

**SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE VISUAL ARTS
IN NAMIBIA
A STUDY OF TRANSITIONAL AND POST-INDEPENDENT NAMIBIAN
VISUAL ART, FOCUSING ON JOHN MUAFANGEJO, JOSEPH MADISIA
AND NDASUUNYE SHIKONGENI**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to make a critical and in-depth analysis of the cultural identity and the socio-cultural statements of transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art. It aims to investigate how transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art is different from visual art developed during the colonial period, by focusing on issues of cultural identity and socio-political statements. For this purpose, three indigenous Namibian visual artists were discussed, namely; John Muafangejo, Joseph Madisia and Ndasuunye 'Papa' Shikongeni. This is because the three artists are presumed to have produced art that embodies Namibian cultural identity and social commentary. The study used a review of literature, interviews with key participants, observation and interpretation of artworks as methods of collecting data. Artworks were also interpreted according to their metaphoric and symbolic expressions.

The study found that transitional and post-independence indigenous Namibian visual artists have shifted from the Eurocentric influences of Namibian artists prevalent during the colonial period. Transitional and post-independence indigenous Namibian visual artists use their cultural backgrounds, traditional practices, fantasies, beliefs, socio-political environment and immediate surroundings as their sources of inspiration. In contrast, many Namibian artists during the colonial period used Eurocentric art training influences, the wildlife and landscapes as their sources of inspiration. The study therefore shows that Namibian visual art from the colonial period does not reflect Namibian peoples' historical and cultural identities and their aspirations for the future.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Hilma Ndetshuuva and my children for their inspiration. To Pandura, Erago-Ryetu, Omweendagwombiri and Tiiya may this study inspire you in your school career.

DECLARATION

I, Ervast Mtota, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

Signature-----

Date-----

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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - A shrine at Omugulugwombashe	22
Figure 2 – Communication	25
Figure 3 – Communication	26
Figure 4 – Namibian Citizens	32
Figure 5 – Land Issue	36
Figure 6 - Muafangejo’s Kraal	48
Figure 7 – A Kwanyama Wedding	53
Figure 8 – We are drinking Ovambo Bier at Eliakimas Kraal	56
Figure 9 – She divorced her husband together with her children	60
Figure 10 – Men are working in Town. They are working in mine	62
Figure 11 – Angola or Kunene Republic	64
Figure 12 a – Photo of King Mandume killed	69
Figure 12 b – Death a Chief Mandume	70
Figure 13 – Oniipa Rebuilding of Press	79
Figure 14 – African Rhythms	91
Figure 15 – Kamashona	94
Figure 16 – Culture	97
Figure 17 - Worshipping with an African Identity	100
Figure 18 – Tribal Healer	101
Figure 19 – Traditional Priest	104
Figure 20 – Untitled Mixed media	105
Figure 21 - When the spirit speaks	109
Figure 22 – Money comes around, money goes around	111

Figure 23 – Culture of one	122
Figure 24 – Omunahambo	126
Figure 25 – Nama girl	128
Figure 26 – Herero woman	130
Figure 27 – Namibian Dance	132
Figure 28 – Wealth Land Generation	134
Figure 29 – Shikongeni	137
Figure 30 – Africa stop the war	141
Figure 31 - Shadow of life	144
Figure 32 – Calabash	146
Figure 33 – Ohii omuthenu	148

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgement	iii
Dedication	iv
Declaration	v
Copyright statement	vi
List of figures	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Orientation of the study	3
1.2 Statement of the research problem	6
1.3 Objectives of the study	7
1.4 Significance of the study	8
1.5 Limitations of the study	10
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Discussion of key concepts	19
2.2.1 Cultural Identity	19
2.2.2 Social Commentary	33

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	40
3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 Data Analysis	43
3.3 Research Ethics	44
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF ARTISTS AND THEIR ART	45
4.1 JOHN MUAFANGEJO (1943 - 1987)	45
4.1.1 Introduction	45
4.1.2 Historical Background	45
4.1.3 Cultural Identity	51
4.1.4 Social Commentary	58
4.1.5 Setting things straight through Art	65
4.1.6 A voice for indigenous Namibian communities	75
4.1.7 Muafangejo's legacy of print making lives on	81
4.2 JOSEPH MADISIA (1954 -)	84
4.2.1 Introduction	84
4.2.2 Historical Background	84
4.2.3 Cultural Identity	88
4.2.4 Social Commentary	102
4.2.5 Metaphor and Symbolic Expression	103
4.3 NDASUUNJE PAPA SHIKONGENI (1971 -)	114
4.3.1 Introduction	114

4.3.2 Historical Background	114
4.3.3 Cultural Identity	120
4.3.4 Social Commentary	138
4.3.5 Metaphoric and Symbolic Expression	142
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	150
REFERENCES	154
ANNEXURES	161
Annexure A - Abbreviations and Acronyms	161
Annexure B - Glossary	162
Annexure C - Research questions	163

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to make a critical and in-depth analysis of the cultural identity and the socio-political statements of transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists. It aimed to see how post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art is different from the visual art developed during the colonial period, by focusing on issues of cultural identity and socio-political statements. For this purpose, three indigenous Namibian visual artists are discussed, namely: John Muafangejo, Joseph Madisia and Ndasuunye 'Papa' Shikongeni. The three artists are regarded as most important and inspirational for many young and upcoming indigenous Namibian visual artists. Muafangejo and Madisia are considered to be transitional artists and have set the tone for the post-independent indigenous Namibian art.

The term transitional indigenous Namibian visual artist in this research applies to John Muafangejo and partly to Joseph Madisia whose careers as artists ranged from 1970 to 1987 for the former and early 1980 to date for the latter. It refers to the specific period in the history of Namibian art, when a generation of Namibian artists started to explore new and topical dimensions in art in Namibia. It further refers to the time when the majority of Namibian artists abandoned the customary Namibian landscape with fauna and flora, for a creative and fresh look at Namibia's cultural, social, and political landscape that was projecting the country's new future (Levinson, 1986). Joseph Ndasuunye Papa Shikongeni started his career as an artist

after Namibia's independence in 1990, and therefore he falls into post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists' category.

The analysis and interpretation of artworks focused more on intangible elements, which are the expression of the artist's individuality, than on the physical elements in a picture. This means the research endeavoured to interpret how the artists expressed their emotions. Where the physical elements in a particular picture are analysed, it is to underscore a specific view on emotional expression. It should be pointed out that analysing a work of art is generally subjective. Common physical elements of a picture include; rhythm, line, forms, space, light and shade, and colour (Read, 1972). This research also explained how the artists have shown cultural identity and socio-political statements, namely; through metaphoric, symbolic or iconographic expressions.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction which consists of rationale of the research, statement of the research problem, objectives of the research, significance and limitations of the research. Chapter two presents a critical analysis on the available literature on pre and post-independent Namibian visual art. These concepts are important to the interpretations of art works that are discussed in the study. Key terms are discussed to show how they relate to the Namibian visual art and relevant examples are given. Arguments on cultural identity and socio-political statements by African writers such as Solomon Wangboje and Kwame Anthony Appiah are also discussed for the purpose of giving an understanding of these concepts from the African perspective. These authors did not

write about Namibian art, however, an effort is made to apply their views on the Namibian visual art context.

Chapter three outlines the research methodology. Chapter four focuses on the critical analysis and interpretation of artworks by the three leading transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists, namely; John Muafangejo, Joseph Madisia and Joseph Ndasuunye Shikongeni. The analysis of these artists' work is aimed at showing how they relate to their cultures and how they make socio-political commentary through their work such as linocut prints and graphic art. This analysis is complemented by interviews with art curators and art historians. Chapter five highlights the main arguments of the research and presents conclusions and recommendations for future research on Namibian indigenous visual art.

1.1 Orientation of the study

This research was based on the assumption that the three indigenous Namibian artists, namely: Muafangejo, Madisia and Shikongeni have produced art that embodies Namibian cultural identity and social commentary. They are therefore considered as the forerunners of Afro-centric indigenous art production in Namibia.

In addition, this research has also been rooted in the acceptance that many post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists did not have the privilege of being written about in a form other than catalogues or newspaper articles. Muafangejo, Madisia and Shikongeni were selected due to their popularity both locally and internationally and are regarded by this researcher as the forerunners for many of

those that this study could not accommodate. These three artists' popularity was determined by how widely their artworks are exhibited as it will be seen in chapter four where each of them is discussed.

Post-independent Namibian visual artists started to pursue their art through experimental work, searching for a new identity as they become aware of their function in their communities, specifically making social comments and at times making use of their art for economic benefit. Their art is a clear representation of the shift from Eurocentric to Afro-centric concepts, as more techniques, media and styles emerge. Lilienthal (1996) agreed that in post-independent Namibia, artists are more encouraged to revive traditional art forms and to find new modes of expression and to display their artworks with pride in new localities.

Levinson (1986) considered Muafangejo's art to be more pre-occupied with exact formulation of his literal environment. This research aimed to investigate the accuracy of claims such as the ones made by Levinson. The influence of Muafangejo's art on Namibian artists, especially indigenous Namibian visual artists, is particularly strong. It has become a cultural aspect that has been passed on from one generation to another through art training at institutions such as the: John Muafangejo Art Centre (JMAC), College of the Arts (COTA) and its National Arts Extension Programme (NAEP), University of Namibia (UNAM) and some privately owned studios. Other artists simply become inspired through direct observation of Muafangejo's artworks in publications such as those published by the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN) and the Arts Association Heritage Trust (AAHT).

In addition, Levinson (1986) and Lilienthal (1996) claim that in Namibia, prior to independence, most of the artists created work that reflected on historical, scientific and ethnological interest. They portrayed landscapes or wildlife influenced by the realistic-romantic genre of European art. Little attention was paid to the socio-cultural aspects of indigenous people and cultural and ethnic identity. One could also argue that aspects of cubism and surrealism that originated from Western art clearly influenced local artists such as Christine Marais and Koos van Ellinckhuijzen respectively. Ellinckhuijzen's surrealistic style has a significant influence on Madisia's art. One could also ask whether the realistic representation of a style with which many artists of the colonial period in Namibia portrayed their subject matter, can be identified with the indigenous people of the country.

The break-away from European art influences can be observed, for example, when post-colonial indigenous visual artists reflect themes, forms, texture, patterns and colours that relate to their immediate environments, artistic and cultural identities. The use of cardboard for printing, for instance, is also one of the obvious examples where indigenous Namibian artists show how they wanted to break free from Eurocentric ways of making art and the use of art materials. Cardboard printing is used as an alternative for linoleum printing which is also costly. This technique was introduced to Namibia art training by Demetrius Spirou in 1984, when he taught print making techniques at the Academy – currently known as UNAM – especially in mixed media and silkscreen. Spirou was a South African resident of Greek origin who was killed in a car accident in 1985. However, it is not clear whether cardboard printing originated in Greece or South Africa or from him personally (H. Viljoen,

personal communication, November 05, 2014).

This shift from Eurocentric to Afro-centric ways of making art also indicates that indigenous Namibian visual artists are becoming exposed to different cultures, life styles and living conditions, the internet, socio-cultural networking sites, and globalisation (Lilienthal, 1996). It also represents a self-realisation with confidence by these artists. Namibian cultural backgrounds, traditional practices, social issues, immediate surroundings became sources of inspiration, shaping their sense of belonging. Now their art aspires to be socially relevant. They are committed to exploring collective issues, such as what it means to be a Namibian in particular and an African in general. Muafangejo and Shikongeni in particular put emphasis on content by repeatedly focusing on a specific cultural, political or social message. Madisia on the other hand puts more emphasis on both form and content, often quite symbolic, metaphoric or iconographic.

1.2 Statement of the research problem

There is a lack of sufficient academic research and documentation about cultural identity and socio-political expression in transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art. The existing literature only reflects the art of pre-independent Namibia which does not represent the people of contemporary Namibia's cultural identity and aspirations. Muafangejo is the only contemporary indigenous Namibian artist whose art is recorded in the existing art history literature in Namibia. There is no other indigenous Namibian artist whose art was researched and documented until after Namibia's independence in 1990 (Palumbo, 2005).

According to Lilienthal (1996), Namibian traditional art has also not been thoroughly researched and documented. As such, traditional art, as part of Namibia's cultural heritage, has been neglected. Although Lilienthal only refers to traditional art which might refer to traditional craft only, visual art with western influence done by post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists has also been neglected. Traditional art includes items such as basketry, leather products, ornaments from ivory or copper, clay pot making, wooden and grass masks. Often traditional art is three-dimensional and can be have functional or have ritual or religious purposes. The AAHT has a good number of examples of traditional art in its collection representing nearly all the indigenous cultural groups of Namibia (NAGN and AAHT, 2011).

It is the lack of thoroughly researched and documented materials on transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists, their cultural identity and socio-political comment that has resulted in a large proportion of contemporary Namibians having very little or no insight into contemporary Namibian visual art (Palumbo, 2005).

1.3 Objectives of the study

As indicated earlier, this research aimed to make a critical analysis of the cultural identity and the socio-political statements of three leading transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists. It intended to show how transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art is different from the visual art developed during the colonial period, by focusing on issues of cultural identity and socio-political statements.

Furthermore, this research planned to offer opportunities for artists to present interpretations of their artworks. This research also gave art professionals such as curators and art historians an opportunity to interpret selected artworks by the three main indigenous Namibian artists. This research further aimed to give a scholarly account of post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists for upcoming researchers to build on and contribute to the knowledge in the field of art that is under-researched. This research also hoped to create awareness among Namibian people so that they might start appreciating their locally produced art. This might lead to the increase in the collection of post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art by local Namibian patrons. Namibian artists might also be engaging in formal talks about their own artworks and the issues they raise.

1.4 Significance of the study

There is a need for cultural recording and recognition of the art of post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists. Thus, this research is meant to enhance visual literacy and contribute to critical understanding about visual art. This visual literacy and critical understanding of art is relevant in today's media driven culture. A visual art literate person can therefore help in the preservation of culture.

Currently, more Namibian art lovers seem to prefer buying foreign art while Namibian art is often collected by foreign patrons, most of whom view African art as souvenirs that have no particular aesthetic value or socio-cultural importance. There is a potential danger in this though, as Lilienthal (1996) cautions "the best art will be bought up by foreign connoisseurs and that quantities of Namibia's visual art heritage will be lost to future generations" (p. 221). But this seems to imply that

Namibian art should only be bought by local Namibians.

This paradox is a result of the lack of understanding and collecting visual art by Namibians. It can also be attributed to the lack of access to art education in pre-independent Namibia and the inaccessibility of art galleries to many indigenous communities. Thus, most indigenous people feel that contemporary visual artists produce art which is exclusively made for the white patrons.

Consistent with this perception, Palumbo (2005) indicated that although Muafangejo's art spoke to the black community, liberal whites and tourists were mostly his patrons. Nevertheless, since visual art is widely regarded as one of the most important forms of social commentary and as a form by which a community can be identified, the significance of this research lies in how to make the post-independent indigenous Namibian art accessible and collected by all Namibia people.

Palumbo (2005) further observed that there is a lack of in-depth scholarly and juried information/publication on post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art. Therefore, the significance of this research is found in recording and giving prominence to post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art. The research is therefore necessary to fill the existing gap in terms of critical analysis and scholarly written information about visual art.

1.5 Limitations of the study

The selection of artists and their artworks was made primarily based on the limited written material available, for example, pictures in catalogues and newspaper clippings were used. Artworks in public and private collections have also been examined and analysed. The study could not include all post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists but only focused on three main indigenous artists, namely; Muafangejo, Madisia and Shikongeni. Two artists, Madisia and Shikongeni, have spent most of their lives working in Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia, but Madisia has in the meantime relocated to the far south of the country.

Muafangejo passed away in 1987, and information could only be gathered from existing written materials, which although in abundance, only few were for academic research purposes. This has made the research more challenging as information could only be collected through interviews with people that knew him and from observation and interpretation of his work. Nevertheless, his prints are part of this analysis because he is considered a father figure by many young indigenous Namibian visual artists.

Joseph Madisia was included in this research although he could not be reached personally. Being unable to have an interview with Madisia, whether personally, telephonically or by any other means of communication, was a significant setback to this research. It forced the Researcher to rely on the limited information sourced from limited art publications. Although Madisia is one of the leading artists in Namibia, this Researcher established with surprise that the main visual art collector,

the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN) has none of his graphic artworks in its permanent collection except for one painting. A few of his artworks that are discussed in this research were obtained from the Arts Association Heritage Trust (AAHT), another important visual art collector in Namibia.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

As articulated in chapter one, visual art produced by transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists marks a shift from the customary Namibian landscape with fauna and flora, to a creative and fresh look at Namibia's cultural, social, and political landscape that was projecting the country's new future. This chapter will discuss some of the studies on Namibia's pre and post-independent visual art. The chapter will also discuss some key concepts within the context of pre and post independent experience.

Most of the literature available reveals that there is a strong relationship between art and culture, as art is considered to be one of the main carriers of culture representing the meanings and values of the artists. However, according to Appiah (1999), there are certain tensions that exist within this relationship. One of such tensions is that contemporary African art is still largely dependent on the European-American market, which has an indispensable influence on its materials, techniques, form and content and sometimes even on what is produced. This often raises the question whether elements of Western culture remain hidden in post-independent African art. This is likened with what critics such as Olu Oguibe's review of Susan Vogel's book titled *Africa Explore: 20th Century African Art* and E J de Jager, in his article titled *Namibian artist Muafangejo (1948-1987)* see as 'neoprimitivism' when they see an emphasis on self-taught art in major international art exhibitions. Also many

contemporary African artists of note are living permanently abroad (Oguibe, 1993 & De Jager, 1990).

This was however not the case with Muafangejo or Madisia who remained faithful to their mother country although both were reasonably exposed to the outside world and were well aware of the potentially dominant cultures that could have influenced them. As a result of being steadfast and resilient, Muafangejo earned huge respect, more especially from his patrons although he did not make a good living from his art. His art did not alleviate him from poverty, a condition that lingered until he died. In addition, he left his art under non-family members who continuously benefit materially from it instead of it benefiting his family (Palumbo, 2005).

However, there is a scarcity of literature addressing these issues within the context of post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art. Art in Namibia whether during the colonial or post-independent period is written by authors who are either Eurocentric or just present the profiles of a few specific individual artists without providing in-depth analysis of the artworks to determine the social context as well as cultural identity.

Moreover, other written materials simply give brief profiles of post-independent visual artists and their art but remain silent on the issues of cultural identity and social comment. According to Layiwola (2000), some studies on African art, although differing in their interests and traditional focuses, largely excluded post-independent indigenous Namibian art and its socio-cultural significance. Palumbo

(2005) also maintained many pre-independent Namibian studies are Eurocentric in nature and do not provide the Afro-centric analysis of Namibian art and often lack significant scholarship.

Scholars such as Levinson (1986), Lewis-Williams (1983) and Roos (1978) have written more on the historical development of art in Namibia, particularly the ancient rock paintings, the naturalistic portrayal of landscapes and wild life produced by predominantly early explorers and the German painters of the late 19th and early 20th centuries respectively. For example, artists such as Charles John Anderson, James Chapman, Tomas Baines and others, who arrived in Namibia during the early 19th century and pioneered Namibian art, concerned themselves with landscapes focusing on fauna and flora and other natural scenery (Lilienthal, 1996).

These artists were followed by another group of artists comprising of primarily Germans who came to settle in Namibia during the early 20th century. Artists such as Hans Anton Aschenborn, Axel Francis Erickson, Carl Ossman, Johannes Blatt and others were also primarily interested in pictorial records of what they saw. Their artworks reflect different European art styles prominent during specific periods. There were few exceptions in the artworks of Adolph Jentsch, Otto Schröder and Fritz Krampe who introduced a new dimension to the art scene of the territory by including pictures of indigenous people and socio-cultural scenes (Levinson, 1986; Roos, 1978; National Art Gallery of Namibia and Art Association Heritage Trust, 2011).

Lilienthal (1996) and the *Arts Association Heritage Trust* (AAHT) made an effort to

give an inclusive overview on the development of Namibian art across three main stages, namely; ancient rock art, landscape and wild life art and the new developments in Namibian art. Lilienthal further dealt with contemporary art and artists highlighting the new trends which emerged during the 1970s and the developments in the visual arts since Namibia's independence. The transition to independence in the later part of the 1980s precipitated significant changes in the broader cultural spectrum, the culture of inclusivity (Lilienthal, 1996).

According to the NAGN and AAHT catalogue entitled *Annual Visual Art Exhibition Programme* (2011), the new era in Namibian art history was gestured by a sensational exhibition 'Five Namibian Artists' that took place at the former Arts Association in 1984. Those who participated in this exhibition were predominantly art educators at the former Academy, specifically; Dörte Berner, Francois de Necker, Doreen Hildenhagen, Demetrius Spirou and Hercules Viljoen. It was during this time of the early 1980s when Joe Madisia was starting his career as an artist.

However, John Muafangejo was already active as an artist since he had completed his art training from the Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift in the early 1970s. He was the first Namibian artist to express a philosophy of human life in his works of art which was in stark contrast with white predecessors. His works are known and appreciated for their both graphic quality and authentic artistic expression. Muafangejo's work reflects African culture and criticises socio-political domination maintained by the apartheid system (NAGN and AAHT, 2011).

According to Timm (1999), Muafangejo depicted scenes of socio-cultural identity as well as those of religious and socio-political influences. Muafangejo's art reflects influences of traditional beliefs, customs and activities in the environment in which he lived which have inspired the art of many of his fellow indigenous Namibian artists. Many regard Muafangejo as either the pioneer for contemporary indigenous Namibian art or as their father figure (Lilienthal, 2010; NAGN and AAHT, 2011). Muafangejo was the first indigenous Namibian artist known to have received art training beyond the elementary school phase. He practiced art alongside progressive white Namibian artists especially those who taught at the former Academy, namely; Francois de Necker, Hercules Viljoen and Demetrious Spirou (NAGN and AAHT, 2011).

The Academy was a multi-racial institution, and these artists sought new identity through their experimental work as they became aware of their function in their communities namely, making social comments. They shifted from objective, realistic, representation of nature to highly subjective expressionist, abstract or non-figurative art reflecting the unstable restless exciting political and cultural climate of pre-independent Namibia (NAGN and AAHT, 2011).

Lilienthal (1996) further acknowledged that there has been a shift in approach from strong Eurocentric influences to a more Afro-centric way of making art in Namibia. However, her analysis lacks scholarly depth in some areas. Margo Timm-Forster's academic articles on John Muafangejo make a valuable contribution to this research, as much literature about Muafangejo, is a mere documentation of his life as an artist

in the form of articles and catalogues that are produced by individuals and particularly the Arts Association Heritage Trust which holds his collection.

