

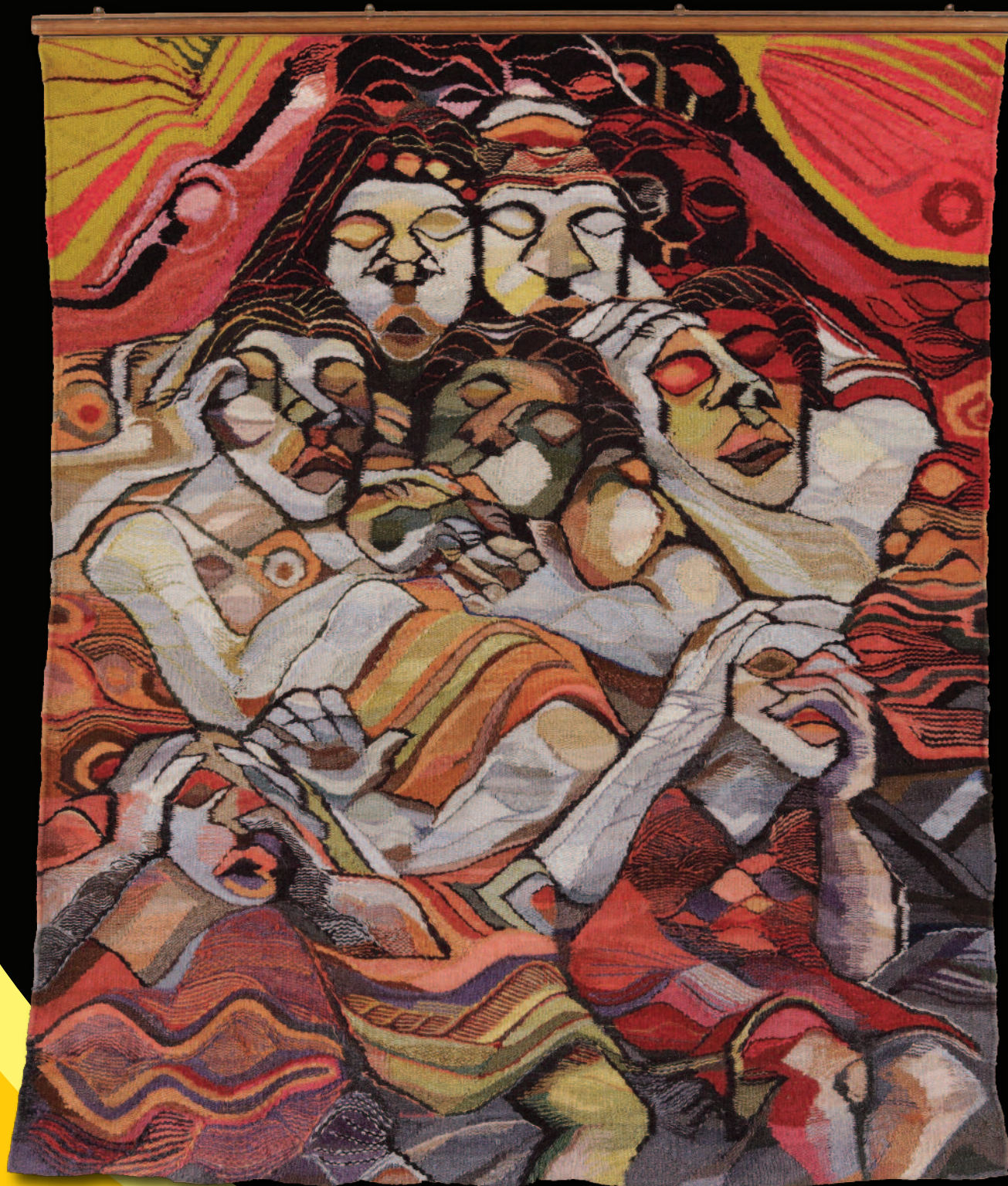
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Cover: Artwork: Joseph Ndlovu, *Humanity*, 1995, fibre, 181.4 x 150.5cm. Constitutional Court Art Collection. Cover image courtesy of the Constitutional Court Trust, as part of the Constitutional Court Art Collection. For more information visit [ccac.org.za](http://ccac.org.za) or follow [@concourt\\_art](https://www.instagram.com/concourt_art) on Instagram and Twitter. Photograph by Angela Buckland.

