

Michael Zondi
South African Sculptor

by

Kirsten Nieser

This is a draft of my thesis – presented to the artist on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition of sculptures by Michael Zondi in the Tatham Art Gallery, Pietermaritzburg, curated in partial fulfilment of the academic requirements for the degree Master of Art in Fine Art in the School of Language Culture and Communication at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Pietermaritzburg 2004

MICHAEL ZONDI

2003

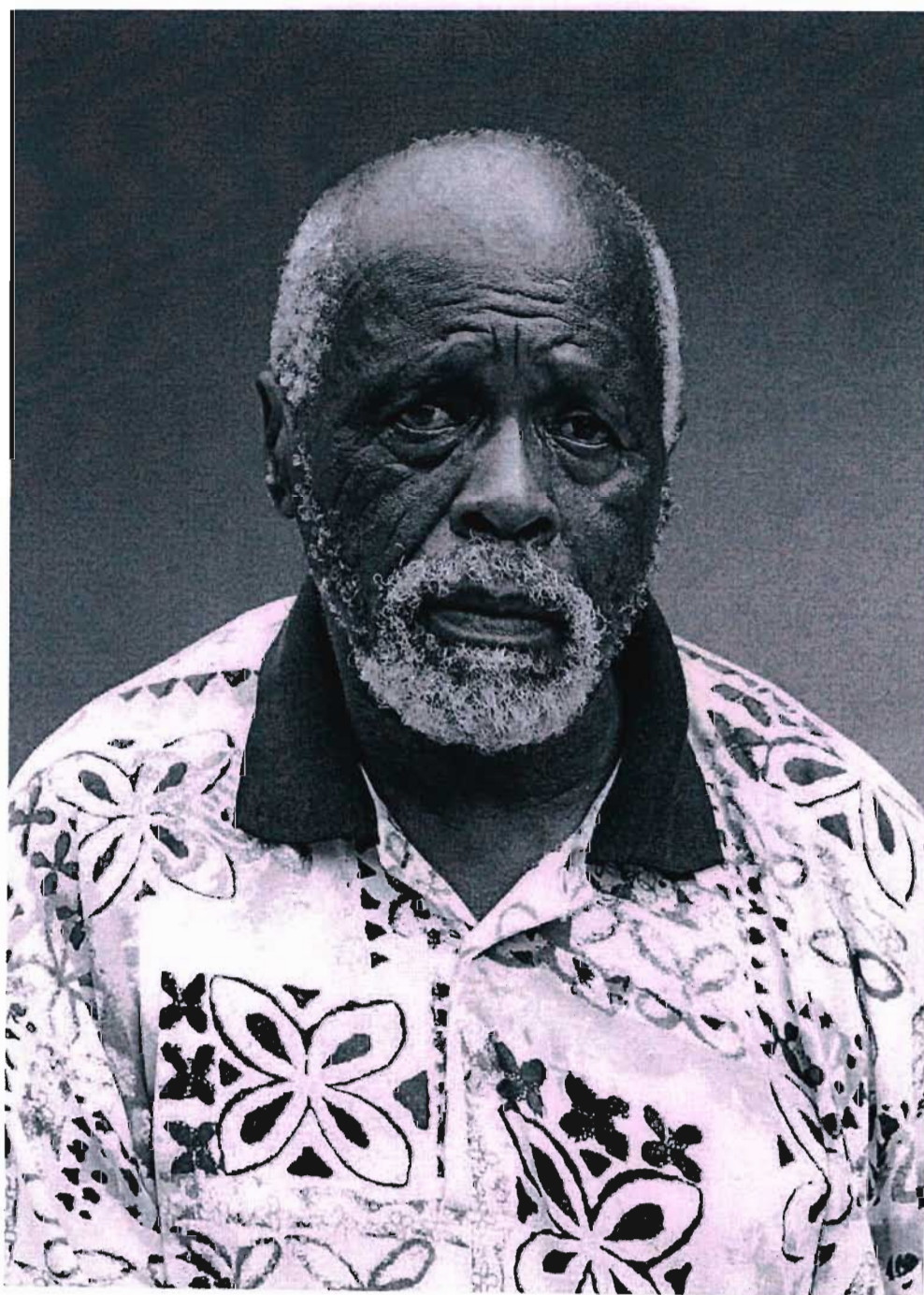


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ABSTRACT

The art historical foregrounding of pioneer and contemporary art of black South Africans during the last two decades of the 20th century has emphasised two-dimensional media. Given the dearth of biographies on black artists in general, it is the purpose of this dissertation to reposition the three-dimensional oeuvre of a pioneer sculptor in the context of the artistic creativity occurring within the educational and economic constraints of a segregated South Africa.

While Michael Zondi's school education and vocational training was forged predominantly within a western mission context, the emergence of his talent remained largely independent of any art training initiatives or art-making institutions. This research study places a strong emphasis on Zondi's interface with a white élitist patronage base. As a member of an educated *kholwa* élite, Zondi's acculturation and intellectual exchange with his patrons regarding mores, belief systems and world views, centred on reciprocity, as the artist sought to redefine himself in terms of western paradigms initially imposed by colonialism. The exchange found consistent expression in Zondi's stance of reconciliation, which reflected the cross-cultural friendships under the aegis of a shared Christianity which the artist forged into a syncretism with his own received belief systems. Zondi's espousal of western cultural paradigms which facilitated the interface resulted in the public foregrounding of the work of this black artist, at a time in South African history when this was exceptional.

From the 1960s the Lutheran mission enterprise in Natal provided a platform for liberation theology, challenging the suppression of indigenous belief systems as well as state autocracy and the reality of a segregated society. Given Zondi's acute political awareness, he was prompted to take up that challenge, albeit covertly, with visual texts addressing moral issues and voicing humanitarian concerns. With figurative genre sculptures frequently alluding to the artist's rootedness in his received Zulu traditions, the thematic content of some of Zondi's work shows an indigenisation of the Christian gospel as he drew on Biblically inspired imagery, making his art function as a vehicle for the articulation of his dissent.

This study traces Zondi's stylistic development from representational naturalism of his early work to an espousal of a modernist visual language embracing some experimentation with his preferred medium, South African hardwoods. Within his essentially figurative representational style, and in part as a result of the intervention of his supporters, Zondi made use of expressive surface textures and distortion. His pronounced use of faceting in the later 1960s was consolidated after a short sojourn in Paris in the mid-1970s, when, for a short time, he created more conceptual human forms in a cubist manner. This represented his most marked departure from his recognizable figurative style of representational carving.

While some of Zondi's pieces in private and public collections were included in group exhibitions during the 1980s and 1990s¹, research has not yet revealed pieces post-dating 1987. It is probable that ill-health forced Zondi to consider his retirement from sculpting by the early 1990s.