Apart from Muafangejo, the only other “professional” post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artist who would emerge in the 1980s was Joseph Madisia (Palumbo, 2005). However, it was not until the transitional period of Namibia’s march towards self-rule, in the late 1980s that Madisia came into the limelight as an artist. According to Bogatzke, Brockmann and Ludszuweit (2000) Madisia came up with an alternative art, an art which was strong, portraying people of Katutura, which resulted in him being called a ‘people’s artist’ (p.14).

Katutura is a township in Windhoek the capital city of Namibia created in 1961, traditionally for the black population, who were divided according to their diverse ethnic groups. Katutura in *Otjiherero* language mean: “We do not have a permanent habitation”, this is in reference to the forceful removal of the black community from a Windhoek suburb called Old Location, today known as Hochland Park, because blacks were considered to be residing in too close proximity of the whites. The forceful removal was in line with the South African apartheid policy of defining geographical, economic and social boundaries between people (Pendleton, 1974, pp. 51-52).

Madisia also lived in Katutura at that time. He created an artwork entitled *Katutura: A Place Where We Stay* 1995, in reference to his experience of cultural and social connection to the township (Bogatzke et al., 2000, p.20). Although this print entitled

Katutura: A Place Where We Stay, was a commissioned work for the cover of a second book authored by Wade C. Pendleton in 1994, the work is a reflection of Madisia's emotional expressions about the place which became his home for a long time. Madisia further explained how he used his art to portray a positive picture of Katutura that was seen as "the domain of the lowest of the low, labourers, domestic servants, squatters etc." (Bogatzke et al., 2000, p.14).

Other written materials that give art reviews of contemporary Namibian art, and brief portfolios of post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists and their artworks, include catalogues such as *Visual Artists – Namibia of 2009-2010*; daily newspapers such as *The Namibian*, *New Era* and magazines such as *Flamingo*. Although these publications offer important information about Namibian contemporary visual art, they lack academic analysis.

The catalogue of selected works from the collection of the NAGN and AAHT entitled *Annual Visual Exhibition Programme 2011* provided an updated analysis on the artworks that are in the permanent collections of these two arts bodies. This research found the analysis jointly done by the three curators, Annaleen Eins and Elize van Huyssteen of the AAHT and Luness Mpunwa of the NAGN very useful as the catalogue gave the interpretations of the passionate expression of the specific artworks for the first time. These curators endeavoured to interpret the abstract and symbolic qualities of the artworks in the catalogue which made this publication more meaningful and valuable as a reference material.

Pohamba Shifeta (Philander, 2007) stated in his opening remarks at an art exhibition in 2007 at the NAGN that the arts have the potential for job creation and for contribution to Namibian cultural identity. Shifeta further explained that arts involve processes of transformation, interpretation, design, creation, innovation and value adding, thus making it a source of knowledge, intellectual property and wealth creation (Philander, 2007). *Tulipamwe International Artist's Workshop* (2008), redirected its focus on community building and empowerment through training and the sharing of skills as well as the validation of local cultures and history without losing sight of its original vision of art appreciation and visually literacy in broader terms.

2.2 Discussions of key concepts

2.2.1 Cultural Identity

Although identity can be classified in many different categories some of which include cultural identity, personal identity, social identity, national identity, and so on, this study limits its discussion to cultural identity which is interlinked with artistic identity which can be both a collective (cultural) and individual identity. Many scholars, be it social scientists, anthropologists, philosophers and so on, have reflected and attempted to define the concept identity. The social sciences, particularly psychology and sociology, define identity as a person's conception and expression of their individuality or group affiliation such as national identity and cultural identity. They further describe it as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of particular social category or group (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Hogg and Abrams, (cited in Fearon 1999, p. 4), define identity as “people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others”. Deng (cited in Fearon 1999, p. 4) defines identity as the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture. Jenkins, (cited in Fearon 1999) explains identity as referring to the ways in which individuals and groups are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and groups. On the other hand, Bloom (cited in Fearon 1999) describes national identity as a condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols, have internalised the symbols of the nation. More interestingly, Berger and Luckmann (cited in Fearon 1999, p.5) argue that identity can be objectively defined as location in a certain world and can be subjectively appropriated only along with that world.

The above definitions give enough space for one to define his/her identity be it with an ethnic group or with one’s construal of past ancestry and one’s future aspirations in relation to ethnicity, country or continent. This is very much evident in Madisia’s and Shikongeni’s work which more than often depicted images of the spiritual world and fantasies. Madisia’s cardboard print entitled *Worshipping with an African Identity* [fig. 16, page 88], and *Traditional Priest*, [fig. 18, page 92], are good examples. These artworks are discussed under the respective sections in chapter four.

There are similarities in the definitions as attempted by all sources cited above that identity is something with how individuals or groups see and define themselves, and how they are seen or defined by other individuals or groups. In other words; how one

sees one self, will influence the friends one has, who one will marry or live with, and the communities and groups to which one relates and belong. Identity therefore fits individuals into the society in which they live. Some individuals have multiple identities, asserting different identities in different circumstances. Identities may also change overtime.

Identity can also be shown through artworks. For example, the history of Namibia is characterised by a fierce wars for independence, beginning with the war against the Germans who colonised the country during the 19th century, followed by the South West African People's Organisation-led (SWAPO) armed struggle that started with the battle of Omugulugwombashe in 1966. The figure [1] below shows the shrine produced by Madisia (2004) which was erected in honour of those who fought in the battle at Omugulugwombashe in Tsandi district, Omusati Region, north of Namibia. A shrine such as this one can only be identified with Namibia. It is the view of the researcher that artworks such as shrines or monuments, that represent certain events or people, groups or individuals, symbolise Namibia's identity.



Figure 1 - *The Shrine at Omugulugwombashe, Madisia 2004*, courtesy of National Heritage Council.

Sarrazin (2012) claimed that she did not ascribe to the categorisation of artists according to their colour or culture (P. Sarrazin, personal communication, October 9, 2012). In line with Sarrazin's view, Clive Kellner (2007) explained that many contemporary artists from African and the diaspora maintain that being black or belonging to a nationality, country of birth, political exile or city of choice only informs their practice and identity but does not determine their identity. They can equally explore issues of intimacy or sexuality the same way they do rituals or traditions in their practice. They do not want their identities to be determined according to rituals and traditions which is the notion consequent on the discourse of anthropology and the conceptual constraints of ethnographic museums that was commonly used in the late 19th – and early 20th century. What comes first is that they are artists and that is what counts (cited in Africa Remix 2007).

What is evident about contemporary indigenous Namibian artists is that the process of personal and regional identification involves using resources of historical importance such as indigenous language and traditional practices when giving the titles of artworks. It is also evident that in this age, urban, modern and cosmopolitan elements cannot be ignored as influential factors in contemporary indigenous Namibian artists' identity formation in addition to traditional influences.

Brasche (2003) writes that contemporary indigenous Namibian artists should be aware of the Eurocentric identity that overshadows their art resort to publicly juxtapose traditional and modern features in their artwork in order to be able to actualise their identities. For example, an artist of Owambo origin may combine

symbols of tradition and that of modernity in his or her work. Traditional and modern practices co-exist in today's communities and these practices are often reconciled by urbanites sentimentally highlighting the local or traditional and rural people emphasising the cosmopolitan. "This association with both tradition and modernity is an important tool in cultural identity formation, and to a degree, empowers Namibians with the option of choice in self-definition" (Brasche, 2003, p. 44).

The year 2007 and 2009 woodcut prints series by Alpheus Mvula are perhaps a good example of using modern hoes as a means of metaphoric expression. Modern hoes have replaced the old Owambo traditional hoes that the indigenous Namibian traditional smiths made. The hoes in these prints which are both entitled *Communication*, 2007, [fig. 2] and *Communication*, 2009, [fig. 3] are used to reference to the Group 8 Summit with men and women in black suits. The hoes that resemble human figures without ties represent women who have been excluded from various international decision making forums.

The hoe handles both [figure 2] and [figure 3] represent the technology installation for communication. The communication wiring or lines in [figure 3] are more intense and expressive suggesting how advanced communication technology had become in the period of two years. The inclusion of cattle in the top part of both prints, represent the continents with the horns of the cattle also representing lines of communication that connect the continents. Cattle are a symbol of communication and trade. Mvula's artworks can easily be identified by his use of cattle as his regular subject matter (A. Mvula, personal communication, October, 11, 2013).



Figure 2 - *Communication*, Mvula 2007, courtesy of artist's own collection.



Figure 3 - *Communication*, Mvula 2009, courtesy of artist's own collection.

According to Brasche (2003), in pre-colonial Namibia, cultural identity was connected to a person's tribal affiliation, family, clan, social position and so on. Nevertheless, colonialism de-linked identities through the marking of difference and exclusion within the modalities of power inherent in colonialist ideology. Ironically, this separation of identity links was continued not only through political influence but also by missionaries. Missionaries were influential in improving cultural symbols that are crucial to cultural identity. For example, they contributed to the organising and the writing of African history and were also instrumental in developing African languages. Even with "African languages, it was the missionaries who chose what the proper form of the language would be, thus serving both to further unity and produce divisions by producing firm boundaries" (Vail, 1989, p.11). Language is an important element of culture as it will be evident in titles given to some of the artworks created by the indigenous artists. Muafangejo even included texts written in his own language in some of his lino prints to accentuate his cultural identity.

Vail (1989, p.11) further argues that "missionaries were also involved in creating cultural identities through their specifications of customs and traditions and by writing tribal histories". These elements are therefore used as the base of defining and describing ethnic identity that replaced older unifying values that depended upon voluntary belonging and loyalty to a cultural group. Therefore strong and relatively rigid ethnic confines, many of which were highly illogical, came to be fashioned and were then reinforced by the group of stereotypes of the 'other' (Vail 1989, p.11).

When one considers what identity is, whether ethnic or national, there are common features that come to mind. Some of these could be the belief that “the community exists, recognisable by its shared language and mutually acknowledged obligations; the embodiment of its historical continuity, although the origins might be lost in the mists of time; shared sorrows and victories; the connection to a particular place, the territorial element serving as a base for the political state; shared traits which mark them off from other people, and these traits must in some sense correspond to social realities” (MacClancy, 1997, p. 86).

While these are broadly accepted as features that define or serve as common characteristics of identity, (Bhabha, cited in MacClancy 1997, p. 87) maintained that there are significant discontinuities between ethnic and national identity. In his view, “nationality is formed not through ethnic self-definition, but by the exigencies of power, the nation-state creating a national identity or a national character of the ideal, metaphysical or transcendental person to assure itself of the loyalty of its citizens. It distinguishes itself from its neighbours and emphasises the historic kinship of its constituent *ethnic*”.

Huyssteen (2013) explained artistic identity as being an artist’s signature, not the written signature in the corner of the picture but the mark the artist leaves on a viewer’s mind. The artistic identity is that what makes an artwork recognisable among hundreds of artworks or even if it hangs in a room or wherever it is, one should be able to recognise the artist who created it. It should be recognised for

example by the subject matter that is iconography or by the style; irrespective of what medium the artist has used (personal communication, October 12, 2013).

Sarrazin (2012) argued that when artists resort to using non-traditional art materials, it is because they want to have their own signatures, they want to come up with something which they can be recognised by, their own identity (personal communication, September 11, 2012).

Muafangejo developed his own artistic identity, a style which can be recognised as his own. Artists do not want to make art that looks the same or reproduces what others did before, because if they do, that is not considered creative. This does not mean that artists will not be inspired by other things, such as the internet, television (TV), and the print media. It was perhaps different before Namibia became independent because artists were isolated in many ways, unlike today when artists are widely exposed and connected to potential influences including multimedia both inside and outside Namibian.

According to Leuthold (2011), culture embraces art and art discourse, the symbolic world of meanings, the commoditised output of the cultural industries as well as the spontaneous or enacted, organised or unorganised cultural expressions of everyday life, including social relations. It is constitutive of both collective and individual identity. Culture can be regarded as a historical reservoir and is an important factor in shaping identity for a group of people. Culture, can also refer to the unifying characteristics of a group of people and to the practices, tastes and values associated

with particular social classes. “Culture refers to the values that people place on some artistic expressions as worthy of public recognition and support” (Leuthold, 2011, pp. 10-11).

Cultural identity is the identity of a group or culture or of an individual as far as one is influenced by one’s belonging to a group or culture. Cultural identity is something that can be used as identifying factor that is universal and can be overt in the depiction of people with specific features and cultural artefacts stylistic identity or chosen identity in terms of politics, personal views of social issues (N. Marais, personal communication, July 15, 2013).

The Researcher maintain that cultural identity can be defined by various identifiers such as location, gender, race, history, nationality, language, family, sexuality, religion, belief, ethnicity, aesthetics, education, clothing and food. Sometimes it is difficult to divide cultures especially when the population is ethnically diverse and social unity is based on common social values and beliefs such as the ‘tribal’ cultures of the Aawambo people. Aawambo is a collective term defining eight sub-tribes who traditionally occupy the northern part of Namibia, bordering with Angola (Amukugo, 1930).

Madisia’s commissioned linocut print with Namibian faces made as a poster for the first general election could be a good example of this definition. Madisia was conscious that the general election was a democratic exercise meant to give all the Namibian people an opportunity to determine their destiny. He included faces of

white people in his picture because the exercise is meant to be inclusive. For the first time Namibians of all races had the chance to determine their destiny as one nation with diverse cultures.



Figure 4 - *Namibian Citizens*, Madisia 1989

Madisia uses the most identifiable headdresses especially those worn by Herero, Damara and Ovahimba women among the rest of the portraits, to best represent the Namibian masses' cultural identity. A viewer who is familiar with the Namibian demographic will probably not struggle to identify this print as containing portraits of Namibian people, even if he/she does not know who the artist is. And if the picture can be identified as such, then it shows how Madisia can best interpret Namibia's cultural identity. This is an effort to represent unity in diversity where there is no particular culture that unifies all the tribes or races with their different ways of doing things, for example how they dress, eat and speak. However, it could also be argued that such an artwork was a mere visual image of what was dictated to Madisia by those who commissioned it.

2.2.2 Social - commentary

Social commentary refers to visual art that addresses issues of social concern and is intended to raise awareness of problems in society. Generally, these can be social issues related to the environment, health, political, economic, family such domestic violence. Artists look at their art as a means for social change and correcting the ills and injustices of society. Also, artists often combine historical and popular culture references with images relating to current events in order to depict contemporary societal problems. Being responsible members of societies, artists such as Muafangejo and Madisia often take the role of social critics (Wangboje, 1986).

According to Mutorwa (cited in Philander, 2005, p. 18), artists have a vital role to play in how we perceive one another and our circumstances, "even though their

interventions may at times be disturbing to some”. John Mutorwa was the minister of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MYNSSC) between 1995 and 2005.

Consistent with Mutorwa’s statement, the appropriate example is perhaps Laidlaw Peringanda’s performative installation during one of the major exhibitions at the NAGN in the year 2000 where he exhibited an effigy of a poor man whose begging hands to the jury were filled with faeces. Caricatures of Namibian Dollars were strewn on the floor surrounding the standing hopeless poor man. The statement was about the lack of financial support of artists as well as the gap between the rich and the poor allegedly perpetuated by the Government by allegedly failing to equitably distribute the national wealth.

Just after the installation was accepted for the exhibition, the artist returned with what could be considered as an afterthought. He returned with dry human faeces in plastic to be added to his installation on the day of the official opening of the exhibition. Both the adjudicators of the exhibition and the management of the Art Gallery refused to accept this extra piece to the installation that was already juried and accepted based on the original composition. Irrespective of all consideration and reasoning advanced by the management of the gallery, the artist raised a critical point, which government should have paid attention to, had the installation been exhibited in the form the artist wanted to it be.

In the adjudicators’ opinion accepting the extra piece to be added was a misrepresentation of the juried composition and its original statement. It also would

have been very difficult to curate such an installation due to the bad sight and smell. The management of the NAGN refused the additional part of the installation on the basis of health considerations and the embarrassment it would cause the Gallery in the public eye. The artist threatened to take unspecified action towards the Gallery should his wish not be accommodated but to no success (A. Eins & R.L Hofmeyr, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Samuel Amunkete is another artist who made a strong socio-political statement through his mixed media art piece entitled *Land Issue* 2005 [fig. 4]. Amunkete claimed that the art piece was inspired by the objective of the Namibian Liberation Struggle movements which was to reclaim land. Land was taken away from the indigenous Namibians by force and had been occupied by foreigners who were a minority. Amunkete holds the view that the liberation struggle's objective was not yet achieved as he asked whether the indigenous Namibian had gotten their land back yet.

In his view, indigenous Namibians are still fighting for their land to be returned to them. To him, land is still a burning issue in Namibia. Amunkete tried to give a visual image by painting the first layer of his canvas in crimson red. He then covered the first canvas with white paint on which he burned holes so that the red painted canvas can be seen with the red symbolising fire that is burning. He glued some pieces of grass and some millet to underscore his point of how much land means in sustaining both human and animal lives (S. Amunkete, personal communication, March 8, 2014).



Figure 5 – *Land Issue*, Amunkete, 2005, courtesy of National Art Gallery collection

In considering the above mentioned artworks together, and in terms of quality, creativity and the originality of the works, the research found them contributing to cultural and social comment and to have powerful messages. However, while the statement made by Peringanda is strong, owing to its performative character, adding unpleasant pieces to it could compromise its intended impact, because viewers might not endure its unsightly and foul smelling element. It might end up not being viewed at all. The NAGN is a public place and it should be treated as such. To subject the public to the most ghastly and unpleasant sight simply due to the artist's insistence, could have not only compromised the reputation of the Gallery but also the health of the visiting public.

In accordance with the above analysis, artists such as Peringanda need to understand that the idealisation of artists is essentially rooted in a romanticism regarding their creative abilities. Creativity is accorded special value in society for its ability to challenge, inspire and transform and, therefore, it is regarded as one of the highest-level performances and accomplishments to which humankind can aspire. Much contemporary art within and beyond Europe has aimed at undermining this romantic idealisation (Chalmers, 1986).

According to Nanuses, any artwork produced should have an audience and the respect of a specific community of interest. Namibians who participate in art events generally make positive comments about their own artists and their work. All too often, speeches delivered at the official openings or comments written in visitors books are often modest and positive. Many choose not to comment at all and society

can perhaps not be blamed for this innocent approach to art because critical commenting is best done by professionally trained critics (D. Nanuses, personal communication, October 10, 2012).

Pohamba Shifeta, a former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture (MYNSSC), argued that it is the responsibility of society to put more resources into the development of artists so that they can realise their potential and achieve their objectives. Many societies have realised the value of preserving their art collections which in many instances are derivative of their cultures. Only when society understands the role of artists can they appreciate their valuable contribution to nation building. The importance of art in bridging the variables of the country's diverse cultures cannot be underestimated.

Artists play a vital role in society's daily life. They provide enjoyment, communicating messages on issues of social interests and they educate. This is indeed a message of encouragement. The question remains as to how many members of Namibian society see important exhibitions such as the Bank Windhoek Triennial, enjoy it, get educated and receive messages pertaining to social issues? For the artists to be able to know that what they do is appreciated, and for artists to improve their artistic skills and their choices of issues to address, society needs to attend art exhibitions and give comment and critique of the works (Shifeta, cited in Philander 2007).

Perhaps a turning point in Namibian art was Herman Mbamba's exhibition titled "Interplanetary Revolution," (NAGN, 2007). A critical review by John Sampson found the body of work lacking excitement in its theme. He found the works not speaking for themselves as elements failed to hang together creating huge gaps and leaving a lot of questions unanswered as they rendered themselves less relevant to the theme. The eloquence shown in the text by the artist himself was not carried through by the body of work that was exhibited. Although there was a strong reaction in his defence of Mbamba from the Director of the NAGN at that time, it might have been a turning point in his artistic career. Mbamba is now living abroad and has become a successful artist.

To summarise, most literature do not address post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art the same way pre-independent Namibia visual art do. Little attention was paid to the socio-cultural aspects of indigenous people and their cultural identity. Instead, most literature reflects historical, scientific and ethnological interests, portrayed through landscapes or wildlife influenced by the realistic-romantic genre of European art. Whenever post-independent indigenous Namibian visual art is reflected, such literature focuses only on the development stages and the profiling of the individual artists.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

A literature review from sources available in libraries and online was conducted for the critical interpretation of art reviews, art historians' and curators' viewpoints in order to contextualise the topic of this research. Literature on Post-colonialism in African visual art was reviewed to provide a broader perspective in relation to this research. Key concepts used in this research such as cultural identity and social commentary with the specific focus on political statements, are discussed to provide a better understanding of these concepts.

Online sources were also helpful when definitions of some of the key concepts were discussed. Artworks by the three selected artists that make political statements, social comment and show cultural identity were discussed. Secondary sources such as earlier research materials on the development of art in Namibia, journal articles, academic writing, newspaper articles, and catalogues by the Arts Association Heritage Trust (AAHT) and Visual Artists of Namibia (VA-N) were also used.

Among the important scholarly research publications that were reviewed is the doctoral dissertation by Meredith Palumbo, which gives a descriptive analysis of the development of Namibian visual art in relation to nation building. In addition, Margo Timm's *'Inversion of the Printed Image: Namibian Perspectives of John Ndevasia Muafangejo'* was also reviewed. Primary source materials such as photographs of artworks, interviews with artists and managers of major art galleries were undertaken

in order to obtain views on cultural identity and social commentary by transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were used in order to allow respondents to present information spontaneously and narratively rather than numerically. Interviews were used as the main methods for collecting data because the interviews permitted the researcher to be sensitive to the interactive ways in which identity can be fabricated through narrative in particular social and spatial contexts. Interviews were conducted through e-mails, telephones and face to face.

Interviews were recorded on audio cassettes, transcribed verbatim and coded to allow comparisons to be made within and between interviews. A digital camera and cellular phone were used to take pictures of art works. A tape recorder was used to record the discussions and at times hand written notes were taken. Direct observation of art works displayed in places such as the National Art Gallery of Namibia (NAGN), the Goethe Centre, and the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre (FNCC) was made. Artworks by Papa Shikongeni and Joseph Madisia were observed in private collections and in other public offices such as the office of the Minister of Youth National Services Sport and Culture.

Selected artworks were interpreted through direct observation which was supported by interviews with artists and professionals in the field of arts. Established visual artists, whose art reflects post-colonial cultural identity and social comment, were selected so that their art could be examined. Artists such as Papa Shikongeni, Nicky

Marais, Elize Huyssteen, Alpheus Mvula, Herman Mbamba, Samuel Amunkete and David Amukoto were interviewed.

An online interview was conducted with Herman Mbamba because he resides in Norway. A telephonic interview was also conducted with Alpheus Mvula as he was out of Windhoek at the time. Efforts were made to conduct an online interview with Yoba Valombola who is currently living in Germany, but the efforts were fruitless. Some of the planned interviews did not take place due to the respondents' tight schedules and in-accessibility. For example, an interview was arranged with a member of the NAGN Board of Trustees, where interview questions were even sent through email but nothing materialised. These interviews were carried out to establish if indeed the artists addressed the aspects of cultural identity and social comment and if they did how they addressed these. In addition to interviews, the researcher attended several art exhibitions and public lectures on art issues.

