



SPOTLIGHT

26 OCTOBER, 2021

Mancoba in a class of his own

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Phindile Xaba

The late Ernest Mancoba, painter and sculptor, should be to South Africans as Van Gogh is to the Dutch and Picasso is to the Spanish. He, like others, have for too long been excluded from the South African narrative. He is considered to be in a class of his own and yet his work is not sufficiently studied at South African universities or art schools. The father

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of writer Njabulo Ndebele, Nimrod Ndebele, a playwright and friend, is known to have described Mancoba as the leading intellectual of his generation in the 1930s.

This week on 29 October 2021, The Art and Ubuntu Trust (AUT), the organisation that has worked, building on Dr Elza Miles foundational efforts, to end the erasure of Mancoba, reached a major milestone when it donated a tapestry of Mancoba's oil painting, *L'Ancêtre* (1969-71) and a bust of him to the Constitutional Court Trust (CCT) in 2017. Renowned master weaver Joseph Ndlovu wove the tapestry but sadly died recently before seeing this work publicly acknowledged at the highest court in the land. Sculptor Dorothy Randell sculpted the bust in 1930.

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As a celebration of these notable artwork donations, the Constitutional Court Trust (CCT), custodian of the Constitutional Court Art Collection (CCAC), and AUT will host a webinar entitled – "African spirituality, humanity and heritage". The webinar will discuss master weaver Ndlovu's interpretation of the oil painting transformed into a tapestry.

A six-minute video artwork "Reading the Ancestor" by Abdulcadir Ahmed Said, donated to the CCAC by Tomas Films in 2021, will also be screened during the webinar as it enriches the interpretation of these artworks.

According to Justice Sisi Khampepe, outgoing chairperson of the CCT and the CCAC Artworks Committee, the interplay of mediums between these four distinct yet interrelated works (Mancoba's original painting, Ndlovu's textile, Randell's sculpture and Abdulcadir Ahmed Said's film) offer bountiful interpretive possibilities. The interconnectedness of South Africa with the African continent, and how the CCAC "doesn't just look inwards but considers constitutionalism more broadly," was noted.

"The significant context of Mancoba's time spent in exile, and the sense of community across the world around what our Constitution comes to represent today was also recognised. "Mancoba's message [...] saying we need to preserve African heritage as a shared heritage of humanity, resonates with Joseph Ndlovu's *Humanity*, the very first artwork of the CCAC, aptly speaking to our constitutional ideals, as reflected in the CCAC," Justice Khampepe said.

"We are delighted that the Constitutional Court Trust has agreed to add this work to its art collection and collaborate on the webinar," said Bridget Thompson, Executive Trustee at Art and Ubuntu Trust who is the originator of this effort. She further explained that after making a film in 1994 about Ernest Mancoba's first return to South Africa in 56 years and having thereby been exposed to his work and ideas she had felt the necessity in 2004 to curate an exhibition to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth. This exhibition, 'In the Name of All Humanity: The African Spiritual Expression of Ernest Mancoba' initiated the work of the Art and Ubuntu Trust which is committed to developing understanding of and preserving Mancoba's legacy and that of other African artists. Thompson met Mancoba through Govan Mbeki who described Mancoba as his mentor.

The Trust has so far preserved his legacy through significant outreach programmes in all nine provinces. Seminars on Mancoba's work at

community art centres over the past ten years have reached thousands of artists, teachers and learners. This effort was consolidated in a special ArtSAT Webinar series held every Saturday over 12 weeks recently. These sessions focused on his work and the work of other leading South African artists and brought together some of the country's leading brains in the art space.

Abdulcadir Ahmed Said director of "Reading the Ancestor", the short video artwork that will be part of the webinar, collaborated with a team to make several short films on leading artists and these were shown in the ArtSAT series. Through these collaborative efforts Thompson said that

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AUT is realising its aim of developing awareness about the indigenous knowledge in the arts that informed Mancoba and other South African artists, musicians and writers.

Mancoba was born in 1904 in Gauteng. He left the country in 1938 and was unable to return after being interned during World War II and then marrying a Danish artist, Sonja Verlov. "His work was ahead of its time but very much centered on an African spiritual expression," said Thompson. "This started in 1929 with a sculpture in wood, The African Madonna and finishing in the 1990's with oil paintings and lithographs. The *L'Ancêtre/The Ancestor* took him from 1969 to 1971 to complete," she said. He died in Paris in 2002.