¹ *The Neglected Tradition*, 1988; *Images of Wood*, 1989; *Land and Lives*, 1997

DECLARATION

This dissertation is based on my original research unless otherwise stated and acknowledged, and has not been submitted in any form to any other institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kirsten Nieser". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Kirsten Nieser

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The shared expertise, encouragement and enthusiasm of others are the ingredients which augment one's own efforts during the journey called research, and which make it such FUN

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who shared his philosophies with me, and his memories of a lifetime

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my local friends and those on other continents
- who have endured the passionate voicing or mailing of my one-track focus and interest
for over a year

I dedicate this dissertation to my late husband

Jörn-Uwe Nieser

– The arts have always required mentors –

I have lived and worked here in South Africa,
knowing that Bärchen was behind me, looking over my shoulder



Michael Zondi
South African Sculptor

by
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Supervisor: Dr. Juliette Leeb-du Toit

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This dissertation consists of three sections, each with individual numbering:

- 1. The Dissertation with a bibliography and four appendices**
- 2. A Research Methodology paper with a bibliography**
- 3. A Literature Review with a bibliography**

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INTRODUCTION

A relative neglect of focus in the literature on South African sculpture by black artists up to the 1980s has been concomitant with two-dimensional work finding disproportionate attention (Rankin, 1987:148). From the 1980s three-dimensional expression in art-making enjoyed greater attention, but South African art history is largely incomplete, with only two comprehensive publications devoted entirely to sculpture,¹ and no separate biographical work on a black sculptor. This research study serves to reposition Michael Zondi's oeuvre within the context of the current discourse of 20th century South African art.

South Africans of Michael Zondi's generation were among the first who had to straddle the cultural cleft between the new market economy of urban life and a rural lifestyle of tightly knit hierarchical inter-dependencies. The European colonial enterprise in Africa had determined cultural location, largely precluding communication between the African and the European intellectual and artistic experiences. The notion of rupture cemented not only the fallacy of fixedness of cultural phenomena in Africa, but also its lack of capacity for assimilation, integration and change. Foregrounding the artistic oeuvre of a black South African sculptor, this dissertation lays a particular emphasis on the intense and personal interface between Michael Zondi and his white patrons within an urban context of western paradigms while foregrounding the artist's rootedness within his own African culture. His deep level of engagement with his patrons represented a partial solution to the dilemma of being an artist and an African in the context of cross-cultural confines during South Africa's apartheid era.

Zondi's choice of woodworking as a vocation developed into an artistic career free from any of the few formal art-teaching institutions to which black South Africans had access within the system of Bantu Education. As socio-economic conditions largely precluded a black audience, the humanitarian themes of Zondi's artistic endeavours were directed towards the understanding and the predilections of an élitist white audience. The artist's human rights remained abused in terms of the political integrity of the system in which the interface occurred, and on whose periphery he was otherwise forced to exist. It will

¹ *Images of Wood* (Rankin,1989) and *Images of Metal* (Rankin,1994)

be shown how Zondi's thematic discourse reveals his cultural and political awareness, while also reflecting his strong Christian faith.

With patronage as the basis of most free-lance artistic endeavours, this research serves to reveal how Zondi made conscious choices for gaining his independence and retaining his artistic integrity within the relative confines of dependency on his audience, and how the incorporation of his ethos in his artistic expression became a vehicle for the re-definition of his own identity.

My initial contextualisation of Zondi's oeuvre in Chapter One serves to position this sculptor within the creativity of his generation and the younger artists who were active during the height of his career. Placing some emphasis on the artist's Christian faith, my discourse reveals how the mission context affected his education as well as the manner in which Zondi appropriated religious imagery as a vehicle of expression. In revealing Zondi's rootedness within his Zulu ethnic tradition, a brief exploration of African selfhood creates the link to a black literary élite's aspirational voice for liberation. In tracing educational and vocational opportunities for black South Africans, I make reference to art-making institutions, the concept of individualism and cross-cultural, reciprocal influences. In view of public exposure of art, I give a brief outline concerning evaluation and museum traditions.

Zondi's career as a sculptor emerged from his vocation in carpentry. In Chapter Two I trace the stylistic and thematic development of the artist's work over a period of almost two decades, up to the time he became a free-lance artist in 1972. With experience in low relief carving which the artist incorporated in large kists during the 1940s and 1950s, he moved into naturalistic figurative sculpture, choosing figures from his rural home in Natal. Linked to his upbringing in a Christian context, Zondi uses biblically inspired works to articulate ideas related to morality, as well as covert political dissent which is explored briefly within the context of liberation theology from the late 1960s.

The smooth finish of Zondi's realist style up to the late 1950s is seen to give way to differentiated facet surface structure as well as exaggeration of individual human forms, encouraged as he was by mentors and patrons familiar with western modernist preferences.

Frequently indigenising his figures, he creates increasingly animated, and at the same time more conceptual works.

Chapter Three traces Zondi's development as a free-lance artist, incorporating the influence of his intellectual exchange with his patrons, patronage in general as well as exhibition opportunities as the springboard for an extensive body of work finding its way to overseas markets. In view of the apartheid politics affecting black South Africans, some focus is placed on Zondi's perceptions of reconciliation as well as his representing South Africa at an exhibition in Paris in 1977. After his short sojourn in Paris, Zondi's brief foray into experimentation with pronounced cubist faceting in the human form was followed in the early 1980s, by his reverting to stylistic modes seen in the work of the later 1960s.

From the 1980s and into the 1990s, the inclusion of a few Zondi sculptures from private and public collections in exhibitions with publications foregrounding the work of black South Africans² belies Zondi's prolific career spanning the decades of legislated segregation in South Africa's more recent political history.

Zondi's awareness of human rights violations found expression within a reconciliatory mode of articulation in his work. While he remained consciously outside political activism, the statements he made pertaining to humanitarian concerns were unequivocal. The seeking of *rapprochement* between himself and his white patrons, and thinking of himself as a bridging agent between black and white South Africans, no doubt, in part, account for the artist's motivation in seeking more than a mere commercial relationship with his patrons.

Stylistically the experimentation of Michael Zondi's work with the human form will be shown to have remained within a pronounced representational mode. His endeavour of interpreting creation by speaking "to mankind" (Zondi, 1960b:2) across all barriers of prejudice, as experienced in South Africa during his active career, has resulted in a body of work, whose humanitarian statements retain their validity beyond the political backdrop which informed the artist.

