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M & A FEATURE

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Cover: Artwork: Siphon Ndlovu, ‘Images of South African History 1 – 4’ (1998). Bought from the artist by Albie Sachs and donated to the CCAC. Cover image courtesy of the Constitutional Court Trust, as part of the Constitutional Court Art Collection (CCAC). For more information, visit ccac.concourtrust.org.za or follow [@concourt_art](https://www.instagram.com/concourt_art) on Instagram and Twitter.

Photograph by Ben Law-Viljoen.

Images of South African History

THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT TRUST

Sipho Ndlovu's 'Images of South African History' consists of four panels, representing different periods in South Africa's modern history. Art academic Eliza Garnsey noted that it is as if the cartoon-style imagery of each panel summarises a history lesson.

While some images of colonialism are depicted in the first frame, it is predominantly a graphic representation of the horrors and oppression of apartheid that appear in the first two panels. Torture, death, restriction of movement and protests give way to the optimism, celebration and growth associated with the country's first democratic elections. Also depicted in the third and fourth panels are the sporting successes during our early democracy and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's investigations into the human rights abuses committed under apartheid.

In a recent interview the artist explained that he wanted to tell the history of South Africa – normally told in books – through art, particularly since a picture is worth a thousand words. This would be especially for those who cannot read or those who do not have the time to do so. Ndlovu expressed his desire that children should learn about the history of oppression in South Africa through the images. He emphasises that apartheid affected all South Africans, and not just the black population.

He refers to military conscription and how many young white male South Africans had to flee the country to avoid compulsory military service, which was punishable with the full wrath of the law. "Whites and blacks were treated terribly; families got separated," the artist says.

The story does not end where the artwork does. South Africa today is arguably out of kilter with the optimism depicted between the years 1994 and 1998. Does the artist want to produce another work that speaks about South Africa 25 years after democracy? "Definitely, I'm looking forward to it." Ndlovu adds: "The democracy we are celebrating is [full of] big corruption and oppression. Black people are still being oppressed to the core, without access to water or flushing toilets. People are making a living oppressing others. People are falling into pit toilets, while billions [of Rands] are allocated to aircraft." He criticises politicians for enriching themselves while many South Africans are living in "abnormal conditions" – these are some of the things the artist would like to add to a fifth instalment to this series.

For Ndlovu it is a dream come true having his work shown in the Constitutional Court. He speaks of foreigners seeing his work and being exposed to the history of the country, and how he has received calls and letters from around the world thanking him for his work, and wanting to know more about the motivations behind it. "I can't believe how these paintings attract people and how knowledge of them has travelled all over the world," says Ndlovu. ♦