

Avhashoni Mainganye: tireless spirit

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by Vonani Bila

Avhashoni Ntsengeni Frederick Mainganye Mundalamo is the prolific and versatile visual artist from Phiphidi. The village's main marvel after Mainganye is surely the Phiphidi Falls which lie within a dense forest on the Mutshundudi River near Thohoyandou. Most people of his age are flabby with pot bellies and often complain about stiff and painful joints, backaches, arthritis, ceaseless headaches, diabetes, hypertension and gout. Not for the soft-spoken Shoni or Mainganye, as he is affectionately addressed by friends. He grew up eating the nutritious mopane worms – masonja – whose protein and iodine levels are super high. And yes, art has kept him young and vibrant. Diminutive in stature, the slim and energetic grey-bearded man wearing his not-so-long dreadlocks, a pair of jeans and a military cap is a hard working artist. His ID says he was born in 1960. I meet him dressed in his apron, busy at work, at the Thohoyandou Arts and Crafts Centre, outside Thohoyandou in Limpopo province. It's a warm Saturday late morning.



Photo: Scott Williams

“I was actually born at home on 11 October 1957 at Phiphidi. My birth was accompanied by a huge hailstorm. The 1960 birthdate story which appears on my ID was a result of peer pressure. You see, I had a small frame compared to the fat boys and girls in my class. One day the teacher called out our names and we were supposed to give him the exact birthdates. Everyone in class was younger than me, but looked big. So I joined the 1960 brigade. It would have been foolish of me to disclose my actual birthdate tiny as I was. My classmates were going to laugh their lungs out, and I would be enveloped by embarrassment” he says, as we chat about his life, art and his dreams from his work station. He generously takes me on a brief

tour of the decomposing art centre which, probably since inception, has never had a curator or arts administrator. The centre's infrastructure is in a state of shambles.

"This centre is better known for hosting weddings and other social events, but after these events, chairs always go missing", Mainganye says. The arts centre is located a few meters away from the newly built R1 billion Thavhani Mall on the outskirts of the bustling Thohoyandou town. The monster mall with typical Venda colours and shades is buzzy and glittering. People in wigs, cosmetic hair and make-up leisurely return from boutiques and retail brands with goodies, perhaps smart cellphone gadgets and accessories, groceries and tuck themselves into elegant cars and hit the road. The children sip ice-cream, others are munching a pizza, sandwich or pie. At the arts centre, which houses remarkable and authentic Venda art, it is cold and desolate. It stands like a disused, ghost building. I've been here for four hours, catching up with world-class artist Mainganye, and nobody pops in to view or buy a painting, little sculpture or even beaded cloth as a souvenir. Mainganye, who has been running his own art classes for students at the centre since 1999, sees these consumer crazy folk everyday, shuffling and pushing trolleys from the mega double-level mall. Some frequent the mall to simply experience the escalator and lift ride. Some come to eat in sit-down restaurants. I'm not sure if they are aware that most of the shops they support are not owned by their black African cousins and nephews.



Photo: Scott Williams

"The art centre, is supposed to renew and transform the arts space in Venda. It was opened with a lot of fanfare and promise. But now the place, unlike the old and vibrant Ditike which was created solely to serve the arts community, is dead. Nobody knows about us here. There are not enough signposts to direct potential visitors and clients to the place. How will people support us if they don't hear about us on the radio and TV?" asks Mainganye incredulously. Mainganye, himself a renowned artist, print-maker, poet, water colourist and art teacher does not have an office at the arts centre. He uses a makeshift and degraded space to make art and train some of the budding artists. But Mainganye firmly believes that if there's buying power for

all the brands at the new mall, surely nothing should stop the people to appreciate and buy art. But there's hardly a shop that sells art works at the Thavhani mall. Despite his passion for the arts, some questions linger on his mind. Perhaps artists are not carving populist work that serves the interests of the clients? Or maybe the artists have become irrelevant and less sophisticated? Or simply, there's no clientele for art in Thohoyandou? Except for the trickling of foreign white tourists mainly from Europe and North America, it's difficult to imagine how rural artists survive when the majority of black people seldom buy local art works, especially meaningful paintings and not the mass-produced kitsch stuff disguised as art.