Although not all artworks by the above mentioned artists were included in this research, their contribution helped the researcher gain a better understanding of issues that artists express through their artworks. The selection of artworks has been done carefully and according to their relevance to the research topic. Artworks were also interpreted in terms of the meaning expressed through metaphoric and symbolic or iconographic expressions.

Those who were interviewed for this research were Luness Mpunwa, senior Curator at the NAGN; Desire Nanuses, Curator at the NAGN; Pauline Sarrazin, Culture

Officer at the FNCC; Elize Huyssteen, Manager and Curator at AAHT; ; Annaleen Eins, Art Historian and former Director at NAGN and AAHT; and Retha Louis Hofmeyr, Director of Art in the MYNSSC. My long experience in the Arts field served as an advantage since many of the respondents are known to him. The researcher's privileged position on the Exhibition Selection Committee of the National Art Gallery of Namibia was equally valuable. Although written materials on the topic are relatively scarce, I sourced useful materials from institutions such as the National Library of Namibia, National Archives of Namibia, UNAM Library, Ministry of Education Resource Centre, NAGN Library and the AAHT.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data was analysed during and after its collection, using a content analysis method (Sarantakos, 2005). The process involved recording, organising, interpreting, categorising and documenting. Transcripts of interviews were used throughout the research to support the views taken from literature. Follow-up interviews were made with respondents to verify some information that was collected during the first visits.

The conceptualisation and interpretation of selected artworks were made in the context of cultural and artistic identity, social comment and socio-political expression. Where applicable in the existing literature, the interpretation of artworks is compared with the researcher's own interpretation of the specific artworks. Metaphor and symbolic expressions as a way to address some political issues were also analysed for better understanding of specific artworks.

The information about the three main artists in this research was collated mainly from non-academic literature such as art catalogues and newspaper clippings most of which are kept in private collections. Equally, a large amount of information was obtained from the semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher as well as from art curators at the NAGN and AAHT. As mentioned earlier, where the researcher was not too sure of the accuracy of the interpretation of a specific artwork, return visits to respondents were arranged.

3.3 Research Ethics

Participants were fully informed of the purpose of the research. Respondents were keen to give their support freely, due to the fact that the research is for educational purposes. Permission to make photocopies and use the artworks as part of the thesis was requested. Acknowledgements are made towards copyrights, respondents, copies and images of artworks, and all references used.

Whilst having worked in the field of arts for more than twenty years, this did not give me a reason to assume involuntary support and respect from the participants. Nevertheless, except for Madisia, there was no difficulty in obtaining permission from the artists, the NAGN and the AAHT to make photocopies of the artworks as they are to be used for study purposes. It was important for me to be humble even when I had to interview participants who are my subordinates such as Amunkete, Shikongeni and Marais.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF ARTISTS AND THEIR ART

4.1 JOHN MUAFANGEJO (1943 – 1987)

4.1.1 Introduction

This chapter will start by providing a brief background on Muafangejo's early life as a young man who like many of his peers in northern Namibia grew up in a specific cultural environment that made an influence on his art. The chapter will also concisely discuss Muafangejo's art education both in Namibia and South Africa and what impact it made on his art as a professional artist. This chapter will examine how Muafangejo dealt with his cultural identity and with socio-political statement through his artworks. Also, the chapter will examine how Muafangejo's art inspired some of the younger Namibian artists.

4.1.2 Historical Background

John Muafangejo was the first professional indigenous Namibian artists to have worked during the time when the art scene was white dominated. He challenged the status quo and his art has inspired most of post-independent Namibia's visual artists. He lived and practiced his art before Namibia's independence and played an important role in reclaiming and elevating the indigenous Namibian history and culture by making it the subject matter of fine art prints.

According to De Jager (1990), Levinson (1992) and Lilienthal (2010), Muafangejo was born at Etunda lOnghadi in Angola in 1943. His life started out on a placid and orderly traditional basis in his father's homestead. His father was polygamous,

having married eight wives and fathered eighteen children. His mother, Petelena (sic) Hamupolo had eight children, six girls and two boys, one of whom was John Ndevasia. Like all boys of his time, the young Muafangejo performed the customary duties of herding the cattle and goats. Women and grown up girls cultivated the *omahangu* fields (millet) for porridge and *oilyavala* (sorghum) for beer.

Muafangejo started his artistic career at an early age, still a young boy herding his father's cattle. His interest in art started when he and his peers sat under the trees and drew images of people and animals such as oxen, cows, goats and dogs which they were familiar with. This way of creating images without shading by using simple bold outlines and purely from natural talent, became Muafangejo's artistic signature that was to be identified with his later works. As Timm (2002) states, "the initial work that Muafangejo created were in fact established before he went for further art training at the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre in South Africa from late 1967 to 1969" (p. 336).

In his print entitled *Muafangejo's Kraal* 1970, [fig. 6] Muafangejo reveals that his father was a man of substance with 200 heads of cattle and enough crops. Muafangejo depicted two versions of his father's homestead from memory using linocut. His lines are less bold and he included text in the 1970 version somewhat sparsely (Levinson, 1992, p.23). Unlike his father and his senior wife, the other family members are represented by mask-like heads, placed next to their respective apartments within the homestead. Masks are known to be part of the oldest African tradition and Muafangejo could have been inspired by them.

Muafangejo placed his father standing next to his traditional weapons almost in the centre of the homestead watching over everything in his home. His father is an imposing figure symbolising authority. He stands over ten granaries creating an embankment on the northern side of the house while the cattle kraal almost surrounds the house. Of secondary importance in the family, is the senior wife who is shown on the right side of the house cramming the traditional weapons with the head of the house.



Figure 6 – *Muafangejo's Kraal*, Muafangejo 1970, courtesy AAHT collection

After his father's death in 1956, Muafangejo's mother became a Christian and in the same year she and her two younger children moved to the Anglican mission station at Epinga across the border in present Ohangwena Region, Namibia. As a teenager, Muafangejo also crossed the border into Namibia, to reunite with his mother and his siblings. While in Namibia, Muafangejo started his formal education at the Anglican mission schools at Epinga and Odibo respectively. He went up to Standard 7 where his artistic potential was spotted by an American missionary who facilitated his enrolment at the Art and Craft Centre of the Ecumenical Lutheran Church at Rorke's Drift in Natal, South Africa in 1967 (De Jager 1990; Levinson 1992 and Lilienthal 2010).

According to De Jager (1990), Levinson (1992) and Lilienthal (2010) while at the Art and Craft Centre in Natal, Muafangejo learnt art techniques such as the design and weaving of tapestries, woodcarving, etching and aquatint as well as painting in oil and watercolours. He, however, later concentrated on linocuts due to the unavailability of other equipment.

While at Rorke's Drift, Muafangejo used graphic arts as a means to address issues of social concern. His Swedish instructor for printmaking, Peter Gowenius, encouraged his students to tell stories through art. Although the instructor was careful not to allow his students to make direct political statements, he made an effort to encourage creative thinking and self-awareness of his students. The Bantu education system had a tendency to suppressing expressions of self-awareness and creative thinking as

doing that would be regarded as “anti-apartheid language” (Hobbs and Rankin, cited in Palumbo 2005, p.74).

Apart from the influence of Gowenius, Biblical stories, traditional life and his immediate surroundings, Muafangejo’s earlier prints also reflect Azaria Mbatha’s influence. Mbatha, a South African indigenous artist, first received his art training from the Lutheran Art Centre at Umpumulo (later known as Maphumulo), Natal, in 1961. He arrived at Rorke’s Drift in 1962 and stayed there until he was awarded a scholarship to pursue art training at Konst Fack Art School in Stockholm, Sweden between 1965 and 1967. Mbatha returned to Rorke’s Drift in 1967, the same year Muafangejo arrived at the Art Centre. He taught Muafangejo how to “use a rich metaphorical language that spoke to the black community undetected by white authorities” (Hobbs and Rankin, cited in Palumbo 2005, p.74).

Muafangejo’s prints made while he was at the Art Centre, bear testimony to the fact that he blended in well with the surrounding environment although homesickness and the news about his mother’s death reaching him in a faraway place, could have led to the temporary mental break down that landed him in Madadeni Mental Hospital. Prints that he produced were further inspired by Biblical and historical sources and the surrounding environment. These include prints such as *Adam and Eva (sis)*, 1968 *Battle of Rorke’s Drift* 1969 and 1981, *Madadeni Mental Hospital which has many people* 1969, *Zulu Land* 1974, *Orange Farm* 1974, *The Rorke’s Drift School* 1968 and others. Muafangejo did not yet introduce the style of complimenting the meaning of his prints with text which became one of the prominent features in his art.

4.1.3 Cultural Identity

According to Elize Huyssteen, Muafangejo was a true Namibian and a true African who stayed true to his roots. Muafangejo's art is intimately and deeply tied to his identity, the Owambo roots. No matter how widely he was exposed to the outside world, he continued with his style. When established in his work style, Muafangejo withstood outside influences with the resiliency that many young Namibian artists cannot show. They easily get influenced by international trends (E. Huyssteen, personal communication, September 27, 2013).

In his print entitled *A Kwanyama Wedding 1973* [fig.7], Muafangejo shows the traditional wedding, *efundula* or *olufuko* which is a female initiation ceremony. Girls between the ages of 16 and 20 have to go through the ritual in order to become mature and marriageable women. The ritual is performed by an elderly woman called *namunganga*. After the week long ritual that is accompanied by drumming, dancing and feasting, the girls are confirmed officially as prospective brides. Single men and even polygamists may show their interests in the brides by placing jewellery or bracelets on the wrists of the brides (Thomas, 2012).

The ritual used to be practised by all Aawambo cultural groups before it was discouraged by the Christian missionaries who arrived in Namibia towards the end of the 19th century. The Church deemed practising *efundula* unholy and it was therefore replaced by Church or court marriages, until the year 2012 when *efundula* was revived by some Aawambo traditional authorities. The revival of the *efundula* by some the traditional authorities in northern Namibia, with the support of the

government is premised on the belief that cultural heritage will be preserved; women will regain self-respect and women's dignity will be restored. All this was not only denigrated by colonialism but also through gender violence and the abuse of women perpetuated by modern men (Thomas, 2012).

In this context, Muafangejo's art is not simply about making a visual record of *efundula*. It is his effort to interpret important elements of his cultural heritage that need to be preserved. No matter how close he was to the Church, Muafangejo did not see *efundula* as unholy. Instead he used socio-cultural subject matter such as the *Kwanyama Wedding* [fig. 7] to reclaim his people's Africaness. This is the same approach he and Mbatha were using while at Rorke's Drift when they used Biblical themes. This is indicative that Muafangejo was fully conscious of the socio-political situation that needed redressing.

In the print *Kwanyama Wedding* [fig. 7], two young women seem to be the focus of Muafangejo's interpretation of this social event. This is shown by cladding the women in headdresses called *omhatela*, and tanned special leather skirts decorated with ivory, *ekipa*. In celebration, they are brandishing flywhisks normally from a horse or a cow's tail. Flywhisks are still popularly used at modern wedding celebrations of Owambo communities. Two young men are joining in the dance that is accompanied by the drumming. According to Palumbo (2005) "Muafangejo's energetic rhythmic patterns offer a visual equivalent to the excitement and noise of an Africa wedding; it is a lively, yet sacred African experience into which no signs of western dress or demeanour intrude" (p. 97).



Figure 7 – A Kwanyama Wedding, Muafangejo 1973, courtesy of AAHT collection.

Some of Muafangejo's prints that show socio-cultural activities are; *We are Drinking Ovambo Beer at Eliakimas Kraal* 1977, [fig.8] *Two Girls are stamping the corn in in 1975* (1975), *He is Making Sour Milk in 1975* (1975), *He is killing an ox to collect the corn* 1987, *The Girls are dancing through the arms* 1982, and *Party Day* 1983.

Although Muafangejo seemed to give a direct interpretation of these socio-cultural activities, the question as to why he selected the specific activities might reveal some interesting motives. For example in his print entitled; *We are Drinking Ovambo Beer at Eliakimas Kraal* 1977, [fig.8] could be regarded as "his personal experiences [that] are portrayed in an almost childlike way, with sincere naivety that is not affected in any way" (Schoeman, cited in Lilienthal 2010, p. 30). Referring to the print as 'child-like or naivety', Schoeman's statement is problematic that this print is not different from most of Muafangejo's other prints and the subject matter. Muafangejo is just trying to communicate his message in a simple way so that it can be understood by all and sundry, including those who are not art literate.

Furthermore, a close look at the print [fig.8] reveals that it is not just about the local community or those in the neighbourhood who gathered at Eliakimas' homestead for a social moment. The inclusion of white faces seems to suggest how Muafangejo was devoted to his ideals of social harmony for all Namibians. It could be his vision of a free and independent Namibia in which all people would enjoy freedom and prosperity, a land free from hunger, poverty and disease.

Muafangejo combines elements of rural traditional life with urban life in the way the people are dressed. In a composition such; *We are drinking Ovambo Bier at Eliakimas Kraal* [fig.8] and others where he portrayed whites and blacks drinking together. Muafangejo advocated equality between the races, giving equal value and merit to black culture alongside white traditions (Palumbo, 2005). “Muafangejo envisioned an idyllic society, where the barriers to racial harmony would be removed by education, appreciation, and understanding. [This] could only be achieved by social interaction between blacks and whites” (Palumbo, 2005, p. 92).



Figure 8 - *We are drinking Ovambo Bier at Eliakimas Kraal*, Muafangejo 1977, courtesy of AAHT collection

Wangboje (1986) argued that if the world is indeed characterized by spiritual disorientation as a result of inadequate self and group definition, then it is obligatory for members of the society, particularly the artists to assist in this search for a new balance through the medium of art. While many white Namibian visual artists continued to explore natural themes such as landscapes and wild life. Muafangejo's work mostly portrays elements that signify and give identity to rural life which include, cattle, calabashes, bowls, costumes, bows and arrows and several forms of subsistence farming equipment as well as traditional music instruments and patterns.

Lilienthal (2010) pointed out that Muafangejo is the Namibian artist who has made the most crucial contribution to contemporary African art in various aspects, such as via graphic quality, skill and authentic artistic expression. His work reflects African culture and the racial conflicts of the African continent and that will make his work always stand out as a testament to his community and the times in which he lived. Lilienthal's analysis as stated above could serve as countering some of the older literature that classified Muafangejo's "art as having all the most important qualities of 'naïve' art; a reference to a style that is completely unaffected and no endeavour to make it complex. It is simple direct, bold and spontaneous" (De Jager, 1990, p. 41). Naïve art may be child-like but is not always, especially in Muafangejo's work, 'simple'. According to Freeborn Odiboh (2005, p. 2) "critics who apply western considerations of modernism, postmodernism and globalisation to the analysis of modern African art seem obsessed with the primitive and naïve as a display of the significant difference between the African as 'other' and the West". This stereotype could be countered by the success accorded to Muafangejo whose art however

simple it may look, has attracted and inspired many post-independent Namibian visual artists.

Muafangejo in particular continued to reflect through his work the influence from his formative years, which were characterised by the traditional beliefs and customs of the Ovakwanyama rural life. “His artwork remained authentically African in style and subject matter, despite his contacts with European cultures and international contemporary art trends” (Lilienthal, 2010, p. 13). Muafangejo’s prints titled *Hope and Optimism In spite of the Present difficulties* 1984, and *John’s New House in Katutura at Windhoek* 1987, show people from different backgrounds shaking hands and interacting with one another. These reflect his pictorial vision of a united nation although they were created before Namibia attained her independence.

4.1.4 Social Commentary

Muafangejo makes art that address direct social issues, socio-economic concerns as well as direct socio-political issues. Those works that make direct social comment include: *They are meeting again at home* 1982, *A Jealousy Man* 1976, *Forcible Love* 1974, *The Thief Who Is Chain* 1975, *Blind Man and Creep Man* 1983, *Old man* 1983, *A good Family in Ovambo* 1985,

In the picture titled *She divorced her husband together with her children* 1980, [fig. 8], Muafangejo could not make indirect reference to his mother and his siblings as this would be culturally disrespectful. Muafangejo includes a teenage boy in the composition that seems to indirectly show that his thoughts accompanied his mother

and the two siblings, although he physically had to remain behind. He avoided including a text in this print, perhaps deliberately so that he could pay homage to his mother moving to the present Namibia. Technically, the picture creates a sombre mood when looking at the motionless figures. The tree branch forming a 'u' curve with leaves also creates a melancholic feeling as the woman had to leave with only limited belongings. This is a social factor, that shows a woman's position in former African society where a woman's material possessions are almost nothing.

According to E. Huyssteen (personal communication, September 27, 2013), Muafangejo's print, [fig. 9] is a clear social comment by him that could represent what was happening at that time. Muafangejo is depicting the breakup of a family, where the mother going away with children.



Figure 9 - *She divorced her husband together with her children*, Muafangejo 1980, courtesy of AAHT collection.

Muafangejo's lino print *Men are working in Town. They are working in mine* 1981 [fig.10], shows not only the hardships men were suffering while working in mines, but he also shows the effects this contract labour system had on the families of those contract labourers. Men, mostly those who were married, formed the largest group of migrant workers; therefore their families too experienced the additional work load back home. Muafangejo takes the viewer through a life of suffering as experienced by the wives of these men as he shows women performing tasks that are traditionally performed by men in Oshiwambo and other cultures, for example women milking the cows and goats as well as cutting down a tree (Palumbo, 2005).

Muafangejo divided the print into three tiers each portraying a different activity. The top part of the print is also addressing two different activities which are of socio-economic importance to Namibia. In one of the scenes entitled, *They are working in mine* 1981, Muafangejo seems to portray the effects of hard labour as suggested by the way the men's long hair that is blown in all directions by seemingly the strong wind. These men do not seem to have proper protective clothes which could suggest that what matters most for the mining authority were the minerals, the gems and not the safety of the workers. In contrast to this scene, is another one entitled, *Men are Working in Town*, which the faces of the workers who seem to go about their routine with less hardship. Muafangejo includes two white faces probably sitting in their offices or shops.

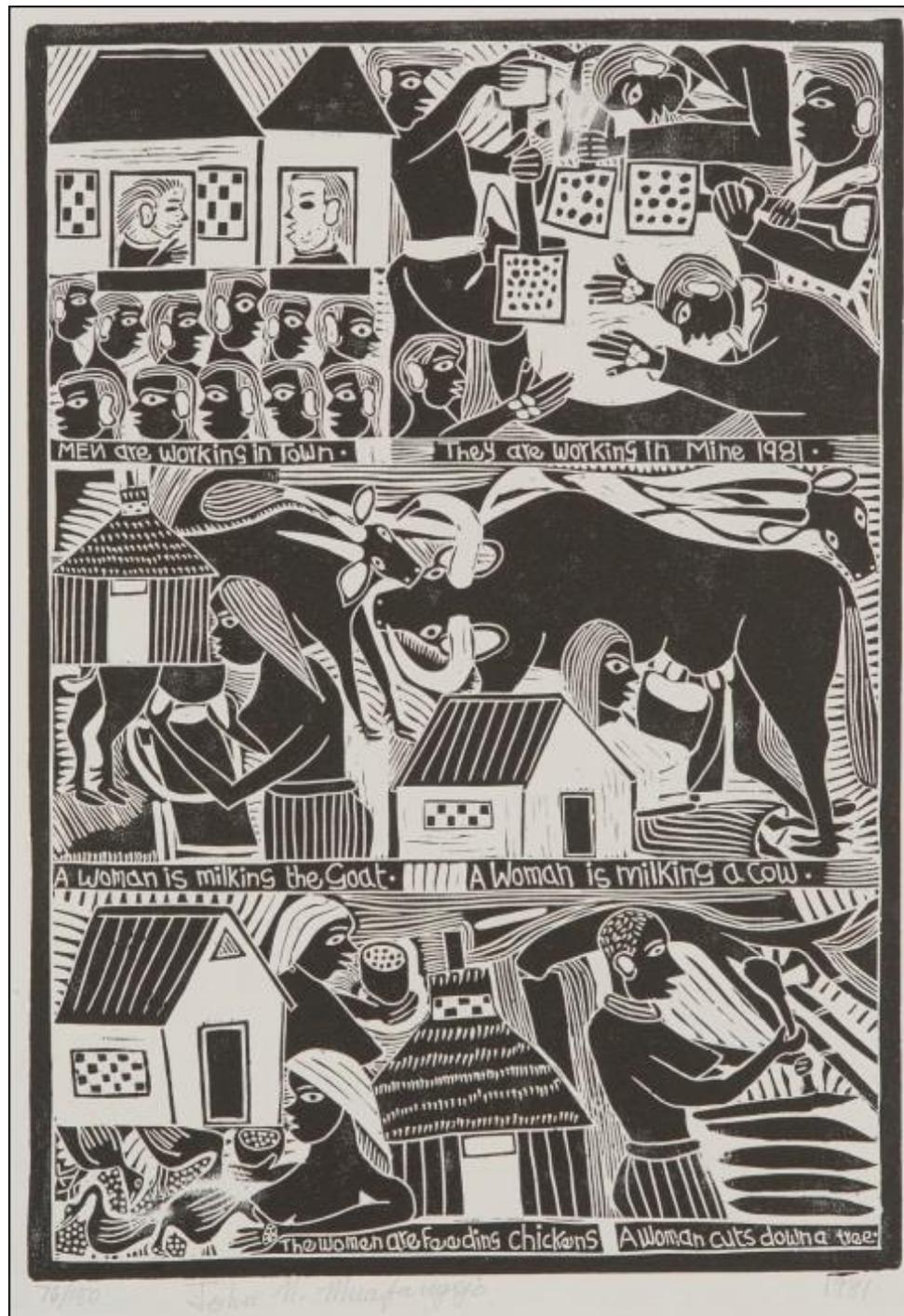


Figure 10 - *Men are working in Town. They are working in mine*, Muafangejo 1981, courtesy of AAHT collection.

Muafangejo's print titled *Angola or Kunene Republic*, 1976; [fig.11] is a good example of his consciousness about his people's history and cultural suppression by the colonial regime. A transverse fence in the centre of the composition is marked in an uncommon neatly written tag '*ARTIFICIAL BOUNDARY*'. It is a forced demarcation that has divided the traditional lands of the Ovambo people. Established only in the late 19th century, the straight border is a remnant from the colonial occupation of Namibia (*South West Africa*) (Moleah, 1983). Muafangejo himself suffered this mental pain when he had to cross over to the southern side of what he calls the artificial boundary in order to reunite with his mother and his siblings who immigrated to the other side to lead a Christian life.

