

Art & Justice

A CONSTITUTIONAL COURT
ART COLLECTION SERIES



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LAURENTIA DLAMINI &
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Hlabisa baskets

CCAC
Constitutional Court
Art Collection



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Art & Justice: A Constitutional Court Art Collection series is a short monograph series about artworks and artists represented in the Constitutional Court Art Collection (CCAC), housed within the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

The series also showcases the critical behind-the-scenes conservation work undertaken to document, stabilise, store and preserve artworks in the CCAC, using a combination of historic research, scientific analysis and material treatment, so that they can be exhibited to the public well into the future.

It is published by the Constitutional Court Trust, the non-profit organisation that owns the CCAC, tending to its preservation and presentation through conservation and curatorial programmes.

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INTRODUCTION

There are six traditional Zulu handwoven baskets, called *amaquthu* in Zulu, in the Constitutional Court Art Collection (CCAC), woven by three female artists – Angeline Bonisiwe Masuku, Nonhlanhla Nelisiwe Mangele and Laurentia Dlamini – from the Hlabisa district of rural KwaZulu-Natal. In February 2020, the CCAC curatorial team visited Hlabisa with these baskets to learn about the practice of basket weaving from these artists and to document the baskets' conservation.

The team recorded the restoration process by taking photographs, videos and conducting interviews. A short documentary film on the restoration of these baskets, *Weaving Baskets from Stars*, was also produced.¹ Nokukhanya Khumalo, daughter of Masuku and a weaver in her own right, gave the team insight into how a new generation continues the art of basketry making. Further research aided in better understanding and contextualising these baskets within the CCAC.



Angeline Masuku (b. 1967)



Laurentia Dlamini (b. 1936)



Nokukhanya Khumalo (b. 1995)



Nonhlanhla Mangele (b. 1960)

¹ It can be watched online at ccac.concourtttrust.org.za or <https://youtu.be/6YSFzCninL4>.

Hlabisa Baskets as Carriers of South African Heritage

Thina Miya and Francois Lion-Cachet

Angeline Masuku, Laurentia Dlamini and Nonhlanhla Manqele all agreed on how best to start making a traditional Zulu basket. “You start with a star,” says Masuku, who began making baskets in 1975 as a young child. The “star” refers to the central point of a coiled basket’s base that spirals outwards and upwards, the coils bound together by stitches.

The six Hlabisa baskets in the CCAC were bought by the Architectural Artworks Committee of the Constitutional Court, from the African Art Centre in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, in 2003, during the construction of the Constitutional Court building on the Constitution Hill precinct. This acquisition was intended to contribute to the diversification of the collection in line with the inclusive ethos of the new home for South Africa’s progressive new Constitution. The African Art Centre had put forward the baskets in response to the request of the Committee for what was referred to as “quality traditional craft” from the KwaZulu-Natal region. This selection included these baskets, two Zulu beer pots (*izinkamba*) of

the Nala family, a decorative mobile chandelier by Timothy Mlambo, and beaded sculptures by Ceaser Mkhize and Thafa Dlamini.

Janina Masojada,³ one of the architects of the Constitutional Court building and member of the committee that steered artistic vision intrinsic to the new court, states that the driving design intent was that all South Africans should find significance in, and a personal connection with the building. For this reason, a range of inclusive and participatory opportunities for artists engaging with traditional South African creative practices were incorporated into the architectural process. “We wanted to design a place in which all people would feel welcome, where South Africans from urban and rural areas, the young and old, could gather without inhibition and have a connection, a sense of belonging and identity.” She adds that “[t]hese baskets were outstanding examples of the traditional craft of basket weaving from the Hlabisa area of northern KwaZulu-Natal. It is a craft form that has endured political change and continues to the present day.”

“We wanted to design a place in which all people would feel welcome, where South Africans from urban and rural areas, the young and old, could gather without inhibition and have a connection, a sense of belonging and identity.”

- JANINA MASOJADA

² The Constitutional Court was inaugurated on 21 March 2004, Human Rights Day, 10 years after South Africa became a constitutional democracy. The following day Constitution Hill opened to the public as a museum focused on heritage, education and tourism.

³ Masojada is now a member emeritus of the current-day Artworks Committee that decides on artwork donation proposals and oversees the curation, conservation and other matters pertaining to the CCAC.