"In countries like Belgium and the US, where I frequently go to teach art, I'm provided with a decent working space, studio and an office. Here at home, these things are a rarity, let alone a bench, because the government holds the view that art is a hobby and not a way of life. For the kind of government we have, art is less capable of lifting people from the doldrums of poverty and want," he chuckles. How do I sugarcoat this reality when it stares at millions of South Africans who live in the periphery of the economy; millions who depend on welfare grants to survive? A key document like the envisaged National Development Plan (NDP) scantily mentions the role of the arts, culture and heritage in the course of job creation and general social transformation.

"The government doesn't buy nor appreciate art. Artists exist precariously; on the edges. These guys in suits seldom attend art exhibitions. Here at Thohoyandou Arts and Culture Centre, there's no proper governance structure in place. Staff is extremely thin. Cleaners love their job so much; they keep the place of artists too clean for my liking. They get upset when artists 'mess it up' with oil spills, wood chips, sandpaper dust and cuttings of either wood or paper that may lie on the floor. The cleaners come to work on time, leave the place at 4 pm, and can't understand why artists want to work until late" Mainganye remarks, adding that Thohoyandou is a growing town and boasts a set of magnificent sculptors and crafters, but its potential for further growth and development is strained by the lack of a comprehensive marketing plan and political will.

"The absence of a public art gallery in Thohoyandou and the whole of Limpopo in general is a serious drawback. Something should be done to develop, promote and market the rich artistic tradition of the Vhavenda people and their neighbours Vatsonga. Equally, the gallery would showcase works from our neighbouring countries Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Botswana," he says.

Mainganye longs for the days of Vhavenda Art Foundation, an NGO that he helped to establish to support artistic endeavours in the former Venda Republic. He really yearns for Ditike – hosting exhibitions, selling art, promoting tourism, encouraging art criticism. Ditike is a Tshivenda word for 'stand up on your own', and the collective was established in the mid 80s by the Mphephu Ramabulana regime as a project of the then Venda Development Corporation. It was regarded as the craft hub of Venda for its unbending recognition of artistic talent and the ability among the Vhavenda artists.

Thohoyandou is the birth and home-town of Mainganye, whose clan name Vha-Ndalamo is associated with the revered Vhavenda medicine men and women. It is

believed that Vha-Ndalamo, who may have originated from South Sudan and parts of Ethiopia and came through the Arabian Peninsula, are the ones who brought to the Soutpansberg (Riyonde) and former Venda areas the Ngoma lungundu – the mysterious drum of the dead that thunders which is held sacred by the Lemba people, also known as the Black Jews. “I’ve heard that we Vha-Ndalamo are behind the powers of that fearsome drum,” Mainganye says.

Although Thohoyandou Arts and Crafts Centre exists, Mainganye bemoans the lack of support for the rural arts today. “Although the old Venda government was discredited, nonetheless it created an organisation like Ditike primarily to support local artists and crafters. Whether government did that to prove a sense of independence, it doesn’t matter. Ditike assisted us to hold exhibitions, sell our sculptures, beads, baskets and paintings. It constantly provided us with important information and training workshops. Ditike launched most artists’ careers, including the famous Noria Mabasa,” he remarks.

“People would come to view art, more so that the centre was built along the road unlike the Thohoyandou Arts and Craft Centre which is hidden. There was a colourful brochure called Venda: Land of the Legend which profiled the key Venda artists, tourism potential of the area and its sacred and heritage sites. This brochure was widely circulated,” Mainganye remembers.

Mainganye recalls how the cultural commissars and politicians of the Venda Bantustan government would cheerfully attend art exhibitions in droves. “Art was progress and a symbol of the nation’s identity and soul”, he says.