² Zondi's work was included in Sack's *Neglected Tradition* of 1988 (Sack, 1988:91), Rankin's *Images of Wood* in 1989 (Rankin, 1989:49;71-72;180-181), and Miles' *Land and Lives* of 1997 (Miles, 1997:111-115)

CHAPTER ONE: MICHAEL ZONDI IN CONTEXT

Introduction

Zondi belongs to a generation of ‘pioneer’ artists who mostly came from a rural background but had formal schooling in a mission context. While I touch on the circumstances of western-influenced art-making and patronage in South Africa amongst black artists before Zondi, a mention of the white domination of the art market and patronage serves to elucidate the domination of a colonial vision of ‘other’. Zondi was strongly committed to a Zulu heritage, which he covertly expressed in his work. Using the ethnic specificity in the art of Gerard Bhengu¹, with dichotomous interpretations and appropriation of his ‘tribal’ imagery², serves equally to focus on ‘reading’ of apparently genre imagery on the part of a white audience as it does to create a link to an African nationalist intelligentsia plotting their course towards liberation from the discriminatory politics of white hegemony.

My discourse regarding Zulu converts to Christianity, seeking to redefine themselves as they found individual mobility within a western economy distant from received traditions, serves to contextualise Zondi within an *amakholwa* elite of the 20th century. I touch on Lutheranism in Natal providing a platform for *kholwa* liberation theology as western educational skills were synchronised in a process of acculturation and the voicing of aspirational politics, linking Zondi’s affiliation to his African heritage with *Négritude* philosophy.

Elucidating Zondi’s educational opportunities within the mission context and his teaching under Bantu education involves a brief exploration of concerns related to African aesthetics in terms of the ‘synthesis’ between two cultural influences. Further, I describe briefly informal and formal art-making institutions providing tuition for black artists while Zondi remained on their periphery. Providing a background of museum and curatorial traditions in South Africa serves to contextualise Zondi’s public exposure during the 1960s, while at the same time touching on evaluation criteria for art, in view of a western stance.

¹ Gerard Bhengu is related to Zondi through Zondi’s paternal lineage (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

² Bhengu’s depiction of distinctive ‘tribal’ ‘other’ in the eyes of white patrons substantiated the notion of a cohesive ethnic identity appropriated to maintain the notion of difference to justify segregation, while a black intelligentsia made subversive associations linked to national aspirations (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:18).

1.1. Positioning within the matrix of contemporary South African art

The term 'pioneers' is often used by South African art historians in reference to black artists born before the end of the 1920s (Sack, 1988 and Miles, 1997). This includes Michael Zondi. The collective term 'pioneer', when attributed to the work of African artists in general, implies the creativity which was engendered through the assimilation of new foreign materials, forms and motifs in art-making, while on the whole, extant value systems, received traditions and knowledge were able to retain their place in the expressive, creative process.

Mostly with their cultural roots in rural areas, the South African pioneers had some measure of formal education – and sometimes informal art training – frequently within a mission context. As art education was denied at secondary level in black government schools, some artists emerged from teaching institutions linked to mission stations.³ The resultant greater independence in view of individual choices within environments of increasing urbanisation set them apart from a generation of artists before them, who were mostly without any formal schooling and art training and whose work had developed more closely in accordance with a predominantly white patronage base and market demands. Many South African pioneers began art-making outside their own communities for a white urban audience⁴. From 1913 government legislation had forced many black South Africans from crowded reserves into urban environments. After a rural upbringing, the introduction of literacy and a western religious system within the mission context was frequently the basis for the pioneers' artistic work unfolding in arenas of urban social marginalisation, from whose political destiny they were disenfranchised. Social commentary therefore, if not always intentional on the part of the artist, is a covert expectation of artistic expression of black art in South Africa. A frequent 'blind veneration' is thought to have led to a lack of discernment on the part of white patrons, as in the case of some 'township' art from the 1970s, and the concomitant omission of a critical investigation of artworks themselves (Arnold, 1999:37-39; Verster, 1994:1; Botha, 2000:7 and Schönfeldt, 1992:13-14).

White artists during the first half of the twentieth century clung to Eurocentric traditions.

³ e.g. Gerard Sekoto, Ernest Mancoba and Job Kekana from *Grace Dieu* near Pieterburg in the Northern Transvaal.
⁴ In this they differed from their West African colleagues who worked mainly for an upwardly mobile *petit-bourgeoisie* from within their own communities. The artists themselves were frequently in the first generation who had known no environment other than the 'de-ethnicised' urban surrounds.

Prestige was attached to art training abroad in Europe and Britain and artists brought back with them modernist stylistic influences. Their domination of the South African art market from the early 20th century therefore reflected preferences and modernist artistic paradigms established in the colonial ‘centre’, while many white artists expressed their sense of being a part of Africa merely by depicting an ‘exotic other’, rather than exploring, investigating and attempting to understand extant African art.

Concurring with demands made by white benefactors and patrons, early black artists like Gerard Bhengu, Arthur Buthelezi or George Pemba to some measure fell in with a ‘colonial vision’. In portraiture, as well as scenes depicting a harmonious ‘tribal’ myth implicitly threatened by industrialisation, (Proud, 1996:17)⁵ they depicted indigenous Africans as ‘other’ for a white audience (Nettleton, 1998:86)⁶. Bhengu belonged to the generation denied formal art tuition by the benefactors who attempted to keep his natural artistic talent ‘unspoilt’ (Zaverdinos, 1995:9). In response to his audience’s ethnographic predilections⁷ his depictions of illusionary ‘tribal’ bucolic bliss fostered the perception of a controversial coherence in Zulu ethnic identity, linked to political, economic and cultural expediency of a white political power base (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:16,17)⁸. Mbembe refers to *custom* as an institutional ‘native’ order he calls the “thesis of non-similarity”. He sees difference being inscribed within custom, and when acknowledged as a ‘natural inequality’, it becomes the legitimising factor for discrimination and segregation with colonial structures of hierarchical inegalitarianism (Mbembe, 2002:247)⁹. Paradoxically, while rejecting ‘tribalism’, a black educated *petit-bourgeoisie*, voicing the aspirations of a marginalized black majority, appropriated the ‘tribal’ dimension of ethnicity depicted in the narrative and ‘emblematic’ art of Bhengu, resulting in its acquiring subversive associations linked to national aspirations (Leeb-du Toit,1997:18).

⁵ During the 1950s, while contributing sketches for politically motivated writings, Pemba “never consciously involved in making protest art” (Feinberg, 1996:26,28). “Pemba had to move, physically and psychologically, into and through colonised worlds, into and out of romances with the “European Other”, all the while testing out his reconstructions of an ‘earlier’ pre-colonial Xhosa ‘self’” (Nolte, 1996:37).

⁶ They were representing themselves as ‘others’ –“for the gaze of the colonial audience to whose hegemony they were subjected and on whose patronage they were dependent” (Nettleton, 1998:86).

This sense of looking at oneself through the eyes of others, Scheurich discusses in view of Afro-Americans, citing the notion of “double-consciousness”, where attitudes and actions are linked to racial difference (Scheurich, 1997:121).

