither lights nor light bulbs. At 3 pm we asked for candles to lighten the gloom. There were none of those either, so we peered in the dark to try and make out the rugs. Grey was the colour of that day and it continued in the form of indifference. We heaved the heavy rugs over one by one to choose the best. Exhausted, we lay on our backs on top of the rugs and studied the collapsed ceiling. Sylvia’s comment on the armies of ants on the ceiling was simply ignored by everyone.

Tea was brought in an enamel teapot with a hand-hewed wooden lid. I asked myself why the potters could not make teapots, like they make mugs, jugs and vases with faces and spouts.

We went for a walk in the dark and passed a tour guide expostulating Anglo-Zulu history to tourists, huddled in grey blankets behind the old stone Rorke’s Drift hospital. They moved in an invisible bubble, safely peering through the glass of history, well removed from reality, scraping some passion out of old battles, and nightly they shook off the African dirt in their comfortable lodges.

It was almost dark and we walked down the road greeting women chopping their evening firewood. We joined in some friendly gossip.

We stayed in the former home of Peder and Ulla Gowenius, where the more creative times were evident only in residual art books from the art school period, and a few huge and beautiful ceramic vases from the pottery studio. I reminded myself of the important role the art school had played and resolved to ask what had happened to the records. I hoped that someone, one day, would want to record this important story.
The *Vukani* (wake up and go) Association was established in 1972 by Pastor Kjel Lofroth and his wife Bertha, under the auspices of the Zululand Council of Churches.\(^\text{15}\) Rev. Lofroth and his wife lived in the house next door to the shop.

*Vukani* was moved from the Rorke’s Drift area to Eshowe, as ilala palm and the *Incema* grass for basket making grew abundantly north of Eshowe, around Hluhluwe and up to Kosi Bay. *Vukani* aimed at the renaissance of grass basket weaving in the Hlabisa area of northern Zululand. The Hlabisa area became the main producer of ilala palm baskets.

Jo Thorpe and AAC staff made many trips up to Hlabisa to meet the weavers and to buy baskets for the AAC shop outlet. I often accompanied her and met some of the weavers. Later it was necessary to explain market trends, to introduce quality control, and to find additional markets for the baskets through exhibitions and trade fairs.

The *Vukani* Association gave training on dyes and grasses, quality control and, importantly, the on-going marketing of the baskets. Other areas also produced baskets - the Drakensberg and South Coast areas of Natal - but they had no-one to promote or develop their work. Zululand was unique in that respect.

The first exhibition of woven grass baskets at the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) was from the Cape Town National Gallery. I submitted an article to the newspaper enquiring why the DAG had no traditional grass baskets on display. Subsequently an exhibition of *isiZulu* grass baskets, entitled *Ukusimama KwaMasiko* - Cultural Survival - was held at the DAG in 1993. Jannie van Heerden curated the exhibition and introduced the weavers to Jill Addleson, director of the Durban Art Gallery at the time.

Jannie van Heerden played a pivotal role in publicising the weavers’ art and craft. He met Rev. Tjel Lofroth, who had moved the *Vukani* Association to Eshowe in 1970, and established a

\(^{15}\) Lofthroth, T. *Vukani*, 1972 to 1982 10 year Report. KCAL 351684 Campbell Library
shop to sell local grass baskets and craft. Marketing was of great importance. Mr Elliot Dladla was a trainer and the quality controller.\textsuperscript{16} Van Heerden started accompanying the \textit{Vukani} Association on their trips to the Hlabisa area, where he soon met all the weavers and acknowledged the superb quality of weaving from Beauty Ngxongo, Vina Ndwandwe, Flora Hlabisa, Norah Manqele, Reuben Nd wandwe, Laurentia Dlamini and many others. He was an important contact with the craftspeople of Zululand and brought craft into the AAC for Jo Thorpe and introduced the weavers to her.

Van Heerden acknowledged that he initially knew nothing about rural \textit{isiZulu} crafts and learned extensively from Prof. Jack Grossert who had written his doctorate on Art Education and Zulu Crafts.\textsuperscript{17} Under Prof. Grossert craft education flourished. The annual Ndaleni exhibition was a great event, with people vying to buy the artworks. Many of these artists exhibited and sold their work at the AAC.

Van Heerden recalls the intense interest in basketry, and that after collecting assignments of baskets, “\textit{all over Hlabisa, I was stopped by people wanting to see the baskets made by the master weavers, they were in awe and appreciated the quality of the baskets.}” This prompted him to record the name of the maker, the date the basket was made, the dyes that were used and the area where it was made.

He describes the difficult terrain he encountered in his small hatchback car: “\textit{These were the days before the large off-road vehicles we have today. Sometimes it was very dangerous as the roads were virtually non-existent.}” Indeed, this was intrepid pioneer work. Jannie took me to visit the famous Mona market in Hlabisa where amazing craft was sold alongside hand hewn wooden yokes and farm implements. Vast collections of indigenous herbs and animal products were also sold.

\textit{Vukani} selected the most outstanding baskets and this formed the core of the \textit{Vukani} Museum at Fort Nongqayi in Eshowe. The building was designed by Durban architect Paul Mikula to display baskets in the

\textsuperscript{16}Van Heerden, J. 2009. 16,17.
\textsuperscript{17}Grossert, JW. 1968. \textit{Art Education & Zulu Crafts. Vols 1&2}. Pietermaritzburg, Natal. Shuter & Shuter. From 1935 to 1948 Prof. Jack Grossert was an art teacher and part-time lecturer in art at the Natal Technical College; in 1948 he founded the Ndaleni Art Centre, Natal; from 1948-53 he was Organiser of Arts and Crafts in Natal for the African Schools of the Natal Education Department; from 1963-1974 he was Professor of Fine Art at the University of Durban-Westville. . Prof. Grossert published many books dealing extensively with the craft traditions in \textit{isiZulu} culture, which became the definitive documentation of \textit{isiZulu} Crafts. He fully understood that craft was connected to identity, and spent years investigating and documenting \textit{isiZulu} culture. He also made meticulous ink drawings of the crafts.
https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/john-watt-jack-grossert
appropriate conditions. The *Vukani* Museum has an extensive collection of baskets and isiZulu pottery plus other traditional artefacts.

The *Vukani* Association collapsed in 1992, mainly due to withdrawal of church funding, but also due to a failure to hand over the organisation to people who could manage it efficiently.

Van Heerden recalls:\(^{18}\)

*One day Vukani did not turn up at the Magistrates Court in Hlabisa, and there were hundreds of people waiting. Fortunately, I had cash on me, so I purchased some of the baskets and sold them to the AAC. I then started bringing buyers to the area and acting as an agent for the AAC in Durban and for other galleries. The weavers started relying on me to purchase their work. This meant I had to carry huge amounts of money which was dangerous. Master weaver Reuben Nd wandwe warned me that it was not safe for me any longer. I then encouraged Beauty Ngxongo and Reuben Nd wandwe to become independent. Reuben opened his own shop from his home where he sold his own baskets and from other weavers in the vicinity. Beauty Ngxongo also sold her own baskets from her home and from other women in her area.*

As the *Vukani* Association collapsed, Carol Sutton established the commercial enterprise Ilala Weavers in Hluhluwe, to market the baskets, which they have done very successfully. Many of the weavers formed their own marketing groups or sold individually to galleries and other outlets. This continues today and some of the weavers still supply the AAC.