Mainganye remembers an art work he did and which was put for exhibition at Ditike in mid 80s. “One politician or civil servant closely scrutinized this politically inclined work. The painting was relatively abstract. It portrayed a padlock, bones and wires which represented the apartheid system and its proxies like the phony Republic of Venda. When asked what the work was all about, I said it’s a biblical theme that I’m exploring,” Mainganye mocks, fully aware that it ridiculed the apartheid system. But he had to find reason not to be jailed or killed for making resistance art.

For Mainganye, it is meaningless to make art and ignore the circumstances of the people and their environment. Politics and other anthropological factors are key constructs in the process of understanding oneself and his art-making process. “My work is shaped by the history of my people, our struggles and triumphs, our hopes and dreams,” he says. His steadfast belief in Pan Africanism is an affirmation that for him, art is a construct of society, and in this instance, the primary community he values the most is the African populace.

Mainganye expresses his art in many forms and mediums – sculpture (wood, metal, plaster, plastic and stone), printmaking (lino, etching, screen), painting (watercolour, oils and acrylic), photography, theatre and poetry. Over the years, he has painted countless and diverse works, but I’m fascinated by his passion for portraits.

As Joni Brenner, a History of Art tutor at Wits points out, “Portraits function as memorials or testimonies for an individual.” Mainganye’s portrait series about jazz musicians and political heads are penetrating, refreshing and layered with rich

meanings. Examples include portraits of jazz musicians like maestros Khaya Mahlangu, guitar genius Victor Ntoni and political activists Victoria Mxenge, Ellen Kuzwayo, Mosibudi Mangena and Bernard Ncube. These portraits, like any successful art work, evoke interpretations of a person that reflect both artist and subject.

“Portraits are more than looking and being looked at. I make portraits as a sponge that absorbs all the key ingredients of a life lived or imagined,” he says. For most of his striking portraits, he uses oil painting to make the message, often political and anthropological.

Mainganye’s poetry, mostly unpublished, is written in Tshivenda. It is ornate and rich in rural realism. One example is a sequence poem called *Ipfi la Muhuweleli Thavhani*. In this epic poem, the meditating preacher-cum prophet descends from the mountain to the village. He is dressed in gowns and robes. His message is crisp but delivered so poignantly. The performative element in his poetry derives from his early encounter with the Black Consciousness poetry of Matsemela Manaka, Ingoapele Madingoane and Don Mattera whom he witnessed at Fuba and Funda Drama Centre, in Diepkloof, Soweto. He admired how they were able to bring necessary and relevant poetry to life, in community centres around Joburg, like chanting griots in trance summoning the ancestors to bring people rain and blessings. He re-imagined prophets in poets, and he wanted to be brave and sincere like them one day. He admired Matsemela Manaka’s commitment to the black arts – as writer, editor of the literary magazine *Staffrider* in the 70s, director of stage plays, actor, poet, painter, sculptor and cultural activist who was so present in the affairs of his people in South Africa/Azania and beyond the country’s borders. Besides poetry, Mainganye is a theatre fanatic. After watching politically conscious plays written by uncompromising militant dramatists and cultural workers like John Ledwaba (*Township Boy*), Matsemela Manaka (*Egoli: City of Gold; Children of Asazi; Domba; Pula*), and Mbongeni Ngema, he wrote his own play called *Magaraba*, meaning ‘migrant workers’. Most of these poets and dramatists would dress up in dashiki shirts, a trend that Mainganye has adopted ever since. Back home in the Venda homeland, the fires of politically charged poetry which warmed Mainganye were being stoked by political and cultural activists such as Rashaka Ratshitanga, Tendamudzimu Robert Ratshitanga, Nthambeleni Kaizer Phalanndwa, Maano Dzeani Tuwani and Tshilidzi Shonisani Ramovha. As a poetry enthusiast, Mainganye has written countless poems, but he prefers to remain on the margins. He reads out poems, mainly written in Tshivenda, when it’s necessary. In the past, he has read some of them especially at commemorative events like Sharpeville Day (now Human Rights Day) and June 16 (now Youth Day). He clearly doesn’t identify himself as a public poet, but savours poetry, especially works that focus on the human condition. For this reason, he has kept a hot line with Linton Kwesi Johnson (LKJ), the revered Jamaican-British revolutionary poet whom he met in South Africa during his travels. Mainganye’s attraction to LKJ’s poetry is probably the same attitude he has towards the works of black radical artists, jazz musicians, intellectuals and their movements and organisations like Allahpoets, Malopoets, Lefifi Tladi’s Dashiki Poets, Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre, the Last Poets, Amiri Baraka’s Black Arts Movement to name just a few.