Zulu basketry draws from an age-old cultural history intertwined with a deep understanding of the natural environment in which the basket weavers live. In her article *Basketry: Tradition and Change*, artist Polly Pollock writes that basket making is a universal craft and that many of its forms and techniques evolved independently in different parts of the world, subject to the available natural materials.

Anitra Nettleton situates basketry as an indigenous southern African craft, citing the making of baskets by the Zulu, Ndebele, Sotho, Tsonga, Venda and Lobedu for use in agricultural life to store various foodstuffs.

This rich history of basketry is incorporated into the architectural design of the Constitutional Court. The CCAC baskets and the integrated artworks that draw from weaving lend an aesthetic to the court that, from its outset, was meant to be seen as unequivocally African, being a departure from how the law was used and depicted during apartheid as an imposed foreign power.

In *Art and Justice: The Art of the Constitutional Court of South Africa*, Bronwyn Law-Viljoen writes how both traditional (referring specifically to weaving) and industrial technologies were used in the court building's design and its integrated artworks,⁴ conjuring the African motif of "justice under a tree".⁵



Jane du Rand's mosaic on the pillars in the foyer of the Constitutional Court, along with Walter Oltmann's wire chandeliers that form a canopy of leaves, add to the visualisation of "justice under a tree". These artisanal additions are reminiscent of the making of Zulu clay pots and the weaving of baskets.

⁴ Integrated artworks are categorised as permanently forming part of the Constitutional Court building, such as artist-created doors and security gates, light fittings, mosaic, carpets and other commissioned works.

⁵ "Justice under a tree" refers to an African conception of how law and justice was and continues to be dispensed through gatherings under trees in tribal contexts, before and despite of colonialism and apartheid. It is an acknowledgement of how the practice of justice is rooted in indigenous African customs and environments.



The lights in the Judges' Gallery by Robert Denton and Lientjie Wessels (left) and outdoor chandeliers by Lindelani Ngwenya (right) are reminiscent of fish traps woven from grass.

Woven wire chandeliers by Walter Oltmann and hanging lanterns by Lindelani Ngwenya, Robert Denton and Lientjie Wessels found around the court complex allude to the making of basketry to serve as containers and fish traps and to humanity's interconnection with the natural world.

In considering these baskets, their value as carriers of heritage comes to the fore, yet it should be asked whose heritage this is and to whom it belongs. These baskets were used for customs and agriculture in Zulu culture, marking basketry as part of Zulu cultural identity. Yet it might be said that these baskets have come to form part of South African heritage that extends beyond ethnic definitions.

Justice Yvonne Mokgoro, retired judge of the Constitutional Court who was involved with the conception of the CCAC, considered the protection of cultural identity in the South African Constitution and the creation of national unity in South Africa. She wrote in a 1999 *SMU Law Review* article, as the court building was being conceptualised:

"The enactment of the Constitution did not automatically erase the consciousness of separateness, otherness, and division between ethnic, cultural, and racial communities within the broader South Africa which had been nurtured by colonialism and apartheid. Some communities still aspire to cultural self actualisation, and resist the efforts to unite with the remaining body. The country inherited colonial political boundaries and continues to be divided economically, racially, and to a greater or lesser extent, ethnically...

The combined actions of colonialism and apartheid, therefore, resulted in a weak unitary South African identity. The cultural identity among South Africans is often not to be found on a national level, but on a more fragmented ethnic level such as Tswana, Zulu, Xhosa, English or Afrikaans."

The history of Zulu basketry and these specific baskets' place in the CCAC offer us ways to engage with South Africa's inclusive constitutional project. "The conscious celebration of cultural diversity could enhance mutual understanding and mutual respect – values which could become central to a new South Africanism," writes Mokgoro.

The history and contemporary standing of these baskets may contribute to a shared South African heritage and identity, as is evinced through the design of the Constitutional Court building.



Ezekiel Budeli, *Ancestral Kingdom*, 1996, linocut, 292 x 478 mm, Images of Human Rights portfolio.

This work in the CCAC represents freedom of trade, occupation and profession as stipulated in section 22 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996. It depicts fishermen using cone-shaped woven baskets – the shape of which inspired the Constitutional Court's chandeliers.

"The conscious celebration of cultural diversity could enhance mutual understanding and mutual respect – values which could become central to a new South Africanism."