⁷ Dr. Max Köhler and Killie Campbell encouraged Bhengu

⁸ The artificial and ‘controllable’ colonial construct of a rural order established under the Native Administration Bill of 1927, where tribal chiefs were acknowledged as leaders (Nuttall, 1991:45), belied the fact that the cultural identity of the so-called ‘Zulu’ majority was not cohesive (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:16,17).

⁹ Mbembe cites the creation of specific forms of knowledge like racial and tribal studies – which served to ‘canonise difference’ in an attempt to eliminate the perceived ambivalence of custom. In being made into something specific, *custom* served to designate the lack of correspondence with the western ‘civilised’ world (Mbembe, 2002:247-248).

H.I.E. Dhlomo's¹⁰ encouragement of Bhengu's work may be seen as an example of a 'narrative of liberation' created around a 'dual temporality' between tradition and nationalism – the 'glorious past' and a 'redeemed future' (Mbembe, 2002: 249-250)¹¹. The appropriation of Gerard Bhengu's painting for diverse political agendas raises an awareness of the covert signage related to ethnic specificity in Zondi's work, with the concomitant speculation about the intention on the part of the artist, given that he reached his artistic zenith during the height of Black Consciousness during the 1970s.

1.2. The *amaKholwa*¹²- Zulu Conversion to Christianity

The foundation for political leadership in the African nationalist ideologies of the 20th century was laid in the mission stations of Natal in the 19th century¹³.

The incorporation of the discourse around *amakholwa* – the Christian converts among the Zulu – serves to place Zondi's more recent ancestry into the perspective of an espousal of western social norms and practices within a religious system formerly unknown in the indigenous culture of the region. With a consistently strong rootedness in a rural community, while at the same time being a devout practising Christian, Zondi's interface with Lutheranism requires some understanding of the manner in which Christianisation in the region developed from its initial rejection.

¹⁰ H.I.E. Dhlomo was the first major black South African playwright - and the most representative - of what Couzens terms the 'lost generation' of the 1930s and 1940s (Couzens, 1985). – see further 1.3.1. *The Literary Élite*, p.11

¹¹ Couzens describes Dhlomo defending the 'New African' under threat. He sees Dhlomo's re-appropriation of the past as a counter-ideology to the Hertzog government's misinterpretation of it. Dhlomo had to find in the past a different legitimising ancestry than the one Hertzog used in attempting to justify his policies (Couzens, 1985:201). Dhlomo's poetic epic of 1941 *Valley of the Thousand Hills* is seen to combine non-tribalism, Africanism and modernism (Couzens, 1985:222). Other examples of his work include: *Cetshwayo* – as "the risen spirit of Shaka" (Couzens, 1985:146) – "presiding over final destruction of the unity of his people" (Couzens, 1985:147) : In crossing tribal boundaries in which Dhlomo did not believe, the drama *Moshoeshoe* – the Sotho-speaking 'ideal leader', unifying disparate clans and individuals into a single nation – is shown by Couzens to be "projecting the unity of the past into the future" (Couzens, 1985:164). With this drama, he sees Dhlomo operating on two levels: advising the repressive Hertzog government to be more tolerant and accommodating - as well as the African National Congress in view of 'tribal' unification (Couzens, 1985:166).

¹² Referring to the context of diverse cultures and syncretic forms of religious practice in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Leeb-du Toit points out that South Africa represents an amalgam of diverse religio-cultural influences and aspirations making of the term *kholwa* (referring to Christian converts among the Zulu) a misnomer. Within 'Christian' practice she cites the retention of a traditionalist based cosmogony, as well as the "celebration of ancestral intercession and mediation" (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:15).

¹³ With sermons addressing 'universalism', mission stations were seen as "seedbeds of African Nationalism" (Etherington, 1971:294). Literacy was used to 'write back' to a colonial centre. Later prominent figures from *amaKholwa* backgrounds included John L. Dube, H.S. Msimang, Saul Msane and Albert Luthuli (Etherington, 1971:336).

An overt recognition of shared values and mores in the two apparently dichotomous belief systems – and, with it, acknowledgement of the fundamental humanity of black people – would take more than a century from the inception of Christianity in Natal to come to bear positively on political aspirations. The translation of Zondi’s religio-political awareness would find expression in his artistic oeuvre at a political cusp of this discourse within local Lutheranism, accustomed as the artist was to being with people of other races under the Christian aegis. In his positive acknowledgement of mission work done among ‘his’ people, Zondi thought of himself as “a product of the German Missionary work” (Zondi, 1975:1).

Implicit in conversion to Christianity was the western ‘civilising’ mission. Mbembe speaks of a western perception of the African’s humanity as ‘indefinable’ within a tribal context, linked as it was, to “the ability to imagine goals different from those imposed by custom”, amongst them individuality (Mbembe, 2002:248). In this way a denial of humanity is founded in historically propagated racial specificity. Taking the premise that there is an ‘essential similarity’ among all human beings as a concept from the Enlightenment, Mbembe cites conversion as the condition set for the African to be perceived and recognized as a fellow human being. In the ‘politics of assimilation’ a path from custom into the colonial state’s ‘civil society’, by way of the “civilizing mill of Christianity” which imparted individuality, was seen to facilitate an introduction into a market economy and an adoption of ‘enlightened forms of government’ (Mbembe, 2002:248). With church and school as the ‘twin foundations’ of the civilizing mission (Khumalo, 2003:210), educating the ‘natives’ went hand in hand with the encouragement to conform with European ‘Victorian’ moral codes (Etherington, 1971:74). Despite colonial directives to the contrary, an agenda of segregation along racial criteria was developed from the middle of the nineteenth century, affecting legislation, land tenure and migrant labour.

In discussing the psychology of religious conversion, Etherington links a heightened insecurity and a need for alliance on the part of various Nguni peoples in south-east Africa with their espousal of the Christian faith, caught up as they were in the turbulences of people’s displacement and distribution after the era of Shaka’s hegemony (Etherington, 1971:206)¹⁴. The resultant multi-ethnic character of mission stations saw the *amakholwa*

¹⁴ Shaka had “forced thousands to flee their homeland”. After his death in 1828, many returned to Natal only to find whites occupying the land, causing subsequent ‘political disturbance’(Bryant, 1929:236-237).

become outcasts from traditional societies¹⁵. Seeking land, security and employment, their espousal of a capitalist economy¹⁶, a western education and an increasing mobility set them apart from their 'heathen' neighbours – not always in a positive light¹⁷. Concomitant with the concern that the new religion would interfere with traditional authority and relationships of kinship and obligation, was an opposition to the teaching of gospel by fear (Khumalo, 2003:226). As missionaries were seen to boost their own persuasive tactics of conversion by co-opting the powers of established indigenous people serving the metaphysical needs of their communities¹⁸, the missionaries' teachings of "the nature of sin" was seen to be "troublesome" (Etherington, 1971:153). Practices related to 'witchcraft and magic' were blended with Christianity, as was the use of traditional drugs and potions among the *amakholwa*¹⁹. At the turn of the century Natal boasted more missionary societies than anywhere else on earth. *AmaKholwa* living mostly in missionary reserves numbered 100 000 (Khumalo, 2003:210-211)²⁰. In his discourse around what he terms '*The Grip of Imperialism*', Guy speaks of the fostering of individualism as one of the goals of colonial rule, an agenda perpetrated by missionaries as they attempted to create "communities of individualistic, commodity-producing families" in opposition to tribal production with communal labour underpinning polygamy (Guy, 2003)²¹.