The print served as a land map of the area where Aawambo people had lived for many years but also as a place regarded as a war zone during the fight between SWAPO and the South African Army of apartheid South Africa. The huge elephant could be a metaphoric expression for the large presence of South African army that are posted along the border of Namibia and Angola. This can be suggested by a big rifle that he placed next to the elephant and by what looks like an army airbase with a helicopter and jetfighters placed at the bottom left corner of the print (Timm, 1997). A small sized elephant above the big one could symbolise SWAPO, as if suggesting that its presence in the area was of no significance to the 'mighty' South African army.



Figure 11 – *Angola or Kunene Republic*, Muafangejo 1976, courtesy of AAHT collection

This is where a viewer is expected to think beyond what he/she can see in the piece of work in front of him/her. It was only appropriate for Muafangejo to use metaphor taking into consideration the time in which he operated in order to be able to comprehensively articulate the meaning he wished to transfer through his work of art. This print reminds the viewer that metaphor is often hard to interpret thus people often fail to explain what they see and think about a specific work of art (Timm, 1999).

4.1.5 Setting things straight through art

Muafangejo resorted to metaphors as a way to express his feelings in the tense situation where freedom of expression was non-existent. His work embodies an immense sense of integrity, a manifestation of his inner feelings, personal experience and his vision for the contemporary society. His metaphoric statement: “The snake was in his paradise” which according to Timm was part of his direct political commentary that he made in his later works, can be influenced by the time and environment in which Muafangejo was operating.

South Africa’s oppressive rules appeared to have forced the oppressed to be extra innovative and manoeuvre their ways of communication. For instance, an illustration is that Muafangejo resorted to the use of Biblical themes as a conduit for addressing political issues. It is this metaphor which he used so successfully in “elevating [indigenous Namibian] history and culture by making it the subject matter of fine art prints, and his example as a professional black Namibian artist operating within an

art infrastructure dominated by whites was in itself evidence that an individual could challenge the status quo” (Palumbo, 2005, p. 72).

Timm (1999) explained how Muafangejo defined his approach as a style that is symbolic and simple and that he used symbols that expose the African subconscious. This means that apart from his objective to reclaim his human dignity and his culture, he set out to correct the African history that was told to suit those who ruled the Africans both in Namibia and South Africa. In many instances his art is a manifestation of events as seen from an African point of view. These African perspectives were in many cases not recorded on paper but were passed from one generation to another orally. It is this unrecorded history that Muafangejo shares with all people through his art. This is why many of Muafangejo’s prints show African historical subject matters and are narrative in content (Palumbo, 2005).

‘Setting things straight’ is a phrase derived from the text published by Stephen Paulus, who was the guardian and mentor of Muafangejo. The text, published in 1967, dealt with Christian themes and the history of the Ovakwanyama and other Ovambo people. The text was entitled *Epukululo Lovawambo* –‘Setting Things Straight for the Owambo’ and it had illustrations drawn by both Paulus and Muafangejo (Timm, 1999, p. 336).

Palumbo, (2005, p. 76) argued that Muafangejo’s early print, *The Battle of Rorke’s Drift* -1969 (no picture), is indicative of a cultural consciousness that began at Rorke’s Drift. Palumbo held the view that Muafangejo reveals an awareness of

African history. The way he made the print is an effort to set the record straight through an interpretation of historical events that disputed white accounts. His work is therefore a clear manifestation of his cultural identity and social comment. Stories of the battles at Rorke's Drift were told from two perspectives. One was the British, foreign invaders' perspective which gives credit to the British troops as having defeated the Zulus in 1879 on one hand. On the other hand, the Zulus claim a resounding victory over the British troops, who came to invade on their kingdom (Rankin and Hobbs, as cited in Palumbo, 2005). Muafangejo used visual images to complement the episode told by the Zulus.

According to Nicky Marais, "Muafangejo shows his political stance on a historical event in his print about Chief Mandume's death. He uses words and clear images to make his social comments" (N. Marais, personal communication, September 12, 2013). In contrast, Levinson (1992), states that "although Muafangejo was very aware of the power struggles occurring in the whole region, he nevertheless refrained from political emphasis when depicting historical events" (p. 99). This view is alluding to Muafangejo's political awareness, who most keenly felt tensions between the old and new, between tradition and innovation. He understood that it is the role of an artist to interpret experiences that seem most emotionally jarring (Wahlman, 1986, p. 8). He also assumed the duty as an artist to correct the history about Chief Mandume Ndemufayo, the last king of the Ovakwanyama people of in Namibia and Angola who died in 1917.

For example, in his iconographic theme entitled *Death of a chief, Mandume*, 1972, [fig.12.b] Muafangejo decided to correct the official record by the perpetrators that King Mandume was overpowered and killed at close range by the South African soldiers. Instead, Muafangejo tells the story of King Mandume's death by way of giving the visual image that is based on the oral version told by the Ovakwanyama people that their King shot himself so as to avoid being captured alive by the enemy. Shooting himself is considered a heroic decision that prevented him from being killed or alternatively taken into captivity by the enemy. The Ovakwanyama people believe that the King spared at least one bullet to kill himself should he be overpowered by the enemy forces. After the King Mandume died, the South African military personnel then cut off his head, "a brutal act designed to humiliate, degrade, and demoralize the Ovambo people" (Silvester, cited in Palumbo, 2005, p. 79).

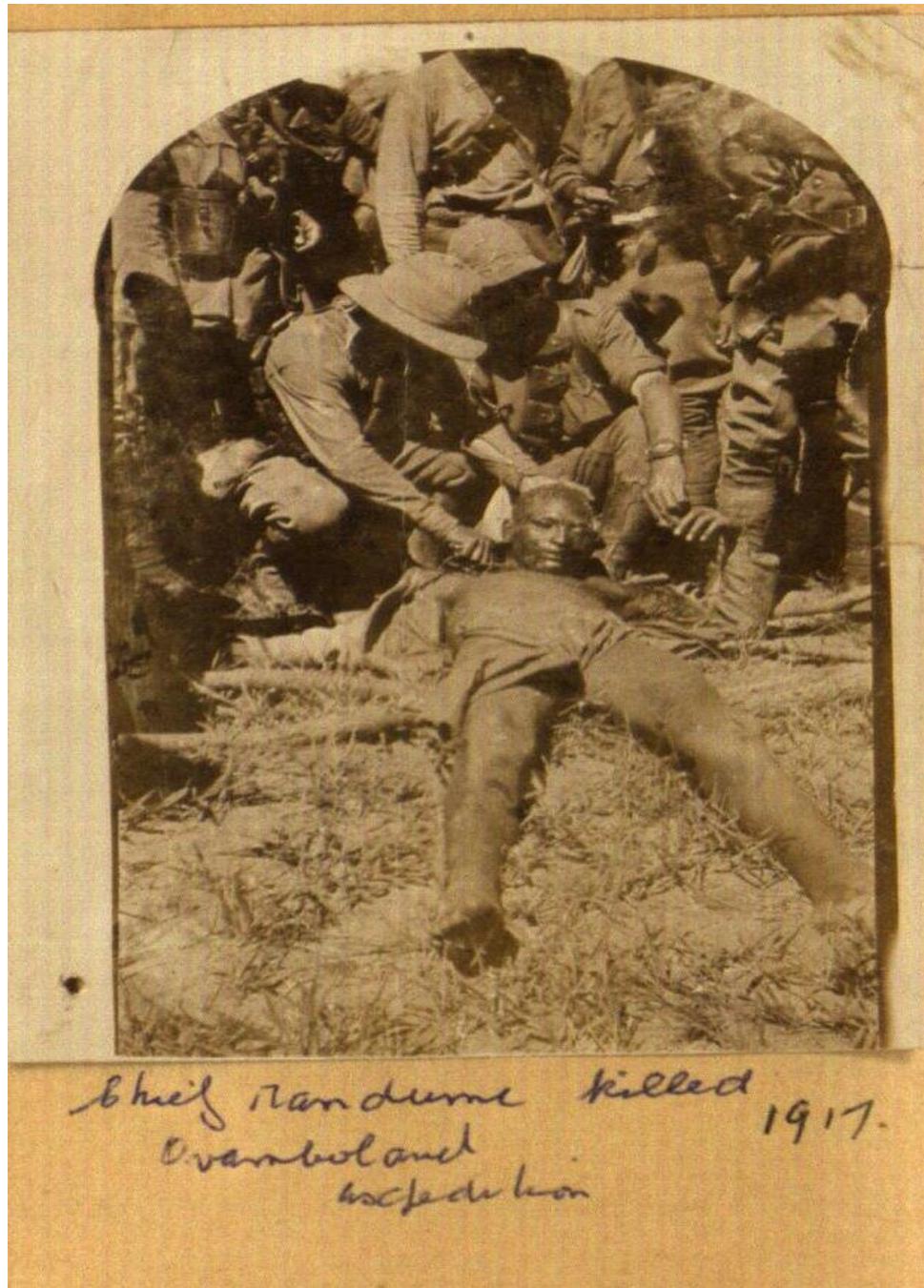


Figure 12 (a) – *Photo of King Mandume decapitated, Bristow 1917, courtesy of National Achieves*

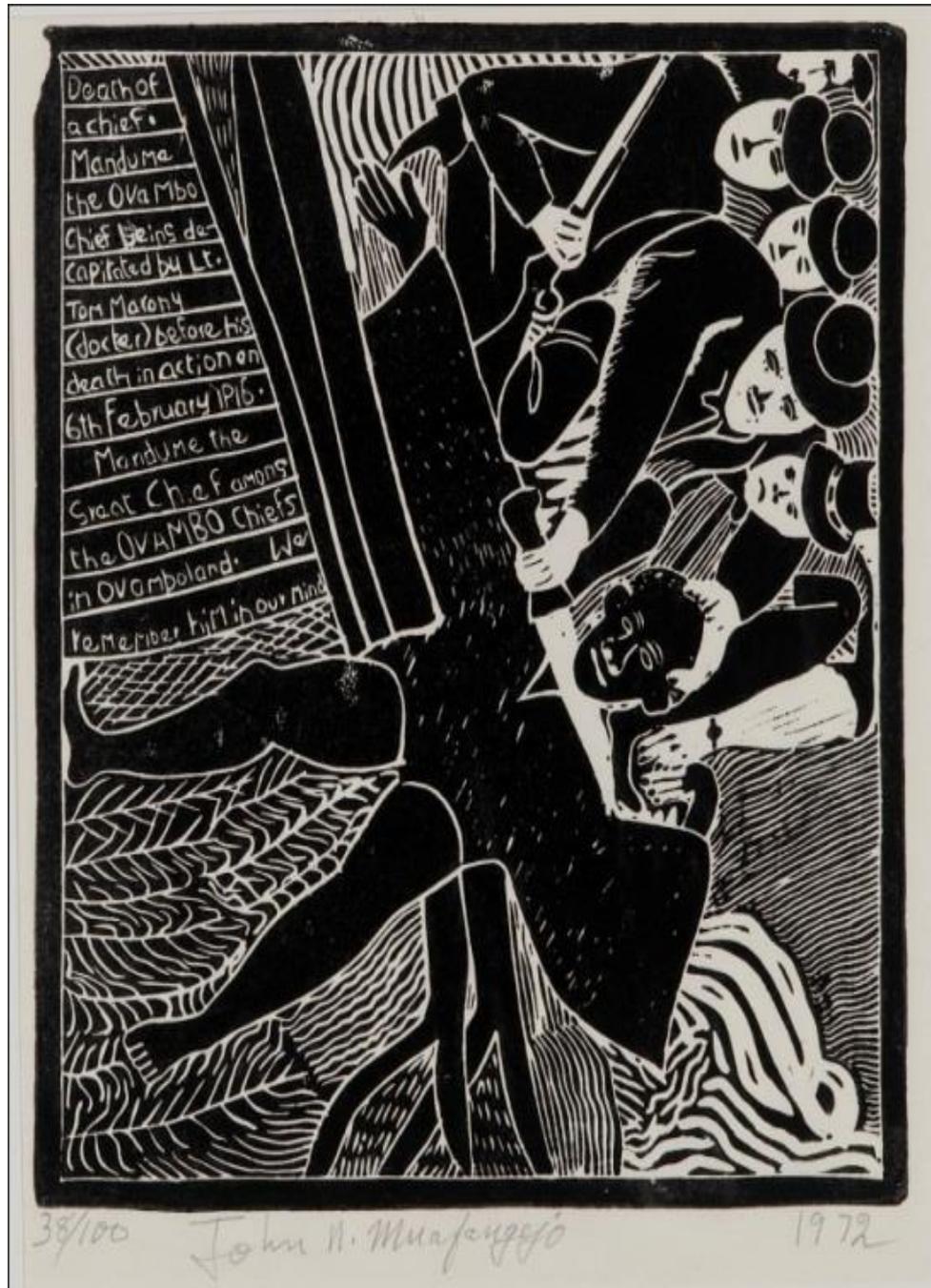


Figure 12 (b) - *Death of a Chief, Mandume*, Muafangejo 1972, courtesy of AAHT collection

Timm, (1999, p. 336) observed that Muafangejo changed the text that accompanied the photograph that was taken first hand by Sydney Bristow who was at the scene. Bristow had the photograph published in the *South West Africa Annual in 1968*. She quoted Muafangejo as follows: “Death of a Chief Mandume the Ovambo Chief being ‘decapitated’ by Lt. Tom Marony (doctor) before his death in action on 6th February, 1916.” Although Muafangejo used the photograph that was published in the *South West Africa Annual*, he decided transform it in order to set things straight for the Wambos.

The photograph of the fallen King Mandume that was taken and published by the South African soldiers was ambiguous and provided more questions than answers about who exactly killed the king. This is clear in Timm’s (1999) observation that the photograph was dominated by the presence of the colonial soldiers overshadowing King Mandume’s body. Their faces have been excluded from the photograph. The two full figures, “on their haunches by the body of the King, are rendered particularly disturbing by their shaded, anonymous faces, bringing to mind Muafangejo’s later reference to the forces of the border warfare as *Master Nobody*” (p.336).

Furthermore, Palumbo (2005) described that in the photograph it appears as if Lt. Marony raises and supports the King’s head; it is not clear if his closed fist is just posed near Mandume’s neck. Therefore this rendered the photograph ambiguous leaving it unclear what; “if anything is in the Lieutenant’s hand is knife.

Muafangejo's print provides clarity; the artist places a large knife at the King's throat, thus supporting the oral history's account of Mandume's death" (p. 80).

According to Timm (1999), using the photograph as a source of his composition, Muafangejo tilted the image, shifting its orientation from the original photograph and making one of the white soldiers holding a large knife at the Chief's throat. This action shows the act of decapitation in the centre of the picture plane making it the focal point of the viewer's attention. Timm further explained that Muafangejo disputed the perspective of Bristow who participated in the attack on the Chief. He thus replaced "treated" with "decapitated," while adding the following text so as to emphasise the heroic stance of the Chief who died fighting, "Mandume the great Chief among Ovambo Chiefs in Ovamboland. We remember him in our mind" (Timm, 1999, p. 336).

Furthermore, in his print entitled *Death of a Chief* [12], Muafangejo symbolises King Mandume's greatness by stretching his dead body across the entire Oukwanyama kingdom (Timm, 1999, p. 337). Mandume did not only die for the Ovakwanyama people but for the entire Namibian nation. The body of King Mandume is paraded over what appears to be the border line between Namibia and Angola. There is no one to be seen nearby other than the white soldiers, one of whom is using a large dagger to decapitate King Mandume. The absence of his soldiers could symbolise Mandume's bravery that he could face a strong joint force of South Africa and Portugal.

A historian in his own right, Muafangejo felt the need to set things right through visual images with the aim of restoring the image and the integrity of his people. By giving the story of King Mandume's heroic fall as he knew it through oral tradition, he contributed to a reversal of the cultural inferiority fuelled by the colonial arrogance of invalidating and ignoring African history. According to Palumbo (2005, p.81) "Mandume's bravery, courage and tenacity were transmitted in an unequivocal statement that there were worthy black leaders in Namibia to emulate, revere and admire". Mandume became an iconic figure for not only the Ovakwanyama people but also for the entire Namibian society, as he is regarded as one of the fallen heroes who pioneered the liberation struggle. He is one of those who laid the foundation for armed struggle on which South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) built its ideology and cemented its courage around this history.

Mandume's heroic stance against colonialism is still being told and sung both at traditional authority and political levels. Thousands of Namibians identify themselves with the many fallen heroes and heroines that fought so fearlessly against colonialism, one of them being King Mandume. It is their identity which they are proud of. He has been given national status. It is therefore relevant to state that in Africa, art does not exist in a vacuum but is a viable means for cultural, social, political, religious or historical identification.

Although King Mandume should be correctly large according to perspective and a main focus of the composition, Muafangejo seems to be deliberate in making the King look extra-large to maintain his importance in the society and to denote the

king's heroism. Palumbo (2005), states that Muafangejo idolizes King Mandume through a number of his artistic creations when he depicted him as an oversized figure that is "dwarfing the nearby trees while in the act of shooting a Portuguese soldier, who is falling onto a mound of European corpses" (p. 78).

According to (Lilienthal, 2010, p. 44), the picture "depicts a gruesome historical event, namely the death of Mandume ya Ndemufajo (the last king of the Kwanyama people of Namibia and Angola) in 1917". Muafangejo uses a historic incident to drive a message home metaphorically. The event can be a suitable reflection of aggression in pre-independent Namibia. It might have reminded him of the "biblical story of Jesus of Nazareth's crucifixion" with his arms stretched wide open on the cross the same way chief Mandume is laying helplessly on the ground (Lilienthal, 2010, p. 44). The researcher holds that tampering with the dead body is barbaric and culturally unacceptable. One can just imagine the level of anguish and grief felt by the King's subjects as they had to bury the headless remains of their leader.

There is a strong symbolic message in this incident which is that King Mandume was a hero to Ovakwanyama people. His diplomatic and military efforts made him an inspirational symbol to the indigenous Namibians during the struggle against apartheid South Africa. Mandume was only king of the Kwanyama people from 1911 till 1917, during which time he had to "confront the encroachment of the Portuguese, who claimed much of his land as part of their colonial empire in Angola, and the Germans, who were advancing on his kingdom [from the South]. He was the last of the traditional rulers to succumb to colonial oppression, the King resisted Portuguese,

German, and South African hegemony until his death in an ambush in 1917 (Silvester, cited in Palumbo 2005, pp. 77-78).

Some of Muafangejo's prints which appear more explicitly political by way of including the text in includes; *The Death of Chief Phillimon Elifas or The Power of South Africa* 1975, *Anglican Seminary Blown Up* 1981, *Oniipa New Printing Press and Book Depot on 11 May 1975*, *John Mother was died* 1980, and *S. Africa Soldiers at North of Namibia*, 1987.

4.1.6 A voice for indigenous Namibian communities

According to Palumbo (2005), Namibians had long been suppressed culturally, politically, economically and socially by the policy of segregation that was orchestrated by the South Africans to establish their claim regarding the inferiority of indigenous societies and to assert European cultural superiority and hegemony. Many organisations such as the Church and SWAPO decided to speak up and many initiatives were put in place in order to reverse this situation, and included policies on mass mobilisation even using the arts in the belief that the arts were in a position to be used as a didactic tool for education and to assert black culture. "Although SWAPO's emphasis was on language, music, and dance rather than the visual arts, there was one indigenous visual artist, John Muafangejo, whose work did serve to raise black Namibians' consciousness about their culture and history" (p.71).

It was Muafangejo who became a pivotal figure as the first indigenous Namibian visual artist to be established in the realm of gallery art. According Timm (1999),

Muafangejo was the first to advocate the culture and concerns of the indigenous communities during the era of Apartheid South Africa control of Namibia through his art. Muafangejo affirmed his standing as a Namibian in both incorporating traditional aspects in his art and by the achievement of a humanist vision associating liberation with holistic integration and reconciliation. Muafangejo considered his art original and educative, having a didactic and moral purpose of delivering a message through themes that are familiar to his people.

Timm (1999) described Muafangejo's work as being of vital significance as he was a voice for the indigenous Namibian community. Timm, like other writers, explained that Muafangejo reinforced this voice by including text in his linocuts to make sure that his message was understood and so make his presence felt permanently by the viewer. When one looks at Muafangejo's work, it feels as if he is accompanying you explaining each and every piece. He assumes the responsibility of a curator, explaining each piece of work that the viewer might not understand.

Muafangejo was conscious that he could use his art as a voice for the oppressed and those discriminated against. He was aware that doing so he was not alone in this fight for social and cultural harmony. He knew he was contributing in his own way to the fight that had long been started by others. The Church which produced newsletters for further disseminating the Gospel among their followers felt the obligation to use their news letters to disseminate of equality of all human beings before God. Muafangejo's art complemented these newsletters that had changed their original objective to that of black theology and consciousness (Palumbo, 2005).

Church leaders and newsletters produced by the Church such as *Omukwetu* (My Friend), which emerged in 1941 and was published at the mission in Oniipa in Oshiwambo, *Immanuel* published in Karibib, and the Catholic Church publication the *Angelus* and *Omukuni* became the target of intimidation by the agents of the South African colonial administration. Muafangejo used his art to speak against such extreme actions in his works and he documented that “A printing press at Oniipa belonging to the Church was destroyed twice by a bomb blast by *Master Nobody*” (Heuva, cited in Palumbo, 2005, p. 86).

With this mission of destroying the Church infrastructure and attacking the progressive local leaders, the apartheid regime embarked on a massive propaganda campaign of sponsoring and distributing written materials, posters, print and electronic media that show SWAPO as a Communist organisation that will destroy Churches, public and community properties. They used schools, hospitals, agricultural units and other public service institutions all over the country with the purpose to win over the support and cooperation of the local people and turn them against SWAPO and the entire effort of achieving self-determination (Namakalu, 2004). Muafangejo reacted to such propaganda campaigns with works such as *Death of Chief Phillimon Elifas or the Power of South Africa* 1975 and *S. Africa Soldiers at North of Namibia* 1987.

Some of Muafangejo’s works that directly or indirectly speak against the intimidation of church leaders who disapproved the unjust apartheid system include, *Bishop Robert Mise is crying*, 1981 and *The Bishop RT C. S. Mallory*, 1981. His

print title *Oniipa Rebuilding of Printing Press*, 1981, [fig.13], *Oniipa New Printing Press and Book Depot* 1975 represent the reaction not only from himself but also from the general indigenous population (Palumbo, 2005).

In the print, entitled *Oniipa Rebuilding of Printing Press* 1981, [fig. 13], Muafangejo includes a text that is quoting the prayer by Bishop Dumeni of the Evangelical Ovambo Kavango Church when he inaugurated the new printing press. In the prayer Bishop Dumeni thanked God for responding to the people of that church as God facilitated financial contributions from the wealthy individuals which made the rebuilding of the printing press a success. The Bishop also prayed for unity amongst the Christians seemingly to be able to withstand the intimidations that were perpetuated by 'Master nobody', an indirect reference to those who opposed the Church's involvement in the fight for human rights and freedom for all the Namibians (Palumbo, 2005).