– JUSTICE YVONNE MOKGORO

HISTORY AND PROGRESSION OF HLABISA BASKETRY

Basketry from Hlabisa has changed from its initial functional purpose in traditional Zulu life to its more commercialised nature today. According to visual arts educator, Jannie van Heerden, in Zulu social life in the 19th and early 20th century, “baskets and clay pots were interchangeable, as both served as containers for food and liquid and were consequently linked to the rituals that were observed in the preparation and consumption of food and beverages.”



A traditional Zulu clay pot used to serve *umqombothi*, alongside a woven *isichumo* vessel that was traditionally used for the process of making Zulu beer. When baskets' primary purpose was still utilitarian, they were often woven tightly enough to hold liquids.

Van Heerden observes that Zulu basketry was predominantly a craft of men before the twentieth century. However, due to socio-economic changes caused by colonialism and exacerbated through the apartheid government's implementation of the Bantustans or homelands, through forced removals, many men were left with no choice but to spend extended periods away from home for work as migrant workers. The severe disruption of family and societal structures was part of the government's policies towards exploiting Black labour and complete political control. As such, basketry came to be practised mainly by women.

Furthermore, the *Bantu Education Act, 1953*, warranted discriminatory educational practices, offering a different and lesser-value type of education to Black learners compared to the curriculum in white schools. It made provision for crafts education in the curriculum of Black schools as, according to Van Heerden, the perceived notion was that traditional handmade art posed “no real threat to white supremacy”. Nettleton concurs, writing that basketry-making was encouraged by the apartheid regime as it was considered inferior to European arts and crafts.



Of the weavers represented in the CCAC, Laurentia Dlamini is the only one who learned to weave in primary school as part of the “craft education” initiative. She is a contemporary of the late Reuben Ndwandwe (1943–2007), a seminal figure of 20th century basket weaving history. Dlamini made a reasonable income from basketry and through teaching younger women how to weave. In 2020, at the CCAC interview, she had, given her age, long stopped making baskets. However, those she trained are still active – including Beauty Ngxongo (b. 1953), another weaver well-known through her active social media presence and artistic collaborations (see page 16), though not represented in the CCAC.

According to Van Heeden, historical developments led to the Hlabisa district of KwaZulu-Natal being the place where a “small nucleus of outstanding weavers” are consistently producing high quality baskets for western markets today. This rural area is the leading producer of ilala palm baskets as it is close to the ilala growing areas around Hluhluwe up to Kosi Bay, along the lush eastern coast of South Africa. The commercialisation of Hlabisa basketry can largely be attributed to the Vukani Association, an initiative of the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church mission in Hlabisa.

The association stimulated basketry weaving for economic development from 1972. According to Nettleton, that programme’s success as a “viable market venture depended on the development of new techniques and natural dyes for colouring the (still natural) materials, quality control and refinement, and marketing opportunities within the urban centers”. This work was successful and led to the revival of basketry weaving in Hlabisa – a legacy that continues to this day. The Vukani Museum in Eshowe houses some of the best work collected by the association over the years.

After work from the Vukani Association lessened around 1993, the African Art Centre in Durban became an avenue to display and sell baskets. First Manqeke then Masuku started supplying baskets directly to the centre. Manqeke has now retired from basket-making, but Masuku continues weaving to this day and remains active as a weaving teacher. In 2020 she taught 42 students as part of a

cebofuthi (developmental) project funded by the Department of Arts and Culture of KwaZulu-Natal. Masuku draws on the skills of up to a dozen women weavers of different ages when she has many commissions or markets to prepare for. She also relies on children of the community for smaller tasks such as collecting the tin cans needed for the basketry dyeing process (see page 25).



Angeline Masuku and Nonhlanhla Manqeke with the two baskets Manqeke made which form part of the CCAC, standing in Manqeke's yard.

While commercial basket-making has kept the tradition active, it has also promoted changes in styles, shapes and pattern designs. Elizabeth Terry and Anthony Cunningham write⁶ that the need for specific basket shapes to undertake particular tasks in agricultural life has, to a large extent, passed. Many traditional forms have been adjusted to fit the “needs and interior decorating ideals of ‘western’ homes”.

New basket shapes for laundry baskets and fruit bowls have extended as far as trays, table and drink mats, and even ceiling and wall panels. In addition, utilitarian baskets' pattern designs were often plain or limited, whereas commercial marketing has led decorative designs to become increasingly elaborate and colourful.