With a strong intellectual commitment to African equality and a sense of Christian unity of all believers, segregation of black and white congregations within the missionary context had

¹⁵ Despite 'tribal' fragmentation among the Nguni, opposition to religious instruction remained in place. Etherington points to missionary schools having been approached by 'chiefs' for "practical, industrial schools", in preference to religious studies or the teaching to "read and write", coupled with industrial instruction (Etherington, 1971:149).

¹⁶ Their tribal status was degraded by their adoption of new kinship and marriage relationships and by giving up allegiance to a cattle economy for another form of wealth. Transgressing sexual division of labour, cultivation of soil by ox-drawn plough (replacing the hoe) was done by men as early as 1857. With ownership of companies and land the *amakholwa* embraced the money economy (Etherington, 1971: 251-252, 258). Preachers had to include sermons relating to materialism on earth.

¹⁷ African servants working on missions stations for wages became the target group for conversion: "In the Hermannsburg mission, employees made up virtually the entire congregation" (Etherington, 1971:206-207). Descriptions of people living at mission stations were not always complimentary: Etherington quotes: 'thieves and rogues', 'no-good drifters and witches' - and the stations described as 'sinks of iniquity' with "unstable, rebellious, rejected people" named as being more prone to conversion (Etherington, 1971:170-171).

¹⁸ Etherington notes: "Nguni had no notion of the Christian God but were familiar with men who claimed to exercise coercive powers over unseen forces which governed nature", citing missionaries "supplementing the efforts of established rainmakers !" (Etherington, 1971:147).

¹⁹ Problematic for missionaries were habits of Nguni sociability which included drinking, dancing and the smoking of cannabis (Etherington, 1971:279).

²⁰ Sir George Grey, British High Commissioner at the Cape Colony had facilitated the granting of land to missionaries in Natal, under the Deed of Grant of 1856 (Khumalo, 2003:210).

²¹ Etherington cites correspondence between Robert Robertson and Colenso: "individualism bred by Christian missions was the primary objection" (Etherington, 1971:192).

been resisted with various degrees of success²². Contextualising the relationship between the missions and African nationalism, Etherington asserts that the denial of human equality did not create the dominant spark for engagement in aspirational politics. He sees the added factor of conversion to a sense of inferiority as the crux for activism, while he holds the ‘suspended’ status of the *amakholwa* - between the black and the white worlds - accountable for forging their sense of unity (Etherington, 1971: 337)²³.

1.2.1. Liberation Theology

In Natal the theological seminary at Mapumulo was the main centre for the dissemination of Black Theology, used as a tool by educated and middle-class blacks (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:149). The opposition towards the state’s “church-sanctioned segregationist ideology” by Natal’s Lutheran ‘liberation theology’ resulted in the latter’s political appropriation, also by non-Christians (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:170). Referring to the emergence of liberation theology from situations of power imbalance, Leeb-du Toit makes special reference to conservative governments who saw a close allegiance between this theology and Marxism. Couzens cites Dhlomo’s study of Marx’ theory concerning racial attitudes – where racial barriers and antagonisms are perceived to originate from propagandistic beliefs in inexorable traits of superiority or inferiority (Couzens, 1985:36). From the above-mentioned perspective related to historicism, Mbembe also cites a Marxist and nationalist thought in which he perceived the rhetoric of *autonomy*, *resistance* and *emancipation* to be rooted (see 1.3.2, Mbembe’s ‘*Afro-radicalism*’ p. 15).

In a quest to humanise people trapped in mindsets of enslavement and fatalism, liberation theology offered the backing of Biblical scripture through which racism and capitalism were critiqued, class struggles and oppression recognized – then to be politically and historically contextualised – and reflected in art-making (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:147-150). Interpretations of

²² The colour line in Hermannsburg was drawn when, in 1860, superintendent August Hardeland introduced segregated services for Germans and Africans, while Methodists ministered to an interracial congregation until 1878 (Etherington, 1971:97-8; 134). Etherington points to Colenso’s paternalism in that he felt the white man to stand “above and apart from the African” and accepted segregation (Etherington, 1971:108). Black Christian separatist movements surprised white missionaries. Zionist and Ethiopian churches were the products of schisms in Christian denominations (Etherington, 1971: 294-96). Etherington names *Unzondelelo*, established in 1875, a self-supporting evangelistic enterprise in Edendale under *kholwa* funding (Etherington, 1971:307) – a Biblical text for African solidarity: Psalm 68 promising “Ethiopia - shall soon stretch out her hands to God” – Ethiopia interpreted as standing for all of Africa (Etherington, 1971: 338).

²³ ‘Petrus of Indaleni’ is quoted as saying in 1863 - “to the natives we are but despised believers – to the English we are no more than Kafirs” a text printed by the Natal Witness (Etherington, 1971:323ff.).

the art of black South Africans has been conducted within the framework of this liberation theology. With a hermeneutic focus on “the cultural elements of the marginalised culture” (Leeb-du Toit, 2003: 207), this ‘inculturation’ reading was common in the post colonial discourse as linked to issues of race, class and gender (West in Leeb-du Toit, 2003: 207). The work of artists like Michael Zondi, Azaria Mbatha and John Muafangejo reveal how religious imagery within a narrative contextualization was used to “recover past or recent histories of oppression and injustice...” (Leeb-du Toit, 2003: 147). Leeb-du Toit cites West’s reading of Mbatha’s *Joseph* story, including elements from the largely suppressed Zulu tradition and culture in addressing communal rather than individual concerns, both in view of human oppression, exploitation and manipulation by a hegemonic centre, as well as the link to the *ubuntu* way of life (a person is a person because of other people) (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:208).