# In memoriam: Joseph Bhekizizwe Ndlovu

(1953 - 2019)

**I**n 1994 when the first eleven Justices were appointed to the Constitutional Court, Justice Albie Sachs and Justice Yvonne Mokgoro were given the portfolio of decor. They were asked to use a minimal budget to decorate the temporary courtroom with the dignity befitting the people that would move through it.

The entire budget was used to commission a single artwork – *Humanity*, by Joseph Ndlovu (fibre, 1995), which would provide a visual manifestation of the underlying principles of humanity. This tapestry was hand-woven by Ndlovu and stands as a testament not only to the birth of the Constitutional Court but also as an emblem of the promise of democracy in South Africa.

The artwork, which depicts several figures huddled together with their eyes closed, is perhaps the reason that the Constitutional Court Art Collection (CCAC) exists and suggests too the broad aim of the Collection – to express principles of justice, human rights and reconciliation. Since it was bought hundreds of artworks have been donated to the CCAC, today totalling over 600 items.

In an interview with Contemporary And (C&) Justices Albie Sachs and Justice Edwin Cameron, speaking collectively about the motivation behind the CCAC, said that this tapestry is “perhaps a wish for the future of a country, which has been so deeply divided by the trauma of its history. The artwork features several people huddling together. All of them have their eyes closed, unable to judge gender, race, or age, and in this way uniting them in their humanity.”

In the same interview it was said that this artwork is a departure from the Graeco-Roman personification of justice and the rule of law as depicted through the image of Lady Justice: blindfolded, balancing the scales and holding a sword in her other hand. In *Humanity*, the mirrored action of people closing their eyes seems markedly different: a coming together of com-

munities to consider justice through empathy and togetherness. This is said to be a working concept of justice, determined by a multiplicity of voices.

In 2017, another artwork woven by Ndlovu was donated to the Constitutional Court Trust, custodian of the CCAC, by the Arts and Ubuntu Trust. As the work's title indicates, *Inspired by L'Ancetre (The Ancestor) 69-71 Oil on canvas by Ernest Ngungunyane Methuen Mancoba* (2016), the tapestry is based on and inspired by a painting by Ernest Mancoba. This was the last tapestry commission Ndlovu completed before he fell ill and passed on the 23rd of July 2019. It is fitting that Ndlovu is remembered through the CCAC by its very first artwork and the last artwork made by the artist.

Ndlovu was born in Johannesburg in 1953. He attended schooling there and at Dlangenzwa High School in Empangeni. Between 1974 and 1976 he studied at the ELC Art and Craft Centre in Rorke's Drift and obtained a Diploma in Fine Arts.

In 1977 he was appointed by the South African Institute of Race Relations as an officer to organise and develop youth and community projects in art, drama, dance, creative writing, craft, photography and informal education. He was responsible for the administration of the recruitment of staff for the education programme until 1982.

From 1983 to 1985 he worked as a freelance artist. Between 1986 and 1991 he was employed by the Open Air School in Durban as an assistant programmer and tutor/coordinator of art projects, both in the school as well as for outreach programmes. He ran the programmes together with the artist Charles Nkosi.

Joe Ndlovu, as he was popularly known, appeared in a number of significant exhibitions both locally and abroad including the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995. His tapestries are also to be found in the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in Washington DC, in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, and in the art collection of Nandos, amongst others. ♦

*Text provided by the Constitutional Court Trust*