According to Nettleton, figurative forms have historically not been found on South African basketry. Zulu telephone wire baskets, an adaptation of traditional weaving techniques for commercial purposes, have been adorned with figures from its first use around the 1970s. Images of humans, animals, boats, houses, trees, insects, flowers and flags have only more recently made their appearance in ilala palm baskets. Masuku is known for her distinctive style of employing imagery of huts and rondavels, as well as animals found in the Hlabisa district in her designs, reflecting traditional Zulu life. Concerning size, Nettleton refers to ilala palm baskets and the more recent weavings of telephone wire found at many markets that has tended toward “gigantism”, an increase in scale she ascribes to an attempt to escape the category of tourist “craft” and to enter the arena of works described as “art”.

“Ngithatha usiko lethu lwamandulo ngilufake kumaquthu ngendlela ethandwa abantu. Lokhu ngenzela ukufundisa intsha ngosiko lwesiZulu, noma indlela esakhula ngayo nendlela esiphila ngayo. Sikhule sihlala kwizindlu ezenziwe ngobulongwe benkomo. Asikhulelanga emizini emihle kanje.”

– ANGELINE MASUKU

“I do not depict modern houses. I make huts, the kind I grew up in. Sometimes you find that we didn't have windows. It was just like a small hole with some kind of paper material that would be forced into it to close it and make it a window. So, I take the olden day tradition and bring it or merge it with weaving, in a new form that people love, in order to teach the younger generations about the tradition, of how we grew up and how we live. We lived in houses built with cow dung. We didn't live in such luxuries.”

⁶ Terry and Cunningham are the authors of the book *African basketry: grassroots art from southern Africa* (2006) which sets out their studies of basketry on a subcontinental scale.

ART, CRAFT AND QUESTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

The notion that “craft” stands in opposition to “art”, implying a one-directional aspirational progression from craft to art, fails to recognise the increasingly blurred, even eroded, boundaries between art, craft and design.

This matter is one that Sally Markowitz has engaged with on a broader theoretical level. She writes that “any distinction between art and craft must involve not only the objects themselves, but a background of practices, assumptions, values, and distinctions that determine how we respond to particular objects and, indeed, how we understand our responses”. She notes that craft may be seen as that which is utilitarian, and art as something that is contemplated.

However, Elbé Coetsee questions the inference that craft is regarded as essentially functional, in contrast with works of art made for contemplative viewing. In her book *Craft Art in South Africa: Creative Intersections*, Coetsee presents work by a diverse range of artists, including CCAC artist Walter Oltmann and Hlabisa weaver Beauty Ngxongo, from city to rural life, Black and white, working in mediums that have been commonly referred to as “craft” – baskets, beads, ceramics, fibres and fabrics, glass, metal and wire, recycling, and wood and cane (all of which appear in the CCAC).

In coining the phrase “craft art” Coetsee embraces the conceptuality of art as well as the physicality of craftsmanship, neither excluding art at one end nor industry at the other – much like the combination of disciplines and styles of the commissioned integrated artworks that give a visibility to justice at the Constitutional Court, drawing from the practice of weaving.

Nettleton, in turn, has sought to answer the art-craft distinction specifically pertaining to baskets from Hlabisa. She writes that basketry has become modern as the practice has grown in response to globally traded notions of

creativity: “In their most sophisticated manifestations, they demand the recognition of the craftsman as an individual artist.”

According to Nettleton, it is through the emergence of named persons with an “aura of individuality” among craft workers that they have been elevated to the status of “artist.” Yet such a view circles back to a hierarchy that positions art as a higher class.

An insightful different perspective was raised by CCAC weaver Masuku. She was undecided about her baskets being craft or art, although she stated that it is important to her that different weavers’ unique skills and creativity, as embodied in stitching patterns and designs, are protected. According to Masuku, there is clear respect amongst the master weavers of her generation in keeping to one’s own designs and stitches. They also add their names to their baskets with a paper tag.

Mutual reverence amongst weavers is crucial for ensuring distinctiveness of the designs, style, and techniques as craft markets may sometimes deaden the “art” with mass-made copies. At markets and stores, artists are most often not recognised as individuals, their region or the broad, and arguably meaningless trope of “African” being cited instead – this is what Masuku wants to avoid.