“I read everything that speaks of Africa and the existence or non-existence of the Africans in the Diaspora,” he chuckles. Indeed, as an avid follower of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) founding member Robert Sobukwe, he has repeatedly read Benjamin Pogrund’s book, *Robert Sobukwe: How Can Man Die Better*. From reading that book, he became more aware about the ideals of pan Africanism and their application as a tool of political awareness. He was further drawn to the writings of Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah and Marcus Garvey.

A striking distinction between Mainganye and most fine artists from Limpopo Province is that Mainganye, despite coming from a family with latent artistic talent, pursued a formal fine arts course at the arts and crafts centre at Rorke’s Drift, immediately after completing his matric at Khwevha High School in 1980. The majority of artists in Limpopo are self-taught. During his high school days at Khwevha, art classes were not offered. But Mainganye, like boys of his time, became increasingly interested in art and began copying images from books and magazines. Oftentimes, especially during the night study, he would draw something exotic or eye-catching on the blackboard and wait for the reaction of the teacher and learners the next day. One day Mainganye sketched out an image of Chief Patrick Mphephu the Paramount chief of Venda. The chief who some saw as a puppet of the apartheid regime was being served *thothotho* – a heavily intoxicating and illicit local gin/brandy-like brew concocted from fermented sorghum seeds, sugar and pineapple. Those who drink *thothotho* know that it has this fierce burn and a few sips with eyes closed are enough. Otherwise you pass out, and if unlucky, soil your pants. So Mainganye’s image of Mphephu being served *thothotho* was provocative. Mainganye says drawing that picture was funny. Together with his arty mates, they would sometimes reflect their political situation through images. Teachers, especially a certain man called Phanael would applaud the boys’ talent. It is Phanael who gave Mainganye the name Frederick, which apparently means a peaceful ruler. But I wonder how peaceful was the restless Mainganye. Some of the drawings from his high school formed the portfolio for his admission at Rorke’s Drift.

As a beginner, he would also collect clay and turn it into different shapes and figures: cattle grazing, thatched huts, human figurines and sometimes he would make little pots – the stuff that was considered girlish. Then, there was the Salvation Army Church which used to play soulful music. The sweet and sometimes melancholic sounds made him fall in love with jazz, blues, poetry and realised the interconnectedness of imaginative and literary arts. “Art can’t be pigeon-holed,” he emphasises.