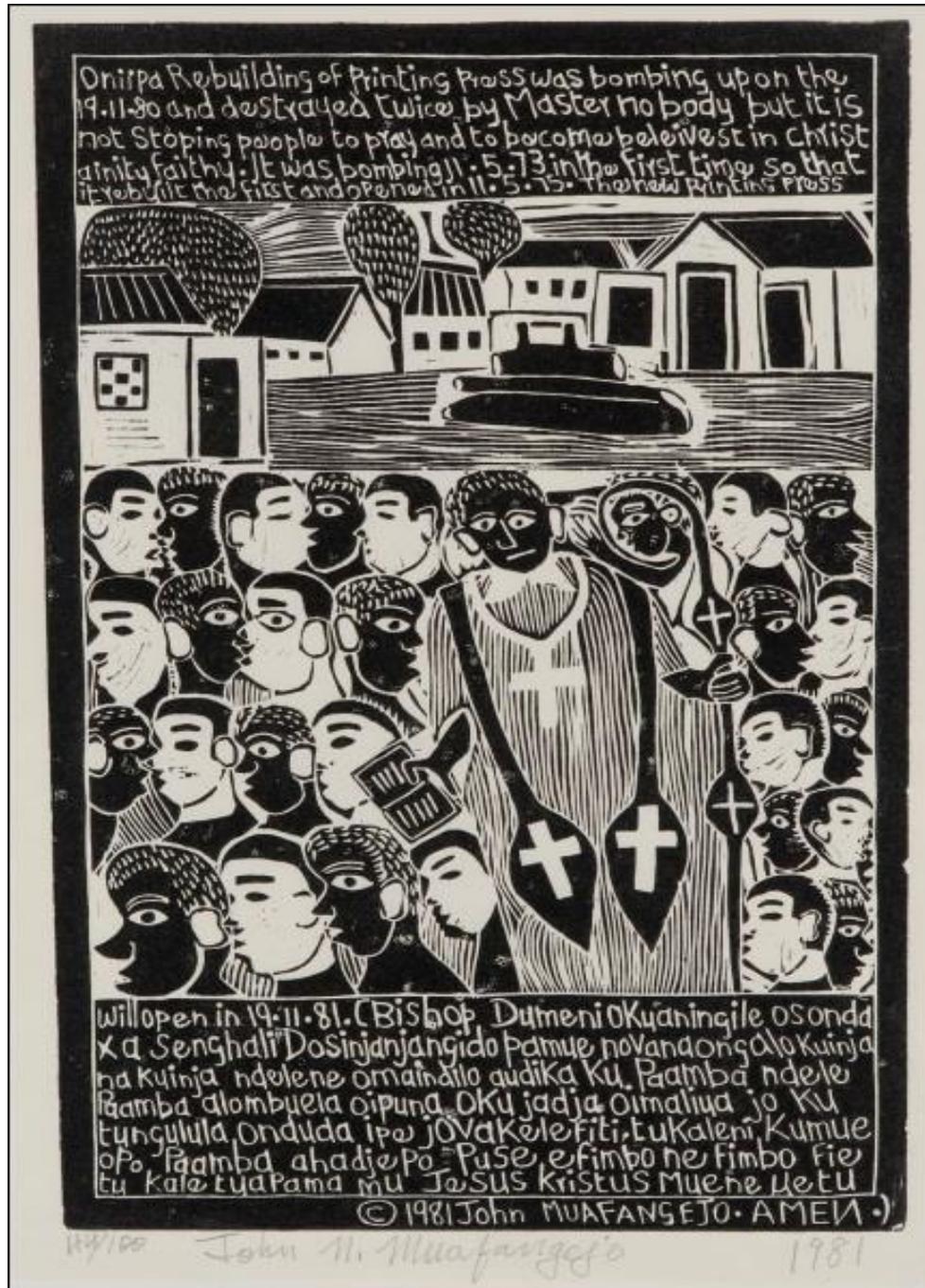


Figure 13 - *Oniipa Rebuilding of Press*, Muafangejo 1981, courtesy of AAHT collection.

Muafangejo expressed his resentment towards notions of white supremacy and arrogance using metaphoric and symbolic expression probably for his own safety. “Both prints were produced to pay tribute to the resilience of the community and the Church” (Timm, 1999, p. 341). Muafangejo was not a propaganda artist but his art shows that he was very much aware of the political tension between the supporters of apartheid and the majority of the black population who were the oppressed and this he addressed in a much sensitive and mature manner in many of his works (Younge, cited in Palumbo 2005).

Palumbo (2005) further argued that other than Margo Timm, most writers have viewed Muafangejo’s graphic work-scenes from the perspectives of recording historical events, events that took place during his time that translate into his personal history and have ignored the political situation that prevailed during his time. According to Palumbo (2005), Muafangejo’s prints indicate that he was engaged in current events and was committed to articulating black history and to celebrating black culture, which to him was a language he chose to speak against the white cultural supremacy and advocate the policy of equality before God, the creator of all human beings.

As a tribute to Muafangejo, Shikongeni spoke of him as follows; “Muafangejo was a revolutionary and spiritual artist fighting against the Apartheid regime... Many Namibians and young talented artists have a poor understanding of the art of Muafangejo, due to their lack of education compared to their counterparts in Europe” (Shikongeni, cited in Lilienthal 2010, pp. 30-31).

4.1.7 Muafangejo's legacy of print making lives on

The success of Muafangejo's role as a founding father for indigenous Namibian visual artists can perhaps mostly be seen in the work of young artists who graduated from the John Muafangejo Art Centre between 1990 and 2000. Many Namibian contemporary visual artists started seeing the significance of his work in many respects. As Rogge (2013, p.12) states, "The legacy of the late John Muafangejo looms large over the landscape of the development of printmaking in Namibia". His influence is clearly evident in the art of printmaking by the second generation of artists who did not have the privilege to meet him personally.

Shikongeni paid tribute to Muafangejo as an artist who inspired him through his themes that deal with Aawambo people's traditions and their cultural heritage. Muafangejo is regarded as a hero by many artists for he paved the way for many young Namibian artists after Independence, inspiring them to have an affinity towards the printmaking medium today. "The majority of young Namibian printmakers have developed the technique of cardboard printing with colour and many have gained international recognition thanks to the contribution of John Muafangejo, Joseph Madisia and Demetrious Spirou" (Shikongeni, cited in Lilienthal 2010, pp. 30-31).

Many younger artists used Muafangejo's style as a starting point after which their work develops in different creative expressions. Selma Neshiko (2013) observed that young Namibian artists reflect contemporary art while at the same time look back in history and try to understand its impact. While their artworks look as if they

represent an extension of Muafangejo's work, the artists have still managed to reflect new thinking and creativity. One of the means by which this is achieved is through the use of remarkable range of bright colours that brought out the strong visual language. However, neither Madisia nor Shikongeni included texts in their art as part of their composition like Muafangejo did.

In summary, Muafangejo remained firm and determined to speak against the notion of Western cultural supremacy. His art is educative and especially meant to sensitise his own people about the issues of their cultural identity and the political harassment to which his people were subjected for too long. He used mostly linoleum printing in black and white, with a simple message which in most cases is accompanied by a text in either Oshikwanyama, his mother tongue or in English or both. Muafangejo did not intentionally make propaganda when he used metaphor to express potentially controversial issues. This was probably due to his close relationship with the Church, which also took a stand against the injustices of apartheid and the ravages of the war.

Like much of his work where he communicates messages of hope, reconciliation and unity (nationhood), after the war that divided the Namibian people, he did not live long enough to personally experience that life. For example, he did not live to witness and be part of the process of the rebuilding and reconstruction of the country that was ravaged by the war. He did not live long enough to see a united people, where black and white together celebrate, as in his print entitled *John's New House in Katutura at Windhoek*, 1987.

He died while his dream was about to come true as Namibia attained her independence only three years later after which people of all races started interacting in public and private places as could be symbolised in the work entitled *Hope and Optimism* 1984.

4.2 JOSEPH MADISIA (1954 -)

4.2.1 Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, this research focuses on three leading indigenous artists to whom many upcoming artists owe their inspiration. Madisia can be seen as representing the strongest link between Muafangejo and the younger generation of the indigenous Namibian visual artists especially those that have adopted print making using cardboard as their main medium of expression. His inclusion in the study is therefore crucial. Due to a lack of scholarly materials, this section will provide an interpretation of Madisia's artworks largely based on the researcher's own perspective.

4.2.2 Historical Background

Madisia can be said to have continued from where Muafangejo left off, the information about him and his art is largely obtained from the published materials and from key respondents other than from the artist himself. The interpretation of Madisia's artworks is therefore limited to his artworks that are found in the collection of the Arts Association and Heritage Trust (AAHT) as well as the National Art Gallery (NAGN). While the AAHT has copyright on the artworks in their collection, permission to use the artworks that are in the permanent collection of the NAGN has only been granted because they were used for academic research purposes.

Joseph Madisia was born at Lüderitz in 1954 and did his schooling in Swakopmund and Rehoboth. As in many schools in Namibia, art was never taught at the schools where Madisia received his formative education. However, he spent most of his time

making drawings and sketches inspired by school subjects such as Biology and Geography. Madisia's natural artistic talent was probably noticed by those around him as after he completed his Standard 8, he started making illustrations and caricatures for an in-house magazine for the Rössing Uranium Mine at Swakopmund where he was working (Schoeman, 1990).

The period between 1982 and 1985 was to become a highlight in Madisia's formative artistic career. While in Swakopmund, he attended a two week watercolour workshop presented by Professor Edda Mally from Vienna, Austria in 1982. Professor Mally was a former student of Oscar Kokoschka. In 1983 he moved to Windhoek to be more exposed to an artistic environment after he was encouraged by artist Koos van Ellinckhuijzen who was very influential especially in Madisia's use of surrealist imagery. While in Windhoek he worked for an advertising company, and started attending formal art classes at the Academy which became the University of Namibia's Department of Visual and Performing Arts (Schoeman, 1990; Lilienthal, 1996; Bogatzke, Brockmann & Ludzuweit, 2000).

Madisia studied textile design and ceramics at UNAM where he completed his degree in Visual Art in 1999. Since then, Madisia has had accomplishments as an artist, some of which include managing the John Muafangejo Art Centre in an acting capacity, Katutura Community Arts Centre manager and as the Director of the National Art Gallery of Namibia from 2005 till 2011.

Interviewed by Gwen Lister (1985), Madisia stated that he was unable to achieve a balance in his work because of his daily commercial tasks and his urge for self-expression when he is working at home. Lister described him as a person of an unmistakable social conscience whose work ranged from expressions of township life to political comment. Madisia felt strongly that African art should be taken out of the curio shops and be exhibited in the galleries. This would give African art the same value and status that western art had and bring an end to its inferior status of a souvenir (Lister, 1985).

Madisia learnt printing techniques using affordable materials from his lecturer Demetrius Spirou during his training at the Academy. According to Lister (1985), Madisia spoke highly of his first tutor, Spirou, who introduced him to his favourite medium, graphic art while at the Academy. "In graphics, you use both hands, and don't work with one hand behind your back". He particularly admired one work by Spirou titled 'Namibian Icon' and also another one by Pablo Picasso about a mother and child titled 'First Steps' (p.27).

While at the Academy, Madisia experimented in printmaking technique, his preferred technique, which he argued links him to Africa because it is about carving out, the same as wood carving which is common in African tradition. After he completed his training at the Academy, Madisia started further to popularise the cardboard printing technique through transferring the skills to yet younger artists during the early 1990s. Spirou did not live long to see the development of cardboard printing technique which he introduced to Namibian art through Madisia as he was

killed in a car accident in 1985. Although Madisia worked in various media including cardboard and linoleum printing, wood carving and painting, he has since the mid-1990s also been working in mixed media, mostly expressing symbolic meaning (Rogge, 2013).

Speaking to Schoeman (1990) Madisia explained that art is a means of communication, something that creates understanding between people. Through art, people become aware of all the aspects of life. Art makes people equal and it makes people communicate at the same level. Referring to his art trainees at the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre where he gave art classes between 1991 and 1993, he argued that to be an artist does not require secondary education. All it needs is motivation and strong willpower. He taught people from different backgrounds. His method of teaching was through demonstration. He taught them many different techniques such as paper-machè, silk screen printing, drawing, using colour and relief printing and so on. Art students were also taught how to evaluate their work and how to organise an exhibition as well as marketing strategies (Schoeman, 1990).

His involvement in teaching was for the love of sharing as he strongly believes that this is the only way he can make a meaningful contribution to the development of art in Namibia. This intervention truly paid off as many young graphic artists who went through his coaching are now dominating the art scene in Namibia (Kandjii, 1993).

A creative genius and a father figure to so many young and upcoming artists, Madisia is also an important and influential transitional artist whose artistic career

spans from pre-independent to post-independent Namibia. Madisia is like their father and a mentor to whom they owe much respect (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, October 23, 2013). Shikongeni explained that his early prints such as *Charity*, *Farmer Life*, and *Township Market in Katutura* clearly reflect the influence of Madisia on his work.

According to Lister, until 1982 when Madisia participated in the Standard Bank Art Competition, his work had little exposure. Lister claims that Madisia preferred to be less exposed because he felt people had become too materialistic, and he preferred to rather satisfy himself than the public. Lister (1985) further wrote that Madisia felt that artists should strive for personal satisfaction rather than high sales. Nonetheless, in the later stage of his artistic career, Madisia has travelled widely over the world and has participated in many workshops, represented Namibia at many art platforms and exhibited in many countries which include: Brazil at the Sao Paulo 22nd Biannual International Exhibition and South Africa, in the *Right to Hope* exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (Lilienthal, 1996).

4.2.3 Cultural identity

Madisia's work has grown from the pre-independence era of political protest art to works of harmony and peace. During the early years of his career he was painting and making prints of social issues, fantasies and cultural themes. His work after independence is mostly expressing symbolic, metaphoric and social commentary. His compositions are rich, complex and a blend of both traditional and modern features

done in almost flat, decorative effects usually in multi-colour cardboard prints (Schoeman, 1990; Lilienthal, 1996; Bogatzke et al., 2000).

Analysing the body of Madisia's artworks, this research found that he prefers to work from his imagination as it is evident in his compositions which often portray images that are mystical, mythical or imaginary. Sometimes he included unrelated elements in one composition such as in his cardboard relief 3-colour print titled *Reprimandation of Temptation*, 1993. This makes Madisia's art very difficult to interpret. Often his compositions have multiple focal points causing the viewer's eyes to wander all over the composition. The influence of surrealism can be observed in most of his compositions that are made up of combinations of unrelated elements.

His silkscreen print entitled *African Rhythms* 1985 [fig.14], is one of the rare examples with some free space in Madisia's compositions. Realism expressed by the hands is combined with abstraction which is expressed by what seems to be a mask that is partly merged with a drum. Lilienthal (1996) observed that Madisia reduced his usual interconnected patterns, shapes and lines to be applied to significant forms in this particular composition. He included only few lines and an unrelated grid which together with the mask interrupt the three dimensionality created by the beautiful tones and shades of black, brown and orange. The glow of orange and yellow creates a feeling of a music sound resonating in the far distance at sunset or at dawn. The broken grid seems to be an afterthought aimed at covering up a technical mistake. The picture creates an atmosphere in which tranquillity prevails as opposed to most of Madisia's compositions. "As this work was created before the

independence of Namibia, the red background may be interpreted as a prediction for a better tomorrow” (Lilienthal, 1996, p. 140).

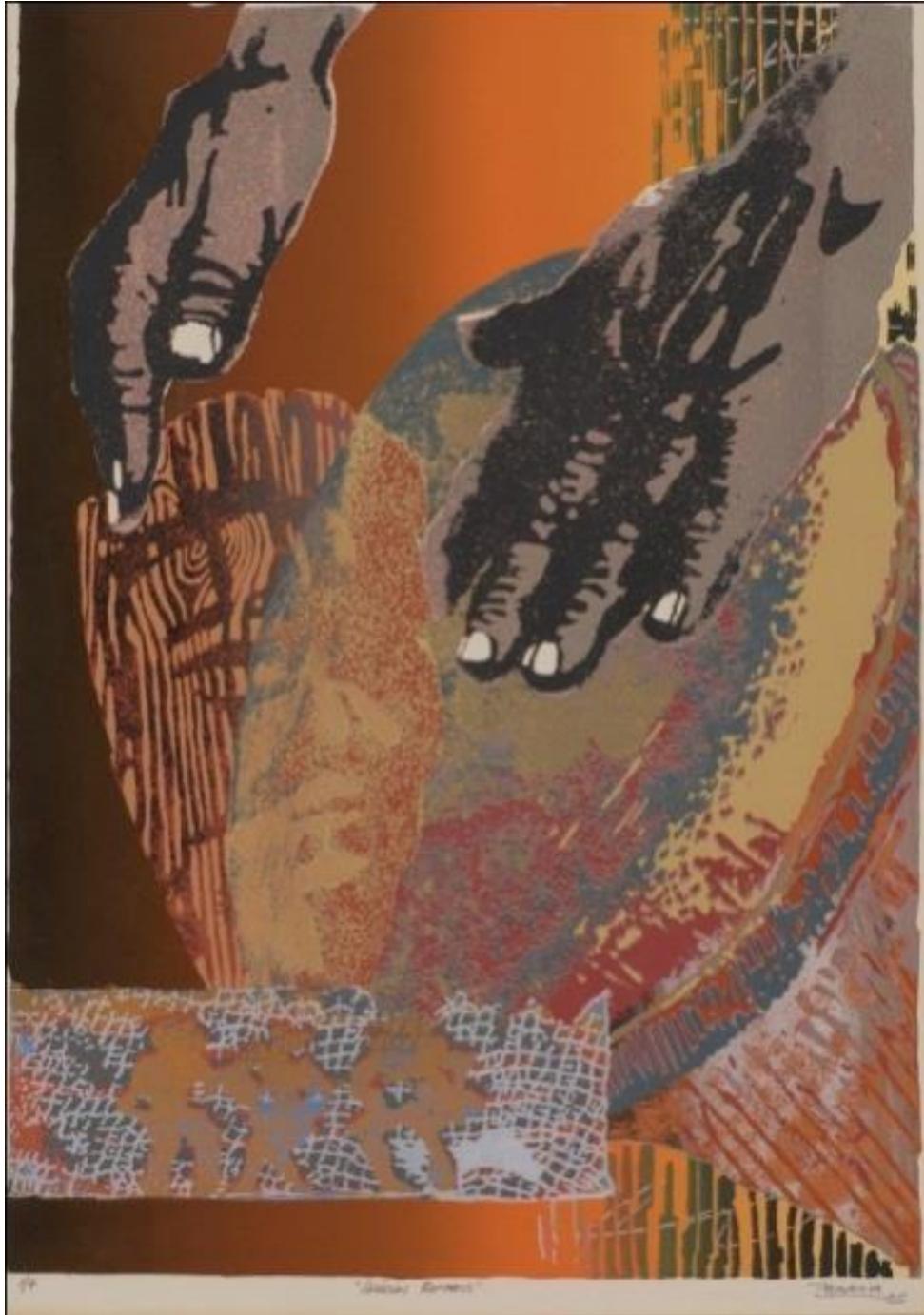


Figure 14 - *African Rhythms*, Madisia 1985

African Rhythms [fig. 14], *Music-makers* and *Tribal Rhythms among Societies* 1988, are some of his early works that depict African culture. Iconographic elements in some of his compositions that show artistic and cultural identity include calabashes, gourds, tortoise shells, clay pots, baskets and other traditional utensils as well as masks and bangles. He also includes traditional music instruments such as the African drum, horns, thumb piano, marimba and guitar. His colour scheme is dominated by warm colours usually interrupted with some blue that represents either the clear African sky or water.

Unlike Muafangejo, his black and white prints are executed in such a manner that there is always a striking tonal balance often expressed in fine lines. A woven mat, brick wall, chess patterns are often included in the background of his prints. Sometimes silhouettes of figurines resembling bushman rock paintings are also integrated to serve as a symbolic link to his Tswana traditional background. When interviewed by Lister, Madisia said he is a Namibian whose Namibian identity is strongly reflected in his work which he sees as realistic and not abstract. He maintained that the word abstract had no meaning to him (Lister, 1985).

Huyssteen argues that Joseph Madisia is perhaps the one who picked up from where John Muafangejo stopped. His cardboard print entitled *Worshipping with African Identity* 1992, [fig. 17] below is an example here. Madisia has successfully included patterns in almost all his multi-colour prints (E. Huyssteen, personal communication, September 27, 2013).

Speaking to Schoeman (1990), Madisia explained that he decided to look inward and what he discovered changed his life and his understanding about art. He was quoted saying: “I came to realise that art is an important means of communication. It creates an understanding between people, an awareness of different aspects of life. Art is not confined to one thing only and has no barriers or limitations” (p. 33).

His print entitled *Kamashona* 1983 [fig. 15], (correct spelling *kamatyona*, an Oshiwambo term for a young boy) was one of his early works that proves that he lived amongst people from different cultural backgrounds. From the theme, Madisia shows the cultural harmony that prevailed in the township where he learned, however basic, the language of other fellow township dwellers. This picture is one of his early artworks where he displays his vision for a new creative approach.

Although Madisia includes iconographic elements in his composition as can be seen behind the boy, the focus did not seem to be on a particular cultural scene, but instead he depicts the immediate surroundings in Katutura. His aim could have been spontaneous and inspired by his new environment. Depicting a young boy in an urban setting could suggest another way living for the indigenous Namibian people, a life style different from rural life. This life has become part of their culture. Madisia could have gone out of the township and make his artworks showing the surrounding mountains that encircle Windhoek or Katutura. His themes are people oriented, as it appears in most of his artworks and that why his art was considered different from that of most of his peers.



Figure 15 – *Kamashona*, Madisia 1983

Like Muafangejo, Madisia joined a few of his fellow artists such Hercules Viljoen, Trudi Dicks, Helena Brandt, Joe Rogge and others who tackled themes that address socio-cultural and political conditions contrary to the traditional landscape with animal life. Madisia and the above mentioned artists, contributed to the formation of Namibia's post-independent cultural landscape. His work reflects socio-political comment, although more symbolically portrayed than the black and white commentary of Muafangejo. He used a metaphoric language to speak or predict independence while at the same time addressing universal themes such as urban life as in his monotype print entitled *Indian Impression* created after he returned from his visit to India in 1990.

Madisia uses dark and light tones in his black and white prints the same way he uses the various colour shades to create both depth and space and succeeds in creating a three dimensional impression. His style is therefore different from Muafangejo who focused on the balance between black and white that makes most of his prints look flat.