Nettleton writes that quality works by master basket-weavers sold through upmarket outlets including the African Art Centre in Durban, art and craft markets in wealthy suburbs of Johannesburg and Cape Town, and at galleries such as Kim Sacks and Art Africa in Johannesburg adds to the perceived elevation in status. She posits that ilala palm baskets can only be made in areas where the materials are easily accessible and that the craft depends on weaving techniques that have been handed down over generations:

"It is thus almost impossible to find baskets woven from ilala palm in the fleamarkets. Because they are difficult to copy, the 'genuine' items can be carefully marketed for substantial sums of money. In addition, the fact that rural dwellers have started growing the materials needed for basket production to prevent the destruction of natural ecosystems enhances their appeal."

Turning to the test of authenticity of basketry may then be a way of transcending this contentious binary. Authenticity could be measured by the mastery and depth of understanding of weaving techniques and styles: historically, culturally and environmentally. Such a command of weaving can then also lead to creative innovation.



Masuku, donning traditional attire, in front of her exhibition stand of her and her students' baskets at a celebratory event for International Mother Tongue Day 2020 in KwaZulu-Natal. She wore her Zulu-patterned beaded jewellery, the patterns of which she employs in some of her baskets. She and Manqele stated that they are proud of Zulu culture's clothing, jewellery, ceramics, and basketry designs. Manqele added that "as Zulu people, to be more beautiful, we adorn ourselves with colourful beads designed with patterns just like in these baskets".



The CCAC also contains a collection of traditional southern African beadwork, collected and donated by the late ethnographic artist Barbara Tyrrell. According to Masuku, the type of patterns in these Zulu beaded necklaces also appear in some of her earlier baskets.

EMPOWERMENT AND INNOVATION THROUGH BASKETRY

As global trade and cultural exchanges have influenced Zulu basketry, weavers have used their skills as a means of empowering themselves within their communities. Terry and Cunningham write that the majority of basketmakers in southern Africa often have low incomes and live in rural or very remote areas, are female and often the head of the household, partake in subsistence agriculture and own few or no cattle. They add that for many, the only significant and consistent source of income is

through the production and sale of handicrafts. Certainly in Hlabisa jobs are scarce; Masuku spoke to the positive financial impact of weaving, and how she finds being her own boss empowering. Apart from the financial benefit, Masuku's skill as a master weaver has also led to her being awarded, and to international travels, for her basketry.⁷ She referred to how Khumalo, her daughter, is currently completing her tertiary studies which Masuku pays for using gains from basketry.



Mother and daughter duo Angeline Masuku and Nokukhanya Khumalo with their baskets made in 2020.

⁷ In 2006 she was awarded first prize in the FNB Vita Crafts Competition, due to her "control of shape and innovative use of design". She was also a finalist in the KZN Exporter of the Year Awards, in both 2009 and 2010, hosted by the Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Masuku's baskets have also taken her to Santa Fe in New Mexico, to the International Folk Art Market, where her work was positively received.

Khumalo is part of a new generation of basket-makers, surrounded by weavers from both her maternal and paternal kin. Some of the other weavers in Khumalo's generation include Bonisiwe Sibiya, Phumzile Tembe and Lindiwe Mhlongo. Khumalo's first basket was a small one, which she learnt to weave from her aunt, Cuwulina Masuku. She later learnt how to make patterns from her mother. Although having started to make baskets out of love, she is also beginning to see the financial benefits of weaving. When not in school, Khumalo makes baskets for extra money that gives her a sense of independence. She also uses basketry to explore her surroundings and way of life, by including iconography and patterns such as religious crosses and animals found in the Hlabisa district. Khumalo is studying towards

a qualification in business administration as she hopes to assist her mom with tasks on the administrative side of her family's business.

Even though the Covid-19 pandemic caused financial challenges for Masuku – local travel restrictions and the cancelling of markets were exacerbated by many clients being based abroad – she and other weavers such as Nxgongo remain committed and active. The 2019 *Hlabisa Bench* project is an example of how basketry is reinvigorated through cross-cultural collaboration, as is Masuku's cat basket that was commissioned in 2020. Basketry is thus not just an ancient practice that has survived, but the skill has been adapted and utilised by the weavers looking ahead to the demands and offerings of the present day.



