

CCAC interview with Sokhaya Charles Nkosi

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

Interviewee name (and acronym): Sokhaya Charles Nkosi (SCN)

Name of translator, if applicable: Thina Miya (NTM)

Name of transcriber: Thina Miya

Notes on access and use, if applicable: Interview recording includes reading of consent and has been omitted in the transcription.

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List of acronyms:

VB: Vincent Baloyi

KLF: Kay-Leigh Fisher

START OF AUDIO RECORDING: 00:01:25

NTM: Please tell us a bit about please tell us a bit about where you grew up and how you became an artist

SCN: I grew up in Durban. I been biological brought to earth through a hospital in Durban, King Edward Hospital, *it was like that* and then I ended up doing a part of my education at Vryheid because I to stay with my granny. My mother was doing nursing at King Edward. So afterwards I had to access primary school and then secondary school at Isibonelo High School. I only did one year there then went to Marian Hill to do form two and three. Then I went to Ohlane high school, then I went to Ngoya. However, since I was a chronic asthmatic person, I had to quit university as we had a damp climate. in 1974, I met this gentleman (refers to Vincent) at Roke's Drift, then we became buddy's together with Joe. in 1976, I left Roke's Drift after a three year stay with him.

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SCN: Then we worked at Marianhill because a friend of mine, , if you know a guy called Mfundo who is a very proficient sculptor, he was a wood sculptor. He lives in Winnie Mandela's area. So then after Juke said come use my space, I'm going to stay in Claremont, Durban. Then I also happened to meet Joe after Joe had given me space to work with him at the Open School in Durban, Abangani Open School. I think the name of Abangani was coined because it had to coin an acronym that would best suit the interests of young developing people in the Arts. So, I took up that challenge. Worked with him, but I had to leave him in 1980 to work for SABC as a graphic artist. Then, 1986, I had to quit because of problems that were there at SABC, the scandals and all that. People were doing bribes in relation to CANSAS to promote their endeavors. So then that's when I left SABC to work for Funda, in the finance department where I've met Steven Sack, who was the director by then, during the times of people like Mtsumi, Sibongile and Sandile Khemese. So I am no longer working there now because I don't want to see myself self-inflicted punishment of being a continuously overstretched community development art worker. I'm 72 years old now, I cannot afford to serve one master for 36 solid years. I mean, it's a God-given talent that I accessed but now if I am teaching from morning to sunset.

NTM: So you work at FUNDA for 36 years?

SCN: Yes. If they can give me a space and say, "Go enjoy yourself." ...I think I got to rediscover myself in terms of being over lenient.

VN: If you were given space to work and offered a lump sum of money, would you not work?

SCN: I think I need to rediscover myself in terms of being over lenient.

NTM: Can you tell us more about how, when and why *Resilience* was made, which forms part of the 30 years in Soweto, from resistance to leadership print portfolio by the Artist Proof Studio. So tell us about how, when and why it was made.

SCN: *Resilience* is part of my small and last reality of the actual things happening in South Africa. In retrospect, bearing in mind where we come from and where we're headed. And via 1976 June - uMkumbane riots. Because when I was born also, there was a time where women forced fathers out of the bar. Mothers, there were these military tanks, they pushed them, at Umkhumbane, eThekweni, they pushed them and they'd turn them over. They killed nine policemen during the strikes, and then there was the realization that; no, being in a place with this much of violence is where the women showed their anger. They entered the bar hitting the men with whips and knobkerries saying you are busy wasting our land and our opportunities, drinking.

So life hasn't been that kind. So it's the resilient that you tolerate all these things. You are expected to allow people to force a recipe for disaster down you galette, knowing that you don't want to eat this but but because the man from next door is a policeman - he can get me arrested. Because during those times, there were instances where if a *blackjack* left his bicycle to chase a thief, he would return to people guarding his bicycle.

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SCN: A man without the compass would be asked "Why are you waiting here?" to another person who will get arrested, "We forgot our compass", "I forgot mine too." "So why are you waiting here?" "I forgot mine too.". You see – people were no longer aware of what is right or wrong. *Resilience*, you've gone through the thick and thin of it, and forced to eat shit that you can't stomach and made to think that you still have a long life ahead of you and you become a "Yes" man. A definition for self-inflicted disaster. So the kind of *Resilience* that you are prepared to fight but you are this kind of soldier that says "May I please stab you?" So that's why you see the spears. Those orbs at the top refer to where we come from.. Masks are part of the attire we need to traditionally adorn ourselves, because the destination is not yet known. And yet there is also a concept is vivid . The assegais up there on top turns out to be stones, because with stones – the assegais were like a GPS. To say "There was death here", you will not go with the path where there are animals of the night.