\(^{18}\) van Heerden, Jannie. Interview, August 2016
Jannie van Heerden was appointed as Schools Inspector for Art and Crafts in 1989 in the then Zululand Government service, overseen by Dr Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi who gave ongoing support to the AAC. Jannie was also a subject advisor for craft and art in the primary schools in Zululand. In 1990 van Heerden attended his first primary schools’ exhibition at the Ulundi museum, and spent three months viewing the work of primary school art in KZN’s 25 regions. He collected the best work and got sponsorship from Durban Arts for prizes. Money from businesses and the Durban Arts Association was used to sponsor rural students to study art at the Natal Technikon.

Van Heerden also worked in Alice in the Eastern Cape and then at the University of Durban-Westville (UD-W, later part of UKZN).

Van Heerden is a practising artist and during his extensive travels in the province, drew and painted the dramatic landscape of Northern Zululand. Fortunately for posterity, he wrote a comprehensive book on Zulu basketry.

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19 Dr Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi was founder of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in 1975 and was Chief Minister of the KwaZulu “Homeland” until 1994. He was Minister of Home Affairs of South Africa from 1994 to 2004. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mangosuthu-G-Buthelezi
20 Van Heerden, Jannie. Personal Interview. August 2016. Durban
Visits to artists in their remote rural locations

Nesta Nala

I visited Nesta Nala a few times with Hlengiwe Dube. The area is remote and the roads were treacherous, sometimes close to waterfalls.

Nesta came from a matriarchal family of distinguished potters. She was taught the traditional skill of making beer-pots by her mother Siphiwe Nala, and in turn, passed these skills on to three of her daughters, Jabu, Thembi and Zanele, all of whom have produced vessels for both local and international markets.

In 1999 Hlengiwe and I took American photographer Edward Ruiz to Nesta’s remote home in Ntumeni across the Tugela River. Hlengiwe regaled us with folklore when we passed the famous mountain Ntonjambili with its hole through the twin mountain peaks, Hlengiwe mentioned that the area was famous for twin babies. She recounted that early one morning she and her mother saw huge tracks in the sand on the bank of the river and was told that enormous snakes came out of the river at night to look for food.

Edward Ruiz’s photographs of Nesta Nala and her daughters were published in an article in Conde Nast House and Garden magazine in 1999.

Images of Nesta Nala firing her pots with her daughter, while Hlengiwe Dube looks on

Photos: https://www.straussart.co.za/artists/nesta-nala
Visits to artists in their remote rural locations

Beauty Ngxongo

Guided by Jannie van Heerden, Carol Brown and Jenny Stretton of DAG and myself on behalf of the AAC, travelled in a kombi bus to Beauty Ngxongo’s remote home in the Hlabisa area.

It was high summer, so the rivers and streams were in full flood. The bus could not safely cross a small swiftly-flowing river, so we all heaved rocks into the river until we had built a steady foundation ford for the bus to drive over. We laboured up the hill in heavy mud, and finally came to the brow of the hill where Beauty’s homestead nestled.

Beauty gave us a wonderful welcome to her neat home, with all her basket weaving tools and dyeing pots outside. She shared her techniques with us as she explained how she wove her exquisite baskets.

According to Beauty: “with the help of the African Art Centre in Durban, I visited Sweden in 1994 to showcase my work. That was my breakthrough internationally.”

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22 https://lexuslife.co.za/the-master-beauty-ngxongo/
Outreach and Development of Fine Art and Craft

Community Art Workshops
The SAIRR started the Abangane Open School at the Ecumenical Trust Centre in St. George’s Street in central Durban in 1963. It was organised by Jo Thorpe, then Secretary of the Natal Regional SAIRR in Durban. The Abangane Open School was a municipal project and received a grant from the Durban Arts Festival. The School was crucial in developing young artists such as Sfiso Ka Mkame, Joseph Manana, Bheki Myeni, and Aloise Cele (who subsequently started an art centre in Umlazi township).

After the collapse of Abangane, the Community Arts Workshop (CAW) was started by Natal Technikon lecturer and sculptor Andries Botha. This important initiative managed to survive the worst of the apartheid crackdowns from 1984 to 1989 until it was closed down by the police. Many of the artists who attended Abangane went on to attend, and teach at, CAW. Thereafter the AAC managed to set up art classes through other art lecturers, which eventually evolved into the Velobala Art Group.

Development Projects
Outreach and development projects were organised as part of the AAC’s mission. Funding was accessed which reached a huge number of art and craft people in rural KZN, many of whom went on to teach others their skills. Some products were improved, for example, the traditional dolls of Msinga were dressed in traditional beadwork and were able to stand up alone. Beaded animals reached new heights of design and colour. Traditional beadwork evolved into fashion items, still using traditional techniques. Some projects evolved into fabric printing workshops and members became part of the Phakamani and Design for Africa projects, and ultimately the Zimeleni Embroidery Project. So one thing led to another as experience and skills were gained by all parties concerned.

The outreach and development projects included:

- Fine Art and Community Workshops
- 1997 Velobala Art Programme
- 2000 Amazwi Abesifazane (Voices of Women)
- 1996 and 1999 Beaded Doll Projects
- 1992 Phakamani (to uplift myself)
- 1992 Design for Africa, Donnybrook
- 2000 Sezenjani Ngengculazi (What are we going to do about Aids?)
- 2004 Okungijabulisayo (What Makes Me Happy)- Richmond Farm Embroidery Project
- 2005 Beaded South African Flag for the Johannesburg Constitutional Court
- 2002 Zimeleni Embroidery Project, Donnybrook
- 2008 Ntokozo Embroidery Project

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23 Martin, A. “Flickering Fires Amidst the Darkness. Community art centres that have been instrumental in the provision of art education and training of black South African artists from 1952 to 1984, with special emphasis on the Community Arts Workshop in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal 1984-1989.”
Fine Art and Community Art Workshops

Concerned artists and lecturers at the Natal Technikon - later the Durban University of Technology (DUT) contributed significantly to fine art development and consciousness amongst local artists. They gave their time and shared their expertise during Saturday workshops for developing artists to expand their skills. In 1977 the Abangane Open School was initiated (later the Velobala Group of artists).

Drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and jewellery design classes were held without charge from the Technikon. Some lecturers gave time to instruct the classes. Masters students were often employed to run the classes. The classes were funded firstly by SIDA, then the NAC, the US Kellogg Foundation and the Artists for Human Rights Trust Fund and National Lotto funding.