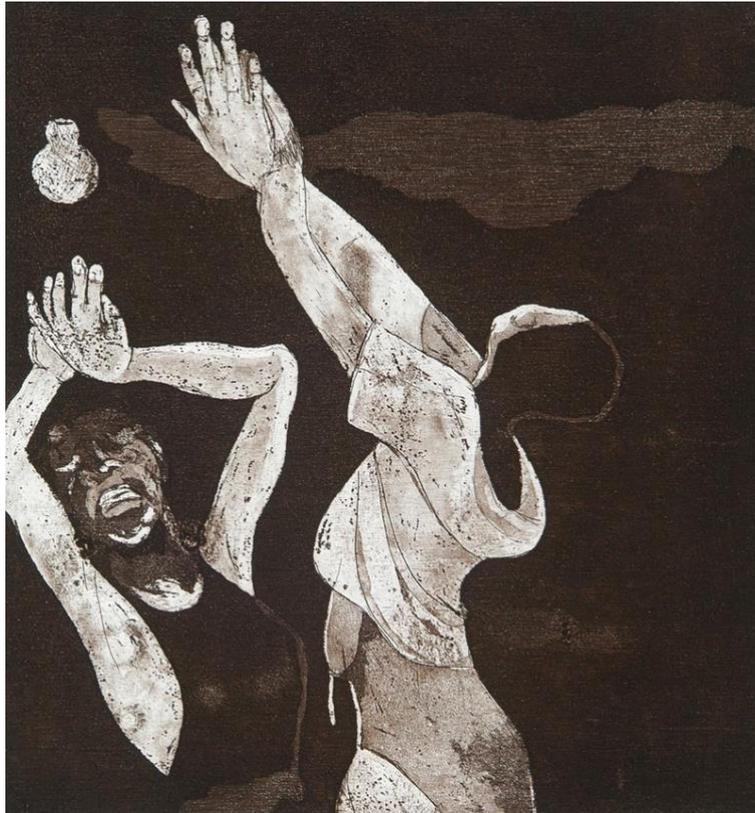
Mainganye had heard about Rorke’s Drift through a contact at Ndaleni Art School. Before he could even think of going there, he had to satisfy the admission requirements. He had to write an essay on why he wanted to become an artist. And his response, “I want to continue the creation of God which God left halfway!” Out of the 95 applicants to study at Rorke’s Drift that year, he was lucky to be among the five selected persons. His childhood ambition to study law or the environment was now overtaken by visual art. He went head on to study at Rorke’s Drift in 1981 and 1982. The art centre at Rorke’s Drift was started by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the 60s. Its aim was to nurture the unique artistic heritage of Africa, and it wanted to extend this heritage with new influences so that it would find its rightful place in an

evolving and changing society. Indeed over the existence of the prestigious Rorke's Drift, great artists such as Bongi Dlomo, and Phiphidi's prodigal son, Mainganye carried the flame of the centre's success.

At Rorke's Drift, Mainganye was taught by master printers from the United States, Sweden and South Africa. An added value is that he met Lionel Davis, an artist from Cape Town. Davis was a staunch revolutionary leftist and partly shaped/ mentored Mainganye indirectly. He gave Mainganye banned books that were questioning the brash laws and restrictions of apartheid and its legitimacy. Although Rorke's Drift was not overtly political, the meeting with Davis became a political platform that made the politically naive Mainganye notice the huge pressure under which blacks had to bear living under apartheid. These desperate conditions demanded active citizenry. It was also at Rorke's Drift, where Mainganye befriended Shadrack Sepenya 'Swenkie' Hlalele, a gifted painter from Sharpeville in the old Transvaal, now Gauteng, whom he regarded as the epitome of resistance township artistry. Mainganye admired Hlalele's ability to sharply inject emotions and feeling in his artworks. Hlalele's strength was pen and ink, and his so-called expressive township art which vividly captured the atrocities of apartheid and black people's pain and grief resonated with Mainganye's homeland of glaring inequities.

When Mainganye completed his course, he returned to Venda and helped establish the VhaVenda Art Foundation, the forerunner of Ditike, an organisation dedicated to assisting rural artists market their work. His quest for knowledge drove Mainganye, in 1985, to study towards a Fine Arts programme at Unisa, through the African art Institute (AIA) at the Funda Centre. He also participated in the Thupelo workshops and studied photography at Funda.

Closely examined, Mainganye's creative sources of inspiration are enormous, and come from deep sources. He considers himself a restless person who invests in the battles to understand emotions and not to be limited to one art genre. He admires the rich and scenic landscape of Limpopo and its amazing wildlife and its restful views such as Lake Fundudzi and the Thate Vonde Forest. He is intrigued by the mythical and spiritual aspects of his Venda people who perform sacred rituals like *domba* – the python dance where young maidens as their final stage of initiation into womanhood line up in single file and dance in long winding lines like a snake. As a spiritual person, he cannot ignore the haunting and demanding yet protective spirit of the Ndaui healer and diviner in him that pushes him to work on images that sometimes are incomprehensible for our naked eyes to interpret and defy categorisation/ interpretation because of its assumed hybrid form. The anguish of the black majority, even 24 years into liberation is a theme that finds expression in his recent work.