In his commissioned work entitled *Culture* 1991, [fig. 16], Madisia seems to suggest that culture should be an integral part of education. The picture was used for the cover of the year 1991 *Overview of Culture in Namibia* prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the Republic of Namibia. Madisia limited his definition of culture to two main items in this commissioned artwork that is a traditional or tribal healer and a calabash. He used the traditional woven mat or a basket for the background seemingly to create an impression of a pristine African traditional

healer's location with the drum player and Bushmen art-like images in the foreground. He included an open book and a pen on the left to contextualise his theme. As in most of his work, Madisia incorporated patterns and items of culture such as pots, a wooden comb, baskets etc. to corroborate his own meaning for culture. This confirms what Madisia (2011) himself has written, that he incorporates cultural objects such as calabashes, clay-pots, drums, the round huts, figures sitting or dancing in a circle around the fire because they are rooted in an African traditional culture.



Figure 16 - *Culture*, Madisia 1991

According to E. Huyssteen, Madisia focuses on men and his environment in his quest to examine and understand the human condition and the enigma of life. Usually using his imagination, his end result is a dynamic mosaic of cultural, modern and imaginary objects. His compositions are often a blend of traditional patterns and forms that are found from his immediate surroundings. Madisia's work can be identified by themes of social life experienced by the people around him, people who live in poverty in Katutura (personal communication, September 27, 2013).

Interviewed by L. Mpunwa, Joseph Madisia explained that Namibian art speaks to people's minds, and about who the artist is. For example, if an artist is a farmer, then his/her art will bring out that culture. Art is a tool of communication with which artists are conveying their inner feelings. Namibian art is original, filled with the beautiful colours, beautiful trees, patterns and the brightness of the sun which makes much of the Namibian art different from European art as it is depicting Africaness. (Personal communication, October 10, 2012).

Huyssteen explained that Madisia is of Damara (sic) descent who depicts with an immaculate technique his cultural roots in works such as *Cultural cross fertilization; When the spirit speaks*, 1997, and an untitled *mixed media work* created in 1999, by including cultural items such as calabashes, bones, animal hide and recycled wood and water in his compositions.

Other artworks by Madisia where he brings out a strong African cultural identity are entitled *Worshipping with an African Identity* 1992, [fig. 17] and *Tribal Healer* 1993,

[fig. 18]. There are commonalities in these artworks particularly in terms of both the style and iconographic elements such as baskets, Bushmen art-like figures, circle, etc. Three figures bow before the fire which has its flames in hollowed circles. There are three animal skulls in the fire with the front one shielding off the worshippers from the heat of the flames. There are also stylised birds hovering around the flames against a blue embankment that looks like a mountain range. The immediate background in a light blue colour is littered with small images of antelopes and birds with a little human figure that is reminiscent of rock paintings. Madisia depicted a hunting scene in this manner which may suggest that the three men that look like bushman hunters worshipping for abundant game. Madisia arranges the blue, pink and light blue colours overlapping with dark tones in between to create depth and the impression of a mountainous landscape.

As it was mentioned earlier, this image is typical Madisia's style of juxtaposing unrelated elements in his compositions. While the act of worship seems to take place in the romanticised hilly landscape, portraying the worshippers on top of what looks like a huge basket makes the meaning of the scene more surrealistic. The huge basket and the Oshiwambo traditional double-sided dagger in its wooden pouch placed just below the giraffe at the bottom right corner of the artwork could be the few iconographic items included in this artwork. The worshippers' skirt-like loin-cloths do not resemble the traditional costumes made from animal skin worn by the Bushmen, instead they resemble modern textile, especially the *keffiyeh*, the headwear, that is commonly worn by some Arab males.



Figure 17 - *Worshipping with an African Identity*, Madisia 1992



Figure 18 - *Tribal Healer*, Madisia 1993

According to E. Huyssteen, Madisia builds on in the awareness raised by Muafangejo for expression of an African identity through his magnificent artistic skill not only as the foremost contemporary print maker but also as an accomplished mixed media artist. In his work Madisia used cultural elements such calabash, drum, basket, mask, and ancestors as symbols of expression. The drum especially features often as a motif in his art. Warm bright colours are used to permeate the light in composition as can be seen in his artworks entitled *Cultural Cross Fertilization* (nd) and *African Rhythms* 1985, evidently showing the vibrant African culture” (E. Huyssteen, personal communication, September 27, 2013).

E. Huyssteen explained that Madisia appears to be proud of his culture and like Muafangejo he also reflects on his agricultural background, by means of animals, such as cattle and agricultural products such as maize and the calabash. He is therefore a significant link between Muafangejo and Shikongeni. Like Muafangejo, Madisia’s art is well-organised and structured. Although his artworks are very strong in composition, they also look very intricate and sophisticated in comparison to Muafangejo’s which is well balanced and sometimes very symmetrical (personal communication, September 27, 2013).

4.2.4 Social Commentary

According to Lister (1985) some of Madisia’s earlier works created between the years 1983 and 1985 express socio-political comment include one entitled *Botsotso*, which is an expression of township night life, and another entitled *Namibian Lament*, which is an expression of crying children whose parents had fled the country, due to

the uncertain political situation in pre-independent Namibia. Also in the same category, a portrait of a young man with a small line-drawing of a human figure in a rock art-like image standing on top of the young man's head, is holding a spear in his left hand as if he is about to attack somebody. The work is entitled *Spade and Spear*. Muafangejo, whose works appeared more explicit when addressing socio-political issues, Madisia did not produce artworks that are so unambiguous in addressing issues of socio-political concern. Madisia seems to have been putting emphasis on his artistic growth and his mastering of printmaking with decorative surrealistic images. Furthermore, this research found that Madisia did not follow a specific thematic approach, instead he moved from one theme to another, even including universal themes.

4.2.5 Metaphoric and Symbolic Expression

In his linoleum print entitled *Traditional Priest* 1997 [fig.19] the worshipping priest is raising his hands to what resembles a half sun. In many African cultures the sun is believed to be the source of energy. The circle and the diamond shapes are once again the dominant forms in this composition. The priest is wrapped in an ankle-long, if not much longer, garment that resembles garments worn by men in West Africa. Madisia depicted Bushmen art-like figures that are probably hunting behind the sun rays, again showing his way of combining unrelated images in his artworks.



Figure 19 - *Traditional Priest*, Madisia 1997, courtesy of R-L Hofmeyr's collection



Figure 20 - *Untitled Mixed media*, Madisia 1997

If his print entitled *Traditional Priest* [19], is viewed together with his untitled mixed media artwork [fig.20] these artworks display parallels in many ways. Both artworks have the round shapes and in the untitled artwork [fig. 20], one can see the animal skin and the bones, the calabash etc. If the iconographic elements in both artworks are interpreted together, the roundness could represent pre-historic human shelters, which were rock caves, when man's survival was dependent predominantly on hunting and wild fruits that were plentiful. Nonetheless, due to 'civilization' that has taken over that natural life style, the San people who until today generally supplement their livelihood with hunting, have now nowhere to hunt. They are largely displaced from their original habitats. They cannot have their questions answered by those who rule them, instead they turn their attention to the shaman, the traditional priest who can represent them before the gods.

Madisia (2011) explained that symbols such as circles and squares are forms that enable people to realise how different they are. He claimed that in art, symbols are one of the oldest visual forms used in peoples' daily lives when conveying meaning beyond what is obvious. The circle is universally regarded as a symbol of unity, wholeness, embrace, infinity, fertility and the human life cycle. The circle had a firm influence on African traditional architecture before the square which is usually linked with Western culture.

Elements that are often of symbolic significance to Madisia include clay pots and calabashes, usually as containers where milk is kept, symbolizing life. Drums, fish, flames, masks, eyes, hands, human figurines, cattle, tortoise shells and belts are

commonly integrated in Madisia's prints. Often it appears the artist depicts images from his immediate surrounding including that of his own hands. All these could have symbolic significance to himself, family, community or the larger African people.

Madisia (2011) further explained that the square represents a cornerstone upon which Western civilisation was built. This can be seen in the Western architecture as well as in most modern technological products such as laptops, vehicles and even Holy Bibles. The square is a manifestation of the Western four-corner shapes that were embraced by non-westerners and has deep roots in African daily life. The circle and the square although not the same are inherently dependent on each other the same way that old and new, traditional and modern do. The challenge is how to apply the two together to ensure a balanced future and a better coexistence in Namibian society.

Furthermore, explaining his philosophy about black and white, Madisia (2011) believes that the two are interdependent like on the chess board. He also believes that in between the black and white there is a space for the grey areas that represents those that are neither too black nor too white. Recognising this harmony, he says will nurture a colourful nation. Madisia has with no doubt translated his above philosophy into visual images as can be seen in the majority of his artworks.

For example, in his mixed media work entitled, *When the spirit speaks* (nd) [fig. 21], Madisia uses wood and plant material as the main materials to create this piece. The

title of the art piece speaks for itself as it refers to the spirits associated with the African mask. Madisia could refer to his or someone else's ancestral spirit that in many African cultures are believed to guide people's lives. The line of twigs hanging on what looks like two leather strips could represent a practice in certain Aawambo traditions. The practice involves the simple arithmetic of adding in the case of a birth or a subtraction in the case of a death in the family. "The Ovambo people used sticks to count children in a given family, cattle or goats, the quantity of omahangu kept in granaries and so on. The practice was used when stock taking or documenting ones wealth" (B. Shikesho, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

The egg-shaped top part of his work entitled *When the spirit speaks* [fig. 21] seems to suggest the practice of grinding using a pestle and a mortar. Grinding is an ancient practice used by human kind over the ages when needing to turn grain into flour. The main piece of wood shows a face on a mortar, used predominantly by the millet and sorghum producing Namibian people. In *When the spirit speaks*, [fig. 21] Madisia could therefore suggest that if the ancestors speak, there is something at stake for the family, which could be suffering or fortune. The piece can therefore be symbolic while at the same time bearing a mythical interpretation.



Figure 21 - *When the spirit speaks*, Madisia

Emphasis has been put on the artist's artistic growth and his mastery of printmaking with decorative imaginary images. Madisia did not follow a specific thematic approach, instead he moved from one theme to another, even including universal themes. Those themes about cultural identity, social or political commentary do not seem to overtly address social concerns in Namibia.

Madisia also touched on topical issues including denouncing the corruption of society as it can be seen in his picture below entitled *Money comes around, money goes around*, 2010 [fig. 22].

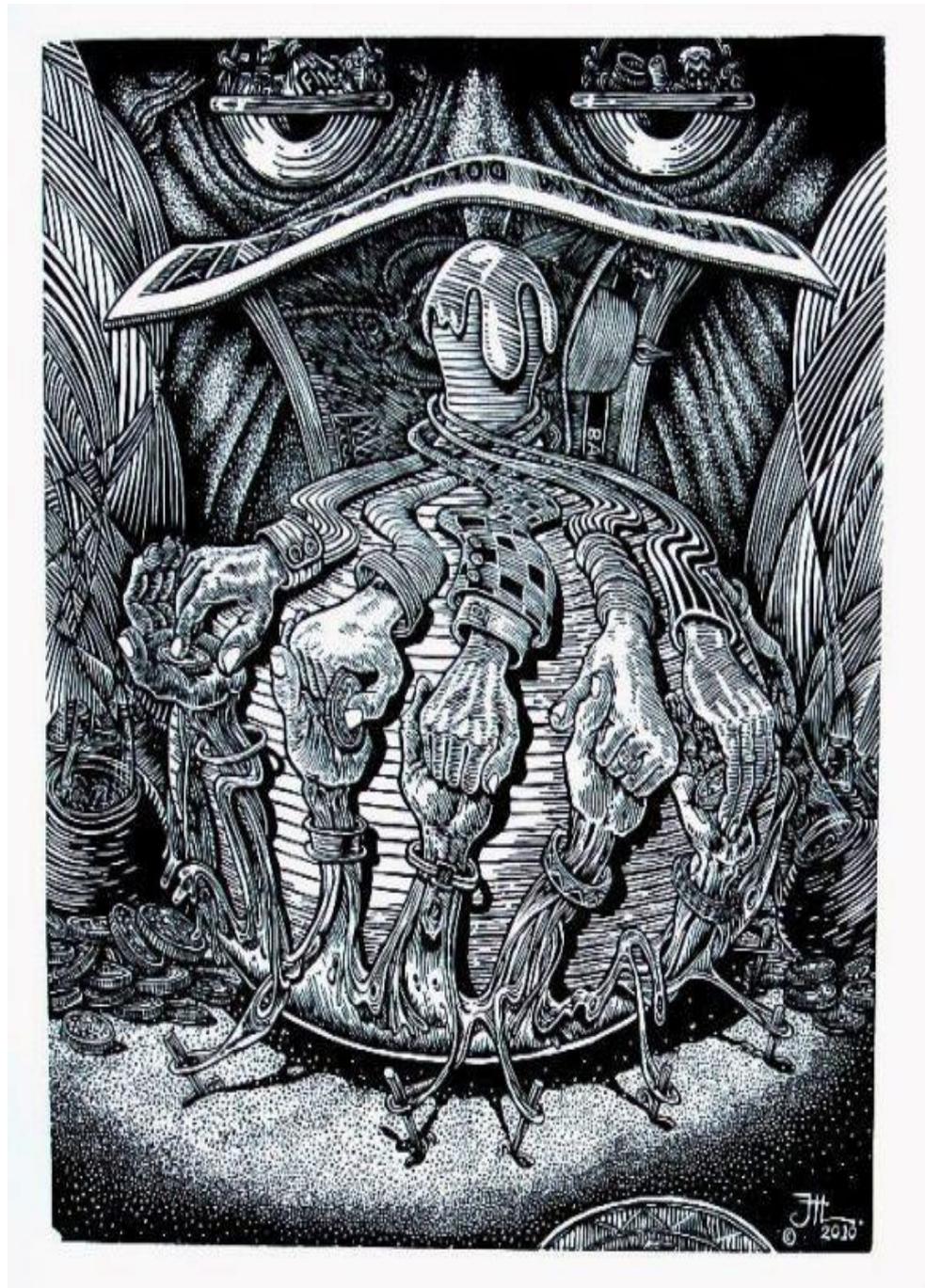


Figure 22 - *Money comes around, money goes around*, Madisia 2010.

The central scene in this picture shows mysterious hands exchanging coins over what looks like a basket or a 'gourd'. The hands and the lower arms from above the gourd are dressed in modern long sleeved shirts while they are tied around the huge knob or the neck of the gourd. The other hands are fastened to pins or pegs that are nailed in the ground. The hands at the bottom seem to represent a weaker partner in the transaction. The hands on the far sides of the gourd have spilled coins over onto the ground at the bottom of what looks like baskets or pots.

The transaction is done under watchful eyes that are hidden above a dollar note. The transaction seems to take place under a veiled secrecy sandwiched by what looks like huge bundles of cotton ropes. The illuminated grey and pitch black tones of the picture also suggest that the act is taking place at night. The picture may point on one hand to the unequal distribution of resources that seems to have taken an upper hand. This practice perpetuates economical inequalities and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor in independent Namibia. On the other hand, Madisia seems to caution that the fortune that is found through an illicit and quick means might not last long. There are so many Namibians, who are so pre-occupied with ideas of how to become rich overnight. A picture of this nature with such a strong metaphoric title might refer to such a phenomenon. This is also one of Madisia's artworks that reflect how he was inspired by his mentor, Koos van Ellinckhuijzen's surrealist style.

In summary, Madisia strives to create artworks whose meaning goes beyond most people's imagination and simplicity. He strives to create art that raise to a level

higher than seen before and that is probably why he remained with his surrealist inclined style. He believes that his ability to create art was inspired by his ancestors. Although Madisia follows specific subjects or themes of African origin, his art cannot be completely considered as following a particular direction when portraying issues of cultural identity or socio-political concerns. Also, even though he includes iconographic elements and motifs of rock art in his compositions, his art remains universally African and not linked to specific issues or events or even specific cultural groups in Namibia. Instead, Madisia's art could be regarded as adaptable to any country on the African continent.

Madisia worked in numerous media and techniques, more than probably any other contemporary indigenous visual artist of his generation in Namibia. Experimenting with found objects has become a new found way for many Namibian artists to circumvent the need for expensive imported art materials and Madisia is no exception.

4.3 NDASUUNYE SHIKONGENI (1971 -)

4.3.1 Introduction

This section will discuss Ndasuunye Hishishi Papa Shikongeni, popularly known as Papa, short for Pan African Philosophical Artist. He is one of those many young artists who little is written about. However, he is one of the most celebrated contemporary visual artists in Namibia. The research will cover Shikongeni's historical background and examine how he addresses his cultural identity and how makes socio-political statement through his artworks.

4.3.2 Historical Background

In an interview with the researcher Papa stated that he was born in Windhoek in 1971, but grew up under the care of his grandmother in the neighbouring town of Okahandja where he started his early school career. His love for art started at a very early stage. He returned to Windhoek at the age of ten. He did not follow his school career for that long before he got inspired by politics, for which his father was his role model. The Namibia National Students Organisations' political activities also had an impact on the young Shikongeni. Because of his active involvement in the students' organization activities he became one of those wanted by the Security Forces. This persecution forced him to go into exile and join the liberation struggle in Angola in 1988 (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

Upon returning from exile, the multi-talented Shikongeni, who also ventured into music, started to attend non formal art classes offered by Joseph Madisia between 1992 and 1995 at the Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre (FNCC). This type of

training he cherishes as he maintained on many occasions that he does not need qualifications “on paper” in order to make art or teach effectively (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

Rogge (2013) states that Shikongeni as a member of the generation that emerged from the teachings of Madisia has an outstanding history as a teacher of printmaking in Namibia. “He has served at the College of the Arts’ National Arts Extension Programme (COTA – NAEP), the John Muafangejo Arts Centre (JMAC) and now the COTA Visual Art Department. Shikongeni is widely regarded as the successor to Madisia” (p. 16). This is due to the fact that he learnt print making techniques and skills during instruction by Madisia.

Although Shikongeni has no formal art qualification, he is an important voice amongst artists of his generation and plays an active role towards the development of the visual arts across the country. He is an outspoken individual who claims to know many artists who do not want to talk and raise their voices to be heard by authorities, so he took it upon himself to speak on their behalf using the media to spread his message. He regards himself as a freedom fighter in art because, as he argues, art in Namibia still needs another revolution (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

When Joseph Madisia opened Shikongeni’s exhibition titled *Ndagaluka, (I am back home)*, held at the FNCC, from March-April 2001, he referred to Shikongeni as a true African and international creative person who unselfishly shares his in-born

talents with others who are keen to learn. He thus considers him as a definite front runner who has irreversibly taken a new route to innovative visual artistic expression in Namibia. The exhibition's title refers to Shikongeni's coming back from Nairobi, Kenya where he presented a two week workshop in cardboard print making. Shikongeni presented similar workshops in other countries including Senegal, Russia in St Petersburg in July 1999 and in Hanover, Germany at the Expo 2000 (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

As a social critic, Shikongeni, a self-acclaimed ghetto artist, believes that it is time that the black community returns to art to see and know its value for their own self-preservation. He claims that his art is made for the blacks and they should therefore support it (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013). Shikongeni, supporting his call to indigenous Namibian people to value art during his exhibition called *Ethimbo*, (Oshiwambo term for time), states "Our art is mostly bought by foreigners who support Namibian art from outside. My people don't buy art and it can empower them. Tomorrow if I die, nobody can benefit from my art – our museums have nothing in them to mark our contribution to the country's development. Our art is overseas in private collections and this can be corrected if there is a functional law that governs the arts" (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

He claims that if people do not support local artists then there will be nothing left for their children to look at in the future. Although he laments the non-support for his art, he maintained that his art is not about money but about what has not been told.

“By creating art, I can express my ideas and talk about the ordinary people of my township”. He argued further that his art is there to show the children the past traditions and culture, as well as to instil a sense of pride in them, to appreciate their parents’ past (P. Shikongeni, personal, communication, September 22, 2013).

His love for working with children is evident in many workshops and special art classes he offers to school going and out of school children and young people throughout the country. These engagements dominate his curriculum vitae from the early stages of his artistic career to the present. Even when he was in Senegal, he surprised fellow workshop participants when he invited local children to the workshop and shared his artistic skills with them (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

He further states that young people should learn to respect themselves and develop their own identity as opposed to the American and European influences such as violence, which they learn from television. He claims that young people pick up bad habits such as alcohol abuse and smoking from hanging around bars. In his view if young people respect older ones, they will gain wisdom and experience (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

When he had an exhibition in London titled *Time inna Mankind*, 1996, he was intrigued by the absence of children playing, dogs barking or chickens running around. All what he noticed was that people appeared to have less time. They appeared to be a computerised society, individualistic and had no sense for a united

community. This confirmed his view about urbanisation which he described as corrupting traditional values – a harsh reality of Africa today. “The Namibian culture is disappearing. People are losing their identities and quality of living due to the effects of materialism. I feel that my black brothers and sisters in my country are not aware of the importance of art in their lives. Our cultural roots can best come to the surface through art which is our first language and shows us the truth about humanity” (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

Shikongeni also created a print showing a *Township market in Katutura* 1994, with a Herero woman in her traditional costume. The print was part of the exhibition that was held in London. Shikongeni maintains that the print titled *Township market in Katutura* was done with the purpose of educating art viewers in England about Namibian cultural identity and not one specific tribal identity. It demonstrates how the Namibian people do business at informal markets, and was used as the invitation card for the exhibition to attract viewers (personal communication, September 22, 2013).

In an interview with the researcher, Shikongeni maintained that his art is created by the will and power of his ancestors. His art comes from within. He asserted that his art comes as direct inspiration from his ancestors and further argued that art cannot be taught by books or teachers as this inhibits the natural or spiritual art and the art loses its originality. A strong believer in spiritual life, he further maintained that art is an expression of inner thought and the connection with his cultural and traditional

values which influence his work (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

Shikongeni, (personal communication, September 22, 2013) maintains that art is a God-given gift and that what he expresses is from within himself and his approach to art is therefore a spiritual one. Sometimes he also dictates ideas to his trainees who need skills and subsequently develop from apprentices to practicing artists. This is how artists worked during the medieval Christian period. God was considered the primary creator and artists were understood merely as channels for divine inspiration. Within this religious framework, Shikongeni sometimes works without thinking of what he wants to do leaving the creation to its spontaneous end result. He claims that his ancestors gave him art and he has a mission to spread it. The ancestors are the spiritual intercessors between God and human beings. It is through them that his artistic talent has been passed to him. To him, the ancestors are the supreme custodians of culture (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

Shikongeni contends that his source of inspiration comes from African art and from places where he goes to such as villages and townships, looking at different people and how they live. In addition, he can also just sit down and ideas just come to him, he then visualises the images which he puts on paper. Before he transfers the picture in his mind onto the paper, he first has to think about the people's interest, what is it that they want to see or what is it they want to know about their cultural or social life and that guides him as he works on his art piece. He therefore concludes that his art is about what is around him and the people with whom he lives. Shikongeni believes

that he is a born artist, his talent is inborn (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

4.3.3 Cultural Identity

Shikongeni believes that what his art portrays is strongly motivated by his culture and at times by his spiritual belief. Most of his work is an expression of the cultural and traditional beliefs of Namibian daily life expressed via linocut, silkscreen, monotype and cardboard print which is his favourite technique. Patterns in the baskets can also be seen in his cardboard prints as can be demonstrated in his print entitled *Culture of one* (1995), [fig. 23]. Crops such as omahangu (millet or sorghum) and maize are also common elements in Shikongeni's artworks. They are a source of energy and by extension, life.

