

EVERARD READ

MMAKGABO HELEN SEBIDI

(b. 1943 Marapyane, South Africa)

Mmakgabo Mmapula Helen Sebidi was born in 1943 in Marapyane, in what was then the Northern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga). As her mother was working in the city for much of her childhood, she grew up with her grandmother, who taught her the values that would guide and sustain her life. This includes the channelling of spirit back into the world through hard work, the commitment of the self to the community, but most of all through acts of creativity – whether this be cooking, making mud walls, creating murals, making pots and calabashes, weaving, beading, dress-making, drawing or painting.

For Sebidi, the artist starts from a root of pain and conflict, and works her way towards the redemption of both herself and those around her through the act of making. The creator becomes invisible during this process and is the channel through which the spirit world flows. The artwork can be seen as the trace of this redemptive journey. Sebidi's art also demonstrates an attempt to go back to a pre-Christian, pre-colonial Africa – to range of symbols, a value system and a way of making meaning of the world.

In her work, Mmakgabo Sebidi traverses mental and physical landscapes with an eye trained on the dangerous, the discomfiting, the traumatic and the ecstatic in human experience. She is deeply grounded in her rural upbringing and traditions but also finely attuned to the rhythms of the city in which she has spent much of her adult life. Sebidi brings together these two worlds in works of great visionary and prophetic power. Her themes are wide-ranging: her cultural roots, the wisdom of the ancestors, the ravages of the modern world on the human psyche, the loss of tradition, the potential of human creativity to build relationships and restore the past.

Sebidi trained in a number of informal art institutions in Johannesburg and for many years exhibited her work – mostly ceramics, landscapes and figurative scenes drawn from her home in Marapyane – at venues such as Artists Under the Sun in Johannesburg and Pietermaritzburg. But, while working at the Johannesburg Art Foundation under the tutelage of David Koloane and Bill Ainslie, Sebidi made her first semi-abstract work, a frenzied, visionary work produced in a marathon of painting that terrified the artist and prompted Ainslie to describe it as her 'miracle'. This marked a dramatic shift for Sebidi, away from her figurative works and landscapes and into a new idiom that is part figuration and part abstraction but that always seeks to escape the boundaries of both.

Sebidi's works pulsate with energy. They are dense and exuberant, both formally and thematically. Layers and layers of rich impasto are applied in painstaking detail, often on top of drip paintings. Strange figures, some fantastical and mythological, and some drawn from her own richly storied history, jostle for space on the crowded canvases. At times they evoke a sense of celebration and at other times of terror and loss.

Sebidi has participated in many group and solo shows. She won the Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award in 1989, the year after she won a Fulbright Scholarship. She was awarded the Vita Art Award in 1990, and the Silver Award of the Order of Ikhamanga in 2004. Her work is in many private and public collections in South Africa and abroad, including Iziko South African National Gallery; the Johannesburg Art Gallery, and the Smithsonian Institute.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

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- 2018 Batlhaping Ba Re!, Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa
Tears of Africa, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2017 They Are Greeting, Standard Bank Gallery, Albany Museum, Makhanda, South Africa
- 2016 Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi: An exhibition of paintings and prints, Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town, South Africa
They Are Greeting, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2005 Solo, Oman
- 2003 The Artificial Shelter Foundation, Tilburg, Netherlands
- 1990 Helen Sebidi, Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
Irma Stern Museum, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa
Association of Arts, Namibia
- 1989 Standard Bank Young Artist Award Winner exhibition, toured South Africa, Namibia & Zimbabwe until 1992
Solo, London, UK
Solo, Hamburg, Germany
Solo, Museo Contemporaneo, Santiago, Chile
- 1985 Federated Union of Black Artists, Johannesburg, South Africa

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2023 When we see us: A century of Black figuration in painting, Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
When Rain Clouds Gather: Black South African Women Artists 1940-2000, Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa
Mapping Another Route, Goodman, London, UK
Rembrandt in the Karoo, Jan Rupert Art Centre, Graaff-Reinet, South Africa
- 2022 Ancestors & Dreams in African Art, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa & Jacaranda, New York, USA
Her..., Sanlam Art Gallery, Bellville, South Africa
Yakhal' Inkomo, the Bongzi Dhlomo Collection, Javett-UP, Pretoria, South Africa
- 2021 My whole body changed into something else, Stevenson, Cape Town & Johannesburg, South Africa
Oasis: 25th anniversary exhibition, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Bag Factory 30 Years: So Far, The Future, FADA Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2020 Staring Straight to the Future, online exhibition, Everard Read, UK & South Africa
The Portrait Show, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
We've Come to Take You Home #1, Michaelis Galleries, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2019 Mellon Foundation Residency exhibition, Javett-UP, Pretoria, South Africa
- 2018 Crossing the Night, Idris Naim Foundation and the National Institute of Fine Arts, Oaxaca, Mexico
Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
32nd Biennial of São Paulo
The People's Art, collaboration between Iziko South African National Gallery and Orms, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2017 FNB Art Joburg, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
A Painting Today, Stevenson, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2016 The Quiet Violence of Dreams, group exhibition, Stevenson, Cape Town & Johannesburg, South Africa
Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- 2013 Centenary Exhibition, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2009 Great South African Nude, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2008 Joburg Art Fair, with Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2006 Mapping the Route from the 60s, Goodman, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2005 Telkom exhibition, South Africa