Sculpture was explored in workshops during the July vacation in 1997. Andries Botha, head of the Sculpture department, solicited input from visiting sculptors such as Peter Schütz from Johannesburg. A wire structure known as ‘The Cage’ was erected outside the sculpture department, funded by the Nedbank Arts and Culture Fund. The secure space enabled artists to work on large pieces of wood and metal and resulted in some commissions for the artists.

One of the most important commissions was the carving of the huge double doors for the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg. The designs for these were worked on together with Janina Masojada and Durban artist Andrew Verster whose idea was to use the gestures of sign language to represent themes from the Bill of Rights. Andries Botha coordinated the carving and installation of Merbau wood panels by Lindelani C. Ndinisa, Musa Ngcobo, Smanga Madlala, Dumisani Mthethwa, Jabulani Mkhize, Ernest Mthethwa, Richard Maphumulo, and Richard Shange. Other commissions followed this, but the sculpture cage was torn down when the sculpture department moved premises within the campus.

Well-known artist Sfiso Ka-Mkame²⁵ expressed his feelings about the about Durban Art Centres and Workshops in the 1970s and 1980s:

_The Abangane Open School started in 1977 in line with the National Youth Programme. It had classes in fine art, drama, dance, music ... Joseph Ndlovu was the organiser of the SAIRR Youth Programme and Charles Nkosi was involved in the programme of running art classes. Both had trained at Rorke’s Drift fine art school. Abangane Open School was an autonomous project_

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²⁴ Lecturers Andries Botha, Jan Jordaan, John Roome and Marlene Wasserman held workshops to expand artists’ skills.

under the auspices of the SAIRR, of which the AAC was an integral part until it moved out from under the umbrella of the Institute to become an autonomous organization in 1984.

At the Abangane Open School, I learned about wood and linocut, and also silkscreen printing in 1982. We were using methods of low technology production of posters and images using minimum materials such as the back of a spoon as there were no printing presses. These workshops were held on Saturdays at the Natal Technikon when John Roome and Jan Jordaan would let us in through the back door. At that time Africans were not allowed in. Eugene Skeef was involved in music and poetry, and my elder brother, who is deaf, attended art classes before he left for the USA in 1981.

My life-long relationship with the AAC began with my selling my prints and drawings produced at the Abangane Open School, visiting and seeing other artists’ works that were selling there and being exhibited. Sadly the Open School closed shop in 1983. Other initiatives followed Abangane, The Community Arts Workshop 1994 to 1998 initiated by Andries Botha, being the most important.

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**Velobala Art Programme**

The Velobala Art Programme continues today and has been invaluable in reaching young artists, giving them the opportunity to explore the many different art mediums.

**Velobala** means - *To Be Exposed to Art*. A competition to name the group and design a logo was won by Sibusiso Mkhize. The programme has had inspiring teachers over the years, some of them being Themba Shibase, Bronwen Findlay, Isaac Khanyile, Janet Purcell, Langa Magwa, Kate Wells, Zamaxolo Dunywa and many others. Many of the upcoming artists who exhibit at the AAC have studied art through the Velobala Art Programme, such as Wonder Buhle Mbambo, Sthenjwa Luthuli, Major Ngcobo, Witty Nyide, Kenneth Shandu, Ayanda Ncobo, Nontobeko Jilajila, Zwelinjani Radebe, Nsebenzelo Mvuyana, Mbaliyethu Mabuza and Lindokuhle Ngcobo.

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*Velobala logo Linocut by Sibusiso Mkhize*

*Velobala studio: Yvette Dunn and instructor Themba Shibase, and Anthea Martin from the AAC*
Andries Botha

Andries Botha had a profound and productive relationship with Jo Thorpe. She counselled and confirmed his need to engage with social issues, which he has done continuously throughout his career as an artist and activist.

Botha’s own upbringing and personal hardships deeply influenced his increasing empathy for black South Africans under oppressive apartheid legislation. As a child of a single parent with meagre resources, he understood the boundaries and barriers to economic mobility and the limitations on educational and other opportunities.

Raised in Durban in an Afrikaner Nationalist background, at university he was influenced by the liberal Afrikaans Sestiger (Sixties) poets26, who had moved into the forbidden areas of atheism and political struggle in South Africa. Their poetry was like a spear in the heart of Afrikanerdom. Personal pain accompanied this journey of conversion and rejection of Afrikaner heritage. Breyten Breytenbach provided inspiration to Botha on how to engage simultaneously in creativity and social action. Botha says that he did not set out specifically to make protest art, but wanted to participate in changing the situation of political disaffection in a practical way. He explains that he became aware that

his life was touched by grace - a complexity and not a dialectic mechanism or a non-rational explanation that allowed him to move in between the narrow apertures he encountered, to emerge unscathed, strong both physically and mentally. Somehow there was always someone to shift you to safety. He started giving back early on, in participating in the positive gifts of sharing, which gave him insight into reading the landscape, not only for himself but also for others.27

With Jo Thorpe’s endorsement, Botha initiated the Community Arts Workshop (CAW) in Durban from 1983 to 1989. He invited his students Gert Swart and Brian Berlien to participate. Many people were involved in teaching: Dennis Purvis, musician Steve Fataar, Jan Jordaan, Lee Scott Hempson, Carol Kuhn, Paul Sibisi, Zane Lang, Carol Beresford, Sfiso Ka Mkame, Bruno and Gonda Brincat. During his time at CAW, he concluded that “my role as an artist there was one of ‘social engineering’: bringing together people of divergent race groups and letting them work as equals in the making of art.”28

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26 During the 1960’s The Sestiger poets expressed their disaffection from Afrikaner Nationalism through Afrikaans. They were Jan Rabie, Etienne Leroux, Andre P. Brink, Elsa Joubert, Ingrid Jonker and Breyten Breytenbach. South African literature proved to be an important expression of resistance against apartheid throughout the 20th century silencing South African writers: https://Encylopaedia Britannica.
27 Andries Botha interview June 2020
28 Andries Botha interview June 2020
Amazwi Abesifazane (Voices of Women) Project

Botha conceptualized the Amazwi Abesifazane (Voices of Women) Project as part of a bigger Africa South venture and personally funded the early development of it from sculptures he sold, which “paid for my international flights to get funding”. Richard Lyster\textsuperscript{29} drew up the original constitution for the CAW. Later, as a commissioner on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission\textsuperscript{30}, he suggested Botha attend and listen to some of the hearings, to fully understand what the apartheid government had done to and concealed from South Africans.

At the Durban hearings, Botha was shaken to the core by the disclosures of massacres and atrocities, as in Conrad’s \textit{Heart of Darkness}, which implicitly commented on imperialism and racism.\textsuperscript{31} He noticed that women were the principal witnesses telling what had happened.

With the Amazwi Abesifazane (Voices of Women) Project Botha believed that, whatever the story, lives are altered when the trauma is witnessed and told and then transformed into beauty using a creative methodology, whereby “the power of creativity lies in transforming the story into beauty”.