Masuku spoke about how basketry is being reinvented through contemporary remixes with other art forms, and through adaptations for commercial markets. The *Hlabisa Bench* collaboration between two design studios and weavers Beauty Nxgongo and Ma Ntuli is one such project. The shape of the bench was inspired by the three-legged cast-iron pot, a staple in many South African homes. The bench's undulating form depicts the rolling hills of Hlabisa. Although Masuku did not work on this specific project, she noted that "it is always interesting to know how to do things differently and to include other cultures." The *Hlabisa bench* was conceptualised by Thabisa Mjo from Mash. T Design Studio, as well as Phillip Hollander and Stephen Wilson of Houtlander. Photograph courtesy of Houtlander.



Stephen Wilson (back left) with Thabisa Mjo (back right) and master weavers Ma Ntuli and Beauty Ngxongo (front from left) together with other women who helped with the weaving of the bench. Photograph courtesy of Houtlander.



The cat basket made by Masuku in 2020 for a client, depicting feline figures on its lid.⁸

⁸ Angeline Masuku can be contacted at +27(0)721099329 for commissions and orders. Her website is <http://angelinemasuku.co.za/>.

RECOGNITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

As this monograph was being completed, basketry was enjoying recognition within institutional contexts. The *Seen, Heard and Valued* exhibition at Wits Art Museum (WAM) in Johannesburg includes baskets by Masuku and Dlamini, shown in the same period as the CCAC baskets in the public gallery of the Constitutional Court. Nettleton posited that it was, in part, through the University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries' collection of African art that Hlabisa baskets gained institutional appreciation:

"The intention in assembling this collection was not only to establish these objects as having a strong aesthetic value but also to destabilise the apartheid-promoted notion that Black South Africans had no traditions of 'art'."

But it was for a different purpose that the Hlabisa baskets in the CCAC were acquired, and their presence in the Constitutional Court speaks to another kind of significance, bringing to mind the work by Eastern Cape-based, Xhosa artist Sandile Goje, *Meeting of Two Cultures*. According to the artist, this work is a depiction of the changes that were happening in South Africa as the country prepared for its first democratic elections in 1994, around the time the Constitutional Court was established. Goje's work also reflects his desire for tolerance between people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and the need to draw from sometimes opposing yet mutually enriching worldviews. The artwork could also hint at baskets' inclusion in museums and other art institutions and the weighted histories reflected by different artistic practices.



Sandile Goje, *Meeting of Two Cultures*, 1993, linocut, 350 x 500 mm. Published with permission of the artist. Goje's linocut *Making Democracy Work* (1996), of which an edition is held in the CCAC, had a seminal impact on the design of the Constitutional Court building during its conceptual design period.



Angeline Masuku's basket titled *The Zulu Village* (2007), co-owned by and being exhibited at Wits Art Museum as part of the *Seen, Heard and Valued: WAM celebrates 40 years of the Standard Bank African Art Collection* exhibition. The exhibition is set to run from June 2021 to February 2022. Use courtesy of WAM.

The baskets in the CCAC are a weaving of the intergenerational passing on of traditions that have survived the passage of time. Although the utilitarian use of baskets in agricultural life has receded, traditional forms and techniques have evolved and are being adapted and reimagined with the times.

In the 21st century, weavers in rural areas continue to use their skills as a means of empowerment and self-sufficiency, constantly refining their craft art as artisans and artists. Reading and respecting these baskets can contribute to redressing societal and art world inequities.

These baskets also offer us ways to consider and engage with South Africa's constitutional project, to consciously celebrate cultural diversity as a way of promoting mutual understanding and respect, also recognising our interconnected part in the natural world.

The display in and incorporation of basketry into the fabric of the Constitutional Court adds to the emergence of a national identity, a multifaceted and interconnected South African heritage made up of many parts including Zulu culture, that creates that sense of belonging aspired to within the court environment.



Hlabisa environment: the local soccer field in Hlabisa a few hundred meters from Angeline Masuku's yard.



"UKWENZA AMAQUTHU, UQALA WENZE UKHWEZI"

"To make a basket, you start with a star"

- ANGELINE MASUKU

THE MAKING AND RESTORING OF BASKETRY

This is a step-by-step photographic recording of Angeline Masuku's basketry-making process in her yard which she mostly uses for basketry. The yard consists of a four-roomed house that Masuku has been building herself, a govern-

ment two-roomed house, a smaller outhouse she uses mainly for Zulu traditional beer-making, and a low-ceilinged, small-doored rondavel for praying to her ancestors.