In his artwork [fig.23], he shows a fantasy-like inspired scene dominated by nudes hovering from above, reaching out to the maize crops in a pool. The pool is held up by three half dressed women squatting in a huge green basket as though suggesting that they are sharing their harvest with those who did not have enough to harvest.

In the same artwork [fig. 23] Shikongeni displays his increasing mastery of direct observation in his command of perspective and foreshortening. A self-pronounced Pan Africanist, he infuses his prints with his African traditions, religious, ancestral or allegorical meanings which are spontaneous. For example, his cardboard print [fig. 23] is a reminiscent of the painting by Henry Matisse titled *Dance* created in 1911. According to Shikongeni (personal communication, September 22, 2013) he has a

unique way of storytelling which is much inspired by the inner spirit found deep within his culture and traditions. His way of storytelling reveals an influence by the African fables and mythology.

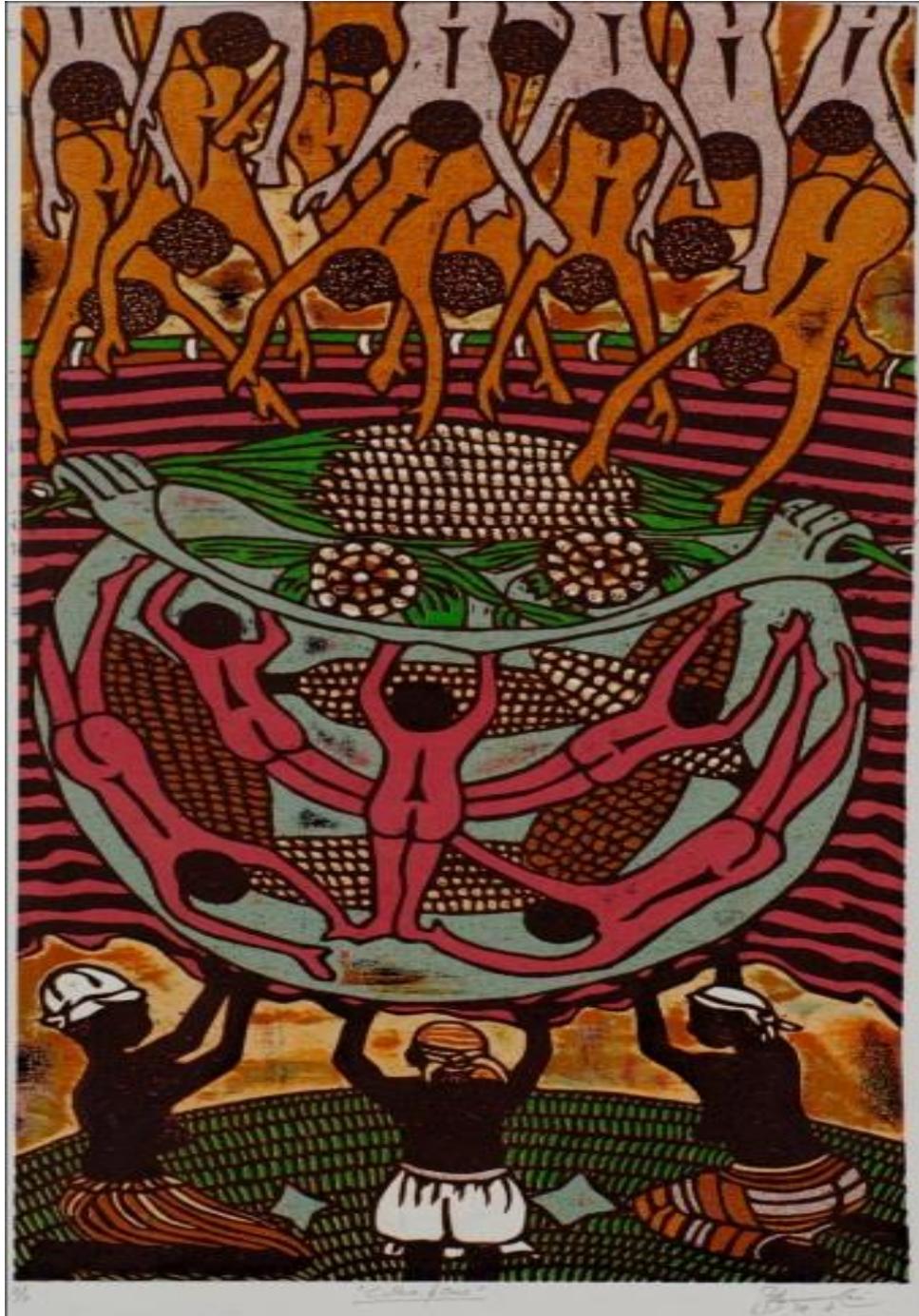


Figure 23 - *Culture of one*, Shikongeni 1995, courtesy of artist's own collection

Shikongeni's style has powerful and immediate mark-making, with intense vibrant colours, that are used to tell different stories. His stories often relate to life in the townships, held together by the spiritual bond of community and family. For example, Shikongeni explains that the aim of the exhibition he took to London in 1994, titled *Time Inna Mankind*, "was to remind the people about our culture with a message to seek freedom of mind, to be you and to live in you" (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

In another artwork created by him entitled *The Offerings 2007*, he expresses his wish to reciprocate to the ancestors who are his inspirational beings. As in the African tradition of giving offerings, Shikongeni often brings his grandmother to his art exhibitions where he serves traditional food and home brewed beer and makes a fire that signifies his Oshiwambo cultural background.

He is constantly exploring new techniques which make each work a new discovery, offering an unusual freshness complemented by a deep, underlying spirituality. His newly found realistic style especially for the artworks he created during 2011 is testimony to a significant development from his early black and white cardboard printing, thanks to his perseverance. Shikongeni has set himself a goal that he should have an exhibition each year, not because he wants to make money out of it, but because he wants to use art to express his emotions and to encourage younger artists to work hard and represent themselves through art (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

He claims that his art will always go through developmental stages and art lovers must expect changes in technique all the time. He is planning to start working in collage and wooden sculpture in future. African wooden sculpture is one of the sources of inspiration that keeps him alive, especially when looking at patterns, symbols and figures (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

As one of the post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists who were privileged to travel and exhibit abroad many times, Shikongeni withstood foreign cultural influences that could have affected his strong conviction in his cultural identity. His self-proclaimed Pan-Africanist principles also guide him in his resolve to promote his cultural identity that makes his art uniquely Afro-centric. Shikongeni can be described as both a true Namibian and an African artist due to his subject matter choice, choice of colour and the use of his own language for some of his titles. (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

Shikongeni's participation in the liberation struggle inspired his black consciousness and motivated him to express the value of his culture and tradition which is part of his ancestral heritage. He also started to understand the importance of his ancestral power within which he believes with affection. Believing in his ancestral power gives him experience and the knowledge to create art that connect the world with the people. Shikongeni explains that his art is chosen by both his ancestors and the All Mighty which is why he uses his art as a peaceful weapon. He claims that the liberation struggle inspired him to use his art as a language that sees no race but deepened his political awareness and knowledge about who is. His art, both visual

and music, is testimony that he is freed from the colonial mentality of slavery. (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, May 18, 2015).

Although he claims to draw his inspiration from his ancestors and his spiritual belief, some of his subject matters seem to be inspired by what he observes on daily basis. This could be demonstrated by his newly found aim to represent the different cultural groups in Namibia. The *Omunahambo* 2011, [fig. 24] is a manifestation of a Wambo culture where a young man in his traditional costume is carrying the milk gourd. *Omunahambo* (the cattle herder) could be returning from the cattle post. This can be suggested by the cloudy background which is indicative of the start of the rain season when the Aawambo men, the cultural group to which he belongs, normally return from their cattle posts. He depicts an almost realistic simple representation of the man and his gourd with a cloudy background. This is particularly one of Shikongeni's recent artworks where he displays his mastery of perspective and foreshortening which can be seen as indicative of his growth as an artist.

In this artwork [fig.24], Shikongeni reflects back on the traditional way of life in the rural regions of northern Namibia. Although the milk gourd remains unchanged, the traditional loin-cloth and the leather belt worn by the cattle herder have been largely replaced by modern clothing.



Figure 24 – *Omunhambo*, Shikongeni 2011, courtesy of artist's own collection.

In the print entitled *Nama girl*, 2011 [fig. 25] below, Shikongeni depicts another Namibian cultural group well-known for the wearing of colourful patched dresses adopted as traditional dress for both the Nama and Damara women. The girl is performing a traditional task, which is to shake the gourd to make butter from sour milk. This is the indigenous Namibian way of preparing butter. The cultural identity of the Namas and Damaras in this artwork [fig. 25] is also recognisable through the girl's dress which is made out of patchwork material. The patchwork technique used by the Nama people can be considered as having its impact on Shikongeni's patchwork technique that he used in his zip collage artworks which will be discussed in figure 32.



Figure 25 - *Nama girl*, Shikongeni 2011, courtesy of artist's own collection

In his print entitled *Herero woman* 2011, [fig. 26], Shikongeni gives a realistic portrayal of a Herero woman with a baby on her back. He particularly set out to show the different cultural groups by paying attention to the fine details of their clothing. The clouds cutting across the deep sapphire blue sky create a rhythm to which both the mother and baby seem to paying their attention. The circle which is faintly hanging above the woman's headdress seems to drift slowly with the rhythm of the clouds. The blue colour seems to suggest that safety and serenity are guaranteed for the woman and her baby even though they have to walk in the twilight of the half moon.



Figure 26 - *Herero woman*, Shikongeni 2011, courtesy of artist's own collection.

The print titled *Namibian Dance 2011* [fig. 27], although neither specifying the cultural group to which the dance belongs nor giving the name of the dance, the colourful skirt in the colours of the Namibian Flag colours and the way it swings can represent the peacock dance performed by the women from the Zambezi Region. The realistic depiction of details of the skirts and the footwear in this particular print could be inspired by a direct observation from the Namibian National Cultural Festival where the artist took photographs.

While discussing this artwork, Shikongeni explained that he often uses photographs he has taken and transfers them into artworks, a new technique which he was not yet ready to share with anybody. He has also introduced silkscreen to the range of printing techniques he has mastered over the years (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, April 2014).

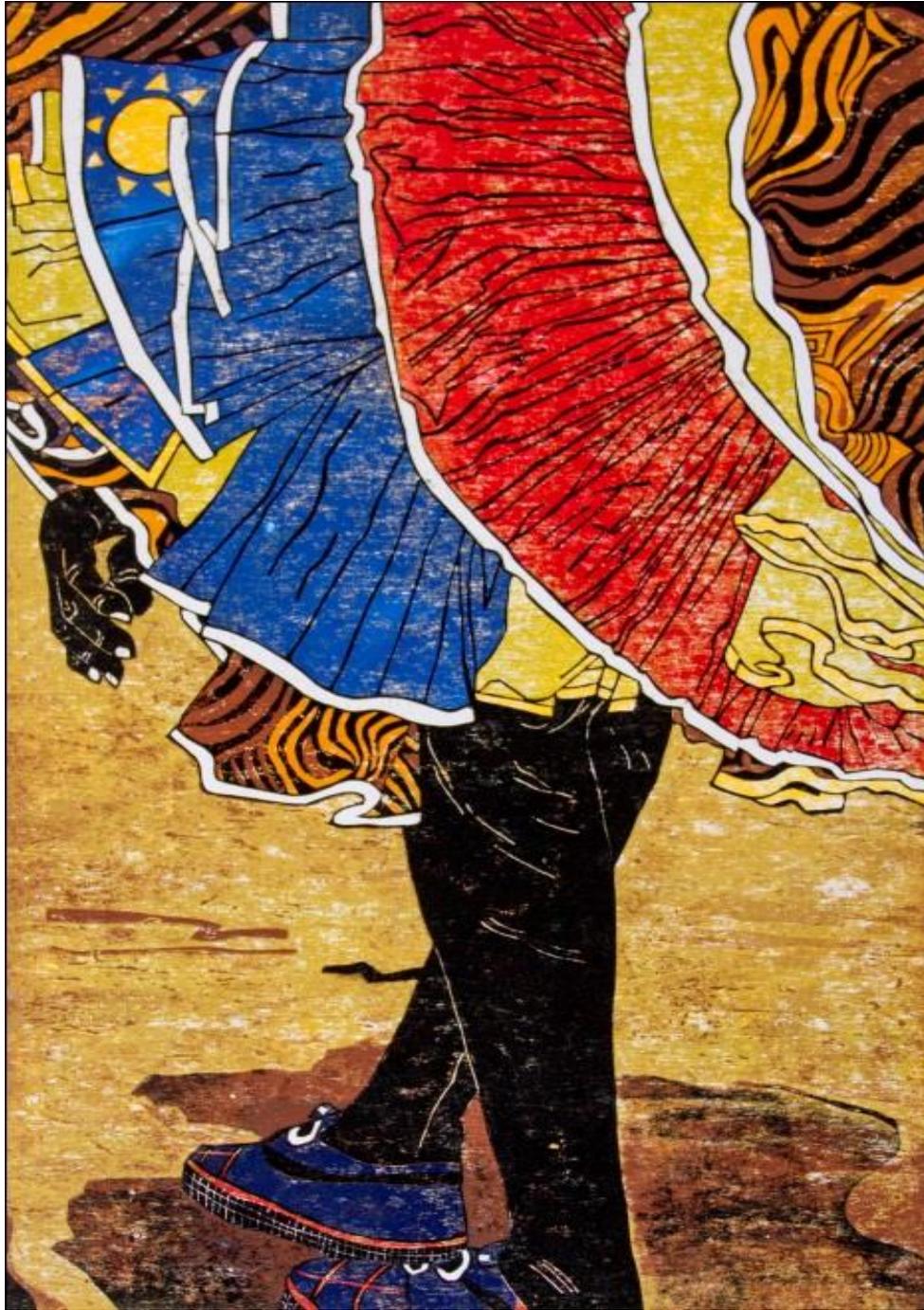


Figure 27 - *Namibian Dance*, Shikongeni 2011, courtesy of artist's own collection

In the print titled *Wealth Land Generation 2011* [fig. 28], Shikongeni is showing a little boy herding cattle. Herding the cattle is common practice among the nomadic tribes living in the North - west of Namibia. The Ovazemba and Ovahimba communities depend largely on cattle and are still living a pastoral life. It is therefore still common for a young boy such as the one in the print below to herd a large herd of cattle.

It is his cultural role as a boy to look after the cattle, goats and sheep. His growth as a man is demonstrated by how well he looks after the family's wealth that is the large and small stock. The modern style of living such as attending formal school is a secondary thing to his community, which is why the school should follow him whenever the community moves away in search for greener pasture for their livestock. The Namibian Government has therefore established a mobile school system for Ovahimba children as an effort to ensure access for them to education (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture & Samoff, 1993). I argue that in this case culture prevails above anything else. A cattle breeding has been a cultural practice for African people for many years and is generally an economic aspect in its own right.

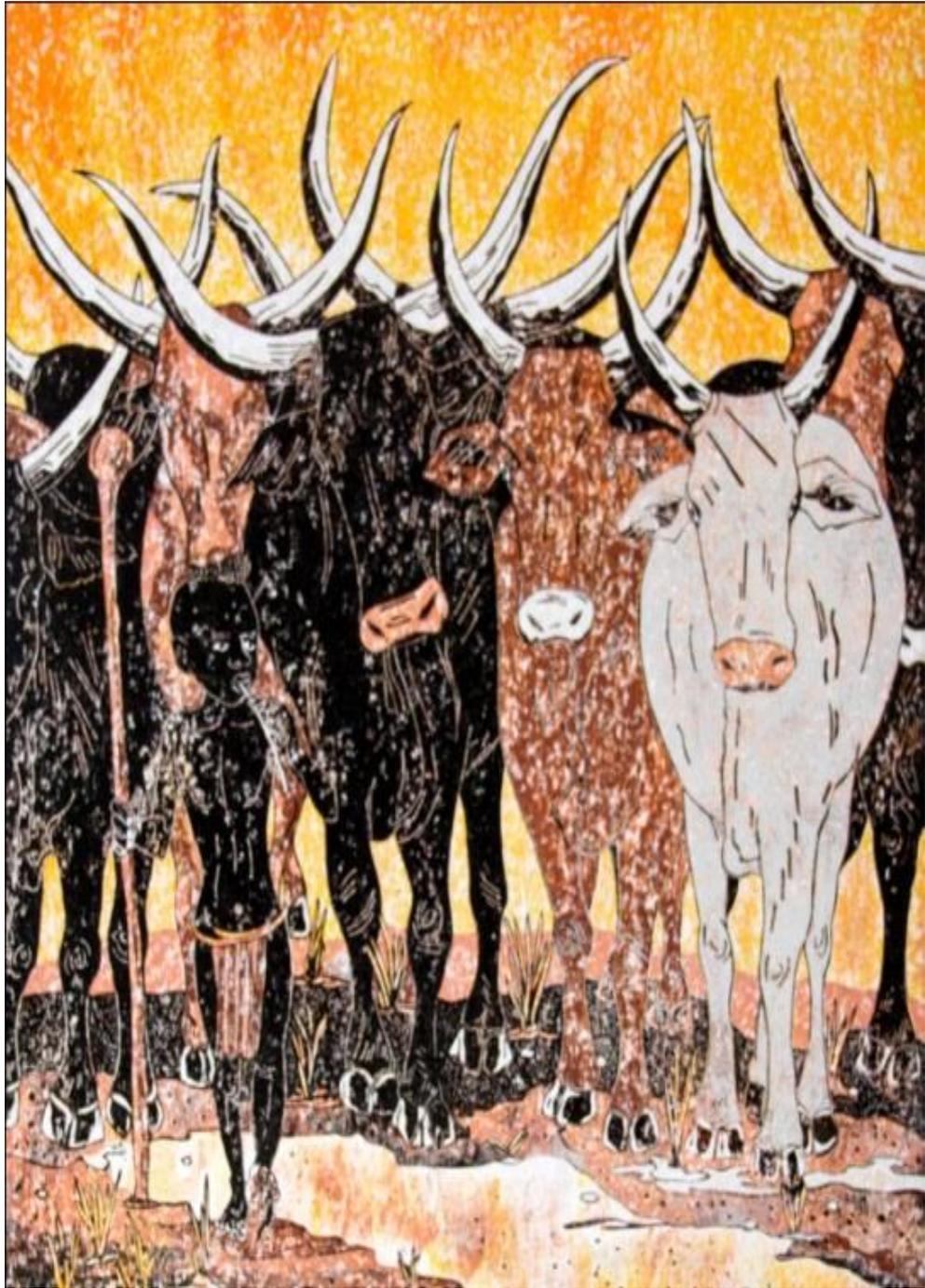


Figure 28 - *Wealth Land Generations*, Shikongeni 2011, courtesy of artist's own collection.

N. Marais states that Shikongeni's print that has portrayed a typical African rural life is when he depicted a village girl migrating to town, representing a transformation from rural life to western life. According to Marais, the way of making social comment by Shikongeni is shown in themes and scenes of Oshiwambo cultural/historical scenarios. These themes are portrayed in Shikongeni's representation style especially of women carrying baskets, stamping omahangu (personal communication, September 26, 2013).

Shikongeni's work can be identified with earth colours, using brown often, accompanied by blue which symbolises water. He however admitted that there has been a steady change in his colour scheme, as in the early stages of his career he would think about what colours to use. This was usually limited to a palette of lighter colours, namely; light brown, yellow, red and orange. But now colours come spontaneously and he uses more colour than before.

Cardboard printing was further promoted by Shikongeni who went on the campaign to promote and share his own country's artistic identity with many artists from Botswana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Russia, and Sweden. Craft has a role to play, when contemporary artists use patterns and colours influenced by traditional art/craft in the same way that Picasso was influenced by African masks when he developed cubism (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

Lilienthal (1996) writes about Shikongeni's artworks as being identified by a combination of narrative and decorative. His cuts are forceful making explicit

outlines. Shikongeni arranges his compositions consciously in order to create depth and space which gives his artworks a well-balanced and harmonious appearance.

As a person, Shikongeni can best be identified by his unique appearance as it can be seen from his picture below. His way of dressing always has a story to tell about him, especially emphasising his Pan-Africanism allegiance.



Figure 29 – *Portrait of Ndasuunye Papa Shikongeni*, 2013, courtesy of artist's own collection.

To Shikongeni identity is very important as it is only through establishing one's own identity and learning about the identities of other individuals and groups that one can know what makes one similar to some people and different from others. "I have mastered the technique of printing so much so that even cutting the cardboard has now become spontaneous, the skill is part of my artistic identity, it is in me" (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September, 22, 2013).

According to E. Huyssteen, (personal communication, September 27, 2013) Shikongeni is of a generation after Madisia and greatly influenced by Madisia to find inspiration in his cultural identity because he does not have any formal education in art. His works are full of energy and vibrant colour and in the beginning when he started to draw in the early 1990s his works were simple, figurative examples but then he developed significantly owing to his strong ancestral influence which can be seen in his work. He also became freer in spirit to express himself in his own vernacular, which is one of the indications that he has developed his own artistic identity different from Muafangejo and Madisia. Most of Shikongeni's artworks reflect an element of fantasy of his own dream world; different from that of Madisia who also reflects and find inspiration in his ancestral background or the connection that both have with ancestors.

4.3.4 Social commentary

Shikongeni has argued that focusing on issues of social or political importance in his art is not an issue as those themes are naturally within him. As Lilienthal (1996, p. 191) observed, "Religious and social issues, dreams and visions play a significant

role” in Shikongeni’s work. His art is after all a God-given talent, so, doing art is giving back to God. That way, some of the themes in his art are God-given, and by doing art for the creator of the universe, he is actually mediating between God and the people. He regards himself to be in the museum of God together with all the other people. He believes that he is in this metaphoric museum also to create. What he gives to God is for the people he lives with in this museum. He further claims that life inspires him strongly in his work for example the suffering of his people. The hunger and poverty which drive away young people from their cultural roots and turn them to violence and crime serve as the springboard for his creative expression (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013)..