Jo Thorpe continually showed Botha beaded love letters – beautiful, coded messages between a woman and a man. A friend Brenda Gouws also had shown him embroidered samplers, and he saw a way to create a South African language using these creations of women. This was an opportunity to aesthetically marry two narratives and use embroidery, applique and beadwork to tell eventful stories of traumatic experiences never to be forgotten. The embroidered cloths became small tapestries of history, giving voice to stories that had until then burdened their makers.

The purpose was to honour those stories and to keep them as part of an archive, never to be sold - 3500 in all. After finding a suitable template, money was raised for the project in KZN and later in the rest of South Africa, as Botha realized that women in general continue to be seriously affected by social engineering and he broadened the project to embrace Indian, Khoisan, Afrikaner and English women.\textsuperscript{32}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{voices_of_women_project_photo.png}
\caption{Voices of Women Project.}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{29} Richard Lyster, Legal Resources Centre (LRC) in Durban 1982 to 1995; and Regional Convener of the TRC 1996 to 1999
\textsuperscript{30} The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), was a court-like body established by the new South African government in 1995 to help heal the country and bring about a reconciliation of its people by uncovering the truth about human rights violations that had occurred during the period of apartheid. Its emphasis was on gathering evidence and uncovering information—from both victims and perpetrators—and not on prosecuting individuals for past crimes. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Truth-and-Reconciliation-Commission-South-Africa
\textsuperscript{31} Joseph Conrad, \textit{Heart of Darkness} (1899)
\textsuperscript{32} Andries Botha interview, Durban, 28 February 2021
\end{footnotesize}
Amazwi Abesifazane - Voices of Women

Amazwi Abesifazane - Voices of Women - was a 2000 Africa South Project, aimed at story-telling. It was initiated by Andries Botha, sculptor and head of the Sculpture Department of Natal Technikon (later DUT), and funded by The Prince Klaus Fonds of Netherlands and Botha himself.

The project aimed to tell the stories of 22 women, skilled in beadwork and/or doll making. The creative process was initiated through the medium of embroidered cloth embellished with beads, which told the individuals’ retrieved memories of personal histories. These were women at the ‘war front’, dealing with the process of ‘speaking out’ about the AIDS epidemic, but also of vendettas, loss of land, houses and family members.

According to Andries Botha, he told the women:

In the history of South Africa, there have been many problems. The future of South Africa is in the hands of the women. The men will fight, but the women build homes. There are many stories that need to be told and heard. If we never speak, we never know the truth. We make beautiful things which have the power of good in them. I am asking you to tell your stories and show you how to put these things together, like a chain of good things and we will show them to many people.

Textile artist Leone Malherbe was the instructor on how to illustrate the stories on fabrics with embroidery stitches and beads. Hlengiwe Dube translated and assisted in the project. The sewing technique was a first for many of the women. Three workshops were held at the AAC, but a lot of the work was completed at home. Recalling tragedies they had suppressed or put behind them, the women said it was painful to bring back the experiences they had had, but to voice the pain was to help heal. The stories included houses burning down, stock theft, floods, drought, robbery, murder, whole families dying of Aids and many funerals.

The embroideries were exhibited at the AAC with written stories and photographs of their creators. This was the start of many Amazwi Abesifazane - Voices of Women projects that travelled all over South Africa.

The women who attended were Cabangile Dimba, Happiness Dladla, Jabu Gcaba, Doris Gwala, Khulumelaphi Hlambisa, Ntombencane Khanyile, Dumazile Khubisa, Ogetia Khanyile, Tholani Lushozi, Dumisile Mathe, Agnes Mtombi Mbatha, Alexia Mshazi, Alexia Mkhize, Balandiwe Meyiwa, Agnes Mthembu, Beauty Ndlovu, Maningi Ngcobo, Celani Nojiyeza, Thokosani Sibisi, Thembisle Shozzi, Tholiwe Sithole and Lobolile Ximba

Happiness Dladla: In 1987 there was lots of rain and the Umgeni river flooded. She lost her house in the floods and so did all the people in her area.

Balandiwe Meyiwa Lost her two sons to faction fights in Shongweni. This changed her life. She was not safe and had to move. She used to have a big family of 11 children. She now lives in a small house with lots of grandchildren all squeezed in together.

Dumisile Mathe: In 1998 her family was attacked at night. Her family fled and escaped, and she was left with the cat. She kept quiet and turned out all the lights, so the attackers thought there was no-one left. Then they began to steal the cattle.

Khulumelaphi Hlambisa: On 17 June 2000, a candle was accidentally knocked over and the house caught on fire and burnt down. She was left with nothing but the clothes she stood in.
**DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS of the AAC**

**Beaded Doll Projects**

In 1999 Hlengiwe Dube initiated a doll improvement project using premises at the BAT Centre. She taught the dollmakers how to make the dolls stand up on their own and also to use traditional dress and beadwork on the dolls to indicate the different status of the dolls, e.g., young unmarried women, married women, married men, and traditional healers.

Kate Wells of the DUT Design Department, was invited to work with traditional doll makers at the AAC for the AIDS exhibition. After this, she instigated the project *Siyazama*: Art, Aids and Education in South Africa, a collaborative project between the Durban University of Technology and the Michigan State University Museum. It also included basket weavers and bead jewellery makers.33

![Dolls and dollmakers 1999](Image)

- Left: Lobolile Ximba with her dolls
- Centre: Fokisile Ngema
- Right: Khulumelaphi Mlaba’s wife and husband dolls

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**Phakhamani (to uplift myself)**

*Phakhamani* was started in 1992 by two Durban artists, Gem Melville and Andries Botha. Six women were trained in the art of designing and hand painting fabrics using motifs and ideas from a wide range of traditional and contemporary sources - from Zulu, Ndebele and West African wall painting, as well as botanical, zoological, marine and architectural references. The products were wall hangings, tablecloths, curtaining, bedcovers, cushions, lampshades, and bags. Fabric by the metre could be

33 Wells, Kate; Macdowell, Marsha; Dewhurst, Kurt; Dewhurst, Marit. *Siyazama Art, Aids and Education in South Africa*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press 2012.
specially designed and ordered for interiors. Innocentia Dlamini, Mamile Mabasa and Busisiwe Bengu were designers.

**Design for Africa**

The Design for Africa project, using a starch resist fabric technique, was a way for local women in Donnybrook, in the midlands of KwaZulu-Natal, to earn money in the off-season, between gathering mushrooms in the local forest.

A defunct Nestle Milk factory had become a landmark in the village of Donnybrook. It was opened by Jan Smuts in 1946, but closed down when Sappi and Mondi bought out the cattle farmlands for forestry, and was then purchased by Connie and Lizette van Huysteen. The Design for Africa project was started by sculptor Lizette van Huysteen in 1992 and lasted until 2005.

