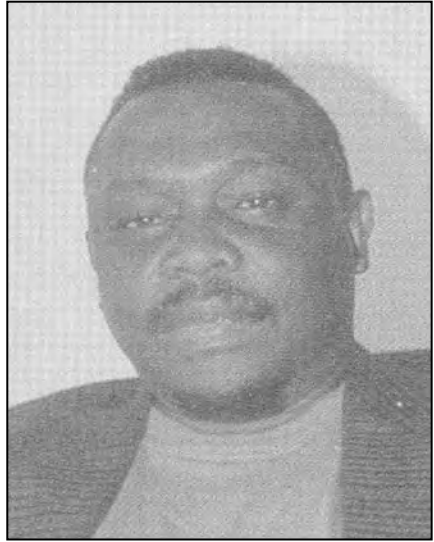


Phila Muziwenhlanhla Trevor Makhoba (1956–2003)

Trevor Makhoba, one of South Africa's foremost artists, passed away on 24 February 2003. He left his wife Gugu and three children, Sindi, Muzi and Nompe, living in the house in Umlazi left to him by his father.

He was born at Mkhumbane (Cato Manor) in 1956. His family were victims of the forced removals of that period and moved to Umlazi. He attended Nyanisweni and Manzolwandle schools and Menzi High School, leaving school at the age of seventeen. His father worked for the Dunlop tyre and rubber company and obtained employment for his son there. After a few years Makhoba was retrenched and found it difficult to get work in the depressed economic climate of the time. He began to paint and to try to sell pictures on the Durban beachfront.



Trevor Makhoba

A friend introduced Makhoba to the African Art Centre, then in Guildford Arcade in Durban and run by Jo Thorpe who had initiated the enterprise. Makhoba exhibited on the *Vulamehlo* Exhibition arranged by the Durban Art Gallery in 1990. The striking quality and originality of his work was immediately noticed by museums and collectors. In 1991 the African Art Centre organized an exhibition of Makhoba's work. The quality was remarkable and a number of South African museums, art galleries and private collectors promptly bought works.

In 1996 Makhoba was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artists' Award for Visual Art. After a period of unrelentingly hard work he produced an exhibition of startlingly high quality, extremely challenging in its social comment. The Durban art critic, Jeff Chandler, wrote of this exhibition, 'Makhoba ... has few peers who have his grasp of the language of painting ... He is the Goya of our streets and countryside. Makhoba has looked into the heart of our collective darkness with unwavering fascination ... The source of Makhoba's imagination, his restless curiosity, resides in the disjunctive fabric of life.'

Makhoba's mother, who was a teacher, had a great influence on his life and was the first to recognize and encourage his exceptional gift. As a child, guided by his mother, he used to make little drawings and moulded clay cattle after the manner of Zulu children. His early experience of the vibrant community at Mkhumbane remained an inspiration throughout his career as an artist. He was passionately interested in the life of people – especially the African people of KwaZulu-Natal. His works show the vitality, the hardship, and the drama of everyday life in that time of great social upheaval in South Africa. He worked with amazing energy, sometimes into the early hours of the morning. He instructed pupils, to whom he was very generous, and they were devoted to him. He was also gifted in music and had a small band that met regularly at his home.

Makhoba's friend, the artist Paul Sibisi, wrote of him in the catalogue for the Standard Bank Young Artists' exhibition: 'Makhoba is one of the country's most relevant commentators on social and political change ... in his community, his nation and the continent as a whole.'

Makhoba is an artist to be remembered in the annals of this country's greats. He is internationally recognized and collected, and his exceptional compassion and insight into the human lot make him an artist of international importance. Deeply concerned for the plight of Africa, he depicts in magnificent forms, patterns, colours and decorations its dilemmas and potential dignities as it meets and mixes with western influences. He was a man of peace who longed for unity, justice and righteousness in the land. He respected women and often represented the difficulties of their lot with great understanding.

Makhoba hated the moral regression of present society and many of his paintings are harsh indictments of that. An exceptionally gifted and intelligent man, coming from a mingled contemporary background of rural and peri-urban Zulu culture, he brings unique insight into his pictorial comments on the social disintegration of the postmodern world. Greatly interested in the dignity of traditional Zulu custom he is yet in the forefront of artists internationally who seriously express concern for the current global degeneration of human values.

VALERIE LEIGH