Ilala palm batches on the floor and handmade brooms, made from *ukhasi* (a type of grass), against the wall. The ilala palm is stored in her main four-room house, referred to as her late father's house. The brooms are unfastened as the grass is needed in the final stages of weaving to reinforce the ilala palm. Masuku tends to buy in bulk to sell some materials to her students and other weavers who prefer to purchase ready-made materials. According to Masuku the cost to buy 20 batches of Ilala palm needed to make a single medium-sized (about 700 mm in length) basket comes to about R600 in 2020, excluding transportation.



Two different plant materials are used to dye the ilala palm before weaving, each having a different effect. These are *Umnqandane* berries and *Umthombothi* leaves. Leaves from the *Umthombothi* plant are used to dye palm leaves black. Often the palms would have been dyed grey using rusted tin cans, whereafter this process would add further darkness to achieve a black dye. The palm is boiled in a pot with the leaves for about two hours.



To achieve a light brown colour, *Umnqandane* berries are mashed and boiled together with the palm for about one hour. For a darker brown, the palm can be soaked with rusted tin cans for about four days after being boiled with the berries.



Here *Umthombothi* leaves are mixed with rainwater, collected from her roof into a tank, and boiled in order to dye the palm leaves black.



Masuku twirling the ilala palm into an iron pot and showing some previously mashed and boiled *Umnqandane* berries.



Ilala palm is soaked in bins with rusted tin cans for about ten days in order to dye them a grey colour. Masuku pays children in her neighbourhood to collect discarded tin cans. The tin cans are the only non-natural material used in the dyeing process, although they are recycled, making this art-form fairly green.



Siphelele Nene, a neighbour of Masuku who sometimes assists her, removes palm leaves from the boil after they have been dyed black. They are first washed in plastic drums to remove stickiness, which makes the weaving process easier. They are then hung to dry overnight, but if still wet will be left to dry in the sun. Masuku removes the palm that has been soaking for some days and that has turned grey. They are spread out in her backyard to dry in the sun.



Masuku weaves in what she refers to as her late grandmother's house, a beautifully tiled rondavel where she displays all her certificates, including books written on Zulu basketry. Here she also stores her own and some of her students' baskets for exhibitions and markets. In these images, Masuku is sizing a lid to fit a basket and proceeding to weave the lid.



To make a basket, you create a star using *ukhasi* (grass). The star serves as the base of the basket, referred to as *isinqa* in Zulu, which translates to "buttocks" in English. After making the star, one cuts the ilala palm into thin strips, sewing *ukhasi* around the strips and connecting it to the star. To introduce a new colour, you need a new strip of palm, sewing it into the basket.



The base structure of the basket is massaged to allow it to stand up upright. As part of the conservation process, the top handle and lining of a lid were repaired. A newer lining technique is used nowadays, allowing for a sturdier and better fitting lid.

CONSERVATION AND DISPLAY



Preventive measures were implemented following the baskets' restoration in Hlabisa to ensure that they do not lose their shape. For storage reinforcement, custom non-acidic foam (SPX4) structures were produced for each basket. Different layers of foam provide dispersed support to each basket. When not on display, the baskets are stored in storage rooms that are closely monitored in terms of light, humidity, temperature and pest control.



When on exhibit, as seen here in the public gallery of the Constitutional Court, the baskets are displayed in areas with low light levels or that have been treated to eliminate UV light and excessive visible (lux) light. The baskets are lifted from the ground on a black wooden base covered with a glass casing.

GLOSSARY

Imbuje - a very straight, elongated basket shape.

Isizimane - Natal gurry root (*Euclea natalensis*), the root is used to make a black dye.

Ukhamba - (pl. izinkamba) a round shaped clay or grass vessel used to serve sorghum beer.

Ukhasi - (*Cyperus textilis*) a decorative waterside plant that can also be used to weave baskets and sleeping mats or to make rolled twine.

Umqandane - (*Diospyros lyioides*) - the fruit used to make ochre dye.

Umqombothi - a beer made from maize (corn), sorghum, yeast and water.

Umthombothi - (*Spirostachys africana*) - leaves used in the dyeing process.

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Nokukhanya Khumalo and Angeline Masuku in the weaving rondavel at Masuku's home in Hlabisa.

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Dominic Toerien (curatorial intern), Thina Miya (assistant curator), Nokhukhanya Khumalo, Angeline Masuku and Francois Lion-Cachet (assistant curator) in Hlabisa, February 2020.