The factory was an enormous place with many side rooms, ideal for a fabric design project to take place. Tables were set up and plain colour fabrics were patterned with starch resist and then colour applied, hand-painted with fabric paint. Cushion covers, tablecloths, wall-hangings and some clothing were made from the fabrics.

The AAC began to sell these Design for Africa products in 2000. Carole Smale was employed as studio manager from 2000 until she left in 2005. On my many visits, I was able to see the process first-hand and was able to give orders to the project for sale at the AAC shop. We also entered some of their products into art competitions and had many exhibitions to promote the fabrics.

I arranged with Brenda Lock of Embo Craft to start a sewing project to teach the women to sew, and as part of it, they were also given their own sewing machines. This was a wonderful opportunity for the women, as they were now able to sew up the items they made. Basisile Ndlovu, Busisiwe Dlamini, Francina Ngubo, Gloria Madiya and Venancia Cele were foundation members of this group.

![Francina Ngubo and Basolile Ndlovu, *Fish playing in the waves*, Vita Craft entry.](image1)

![Basolile Ndlovu, *Tortoise and Palm Trees*, Vita Craft entry.](image2)

![Table runners](image3)
Workshops were held to design beaded jewellery to promote awareness of Aids for the 2000 International Aids Conference held at the ICC in Durban. An exhibition titled “What are we going to do about Aids?” - Sezenjani Ngengculazi? - was organized. Invited artists and craftspeople were invited to express what they felt about the Aids pandemic, which created a very moving and interesting exhibition on how people were coping with the situation.

Bead jewelry designed to promote awareness of Aids for the 2000 Aids Conference held at the ICC in Durban. (AAC archive)

George Msimang (1948-2004)

George Msimang paintings at exhibition What are we going to do about Aids? Sezenjani Ngengculazi? (AAC archive)
The Richmond Farm Embroidery Project
Okungijabulisayo – What makes me happy

The purpose of this project was to create more employment and marketing opportunities utilizing the theme Okungijabulisayo “What makes me happy”. Nine women discussed and reflected on tradition, ritual, family life, nature and special events, using embroidery, appliqué and beadwork to create small thread artworks. The catharsis and healing experience gained in the Voices of Women memory cloths project enabled the stitchers to focus on happier thoughts and times.

The members of the Richmond Farm Embroidery group ranged in age from early-20s to mid-60s and met regularly to help each other improve their skills, create thread paintings expressing the joy in their lives and to share dreams. The members of the group were: Ntombikhona Hadebe, Delisile Khathe, Xolile Ndlovu, Thulisile Ngcobo, Gretta Nkosi, Sphindile Nkosi, Themba Sibiya, Zibuyisile Pretty Zulu, Tholakele Zuma. Textile artist Leone Malherbe was the project co-ordinator.

The embroideries were exhibited at the AAC in August 2004. This initiative was partly sponsored by Susan Dvora of SIZA Marketing Company, USA, and Andries Botha of Create Africa South.

Ntombiknona Hadebe: I feel happy to see animals in the Durban Museum. It was my first time to see them.

Zibuyisile Pretty Zulu: The elephant is a big animal unlike other animals, and it is very ugly, but it has a nice and small heart. I was very happy to see it at the zoo place where animals are kept.

Siphindile Nkosi: The thing that makes me happy is that my brother went to the stadium to watch soccer. Before the game started, they called his number and he won a car so we have got the car at home and it helps us in everything. We go to many places and go when we want to go. We didn’t know that one day we would have a car.

Tholakele Zuma: What made me happy was the day my brother Khayalethu got his Ph.D. in Medicine at Wits university. He was the first one in our poor village to do this. We were very happy, and he was a good example to others in our community.
In 2005 Janina Masojada and Andrew Makin of OMM Design Workshop architects in Durban were commissioned to design the new Constitutional Court in Johannesburg, and to oversee the interior decoration of the judges’ chambers and the courtroom. The AAC was commissioned to make a flag for the main courtroom, and skilled members of the embroidery group were invited to make a large beaded South African flag.

It was a huge undertaking and the panels for the flag had to be assembled on the floor at the AAC because of its enormous size: 6 x 2.5 metres. Plastic beads and embroidery were used to try to lighten the weight of the panels. The completed panels had to be sewn together by the Durban Awning and Tent company using industrial sewing machines. The flag took four months to complete and was mounted on a wall in the main courtroom with a curve to resemble ‘flying’.
A further initiative, the *Zimeleni* Embroidery Project, was started by the AAC in Donnybrook, KwaZulu-Natal in 2002. The project was given its name by Venancia Cele who suggested *Zimeleni* which means ‘to be independent’.

Based on skills learnt from the Voices of Women and Ntokozo embroidery projects, *Zimeleni* aimed to give new skills to the women who worked on the Design for Africa project. A comprehensive embroidery course was designed and run by fabric artist Leonie Malherbe over a period of two years.

A monthly series of workshops were held in three-day sequences. The women had completed a sewing machine course with Embo Craft and had been given their own sewing machines, but they had never done hand stitching with embroidery threads. The technique entailed fabric appliquéd, using bonding paper, hand stitching with embroidery, plus added beading for texture and decorative effect.

*isiZulu* beadwork was used as inspiration for designs. Photocopies of beadwork patterns were used to select designs by using viewfinders, then interpreted into fabric shapes which were freely cut and bonded onto a background of the fabric. Embroidery stitches were taught, which anchored the fabrics together. Beads were added to create texture. Sewing machines were used for making table runners, wall hangings, cushions and bags.

Venancia Noma Cele, Busisiwe Dhlamini, Albertina Bahlulekile Mbhele, Sizakeli Mncwabe, Basolile Ndlovu, Elsie Masisiza Nxasane, Zibeleni Radebe, Francina Ngubo, Albertina Mbhele and Purity Nombulelo Sithole took part. There was one hundred percent attendance at all the courses. The project became self-sustaining after the initial tools and materials were provided by the AAC. Fine results were achieved within the first year and the resulting products were exhibited at the AAC in October 2003.

The embroideries were also exhibited at the textile artists’ Innovative Threads Textile Art exhibition in Cape Town in April 2004, where they received great appreciation. The Zimeleni project continued from 2006 to 2007 with funding from Breadline Africa.
The Ntokozo Embroidery project arose out of the experience gained in completing the huge commission for the South African flag. Beaded and embroidered cushion covers were made, using the design elements of beads with embroidery. The success of the cushion covers continued for a number of years and local and international orders were received for the cushions. In 2008 the original project of embroidering scenes was revisited and ‘What Makes Me Happy’ was repeated to encourage the creative skills of the same group of women: Ntombikona Hadebe, Zibuyisile Pretty Zulu, Siphindile Nkosi, Xolile Ndlovu and Themba Sibiya. The group was encouraged by AAC Manager Hlengiwe Dube, and funded by the Carpe Liber Book Club and the Rotary Club of Bellevue, Seattle, USA.
EXHIBITIONS OF ARTEFACTS

In October 1994 the African Art Centre started exhibiting old artefacts. The first exhibition was called African Dream - Izigqiki - and showed isicamelo - wooden Zulu headrests, pottery and some beadwork. The next exhibition of artefacts was in March 1996 and called Vuka - Wake up! These events, known as the Amagugu Treasures Exhibitions, became a regular feature on the KZN arts calendar, eagerly awaited by art lovers and collectors. They lasted for four years until the supply of artefacts was exhausted.

