

CCAC Interview with Nonhlanhla Manqele on 25/02/2020 in Hlabisa, Kwa-Zulu

Natal-transcript

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Project Name: Hla (Hlabisa baskets)

Date of interview: 25 February 2020 at 16H20

Location of interview: Hlabisa, Angeline Masuku's home

Language/s of interview: Zulu

Length of interview: 00:41:00

Interviewer name (and acronym): Thina Miya (NTM)

Documenter name/s (and Acronym): Francois Lion-Cachet (FLC) and Dominic Toerin (DT)

Interviewee name (and acronym): Nonhlanhla Manqele (NM)

Name of translator, if applicable: Thina Miya

Name of transcriber: Thina Miya

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List of acronyms: CCAC; CCT; AM (Angeline Masuku)

[Start of audio recording: 00:00:01]

NTM: I, Thina Miya, am about to conduct an interview for the Constitutional Court trust, custodian of the Constitutional Court art collection with Nonhlanhla Manqele in the Hlabisa area in Kwa-Zulu Natal on the 25th of February 2020.

1. Could you please tell us a bit more about where you grew up?

NM: [In Zulu] I grew up here, in Hlabisa. I was born here; I grew up here.

2. What is your earliest memory of a basket?

NTM: I don't remember that day because it's been very long since I started or saw it.

3. Can you tell us more about the first basket you made?

NM: [In Zulu] The first basket I made was in Durban - most of the time I saw baskets at the African Art Centre. I saw displays of baskets. One day I went in and I saw the works, the craft that was displayed. And I went in to ask whether I could make some and at least make some money, so I could feed my kids.

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NTM: So you've already answered my next question, which is,

4. Why do you weave baskets? (AMAQUTHU)

NTM: So it was for your kids?

NM: [In Zulu]Yes, yes. Yes.

5. Please tell us a bit more about your weaving process. How do you go about making a basket? (Thina explains Angie's process and requests two or three pointers from Nonhlanhla).

NM: [In Zulu] So, there are different ways to start off. You can start off by making a star mixing or combining the lalla palm colours. Sometimes you could start with using a glass as your structure and then you wrap the grass around it...then you continue with the weaving process. It is really similar to the way in which Khanyo made the lid. You can start from the bottom up.

6. Do you use baskets practically in your everyday life? How many baskets have you made for yourself?

NM: [In Zulu] Yeah, you can use them apart from selling them by decorating with them. Maybe there's an event where you can place them for decorations.

NTM: How many baskets do you think you've made to date?

NM: [In Zulu] I can't quantify because you make different kinds of baskets, small sizes and big sizes. You cannot really count how many...

NTM: Do you remember these? The ones that are part of our collection?

NM: [In Zulu] I remember them by seeing them, yes.

7. Articles about basket weaving in Hlabisa often say that the making of the baskets has been a means of breaking out of poverty. Is this true?

NM: [In Zulu] Yeah, it's true. It's true. Yes, because I know when you start making craft it's because you're looking at earning something so that your kids could go to school.

8. Other articles say that there is a link between basketry in Hlabisa and HIV/Aids awareness. Is this true? Why so?

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[Time on audio recording: 00:18:35]

NM: [In Zulu] No. No.

10. What do you think about the divide between traditional craft and contemporary art?

NM: [In Zulu] I think it's their way of making money because some people make money from making beaded stuff. Some make baskets. Some people make projects because everyone's looking at money to earn something.

NTM: Who do you refer to you by "They"?

NM: [In Zulu] I mean people we'd sell artworks with during that time when I used to sell.

11. Is basketry weaving concept driven?

NM: [In Zulu] Yeah, yes. When you look at it, the designs are different. Zulu people know that when you have this sharp nosed top-lid, you are referring to Ihawu. It is made out of animal skin and Ihawu is sometimes coloured/dyed with similar colours maybe white. So the point of these Baskets is to portray how Ihawu is from Kwa-Zulu Natal.

12. Houtlander recently collaborated with Mash T Design studios and weaver Beauty Ngxongo in the making of an artisanal bench. What do you think about this project?

NM: [In Zulu] I cannot say what they were thinking. But when I see it, the collaboration was to show that you can actually mix such things that you can make one thing from different parts of the world.