Daughters of the Earth I, 2004. Etching on paper, 41 x 36 cm

“Black people’s dignity has been cut into shreds by foreign forces,” he says, but Mainganye has a way of projecting his work without the obvious violence – the blood and gore and reeking urine. Although Mainganye is a gentle fellow, most of his art work is as radical as his views about oppression, colonialism, slavery, economic exploitation, cultural decay, lack of markets and inadequate support for artists and landlessness of his people. He considers the reclamation of African history from the negative influence of Europe and the US through visual art, poetry and other means as pivotal in affording Africans the dignity they deserve.

Shoni’s fascination with history is well known. He describes the journey travelled by his father – VhaVenda Thabela April Mainganye who had over six wives – including Shoni’s mother who-Masindi. His father, like most men of his time, walked from Vendaland to Kimberley to work in the mines, but came home with next-to-nothing to show for his labour. Luckily, his father didn’t lose limb and bone at the De Beers’ mine (now a tourist attraction known as the Big Hole) – the largest hand-dug excavation in the world. Although his father died when Shoni was young, he knows that he was a respected healer who could cure several diseases and afflictions such as cancer, strokes, impotence, infertility and cast out evil spells that were causing schizophrenia, hysteria, impotence, infertility – diseases and conditions that are often hard to cure through Western medicinal practice.

“My father could make a barren woman conceive and give birth to a healthy child. He could equally foretell the future, and his knowledge of medicinal plants was remarkable. He knew medicines that could cure psychosis permanently,” he brags, adding that his father’s picturesque yard was a hub of activities: throbbing drums

summoning the spirit of the ancestors to manifest in the bodies of the initiates who were undergoing training to be healers. At the Mainganyes, every season was special. In autumn the family would harvest maize, pound and crush it until it was smooth enough to prepare porridge. Shoni's father had cattle, sheep, goats, dogs, donkeys, large fields of crops and an orchard along the river. They would enjoy pumpkins, ground nuts, beans and groundnuts and feast over crops and delicious fruits such as marula, especially when it's fermented for an intoxicating beverage. Milking the cows was an all-year-round affair. The yard was abuzz with bellowing cattle and bleating sheep. Since his father couldn't live forever, like all impermanent wood carvings that decay so that something new can be generated/ birthed, Shoni was chosen by his family to continue the ancient tradition of healing. He must learn to communicate with the spirits in the wind, rivers, trees, caves, mountains and bodies. He is ready to learn more about herbs and their medicinal powers. Of course this doesn't make him a shadow of his father, but at least he is in a trusted position to be the embodiment of family history, art and traditions.

"I walk with a Ndaou spirit in me, and I'm considering to undergo initiation into traditional healing in the future so that I can cleanse myself of misfortune and do what must be done in this family," says the edgy and restless artist who wants to strengthen his third eye – the calling from the ancestors to become a healer and save the nation. When he finally becomes a healer, like Jackson Hlungwani, whose emblematic works reflected on biblical themes, Mainganye's art may reflect his true calling from his ancestors.



Walking the Ancient Path, Oil and acrylic on masonite board

Shoni's father was a gifted carver of functional art items like milking jars. A few select men in the village had long mastered the art of carving, using chisels, gouges and saws to carve wooden spoons, bowls, wooden plates and trays, chairs, tables, benches, drums, flutes and coffins. Surely, Shoni encountered sculpting as a way of life, an embodiment of a complete set of cultural values. Instead of carving bowls

and spoons, Shoni has widened the artistic canvas. He is a carver, a perceptive photographer, claypot maker, beader and painter.