The African Dream - Izigqiki - headrests, exhibition was curated in October 1994 at the AAC at 8 Guildhall Arcade, off Gardiner Street, Durban. The headrests and other artefacts were collected by Nesta and Agnes Zondi, Hlengiwe Dube’s mother and aunt respectively.

This was the beginning of the collecting and selling of old isiZulu material and cultural artefacts. The public response was overwhelming, and these exhibitions were wildly successful, with collectors awaiting the opening on camping stools. When the doors were opened there was a stampede. Subsequent exhibitions had to be controlled by admitting people only at the advertised opening time.

Because of the interest shown in old isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiBhaca and isiPedi artefacts, it was decided to hold annual exhibitions, and these became the Amagugu Treasures exhibitions of old artefacts. We sought the advice of the late Yvonne Winters (Senior Museologist at the Campbell Collections of the then University of Natal), on how to correctly document the pieces. The collectors in the field were then asked to question the sellers about the provenance of the pieces. This information was written down and then typed onto a label and sold with each piece. Each year catalogues were compiled with photographs and as much information as we could gather. South African museums and public galleries were given first option to select work, so that the best pieces stayed in the country.
The collectors who travelled out into the countryside\textsuperscript{34} were intrepid and courageous, as often the roads were non-existent. Rivers in flood had to be crossed that had no bridges, and sometimes the collectors were so far into the rural countryside that they had to stay overnight. This led to some uncomfortable and dangerous events. The trust of the people had to be gained first. Sometimes the family had to get permission from the head of the family, or an elder, before an artefact could be sold. Then another trip had to be made. This was very time-consuming and exhausting. Hlengiwe Dube’s mother Nesta Zondi and her sister Nomusa Dube began collecting for her. They were followed by her aunts Agnes Dube and Philisiwe Dube Makhanya, and then by her brothers Nkosinathi Zondi and Mzwandile Zondi.

Fine Art and Craft Exhibitions 1997-2020

During my tenure as director, we held monthly exhibitions as a means of providing exposure and generating sales for the artists.\textsuperscript{35} Some of these exhibitions are highlighted below.

\textsuperscript{34} Dube, Hlengiwe. August 2016. Durban

\textsuperscript{35} See Addendum for a List of Exhibitions
2003: Zamani Makhanya Exhibition
Left: Zamani Makhanya at his Cato Manor studio  Centre: Oil pastel  Right: Mystical Journey. Oil pastel. 88 x 62 cm
The Durban Art Gallery purchased some of Makhanya’s works.
Then Minister of Art and Education, Pallo Jordan, purchased the majority of these artworks.


2005: Andrew Verster
Beadwork Designs - 35 paper maquettes transferred into beadwork jewellery by 10 skilled beaders. Hlengiwe Dube developed the technical aspects from paper to beads. Happiness Mngoma, Maningi Mbonambi, Qhakazile Mngoma, Thokozani Sibisi, Dumisile Mathe, Jabu Gcaba, Beauty Ndlovu, Ntombincane Khanyile, and Alexia Mkhize were the beaders.

2005: Black on Black - Nkosinathi Gumede. Alex Sudheim wrote in the Mail and Guardian: “Proof of this young man’s exciting future as a visual artist is to be found in this exhibition ‘Black on Black’ exploring politics between Zulu and Xhosa. The painting ‘A house divided’ summed it up.”
**June 2007: Sfiso Ka Mkame** Exhibition of mixed media and oil pastels explored the spiritual concept of the ancestors. Sfiso Ka Mkame “The Ancestor”

**2007: Townscape - Derrick Nxumalo.** Nxumalo exhibited widely in Italy, London, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Collections of his work are held by: DAG, Tatham Art Gallery, Campbell Collections, and Paul Mikula.

**October 2007: Mduduzi Xakaza - Rediscovering the divine in nature; Oil paintings of the landscape of KZN.** A romantic view of childhood memories in Maphumulo and neighbouring KZN districts.

**September 2007: Sibusiso Duma - “When we were young”.** This exhibition showed large acrylic paintings depicting a nostalgic look at isiZulu culture, with emphasis on the shadows created by strong sunlight.


Fiona Simmons researched traditional healers in the Mpumalanga area. The photographs were taken over a three-year period 2005 to 2007 as part of a postgraduate study. “The concept and connotations of what divination is in South Africa today means different things to different people. Generally, divination is understood as the act of foretelling the future by using different methods. This process sometimes forms part of a holistically integrated system of healing and may reorientate the client’s preconceptions as any therapy would do”. Simmons, F. (2007) AAC catalogue
Gabisile Nkosi used art as therapy, especially for women abused and damaged by domestic violence. She described herself as inspired by “an indescribable force - some call it passion, some call it soul, some might say – this is the spirit of a person.” She exhibited a few times at the AAC in 2005 Celebrating the Spirits, in 2007 Unveiling the Other Me and Ukwelapha - Healing. She was programme manager and community coordinator at Caversham Press in the KZN midlands. Her work was eagerly collected, including by DAG, which purchased four prints from her Celebrating the Spirits exhibition.

This exhibition seemed to foretell the tragic events in Gabisile’s life. A former boyfriend broke into her home in 2008, shot her and then himself. Speaking at her funeral in Umlazi, Malcolm Christian, founder and CEO of the Caversham Centre and a close friend, said of Gabi:

... through her creative spirit, her extraordinary ability to find lyrical ways to influence and affect people .... her humanity transcended language, culture and gender and we are charged with the responsibility ... to celebrate the life of a wonderful woman artist .... to find tangible ways that her unique spirit, vision and inspiration may resonate beyond these tragic times.

Close friend and artist, Vulindlela Nyoni from the Centre for Visual Art at UKZN said:

Again we are reminded of the scourge that is male violence against women in this country. Our society’s obsession with patriarchal and phallocentric power is a dead-end road. It leads to violence and death, and it is usually the death of people who are pure in heart, like Gabisile.... many of us are in admiration and awe at her ability in achieving the most lyrical, poetic and honest depictions of the things that mattered to her most.”

Gabisile wanted to use her talents to change lives; ‘to heal, inform and educate, emancipating the innate potential and unique capacity of all human beings’.

36 Natal Witness 4 June 2008
2008: **Black Magic by Siphiwe Zulu.** This wonderfully imaginative exhibition of acrylic paintings explored “the evil spirit and practices of witchdoctors and the witches and their clients around the country. These activities happen secretly, usually motivated by jealousy and greed combined with old grudges.” Zulu did extensive research in the townships and at rural settlements where he interviewed witchdoctors and Sangomas to discover facts about the “Black Magic” he portrays in his work.