1.3 Selfhood

Pioneer African artists in all disciplines were involved in matters of identity and cultural heritage²⁴. Zondi was born in rural Natal at a time when political confrontation had come to a head in the form of riots in Durban (Nuttall, 1991:viii). They were sparked by economic hardships exacerbated by segregationist intransigence and informed in part by Zulu ethnicity. Contrary to colonial government directives²⁵, legislated segregation according to racial criteria had infiltrated colonial politics from the middle of the 19th century, affecting

²⁴ Mamdani differentiates between cultural and political identities, asserting that state formation generates political identities that are distinct from market-based identities or a cultural self (Mamdani, 2001:23). So also in South Africa, initially it was a unifying political identity – or one which was based on trans-ethnic Africanness – that was nurtured.

²⁵ Secretary of State for War and Colonies, Lord Stanley, voiced egalitarian ideals, that “any distinction of colour, origin, race or creed” would not be tolerated (Etherington, 1971:146), while Henry Cloete in 1843 urged a “just distribution of territory among black and white claimants” (Etherington, 1971:1). Under the guise of “protecting African rights”, Theophilus Shepstone forged ahead with segregationist tendencies of separate development (Etherington, 1971:17). In 1847 he established the Locations Commission - whose recommendation formed the basis for segregation in Natal with ‘natives’ relocated to designated areas (Khumalo, 2003:210). Under the aegis of ‘civilising’ schemes, funds in the form of grants were made for trade and grammar schools run by missionary societies, with individual rather than tribal tenure granted to lands on mission reserves (Etherington, 1971:56-58). ‘Native’ law, a separate system of justice outside of the Roman-Dutch law was established (Etherington, 1971: 27-28) from which Christian Africans - who could also be property holders - were exempted before 1882. The acknowledgement of chiefs within tribal constructs devised by colonial rulers, (Etherington, 1971:63-74) resulted in political disempowerment of indigenous peoples as their freedom of movement was also inhibited by pass laws (Etherington, 1971:48.). Bryant points to the “hypocrisy and disgrace” of the delimitation of ‘Native Locations’ (Bryant, 1929:237-239).

land tenure and resulting in a system of cheap migrant labour for cities from the later 19th century²⁶.

In the face of socio-political adversity resulting from racial segregation, it was under the guise of finding and defining an own identity, that members of a black élite sought to redefine themselves in a Eurocentric environment, as I shall discuss below. With a view to attaining a political unity amongst diverse black peoples of South Africa, their quest for the definition of a more collective political identity has found mention in view of a generalising perception that the discourse around British ‘nationalism’ was turned to one of African nationalism (Nolte, 1996:36).

Michael Zondi moved from his parental home at Mtulwa in rural KwaZulu-Natal to mission schools for a western education, followed by vocational training at Dundee in northern Natal, where he was also to teach. Eventually he experienced urban environments in Durban and Pretoria. On his journey of redefining his own identity within changing contexts, his self-assurance and his eschewal of an attitude of servitude was based on a strong identification with a rural ‘home’ and a Zulu identity (Bodenstein, c.1968:2), to whose illusionary cohesiveness I shall refer later (see 1.3.3, p.16,17).

Zondi’s consistent concern with *rapprochement* and reconciliation during the apartheid era, both on a personal as well as a broader level embracing political implications, finds expression in his sculptural oeuvre, as also in the interface with his patrons. The artist’s moral and emotional premises from a rural past of indigenous belief systems had to be reconciled with his Christian education and faith, while within the broader scope of South African politics he sought to find avenues to counter racism and discrimination²⁷. This contrasted significantly with a call for oppositional violence in shedding the yoke of apartheid.

²⁶ Indentured for a three-year tenure (Etherington, 1971:61), migrant labourers from beyond the colony’s borders were treated as ‘immigrants’ in ‘white’ towns, being an attempt to stem an influx of blacks into the cities. The formation in 1916 of a separate Native Administration Department – funded by the iniquitous and coercive ‘Durban System’ – secured further control over mobility and employment by implementing curfew and pass laws (Nuttall, 1991:20). The ‘Durban System’ refers to the taxation legislation of 1908, whereby an indirect tax was levied through a municipal monopoly of *utshwala*, the sorghum beer which could only be consumed in beer halls built for that purpose alongside hostels for labourers (Nuttall, 1991:21) (see Zondi’s *Wema Blues* – Chapter Two, p. 69).

²⁷ Written exchanges between Bodenstein and Zondi make frequent reference to their mutual concern for problems related to racial segregation in South Africa.

In addition to this conciliatory stance, my perception of Zondi's strong sense of self, linked to his Zulu roots²⁸, has prompted me to explore in some detail historical aspects concerning acculturation endeavours on the part of a black *kholwa* élite in Natal from the early 20th century. The concomitant voicing of aspirations for autonomy and emancipation is viewed within the framework of urbanisation and socio-political confrontation (Couzens,1985 and Nuttall,1991). Initially acculturation embraced the idea of a 'synthesis' between African and European cultural practices, as subsequently reflected in part in the romantic *Négritude* philosophy to which I refer below (see 1.3.2, p. 13,14).

Prompted by constraints imposed by colonisation and apartheid, these endeavours simultaneously embraced perceptions of selfhood expressed in part through the appropriation of a specific ethnic identity. Within the context of the *Inkhata* movement founded in 1922, John Langalibalele Dube, a representative figure of Durban's African middle class and a founding member of the Natal Native Congress²⁹ in 1900, was initially an "energetic ideologue" of Zulu ethnicity, while aiming to rehabilitate the monarchy³⁰ (Nuttall, 1991:34). The appropriation of such ancestral inclusion served to further a regional agenda of cementing a national identity as a vehicle into a liberated future.

Discriminatory policies in South Africa of the 1920s instrumentalised this ethnicity in terms of politicising regional specificity, attempting to revive pre-colonial social formations in order to obstruct social transformation and militancy amongst an urban population seeking to define itself in terms of Black Consciousness (Nuttall, 1991)³¹.

Shepstone's policy of tribal control was critically assessed and rejected in view of the introduction and recognition of colour bars. However, in his system of indirect rule Dhlomo

²⁸ Apart from references to Zulu cultural traditions in verbal communication, Zondi rendered specific body adornment on his sculptures recognizably Zulu.

²⁹ NNC- a body "to co-ordinate the political defence of 'Christian and civilised natives' against the gathering discrimination of Natal's settler government" (Nuttall,1991:30-31).

³⁰ Dube espoused the cause of the Usuthu chief, Solomon ka Dinizulu, as the legitimate king of the amaZulu.