His print titled *Africa Stop the War* 1993 [fig. 30], was inspired by Shikongeni’s own experience in the liberation struggle for Namibia’s independence between 1986 and 1989. As a member of PLAN, SWAPO’s armed wing. Shikongeni witnessed the ugly part of the war especially in the area that was considered the war zone on both sides of the Kunene River. He tried to make his plea more earnest by depicting the vicious reality of the war in the following manner:

The man who has lost part of his limbs is using a crutch to walk as he moves towards the grain storage. The rooster represents the logo of UNITA, which is a political party in Angola. Shikongeni refers to UNITA at a time when it was a rebel group in Angola fighting against the MPLA government and was fighting alongside the South West African Territorial Forces and South African Defence Forces against SWAPO. This war escalated during the latter part of 1970s and the whole of the 1980s. The

rooster sits on the top of a granary against the Namibian flag, which symbolises UNITA blocking the road towards Namibia's independence and therefore prolonging the war and the suffering of ordinary Namibians and Angolans.

Both the granary, which is not covered with a roof on top as it should be, and the basket at the bottom of the granary, is empty. Shikongeni explains that the empty granary and the basket symbolises hunger caused by the war. He claims that when there is war, people have no time to work in their fields. He further explains that financial resources will be wasted on weapons etc., while people have nothing to eat. In the top left corner of the print, he places a forty-barrel launching rockets directed across the village into the city. He explains that it is not always people in the rural areas that become war victims. Buildings and other infrastructures can be destroyed by the war ((P. Shikongeni, personal communication, November 12, 2014)

Lilienthal (1996) says of Shikongeni's print [fig. 30] that "the work summarises the elements of war and peace on the outskirts of a large city. The *omahangu* storage basket symbolises food which is synonymous with life. Houses and modern urban buildings refer to contemporary Africa. The menacing rockets in the sky are accompanied by serene, floating clouds which probably predict a peaceful tomorrow" (p. 191).

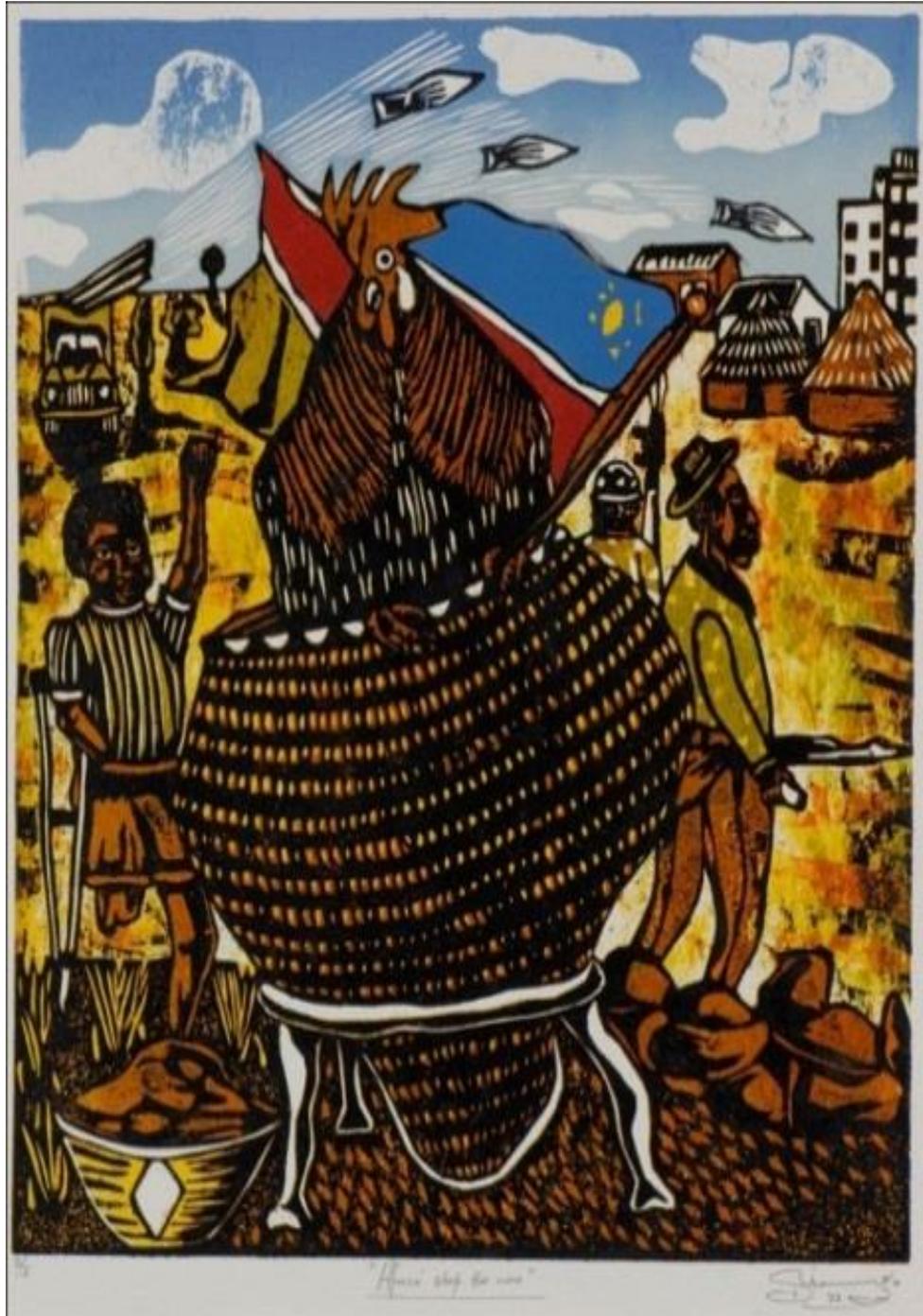


Figure 30 - *Africa stop the war*, Shikongeni 1993, courtesy of AAHT collection.

Shikongeni claims further that the fact that his art exhibitions have always been successful, with the majority of his artworks being sold, is testimony that his art relates to the society he lives in. He argues that even a viewer who might not buy a piece does identify him/herself with his art because usually at exhibitions, people approach him to discuss a particular art piece that interests them in some way.

4.3.5 Metaphor and Symbolic Expression

Although Shikongeni draws his themes from the people around him, from his everyday surroundings and flashbacks into past events, there are some themes that express dreamlike reflections. These include the drawing of *Dream of Art 1993*, [no picture] which depicts a modern African woman breastfeeding her child. To him, young children must be nourished for a better future, “because just as we need old people, we need the young people for tomorrow”. Shikongeni depicts a tree with visible roots and the mother breastfeeding her baby to denote the life cycle of a human being. Both the tree roots and the fish in the water also represent life. Shikongeni explains that once a fish is taken out of the water it will die. The eye in this artwork symbolises a third party’s eye, the eye people cannot see, which is a spiritual eye.

In his print titled *Shadow of life 2002*; [fig.31] Shikongeni once again takes the viewer through his spiritual world. The central figure in the picture represents a traditional healer who is helping the children that are overwhelmed by evil spirits. The healer is wearing a rosary around her neck probably to repel the evil spirits from the children while their mother is looking on from the right. Although the mother is

an important person to the children, she is partly cut out from the picture on the right because the traditional healer has now assumed the central role in this event.

The children are standing on both sides casting their eyes above while a fish-like dark bird flies away with the evil spirits. The spiralling objects that stick out from behind the left side of the healer represent the evil spirits that are linked to the bird. According to Shikongeni, (personal communication, September 22, 2013) the bird is taking away the evil spirits. The fan-like object on the right side represents the ancestral spirits that are consulted by the healer when performing the healing. On the left hand side a dark hand is holding a head that is crowned with a beautiful headdress. The creatures on the left are surrounded by a menacing sanguineous formation. All these are frightening creatures which is why the artist depicts the healer with popped out eyes. The healer's mouth is stitched up as though that will prevent him from being overpowered by the evil spirits.

This is expression of the metaphor of life, suggesting the artist's deep search into his soul. The work is colourful, lively and is able to evoke a mixture of reactions such as intrigue, fascination and complexity.



Figure 31 - *Shadow of life*, Shikongeni 2002, courtesy of AAHT collection.

Shikongeni invented a unique technique where he uses brand new zips of assorted colours which were bought especially to create the zip collage as in his artwork entitled *Calabash* 2011, [fig. 32]. The zips are then sewn together with a sewing machine and trimmed according to the desired image. The image is sewn on a large piece of cloth that is then stapled on to hard board. The mixed media with zip artworks are done to zip up the mouths of his critics, hence his first zip style is entitled *Silence* 2011. As he explains the series of the zip collages were also created to express a metaphoric message for those who believed that he could only work in cardboard. He explains that is general perception about card board print making to be of substandard material and therefore produces artwork of poor quality or value (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

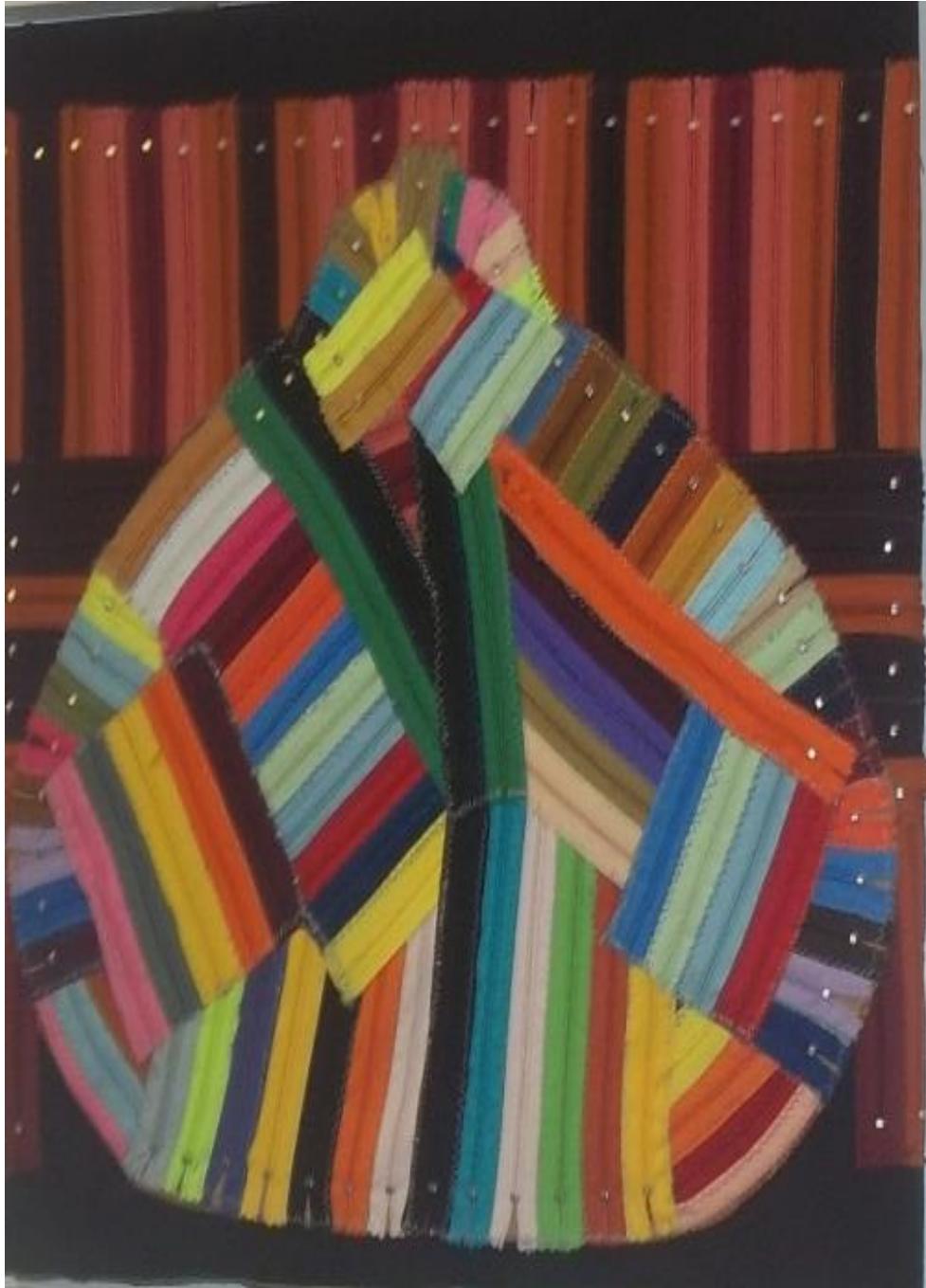


Figure 32 – *Calabash*, Shikongeni 2011, courtesy of the Directorate of Arts collection.

Also of significance in Shikongeni's art are fish, which in his early work represent his zodiac sign Pisces – he was born in February. Fish also relate to the Biblical story of Jesus feeding five thousand people with only five fish and five loaves of bread. Fish just appear to him without having to think about it, just like the moon or sun. To him a fish is life and a symbol of peace. He is connected to it for it being a symbol of Pisces (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).

As mentioned earlier Shikongeni was inspired by Madisia, his artwork entitled *Ohii omuthenu (Oshiwambo for fish is slippery)* 2011, [fig. 33], is quite reminiscent of Madisia's later artworks both in iconography and style. Shikongeni combined his usual colours of blue, black and orange. The elegantly drawn woman seems to be more concerned with her private parts than with the fish that has slipped out of her hands. The big fish is flying out of the woman's hands pulling with it the red drapery that may expose her. It is a picture about virginity and life which he likened with the fish for its slippery characteristic. The fish is about to dive into a pot full of water behind the woman and will not to be seen again.

Shikongeni explained that if a life or virginity is lost, it cannot be regained. The red-orange colour in many African cultures symbolises danger, hotness and even sadness. The colour red in this artwork symbolises a caution to women to be extra careful not to lose their lives or virginity. Shikongeni further explained the colour red could also represent energy as it is vibrant and visual. Without red in his painting he will feel incomplete as red is his lucky colour (P. Shikongeni, personal communication, September 22, 2013).



Figure 33 - *Ohii omuthenu*, Shikongeni 2011, courtesy of artist's own collection

In summary, Shikongeni's art reflects Namibian cultural themes more explicitly than it makes social commentary. His art is a reflection of his inspiration by the traditional culture of the rural life of almost all black cultural groups in Namibia. His art is more inspired by his belief in his ancestors than by the specific conditions in society.

Although printing mainly in colour, a technique which he learnt from Madisia, Shikongeni kept the legacy of Muafangejo by mainly working in print making technique. He claims that he has been proud to promote this through formal art training to his students and through regular workshops which he offers to school children and out of school youth throughout Namibia. Shikongeni claims that the cardboard printing technique can be linked to past African artists who used to carve wood. He considers cardboard carving as a reminiscent of woodcarving which connects him to the traditional African way of sculpting. Traditionally, African art was about carving as opposed to a brush and paint which is more Western.

Shikongeni concludes the interview by saying that art of the German settlers did not have much to do with the indigenous people but mostly served the tourists' interest. Therefore he has nothing to learn from the early painters.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines how three transitional and post independent indigenous Namibian visual artists address cultural identity and socio-political issues expressed through metaphor, symbols or iconography. In my opinion, the study proved that Muafangejo, Madisia and Shikongeni have produced art that embodies Namibian cultural and socio-political commentaries. The study further proved that except for Muafangejo, there are limited scholarly materials written about transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists.

Transitional and post-independent indigenous Namibian artists mostly used metaphor or symbolism to address difficult and sensitive socio-political topics in order for them to avoid direct confrontation with the agents of power. They use metaphor and symbolic expression as a diplomatic way of negotiating socio-political issues that are potentially controversial.

John Muafangejo's technique of print making and his determination to confront situations that disrespect the well-being and freedom of humanity have become a legacy to most of the post-independent indigenous Namibian visual artists. As transitional artists, both Muafangejo and Madisia are generally considered influential by the younger indigenous Namibian visual artists due their art that is associated with the Namibian cultures and social and political life. Their approach to art includes reflections on the diverse cultural aspects of various Namibian and African peoples. The literal depiction of Namibian rural culture, the reflection of informal settlement,

poverty, and suffering of old age, and many examples of social issues contribute to the building and the nurturing of Namibian identity. Madisia uses symbolic expression the most, while Shikongeni relied more on his ancestral inspiration which he expresses by way of pictorial images. Notably, urban life has also been featured prominently in of all three artists studied and generally in the art of post- independent indigenous Namibian visual artists.

This research found that the three artists discussed have approached the concepts of cultural identity and social commentary in different ways. These concepts are explained through the interpretation and analysis done on the selected artworks that created by the three main artists. For example, while Muafangejo uses his art to re-write the history of the indigenous Namibian people and to inform them so that they can regain their culture identity and their socio-political status, Madisia and Shikongeni use their art mostly to explore their personal identities. Madisia and Shikongeni avoid portraying explicit political themes, preferring a generalised approach to such topics. Also, both Madisia and Shikongeni have spent most of their artistic careers experimenting in several techniques most of which they have perfected, whereas Muafangejo concentrates largely on the technique of lino cut predominantly in black and white. The research found that Madisia and Shikongeni often switched from one style to the other as they also switched from one medium such as cardboard printing to mixed media and to sculpture. The three selected indigenous Namibian visual artists reflect themes, forms, texture, patterns that relate to their immediate environments, artistic and cultural identities. Madisia and

Shikongeni include colour in the art to depict realistic representations of specific themes.

The research also found that the indigenous Namibian visual artists showed how they try to break free from both the South African and Eurocentric way of making art, by using art materials imported into Namibia from other countries. In addition, the research found that with the exception of Muafangejo, who used lino cut printing, Madisia and Shikongeni adopted techniques using recycled materials and particularly cardboard printing which they have perfected and transmitted it to some other countries in Africa and Europe. Cardboard printing is used as an alternative for linoleum printing which is costly. The cardboard printing technique was introduced to Madisia by an expatriate artist, Demetrious Spirou, however it has grown deeply in the Namibian artistic tradition; and Namibian artists claim ownership of that technique. It has been accepted as Namibian.

Except for Muafangejo whose style and technique remained unchanged, Madisia, Shikongeni and the other indigenous Namibian visual artists studied, started to seek identity through their experimental work. Sometimes, Madisia and Shikongeni created artworks of realistic representation of nature. Madisia also created artworks that are highly subjective expressionist, abstract or non-figurative art. All three leading indigenous Namibian visual artists studied reflect a self-realisation and confidence inward looking as evidenced by much of their artworks that were examined. These artists display their pride in their cultural identity even using their own languages in the titles of some of their artworks, with Muafangejo including

written text in his mother tongue in some of his prints. Muafangejo, Madisia and Shikongeni's art is a clear representation of the shift from Eurocentric to Afro-centric concepts, shown by more techniques, media and styles that emerged. They represent their cultural backgrounds, traditional practices, social issues, immediate surroundings and Namibia as a whole and their art aspires to be socially useful. They are committed to exploring issues, such as what it means to be a Namibian in particular and an African in general.

Muafangejo has not only left his people and the world a unique and priceless expression of their history, culture and common humanity, but also work that has even wider implications when subjected to critical analysis. This research demonstrates how careful scrutiny of cultural production alongside social, historical and political documents can reveal the contexts of contemporary African art. Generally transitional and post-independent Namibian visual artists were found to have special interest in self-realisation of their freedom as human beings and do not have much interest in reproducing their natural environments. They focus their attention on correcting misconceptions about the past and setting things straight where possible.

Although the study has proven that Muafangejo, Madisia and Shikongeni have produced art that embodies Namibian cultural identity and that their art make socio-political commentaries, future research needs to focus on how the general public relates to contemporary Namibian visual arts. This will inform artists whether the public appreciates their art or not.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAHT	Arts Association Heritage Trust
COTA	College of the Arts
FNCC	Franco-Namibian Cultural Centre
JMAC	John Muafangejo Art Centre
MPLA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MYNSSC	Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture
NAEP	National Arts Extension Programme
NAGN	National Art Gallery of Namibia
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
STANSWA	Standard Bank of South West Africa
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation
TV	Tele Vision
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
VA-N	Visual Artists – Namibia

ANNEXURE B

Glossary

- Botsotso* - In Namibian *Botsotso* refers to a member of a gang or gangster
- Efundula/olufuko* - Traditional marriage
- Ekipa* - Ivory but also in general bone
- Ethimbo* - Time
- Kamashona (kamatyona)* - Little boy
- Namunganga* - A man/woman who performs ritual at the Aawambo traditional marriage or initiation
- Ndagaluka* - I am back
- Ohii omuthenu* - Fish is slippery
- Oilyavala* - Sorghum
- Omhatela* - Traditional headdress worn by Ovakwanyama women
- Omahangu* - Millet
- Omunahambo* - Cattle herder

ANNEXURE C

Research questions

Artists

Education and Training

- Where did you learn about art?

Source of Inspiration

- Who/what inspired you the most as an artist?
- Why did you choose to work in this field?
- Where do you get your ideas from?

Professional Development

- Have you ever participated in art exhibitions, if so how many times?
- Where have your work been exhibited?
- What were some of the comments made about your work that you can remember?
- What do you think have been the developmental stages in your art? In other words what have you started with and changed over time?

Type of Theme

- What are themes that your art portray most?
- What are the main things that you focus on?
- Who do you do art for and why do you do it?
- What are some of the colours that you are use often and why do you prefer them?
- Do you believe your art communicates/relates to society in any way? In which way?

- Why do you think people are interested in your art?
- How do you portray cultural/social issues in your art work?
- How do you define your art as Namibian art not just because you are a Namibian born artist?
- How is your art different from traditional Namibian art?
- What do you like about pre-colonial Namibian art?
- What do you like about post-independent Namibian art?
- What don't you like about both?
- Why do you use symbolic, metaphor in your art?
- What is the meaning of this specific piece of art?
- How exactly does this represent its supposed theme?

Art Managers

- What do curators look at when choosing art works for an exhibition
- How do artists know about the FNCC, NAGN, Goethe Centre, JMAG etc. as one of the venues where they can exhibit their art work?
- What are you looking at when you as an art gallery curator are presented with a body of art artworks by artist or when you go to an artist 'studio to select works for an upcoming exhibition?
- How is Namibian art different from that of other countries?
- What are the influences of globalisation, positive or negative on the Namibian art?
- What does Cultural or Identity mean?
- Why do artists use metaphor?

- What are your Recommendations to the artists?
- Specific Questions for arts managers/professionals
- In your opinion, how does each of the three artists portray his cultural identity in his work? You may have to refer to each one 'specific artworks please. (Muafangejo, Madisia and Shikongeni).
- How does each one of the three artists make social commentary with their art?
- What would you say are the positive and negative influences of globalization (external exposure) on the art of these three artists?
- General Questions
- In your opinion, what is artistic and cultural identity? You may refer to any specific black Namibian artists please.
- Bearing in mind the three main artists for the research, why do you think artists use metaphor, symbolism and iconography as a way of expressing themselves or conveying messages?
- How is post-independent Namibian art different from pre-independent Namibian art? Here reference should be to the early explorers and German artists who came to settle in the former SWA.
- How is contemporary black Namibian art different from that of other countries e.g. South African "Township" art?