2008: **Victor Shange Exhibition.** Acrylic landscape paintings showing rural and urban landscapes of KZN. Above: Landscape – Inanda, Umgeni River

2009: **Best Ceramicists in KwaZulu-Natal.** A joint exhibition of ceramic works by Clive Sithole and Jabu Nala. Nala had been creating clay beer pots in the traditional isiZulu way, but in this exhibition she created larger vessels, some with multiple openings. Traditional uphiso shapes were elongated in the neck area and amansumpa were applied in unusual places on the sides of the vessels. Clive Sithole explored new sculptural shapes, smoke fired and burnished to a high shine.
Winners of the Artist of the Year Award
2003 Reuben Ndwandwe; 2004/05 Timothy Mlambo; 2005/2006 Philemon Sangweni;
2011/2012 Artist Welcome Danca and Embroiderer Xolile Ndlovu

Reuben Ndwandwe - 2003 Artist of the Year Award

Reuben Ndwandwe and Jannie van Heerden at the 2003 Artist of the Year Exhibition opening at the African Art Centre. (Photographs: Anthea Martin)

After the opening of the exhibition, Jannie van Heerden and I took Reuben Ndwandwe to dinner at a well-known Durban restaurant. Reuben was dressed in full traditional isiZulu regalia with monkey tail skirt and cloak, and no shoes. We were ushered into the restaurant like royalty and the staff did not show any surprise at Reuben’s glorious outfit. We had a wonderful celebratory dinner. Sadly, a year later Reuben died.

Philemon Sangweni - 2006 Artist of the Year Award

Together with colleagues Hlengiwe Dube and Yvette Dunn, we visited Philemon Sangweni to document his way of life and work. In Empangeni we met sculptor Willis Nxumalo who navigated us to Philemon’s house on the border of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve. A rugged road lead to Philemon’s amazing self-built double-story house with a showroom for his sculptures. His fully equipped workshop displayed his tools made from iron farm implements. His home was decorated with organic material found in the forest while searching for old dried wood.
African Art Centre

Fine Art and Craft Exhibitions 1997-2008

1997 Nov
Exhibition of textiles, traditional marriage capes and aprons, and invited fabric artists
Mapula Embroidery Project, Kaross Works, Chivirika, Design for Africa, Phakamani Textiles,
Nguni Embroiderers, Pondo People, Indwe, Twananani, Embo Craft, Rorke’s Drift

1998 May
Alson Ntshangase: Solo exhibition of oil paintings

1998 Oct
Azaria Mbatha: Solo exhibition of linocut and silkscreen prints

1999
Edward Ruiz: photographs of Shembe ceremony at the Great July Festival. Ruiz, a young
photojournalist from the USA photographed all aspects of the Shembe festival. "I am drawn to
places that are currently undergoing large social change or about to enter such a phase". Ruiz
met with Robert Papini of the Kwa Muhle history museum in Durban and was inspired to
photograph the Great July Festival at Ebuhleni.

2001 Dec
Christmas Africa: Group exhibition, developing Christmas decorations “Thank God for
Creativity”

2001 July
Senzenjani Ngenculazi?: - What are we going to do about AIDS?
Using AIDS logo on dolls, beadwork, soft sculpture, telephone wire baskets and fine art
George Msimang, Kehle Ngobese, Lancelot Skakane, William Zulu, Sibusiso Duma

2001 Aug
Timothy Mlambo, Themba Khumalo, Sibusiso Gumede, Widus Mtshali

2001 Dec
Jannie van Heerden: Solo exhibition - Oil paintings of the South African landscape

2003
Zamani Makhanya: Solo exhibition of oil pastels. The Durban Art Gallery purchased some of
his works. Then Minister of Art and Education, Pallo Jordan, purchased the majority of these
artworks

2003 April
Paul Sibisi - A rare discovery: Cache of Sibisi’s 1970 prints, discovered in London

2003 May
Isaac Sithole: Linocut prints

2003 Dec
Mduduzi Xakaza: Mystical landscape paintings of KwaZulu-Natal

2004 Mar
Summer: Group exhibition with invited artists

2004 May
Siphiwe Zulu - Human Rights: an imaginative exploration of clauses of the SA Bill of Rights

2004 July
Richard Mtembiseni Shange: Creative portrait sculptures made with hard wire

2004 Oct
Bathini Abantu - What are people saying?: Group exhibition commenting on ten years of
democracy in South Africa

2005 June
Ezequiel Mabote: Linocut prints showing local life in KwaZulu-Natal

2005 June
Gabisile Nkosi - Linocut exhibition Celebrating the Spirits: “Honouring the gifts that allow me
to create concrete images.” This exhibition followed other shows of work: “Unveiling the
Other Me” and “Ukwelapha - Healing”.

2005 July
Nkosinathi Gumede - Black on Black: Alex Sudheim wrote in the Mail and Guardian: “Proof of
this young man’s exciting future as a visual artist is to be found in this exhibition ‘Black on
Black’ exploring politics between Zulu and Xhosa. The painting ‘A House Divided’ summed it
up.”
Andrew Verster Designs Beadwork: Well-known Durban artist Verster produced some contemporary beadwork designs for the AAC, out of coloured paper, which were adapted into beadwork by bead expert Hlengiwe Dube. Local bead makers were invited to execute the designs, which were then displayed in a fashion show. The range was an exciting addition to local beadwork.


Humphrey Armitage: Exploring his family life in pastels

The Five M’s Group Show: Zamani Makhanya, Leon Malherbe, Sfiso ka-Mkame, Marianne Meijer and Anthea Martin

Images of Durban - Group exhibition depicting well-known Durban sites: Welcome Danca, Zama Dunwya, Simmi Dullay, Ezequiel Mabote, Joseph Manana, Tamlyn Martin, George Msimang, Thabani Msomi, Irvin Nkwanyana, Anet Norval, Derrick Nxumalo, Liesel Prins, John Roome, Victor Shange, Sthembisi Sibisi, Emmanuel Sibalo, Malibongwe Shangase, Themba Shibase, Paul Sibisi, Mfundzo Xaba

Ceaser Mkhize and Thafa Dlamini: A collaboration of wire sculpture by Mkhize with bead decoration by Dlamini.

Threading It Together: Group embroidery show

Julius Mfethe - Wood sculptures of rural life in the Transkei

Innocent Themsanqa Hlela - Mosaics and wire sculptures.

Book launch: Light on the Hill - Building the Constitutional Court, edited by Bronwyn Law-Viljoen with photography by Angela Buckland.