³¹ In 1927 the Native Administration Bill was passed. Tribal chiefs were acknowledged as leaders of all Africans, an inflexible control denying urban blacks their identity and finally leading to apartheid and the Bantustan system (Leeb-du Toit, 1996:35). Nuttall asserts that the politics of confrontation of the late 1920s, led by the Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union (ICU), was "informed by militant strands of Zulu ethnicity and communist ideology" (Nuttall, 1991:viii). A paradox arose. On the one hand, rural 'tribalism' gained negative connotations of backwardness in view of aspirational politics of a mission-educated black *petit-bourgeoisie* which took on the role of 'negotiation' between the masses and white power, embodied by the state and a capitalist economy (Nuttall, 1991:v). At the same time they appropriated a 'heroic' Zulu heritage (Nuttall,1991:34) as a political resource.

opposed power being given not to educated ‘true’ leaders but to many ‘chiefs’, whom Dhlomo perceived to be backward (Couzens, 1985: 144). At the same time, he asserted critically that wealth and education had become the criterion for leadership which “often misread” the “pulse of the masses” (Couzens, 1985:35)³².

Retrospection in search of identity has been attributed to a fear of uniformity and anonymity within an urban milieu, as people seek an ‘ethnic vision’ in a world of increasing mobility³³ (Fischer, 1986:197), where personal and group identity has become “provisional and flexible” (Arnold, 2000:55). In a specifically South African context, the appropriation of ethnic identity served to foster unity as a counter to segregationist policies. In order to overcome historical debasement and former humiliation, Mbembe assesses critically the perceived necessity to recover tradition in attempting to ‘reinvent’ a self-identity. This he thinks of as a regression, reasoning that these forceful assertions of alterity merely inspire norms and principles for autonomy - as discussed above in view of Zondi’s espousal of some western ‘norms’- rather than paving the way for an appraisal of difference conducted within a ‘greater universality’. The work of H.I.E. Dhlomo, with whom Zondi made personal acquaintance, is seen to exemplify the duality of the culture of black South Africans during the times of influx into cosmopolitan city life from the late 19th century.

1.3.1 The Literary Élite – Political Involvement

Once formal colonisation had been entrenched in Africa, aspirations for self-determination were linked to an imperative to ‘become civilised’. In speaking of African critique, it is the acceptance of this notion of ‘civilisation’ - as one of the categories of the western discourse to account for universal history - that Mbembe holds liable for the ultimate perception of emancipation and attaining autonomy from foreign rule. It is at this point – where nationalisms came to replace the concept of ‘civilisation’ in favour of ‘progress’ (Mbembe, 2002:250) – that he voices his own critique about the absence of inquiry into an understanding of servitude and its roots (Mbembe, 2002:249). The discourse around indigenous values – the ‘prose of autochthony’, in Mbembe’s view – quelled Hegel’s concept

³² Couzens indicates Dhlomo’s perception that the A.N.C. as a national body, was unrepresentative of African thought and attitude of “a united people’s movement” (Couzens, 1985:35). This may be linked to the ‘universal’ class, a proletariat which Mbembe sees as the only voice perceived to be authentic and legitimate in the project of emancipation – in the eyes of those who would see traditional structures destroyed in the name of progress (Mbembe, 2002:243-244).

of ending the servile condition and developing an ability to be 'reborn as the subject of the world' (Mbembe, 2002:263).

The 'upper ranks' of the African middle class were composed of so-called *izifundiswa*, the mostly western mission-educated; the *amakholwa*, the above-mentioned Zulu converts to Christianity who were clerks, semi-professionals and licensed traders, and the *izemtiti* – 'the exempted ones'³⁴. They lived in a racially structured society and were subject to the entire palette of prejudicial and segregationist ignominies. Their small incomes resulted in their retaining links to both rural economies and mission reserves (Nuttall, 1991:26-7). H.I.E. Dhlomo held mission education accountable for propagating and associating formal education with liberty and higher status (Couzens, 1985:33). With the preaching of a Christian brotherhood based on equality, as well as a newly acquired set of political ambitions that were coupled with participation in a western economy, the white man's language of authority was learnt in view of acquired leadership skills in positions of clerical responsibility. Thus the confidence and goodwill of the rulers could be gained, while simultaneously this learning could be translated for application in secular institutions and political parties.

Included in Dhlomo's 'Neither-Nor' category of Africans were those in mission reserves perceived to have lost 'tribal communism', who "fear social ideals and progressive revolutionary doctrines on race" and "lack a bold, universal national philosophy"³⁵ (Couzens, 1985:32-33). In his discourse around the search of a new identity on the part of a black intelligentsia, Couzens refers to Skota's African 'Who's Who'³⁶, a publication which deals with the "glorification of individual mobility" (Couzens, 1985:16). Couzens sees the publication as a manifestation of the longing for 'self-definition' on the part of a black *petit-*

³³ Fischer sees an ethnic 'vision' or identity as able to contribute in a renewal of self as well as the group within what he romantically terms a "richer, powerfully dynamic pluralist society" (Fischer, 1986:197).

³⁴ Administrative exemption of some mission-educated Africans from the Natal Code of Native Law.

³⁵ In "*African Attitudes to the European*" (1945) Dhlomo divides 'the African' into three categories: the patriotic, proud 'tribal' African; the nationalistic, militaristic 'Neither-Nor African' and the educated, progressive 'New African'. Included in the 'Neither-Nor' category are Africans in mission reserves - those who have lost tribal communism, who fear "social ideals and progressive revolutionary doctrines on race" and who "lack a bold, universal national philosophy". To this African, who understands the white man's dictatorship over the blacks, Dhlomo attributes individualism which, in his view, due to racial discrimination, "does not pay" (Couzens, 1985:32-33). Dhlomo's 'New African' is in search of a new social order, with freedom of expression and active involvement in shaping the destiny of his country. Dhlomo attributes to him an awareness of the power of mass action of a class of "organised urban workers", under the leadership of "progressive thinking African" intellectuals, (Couzens, 1985:33) where issues and values, not race and colour, are his prime concern (Couzens, 1985:36).

³⁶ *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa*, published in 1930 and edited by T.D. Mweliso Skota – general secretary of the A.N.C. – in co-authorship with H.I.E. Dhlomo

bourgeoisie. In view of the colonial legacy of imposed inferiority, this self-definition becomes one of 'class', as it was perceived to encourage "Christian and civilized standards"³⁷. This call for acceptance, for being 'worthy allies' of Europeans is also seen as reflective of a developing nationalism of the educated class which rejected 'tribalism' (Couzens, 1985:16-18) (see also: Leeb-du Toit, 1997:16-17).

In his discourse around domination and resistance politics during the 1930s and 1940s in Durban, Nuttall refers specifically to the appropriation of the notion of 'race' as a political instrument (Nuttall, 1991:vii). Mbembe sees 'the fiction' of race as the converging point of the tension created between 'a shared human condition' (*sameness*) and specific 'other', the latter related to tradition and values within a 'principle of repetition' (Mbembe, 2002:252-253).