EVERARD READ

- 2004 Artists in Conversation, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, South Africa
Visible Visions, Hagen, Essen, Berlin, Osnabrück (Germany); Tilburg (Netherlands)
Resistance, Reconciliation and Reconstruction, MTN Collection, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, South Africa
- 2002 Visible Visions, Electric Workshop, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2001 The Markers, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
Land, group exhibition, Unisa Gallery, Pretoria, South Africa
- 2000 Axis Gallery, New York, USA
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Krannert Art Museum & Kinkead Pavilion, USA
- 1999 Human Rights Institute Exhibition, National Art Gallery, Durban, South Africa
Changing Screens Exhibition, The Firs, Rosebank, South Africa
Judging of competition at Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1998 Lisbon Expo, Lisbon, South Africa
World Wide Workshop & Exhibition, Sydney, Australia
- 1996 Thupelo Art workshop and exhibition, Cape Town, South Africa
Biennale in Museum Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa
Finders Keepers, Sunday Times, Iziko SA National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
The Laager included in a group exhibition, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Santiago, Chile
Centre of the Arts, Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco, USA
South Africa's Finest Painters, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
Common and Uncommon Ground, South African Art to Atlanta, City Gallery East, Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Origin, Hamburg, Germany
- 1995 Objects of Defiance, Spaces of Contemplation, Africus: Johannesburg Biennale, Museum Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa
Women's Day exhibition, Paarl Museum, Paarl, South Africa
Siyawela: Love, Loss & Liberation in Art from South Africa, Birmingham Gas Street Museum, Birmingham, UK
Africa95, Royal Academy, London, UK
- 1994 Six Women from Southern Africa, Lisbon, Portugal
Civic Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1993 Il Croce del Sud, Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
Graphics Exhibition, Jyväskylä, Finland; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Il Croce Del Sud, Rome, Italy
African Hei-ti-@e, Uranienborgveien, Oslo, Norway
Women From Africa, Savannah Gallery of Modern Art, Bethnal Green, London, UK
Three person show with Noria Mabasa & Lucky Sibiyi, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1992 Future Realms, The Africa Futuristic Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
Art from South Africa, South Africa National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
- 1991 A Grain of Wheat, Art Gallery of the Commonwealth Institute, London, UK
The Challenge of Colonisation, 4th Havana Biennial, Havana, Cuba
- 1990 Art from South Africa, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, UK
National Art Museum, Maputo, Mozambique
Zabalaza Festival, South African Festival, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK
- 1989 Ten Years of Collecting, Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa
Pachipamwe II: the avant garde in Africa, Cyrene Mission, Zimbabwe
Johannesburg Biennale, Museum Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa
Finders Keepers, South African National Gallery, Cape Town; Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, South Africa
South Africa's Finest Painters, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
Art Images in Southern Africa, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden
Common and Uncommon Ground, City Gallery East, Atlanta, USA
- 1988 The Neglected Tradition, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
SA Potters Association
Cape Town Triennial, toured South Africa

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- 1987 Vita Art Now, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
Delfiri/FUBA Creative Quest Exhibition, FUBA
FUBA (Seven Woman Artists)
Thupelo Workshop exhibition, Johannesburg Art Foundation, Johannesburg & NSA Gallery, Durban, South Africa
Economic Contemporary Artists Fund exhibition, USA
- 1986 Art for Alexandra, Johannesburg Art Foundation (Sotheby's South Africa Limited), Johannesburg, South Africa
Thupelo Workshop Exhibition, Johannesburg Art Foundation, Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa
Rembrandt Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1985 South African Potter's Association, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1980-8 Brush and Chisel Club, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1980-1 Washington, USA (organised by a private collector)
- 1977-88 Artists under the Sun, Johannesburg, South Africa

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Africana Museum, South Africa
Art Workshop, UK
Sasol, South Africa
Unisa, South Africa
North-West University, South Africa
University of Cape Town, South Africa
Tatham Art Gallery, South Africa
Johannesburg Art Gallery, South Africa
Centre for Africa Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Iziko South African National Gallery, South Africa
1820 Settlers Foundation, South Africa
Standard Bank Collection, South Africa
Pretoria Art Museum, South Africa
The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, USA
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Price Forbes, South Africa
Federated Insurance Co., South Africa
Department of Education and Training, South Africa
Galerie Adriana Schmidt, Germany
University of Wolverhampton, UK
H. Roque Investments, South Africa
ABSA Bank, South Africa
World Bank, South Africa
South African Broadcasting Corporation, South Africa
Gencor, South Africa
First National Bank, South Africa
SA Permanent Bank, South Africa
Government of Australia
Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, USA
Aboriginal Art Museum, Australia
Art Bank, South Africa
Spier Art Collection, South Africa
Bongi Dhlomo Collection, South Africa

AWARDS

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- 2016 Goethe-Institut Vila Sul residency, Brazil
- 2015 Mbokodo Award, South Africa
- 2011 Arts and Culture Trust Lifetime Achievement Award for Visual Art, South Africa
- 2005 Nomination for ILKSSA: National Heritage Council, National Living Treasure Award, South Africa
Oman Association of the Arts Award, Oman
- 2004 Order of Ikhamanga Silver Award given by the Presidency, South Africa
- 2002 Nomination for the Human Sciences Research Council Living Treasure Award, South Africa
- 1990 Vita Fine Art Award, South Africa
- 1989 Fulbright Scholarship, USA
Standard Bank Young Artist Award, South Africa
- 1988 Star Woman of the Year finalist, South Africa