NTM: How did you become a printmaker? And what was your experience working with Artist Proof Studios?

SCN: I did printmaking in Durban, in Rorke's Drift but before I could go there I'd seen some images at the African Art Centre around 1969, that's when I saw that I can do this man. Black and white line, but I did not ask - I took ink and drew images. But that was fun, at Isibonelo they taught us Art but there was no printmaking. There's a guy called Eric Ngcobo who was the art teacher at Isibonelo. So by the time I went to Rorke's Drift, I realized I am undertaking a state of rediscovery, self-rediscovery because the teachers at the townships lied saying "Etching" is when you put sugar. So how I went to Rorke's Drift, there was the man who liked me a lot - who is now late, Eric Ngcobo, who introduced art at schools in the KwaMashu area. He said to my mother who was working for a clinic KwaMashu, "Sisi, this child needs to go there. I've spoken on his behalf at Race Relations. You have it hard because the father of the home is not employed." And then my mother asked where she will get the money. He said he would talk to Race Relations for me. He spoke to them, and they took me. They are the ones who were paying for me, so I got into Rorke's Drift and all was well. Eric introduced me, I studied and finished in the 3rd year. That's when I met Joe.

That's how it all began but we would also meet other students, some white coming from University of Natal, when they would pass by the school and say, geez you are doing such beautiful things. Is this a University? We would tell them no, no. We had committed ourselves to that extent. Vince knew wood Sculpture, clay Sculpture, painting and printmaking. So we were doing all these things there. Does that answer your question?

NTM: Yes except for the Artist Proof Studios...

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:18:29

SCN: Artist Proof Studios was more like an addition on what I already learnt at Rorke's Drift. There was meeting new people. And I also gathered opportunities. Rutgers University for two weeks there with the late Nhlanhla Xaba. Coming back and then interaction with a lot of people, but one of the feathers in the head was when the people from the Museum of Modern Art phoned me and said "Is it true that you introduced printmaking at Funda?" And I said No, let me be fair to other guys who were there. There was Avhashoni Manganye who had been in Rorke's Drift but came later than me. So I cannot deny other people's exposure..."Where did you find my name?" They said they are putting up an exhibition on Protest Art, so I got a recognition of Protest Art through the work that was bought by Reverend Bloom. Hans Bloom(sp), who was used to Gabi Ngcobo. So in 1976, he just bought the whole series, there were 13. So getting acknowledgment from across the seas in highly regarded institution, with printmaking, it has made a great difference in most of us as artists so as you can also switch it, and have the heads be tails. Printmaking without a press, you buy slabs of Perspex, and a roller. You buy ink, some form of rice paper. You don't need to have a Press per se, so you can survive. So that's what I learned at the Artist Proof Studios but it was not reinventing the wheel because the wheel was there.

NTM: How does *Resilience* relate to the 1976 Soweto uprising?

SCN: Resilience implies *shona khona* (dive in), dark or blue or whatever. Because if you are an over compliant person you less focusing on your safety and I've searched as a developing young person you will be taught English whilst you don't want. You had me when I was talking about pushing a mill.. you know they used to do that at boarding schools. It was called treatment. Yes. There was this boy who was much older than us, Rue. He would say if you eat this bread, no one will touch you. This boy was around twenty two doing form one. They'd force food down his throat. He came back to school a bit crazy. Even if you want to progress, don't be over-complaint, stubbornness can be a lifesaver. If a giant puts its foot on top of yours, you can say "sorry, you accidentally put your foot on top on mine." he could say something like, "it's better you recognized it, sorry." Because tolerance is there but when will you get the time to do self-evaluation.

NTM: Where were you when the uprising occurred? The 1976 uprising

SCN: That's when I made the crucifixion. And funnily enough, it just came. We had to do a theme, and I did that and it gave me international access to recognition.

NTM: Okay. How did you look back at the uprising in 2006 when the portfolio was made 30 years after the uprising occurred?