13. When you used to make baskets, did you ever bring basketry weaving together with beadwork or other materials?

NTM: Maybe leather or beads?

NM: [In Zulu] No, I just used grass to weave.

NTM: Would you ever do that?

NM: [In Zulu] (Laughs) No. I am too old now.

15. Your baskets are usually titled "Hlabisa Baskets" as a series or go untitled as single baskets, is that a personal choice?

NM: [In Zulu] No, I've never thought of something like that or giving them titles.

17. What kind of value do you think your artwork has?

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NTM: Think about us coming from Johannesburg to Hlabisa see the artists that made the baskets and interview you for participation on the interview for the CCAC websites and so forth. Think of the collection as a whole maybe. Maybe it might give you an idea of how big the value of these baskets are. Maybe when you started making them the value didn't seem that big, but maybe you might think of it differently now.

NM: [In Zulu] I really don't know what to say because I didn't even think they still exist. I never thought they existed and that I'd ever see them again. As I never thought anybody still thinks about them. I didn't think anyone would go out, look at them, buy them and come back to me with them. I never thought I would see them again.

NTM: How do you feel by seeing them again?

NM: [In Zulu] (Giggles) I am happy.

18. Do you know the story of how the baskets you are restoring came to form a part of the Constitutional Court Art Collection?

NM: [In Zulu] They were just bought from the African Art Centre and I think there were people who would come and buy them then from the Art Centre. I would sell to the Art Centre then they would sell to their clients. I never knew where they'd take the baskets.

NTM: Do you remember how many baskets you sold to the African Art Centre?

NM: [In Zulu] I can't remember.

19. How do you feel about your work being displayed in the Constitutional Court as part of its art collection?

NM: [In Zulu] I am delighted.

20. The baskets were bought from the African Art Centre - how many of your baskets are sold there?

NM: [In Zulu] I cannot remember.

21. Do you know of any of your other baskets displayed in other cities or galleries?

NM: [In Zulu] I used to sell to a store down the road, I forgot the name.... I think it's at Emtatani.

AM: Oh yes, I forgot the name of the store.

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[Time on audio recording: 00:29:40]

NM: [In Zulu] Me too.

NTM: I will try to remind you about it when we get home.

NM: [In Zulu] How?

NTM: Oh I meant remind Angie

NM: [In Zulu] Oh its titled Bets Centre.

(NTM asks what kind of shop it is)

AM: It is a port for boats. There used to be a display space inside the shop.

22. Have you seen your baskets being shown in galleries (where?) and how did you feel about it?

NM: [In Zulu] No, I've never but then at the African Art Centre and Bets I have seen them, I was happy to see them as it was proof that I have worked hard.

23. Do you think Hlabisa basketry is known about by enough people?

NM: [In Zulu] I do not think that the whole world knows about these baskets, but some people do know about Hlabisa baskets.

24. How do you feel about these baskets having been brought to Hlabisa for restoration?

NM: [In Zulu] I am happy.

NTM: Do you think maybe their condition had degraded?
(Thina explains the condition assessments from the CCAC)

NM: [In Zulu] I think that over time baskets do tend to lean more on one side. But that just shows that the bottom is not stable enough.

25. How can the baskets best be taken care of to ensure they are preserved for future generations?

AM: We don't wash them.

NM: [In Zulu] We can just dust them off and place them in a place that isn't moist. If we're displaying, make sure you put in dry flowers less than water to not place them in too much sunlight as the grass will become too dry and hot.

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26. How would you like to see the baskets displayed? How should their story be told?

NM: [In Zulu] I am happy; I do not have any complaints with the way we are displaying it.

NTM: If there was information you wanted us to write on the signage card, what would you prefer?

NM: [In Zulu] When we get dressed up as Zulu people, we wear different patterned beadwork for it to complement your traditional gown. The beadwork is designed in the same way as the patterns on this basket, so that's the relation.

NTM: Which language would you prefer to write this in? Would you like it in Zulu or in English both?

NM: [In Zulu] Oh my child. Just do as you feel this works, whichever helps move the work forward.

NTM: I have noticed that you love being a Zulu woman. So maybe you would love to have the signage in Zulu.

NM: [In Zulu] But what happens when the white people want to read, what are we going to do then?

NTM: We can always translate it.

[End of Audio Recording: 00:39:41]