Join in the webinar at 10am on Friday 29 October to enjoy a feast of speakers including Justice Albie Sachs (member emeritus of the Artworks Committee), Stacey Vorster (former CCAC curator and Artworks Committee member), Zubeida Jaffer (AUT chair), Ziphozenkosi Dayile (Independent Curator), Bridget Thompson (Executive Trustee of the AUT), Prof Pitika Ntuli (CCAC artist), Abdulcadir Ahmed Said (CCAC artist), Bongiwe Hlekiso (University of the Western Cape Doctoral Fellow), Sokhaya Charles Nkosi (CCAC artist), Vincent Baloyi (CCAC artist), Thato Ndhlovu (daughter of the master weaver Joseph Ndlovu), Imruh Bakari (filmmaker and poet), and Mgcineni Sobopha (artist and fine art lecturer at University of Fort Hare), amongst others.

To register click here: <u>https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJYpd-</u> <u>yhrDoqHdVNdWwhLxDVIcNQXKy18x08</u>

Limited places available for 100 only.

For more on Ernest Mancoba visit the Art and Ubuntu Trust website @ <u>https://artubuntu.org/</u>

For more on the Constitutional Court Art Collection visit <u>https://ccac.concourttrust.org.za/</u>.

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Towards a new national narrative

Shepherd Mphofu and Zubeida Jaffer South Africa's transformative national narrative sprung from the intellectual strata. Way back in 1911 a South African lawyer, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, delivered a lecture that gave intellectual stimulation to the decolonisation process. Seme's address was part of a cultural and intellectual movement of writers, artists, religious and political leaders [...]

Decolonising Journalism Education

Ylva Rodny-Gumede, Colin Chasi, Zubeida Jaffer and Mvuzo Ponono These calls are not new. However, at the birth of South Africa's democracy in 1994 they slipped into the background, as the word "transformation" became the dominant focus of the discourse. There was no widespread effort to place the issue of "transformation" into the historical context [...]

Politics and Media Freedom

Dr. Onkgopotse JJ Tabane The tension that is alive between media and the government is caused by wrestling for either to be dominant over the other. to control the national narrative and the public sphere agenda. While South Africa as a country has come a long way since the dark days of apartheid where the [...]

The history of SA's Media Freedom Day

Ongeziwe Babane and Phindile Xaba On this bleak day, then apartheid state minister Jimmy Kruger clamped down on the media leading to the closure of The World and Sunday World, and the Christian Institute's publication Pro Veritate that was edited by anti-apartheid activist and Dutch Reformed Church clergyman Beyers Naudé. Percy Qoboza, who was at [...]

<u>Rediscovering grandeur in ourselves</u>

Vusi Mchunu The carnival takes place in the streets. Dance is a celebration of form over fixity, a momentary triumph over gravitational pull, a symbolic conquest of gravity. In the vein of Afro-Brazilian capoeira, it becomes an anti-oppression martial art-cum-dance sequence. Motion is inherent in change, growth and development in nature and nurture. Orature is [...]

Black Wednesday Edition

As South Africa commemorates the 44th anniversary of this day – October 17, 1977 which, in history became a dark spot and a reminder to reflect on how freedoms of expression were trampled upon, violated and suppressed by the apartheid government, this edition examines where we are today and where South Africa needs to [...]

Media Freedom Statement

Zubeida Jaffer, Shepi Mati, Frank Meintjies and Phindile Xaba Known as Black Wednesday, the day has appropriately become the official South African Media Freedom Day. On that day in 1977, the whites-only racist government banned 19 Black Consciousness Movement organisations and detained scores of activists. It further closed The World and Weekend World newspapers and [...]

Writing Ourselves Into History: The

liberating narrative of who we are

Sylvia Vollenhoven "We are discouraged from taking history or politics too seriously and pushed towards the titillation of crime, sport and frivolity. The confines of being blinkered in this stifling box is a fitting metaphor for where we find ourselves in the 21st century. Our story is still controlled too often by bourgeois economic interests [...]

Sol Plaatje - a writer as the righter of past (mis)representations

Sabata-mpho Mokae He added that he was looking for a publisher. Mhudi was only published ten years later, in 1930. Now, a century later since Plaatje sat down in the cold concrete jungle of London, England, to write this novel, Mhudi is as relevant now as it was back then. Many readers in many parts [...]

Can Themba – A form of selfliberation

Frank Meintjies Themba's life testifies to a commitment to both journalism and creative writing, even though his gainful employment was squarely in the sphere of journalism and, at certain points, teaching. In one sense, educated black people in the 1940s and 1950s faced extremely limited employment options and we thus can't deduce much from their [...]

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CONTEXT MATTERS

About Us

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The Journalist has been launched with the support of the University of the Free State, the Southern African Clothing & Textile Workers' Union (SACTWU) and financial contributions from a range of individuals. Students and media lecturers at the University of Free State, the University of Cape Town and the University of Johannesburg are participants in *The Journalist*.



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