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:25:21

SCN: You know, the spasms of ideas and things evoking old memories in time, like when I was talking about the time top. That when the time spins like this, in some cases it may make you airborne. You feel like "if I didn't spin this top I would not be up here, I would still be down there." So things like that it is said, "fear cannot be a self defeatist weapon to the brave." In Zulu it is said, you must only give up once you've experienced it. You cannot just let a robber into your house to take everything, then you'd say, "thanks bro, please do call again."

NTM: How do you look back at the uprising today in 2020

SCN: Yeah, that will many new things because we don't know whether, we don't know what is the best way to salvage the good from the pollution that is doing the rounds. Where kids are addicted to drugs, and also being too reliant on the state for advancement. When we grew up, our grandparents would leave school in grade four, then work to support the family, and return to school again. The culture of entitlement sometimes it can be the most dangerous. Kids strip wires in the house just to smoke nyaope or glue, its not beautiful. Yeah, so you cannot be an over understanding parent, because you're afraid your child would beat you up. There needs to be a balance. If a kid should join a fees must fall riots, you need to push for that. Not for them to just et drunk in university. The apartheid government is not rulling anymore. Everyone should contribute at home equally, noone is better because they're more difficult or disrepspectful than the other kids.

NTM: Speaking of Black tax, what inspired the title of your work and to which historical and current day thing which you said speaks to?

SCN: I think it the journey is ongoing. because artworks has got to come with lessons of understanding the philosophy of life. You don't hate a person because you think he was once my colonizer or he once arrested me for this. That's not the way to but in literally the domino theory, If you push one, anything goes everything goes on so go to be life is a very sensitive see. You've got to behold . And if you don't want to burn your fingers don't put your foot in the fire in the plane. When a kid understands that fire is burning, they do not return there. Life is a great teacher, think of the climate change and the kid, Gretta Thurngerg, from Swedan. She got on stage and said, you are busy waste wasting time, you denying us the will to live because you compete for who is more powerful than other. They were being told by a young child, who would know better a carbon emissions they are messing up— The Arctic and Arntatica are mentling, and these may have devastating effects on those countries as lead my Polar Regions. So it hurts, we've got to learn that when we want to survive, make sure that you take precaution don't look don't take the other people's ideas down and or think they have to play an inferior role. That child, at the age of 16 even qualified to win the Nobel piece prize. That wouldn't have materialized though but she came with a word that caution everybody was talking about he climate change

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NTM: how do you feel about having your work part of the constitutional art collection and what does the Constitutional Court add collection presents to you?

SCN: That's a very nice story. I feel honoured that my work is here. Sometimes if an institution collects your work, it doesn't mean that you are the one that is there is that needs to be to have his work approved. I know a guy who used who used to write books and featured by work. I know what I learned to respect what guys because some people thought our works were not art, but he saw it and he loved the works. SOme people think we are caught up in art prostitution. Like our work is too ciched. Then you do not feel like your work is worthy of such institutions.

NTM: How do you see art as being connected to justice or human rights in South Africa are more universal.

SCN: Its a universalthing. human rights, it caters for most people. I think it is designed to make sure that everybody feels one that feels looked after. Because you are not protecting one person, you protect the nation.

NTM: Yes. Okay. How do you perceive South Africa's constitution and its impact on the lived realities of the communities it serves?

SCN: I can go beyond what is immediately preceding in the not so far I get to a piece of Africa has produced one of the best constitutions in the world. But now my say is that can our dearly beloved country proof that all the corners of speculation weighing of the scales, including gay and lesbians, and criiminals, Are you able to close one eye and close the other? You cannot condone a constitution that is focused on one and not the other.

NTM: Are you mindful of conservation or preservation requirements to ensure the longevity of the work that you produce and do have specific recommendations for the conservation of your work

SCN: I'll leave that to people call it my way as the conservation it might also mean you know, I can give you a framed work, but you'd say it does not go well with the interiors of your living space. Conservation is an area of expertise itself, my part is to create the artwork. I would not jump onto your expertise, I'll get confused.

NTM: Is there anything else that you would like to be added to your record in this interview

SCN: I loved how the interview was handled but a gesture of obviously it was nice while it lasted it's not like we want money, however, a note at this is what happened would be appreciated. We would like to be part of a yet another initiative and the events shouldn't be about to Joe again, but about we want something that is going to keep this institution alive. Like the Art and Justice publications the publication don't stop it. Carry on, because even residency programmes internationally, bring other people to see what South African interns do.

TIME ON AUDIO RECORDING: 00:43:51

NTM: Thank you. Thank you very much. Yes,

SCN: it was too soon.

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