Another discovery that Shoni's father made which impacted strongly on his son's political view was when the Boers/ governors of the time asked villagers, especially men like VhaVenda who-April, who had been to the cities to surrender any of their guns if they had such. The Afrikaners, commonly addressed as the Boers, claimed that once that has happened, the natives would be given new and reliable guns. As you can imagine, most village men and elders surrendered their guns and ammunition, but instead of the Boers honouring their promise, they dug a deep and long trench to burn down these guns at the Tshanowa mountain. Since that day, the power relations have sharply become too uneven because the Africans couldn't defend themselves. The Boers became more hostile and hard. These unhealthy racial lines increasingly shaped the pan-Africanist aesthetic and concern that is evident in Shoni's art, vision and outlook of the world.

Today Avhashoni has solidly cemented his place in the arts world. Mainganye was named in the top five of the Sasol Works Art Awards and scooped a R25 000 voucher to get material for making his art in 2008. He was one of the 18 artists from South Africa who participated in the *Spring in Chile* cultural exchange programme in South America in 1995. In 2005, he worked for the one-time *Soul of Africa Exhibition* that was hosted by the Development Bank of Southern Africa. He has exhibited in South Africa, France (1990), Chile (1995), Switzerland, Belgium (2001), Holland (2005), Scotland (2007), Germany (2015) and Mexico (2016). His prices vary from prints and stone sculptures that cost between R500 and R4000 to large paintings that sell for R200k.

As a teacher/ instructor, he has facilitated painting and print-making at Coker College in South Carolina and at North Hartville Elementary School. Since 2001 he has taught print making to mentally challenged pupils at a special school in Belgium. He ran a sculpture workshop at the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival under the theme *Craft Art*. He was also invited by the Grahamstown Arts Festival Committee to conduct the craft/art sculpture workshop with Graham Jones. Mainganye established the Matongoni Mountain studio in Phiphidi. Matongoni is a place where people vacated; a place of broken pots. "It's a holy place to work from," he reiterates.

Shoni's big influences include the work of celebrated Spanish Surrealist painter Salvador Dali (1904-1989). Shoni's metaphorical painting, *The Voice of the Master* was partially influenced by the Chilean surrealist painter Roberto Matta (1911-2002) who specialised in abstract techniques. We can deduce that Shoni's fascination with abstract images derives from his love for Dali and Matta's exceptional paintings and sculptures.



The Voice of the Master, Oil on canvas

His painting *Forced Landing* was influenced by reading and absorbing Muthobi Mutloatse's short story by the same title. The painting is marked by a huge figure coming down from the sky. The ground is wet and slippery. There's a rasta with full dreadlocks and dangling gowns. This painting was part of *Tributaries* an exhibition curated by Ricky Burnett for Museum Africa in Johannesburg, that later travelled to Germany. "Back then, Burnett wanted the artwork for R300. I refused. At Thohoyandou Art Centre it was selling for R1000. No one bought it. Eventually, in 2002, the University of Venda bought it for R30,000, but delayed to process payment!"

I'm the key is another of Shoni's extraordinary oil on canvas paintings. It portrays the map of Africa, with bible chained with a padlock. There's something germinating – almost emphasising that Africa can't be starved of truth. Or Africa will break free from all forms of oppression, including religious dogma and bigotry. In the background of this painting lies Joburg under siege. There's also the face of Bob Marley, the Jamaican reggae maestro ad rebel.



I am the key, 1978. Oil on canvas

As we conclude the interview, Mainganye shows me abstract paintings on the wall. Another painting is a gift to his daughter, who is following in his footsteps. He brags about some of his talented students, and holds painter Jan Tshikutula from Tzaneen in high esteem. He shows me rare black and white pictures which he has taken since the 80s. Most of these photographs portray determined people fighting against apartheid. Some reflect township violence, mass funerals of comrades and portraits of jazz artists like Sibongile Khumalo before she became a household name. As we walk out, Mainganye assures me that the vision behind Vhavenda Arts Foundation and Ditike will not die.

“I won’t tire to make art, teach, organise artists and explore opportunities for artists and crafters,” he says.

Vonani Bila is a poet, publisher, academic and cultural activist