Book launch: Revisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art, documenting the art collection of Bruce Campbell Smith

Exhibition of artworks by Sibusiso Duma, Derrick Nxumalo, George Msimang, Zamani Makhanya, Sfiso ka-Mkame, Lindelani Ngwenya; Joseph Manana, Judas Mahlangu, Paul Sibisi

Sangoma Style SA Photography Exhibition: Fiona Simmons researched traditional healers in the Mpumalanga area. The photographs were taken over a three-year period 2005 to 2007 as part of a postgraduate study. “The concept and connotations of what divination is in South Africa today means different things to different people. Generally, divination is understood as the act of foretelling the future by using different methods. This process sometimes forms part of a holistically integrated system of healing and may reorientate the client’s preconceptions as any therapy would do”. Simmons, F. (2007) AAC catalogue


Hidden History: Sfiso Ka Mkame exhibition of mixed media and oil pastels exploring the spiritual concept of the ancestors
2007 July

**Animal Tales:** Timothy Mlambo, Themba Khumalo, Bongani Khumalo, Sibusiso Ndlanzi, June Mpotshane, Wido Mtshali, Sibusiso Gumede, Samson Khumalo. Wood carvings decorated with burnt wood designs. These talented artists live in a remote area of northern KZN.

2007 Aug

**Ukwelapha - Healing** by Gabisile Nkosi and Lindelani Ngwenya. A joint exhibition of linocut prints by Nkosi and copper wire sculptures by Ngwenya who wrote “Sculpting around the emptiness of space, is an attempt to make the invisible visible. My concern is to break boundaries between the mortal and immortal part, thus reviving the Zulu religious system which expresses oneness between the living and the dead. The transparent wire form is an invitation for the viewer to penetrate the artwork to see the actual artwork inside. The process of weaving is very similar to certain dance movements and is a very absorbing exercise, similar to playing a musical instrument, weaving (performance) and the finished artwork become inseparable” Ngwenya, L. (2007) AAC catalogue.

In 1996, in her early twenties, Gabisile Nkosi attended art lessons with the Velobala Group run by the AAC. She subsequently taught some classes in 2001. She had exhibited twice at the AAC and her last exhibition was entitled “Ukwelapha - Healing”. She was passionately interested in how art could be used as therapy, especially for women who had been abused and damaged through domestic violence.

2007 Sept

**Uthunzi – Shadows:** Sibusiso Duma. An exhibition exploring the concept of physical and psychological shadows. “Without shadows, my paintings are not complete...” “To know your culture is who you are.” Duma, S. (2007) AAC catalogue.

2007 Oct

**Mduuzi Xakaza:** Landscape Paintings of KwaZulu-Natal. Xakaza writes “Almost in the idiom of David Caspar Friedrich, I also intend to rediscover and evoke the divine in nature, hence my emphasis on rural and wilderness scenes, where god is believed to dwell. In the fashion of Gustav Courbet of the nineteenth-century Realism and our own David Goldblatt, I also intend to elevate the every-day to a level of particular significance, thus bridging the gaps that have been dictated by certain power structures between the particular and the general. This deviance of conventional understanding of what may/should constitute subject matter is my concern as a postcolonial artist. Questioning the postcolonial is intended to constitute my artistic journey towards further self-discovery.” Xakaza, M. (2007) AAC catalogue.

2007 Nov

**Derrick Nxumalo:** Urban landscape paintings. Nxumalo explores how we live in suburbia. Humorous comments on how we live in grids, but the natural environment is always present in exotic vegetation.

2007 Dec

**Joseph Manana:** Khanya Khwezi - Light After Dark. “My art is based on the reality of the world around me and reflects the society around me, especially gender equality. I try and show people how to take good care of women and children in our society as a South African and a father. It hurts me to see or hear of men abusing women or children... I grew up as a child of a single parent. After my father’s death, my mother raised my brothers and sisters and me, eating out of one bowl and sharing half a loaf of bread. This taught me to value the love of a family and care for others”. Manana, J (2007), AAC catalogue.

2008 March


2008 April

**Sobathathu - The Three of Us.** Paintings by Welcome Danca, Sibusiso Duma and Bheki Khambule. Social realism with a gentle comment on social mores. Comments by Welcome Danca on the hypocrisy of some previously sacrosanct institutions.
2008 May  
**Kuben Pillay:** Landscape paintings. “Since I am passionately drawn to nature, landscape is my favourite subject. In essence what I want from the landscape is something magical and “spiritual”. I recognize nature as the source of all art; when I paint, I emphasize these nature qualities. I see art as a tangible part of my existence and what I want from my subject is something more than a superficial reflection of reality”. Pillay, K. (2008) AAC catalogue.

2008 June  

2008 July  
**Victor Shange:** Landscape paintings of KwaZulu-Natal and comments on South African historical events, e.g. Codesa, Death of Steve Biko, The Death Penalty for the Innocent and the Bad, Isandlwana Battlefield and Mountain, Cetshawayo taken overseas to face Queen Victoria. Shange started making art at the age of 6, but was punished at school when he indulged in art. He is a self-taught artist and had to wait until 1988 for any form of guidance and support. This came from Sfiso ka Mkame who encouraged Shange to sell his paintings.

2008 Sept  
**Siphiwe Zulu:** Black Magic. Acrylic paintings of the supernatural. “This exhibition is about the evil spirits and practices of the witchdoctors and the witches and their clients around the country. I am trying to raise awareness that these activities are real and take place secretly. Usually motivated by jealousy, greed, combined with old grudges, these things can corrupt good characters”.

2008 Oct  
**Lallitha Jawahirilal:** We came to seek something on earth that we forgot to carry

**Winners of the Artist of the Year Exhibitions**

2003/04  
Reuben Ndwandwe

2004/05  
Timothy Mlambo

2005/06  
Philemon Sangweni

2011/12  
artist Welcome Danca and embroiderer Xolile Ndlovu
### ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAC</td>
<td>The African Art Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTAG</td>
<td>Arts and Culture Task Group</td>
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<td>AHRT</td>
<td>Artists for Human Rights Trust</td>
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<td>BAT</td>
<td>Bartel Arts Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAL</td>
<td>Campbell Archives Library</td>
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<td>CAW</td>
<td>Community Arts Workshop</td>
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<td>DAG</td>
<td>Durban Art Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>DUT</td>
<td>Durban University of Technology (previously Natal Technikon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELC</td>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Convention Centre</td>
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<td>IFP</td>
<td>Inkatha Freedom Party</td>
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<td>KZNSA</td>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal Natal Society of Arts (previously NSA - Natal Society of Arts)</td>
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<td>NAC</td>
<td>National Arts Council</td>
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<td>SAIRR</td>
<td>South African Institute of Race Relations</td>
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<td>SANG</td>
<td>South African National Gallery</td>
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<td>SETA</td>
<td>Sector Education Training Authority</td>
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<td>GIZ</td>
<td>Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit (German)</td>
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<td>SES</td>
<td>Senior Expert Services (German)</td>
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<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Agency</td>
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<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<td>UD-W</td>
<td>University of Durban-Westville</td>
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<td>UDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>UKZN</td>
<td>University of KwaZulu-Natal (previously University of Natal)</td>
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<td>WCAR</td>
<td>World Conference Against Racism</td>
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*Natal Witness* 4 June 2008


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