1.3.2 *Négritude* - Liberation in Africa

The critical device of post-colonialism provides a broad platform from which to view colonialism generally, not only in Africa. In his view of colonial hegemony, Edward Said's 'Orientalism' - a 'culture domination' of political imperialism - provides many links to African circumstances, as post-colonialism generally resulted in a reassessment of Africa, its art and its culture from the moment of entrenched contact, all in a bid to redress centuries of 'othering'³⁸ from an authoritative colonial point of view. Reflecting a singularly narrow economic perspective of Africa, the colonial 'centre's' historical standpoint began with the European encounter of Africa (Mamdani, 2001: 21). This not only denied the continent its own heritage prior to colonisation, but also cemented the notion of fixed indigenous cultural paradigms.

The ideological and somewhat romantic concept of African *Négritude* was developed in Paris by a group of African students. In West Africa, black intellectuals led the discursive thrust

³⁷ Couzens sees Dhlomo dividing Skota's 'class' into the 'collaborator-extremist' and the 'true progressive' (Couzens, 1985:34) and reveals how Dhlomo expresses his political stance of dissidence in a number of his writings, invoking - as he frequently does with ancestral inclusion - a 'heroic' past (Couzens, 1985:146), with its 'usurpatory potential' (Nuttall, 1991:34). In doing so he gives a foundation to blacks' aspirations for the future, while at the same time addressing past and current issues of governmental intransigence towards the rights of black South Africans. In literary circles it was thought that traditions, social customs and laws that stood in the way of 'progress' should be vehemently opposed as they recognized the hidden agenda of the colonial government encouraging 'tribalism', putting Shepstone's erstwhile and later Hertzog's policies of segregation under scrutiny.

³⁸ In the post-colonial discourse "Othering" is a term introduced for describing the identification of difference, the deciphering of another culture, stereotyping, assuming boundaries and realities, assuming collectivism amongst people which may be totally fictitious.

of developing the notion of being proudly African, creating a new focus on what this meant in the 'modern' world in terms of both their received culture as well as influences from the foreign cultures which had been forcefully planted in Africa. African identity became central to this new philosophy around the persona of Léopold Sedar Senghor³⁹, the Senegalese poet, politician and exponent of African socialism who was at the same time an advocate of *rapprochement* between Africa and Europe⁴⁰. As a historical phenomenon acknowledged by artists and critics it would later be critiqued in terms of whether it had enduring validity⁴¹.

In South Africa the *kholwa* élite in their conscious process of acculturation sought to find acknowledgement and recognition from the white holders of power⁴², while unambiguously voicing their political aspirations linked to the process of decolonisation. It was only when this failed that a more radical course was chosen in South Africa⁴³.

In many parts of Africa the imposition of Eurocentric colonial governance and power was perceived to have robbed the indigenous peoples of their sense of self. With assimilations of literacy, foreign cultural practices and belief systems, the post-colonial discourse in particular

³⁹ Leopold Senghor had been educated in Paris. For 12 years he represented Senegal in the French National Assembly. Together with the West Indian poet Aimé Césaire, he championed *Négritude*, which was to find expression in the magazine they founded in Paris in 1934 - *L'Étudiant Noir*. While westerners - including Jean-Paul Sartre - on the Paris intellectual parquet at the time - were opposed to Fascism, the group of men around Senghor concerned themselves with colonialism. It was Sartre, who in his essay *Black Orpheus* - published in 1948 - commented at length about the absurd fact of writers expressing *Négritude* concerns in the language of the colonizers from whose shackles they were attempting to free themselves. In 1947 *Présence Africaine* was published, a journal promoting African culture and literature - which became a major organ for the *Négritude* movement.

⁴⁰ He believed that the African possessed a uniqueness that distinguishes him from other races. Drawing on that "quintessence" he could make a contribution to a "hybrid universal culture" (Peters, 1978:15). In this way Senghor's synthesis is based on 'complementarity rather than identity' - a synthesis against apartness (Refer Mamdani, 2001).

⁴¹ Senghor saw in *Négritude* an eternal concept that would still find validity in changing times. Jonathan Peters points out the limitations of such an ideology, saying that *Négritude* had a 'normal life span', which some desired to "expand into a *passé-partout* governing global, cultural, literary and aesthetic modalities of all black peoples" (Peters, 1978: xi). The writer Chinua Achebe saw it as a "prop no longer needed" after it had served to mobilise ideology and thought towards independence, while the dramatist Wole Soyinka saw in *Négritude* "a cultural complex of abstractions by an élite few who are far removed from the large percentage of African people" (Peters, 1978: xi).

⁴² Senghor as a poet placed the artist in a central position, seeing the path to finding African self-confidence in the retention of traditional cultural practices and creating new modes of expression for a modern Africa. He had also proposed that the African seek recognition from the white world for his values and his cultural heritage.

⁴³ The roots for the new philosophy were found in the 'back-to-Africa'-movement voiced by Marcus Garvey in the 1870s and 80s in the USA, which in its turn is directly linked to the post-Enlightenment revisionist look at statehood, as well as human and constitutional rights in the USA. By the 1960s African American voices were heard in the emerging, newly independent nationalisms in Africa - and an idiom of 'Africa versus western Culture' was created, with Africans reversing the European colonial notion of reformulating and redefining themselves in terms of others.

underpins perceptions of loss. These have been subsequently questioned by scholars (Mbembe, 2002), especially in theories surrounding *Négritude*.

The re-appropriation of identity and difference implicit in *Négritude* has been termed *voluntarism* (Mbembe, 2002:244) which, in the context of historicism, is thought to conflict with perceptions of *victimisation* linked to notions of subjugation⁴⁴ (Mbembe, 2002: 244). Zondi's refusal to be engaged in a role of victimhood relating to discriminatory apartheid laws may be seen in the light of Mbembe's current historicist interpretation embracing what he terms '*nativism*' around the discourse of African selfhood and identity (Mbembe, 2002)⁴⁵. Mbembe holds historicism in two forms accountable for hampering the development of concepts leading the African subject to selfhood, both of them rooted in the historical events of slavery, colonisation and apartheid. For one, he sees in '*Afro-radicalism*' the rhetoric of *autonomy, resistance and emancipation*, both in cultural and political spheres, as the subject of manipulation (Mbembe, 2002: 240-241) under the guise of the legitimisation of an African discourse as 'authentic'. Secondly, Mbembe describes cultural identity as the implicit central theme of *nativism*, perceived by him to be a 'burden' of difference linked to the 'fiction' of race where perceptions of the uniqueness of an authentic African culture confer 'a peculiar self' to the African (Mbembe, 2002: 242, 252). He cites Leopold Senghor's philosophy of *rapprochement*, the synthesis of western and African paradigms as propagated in the conciliatory 'giving and receiving' expressed within the *Négritude* philosophy⁴⁶, calling it a 'softer version' of *nativism* (Mbembe, 2002:242,255) (see Zondi re *rapprochement*, p.9)

1.3.3. 'Zuluness'

Despite Zondi's very deep assimilation of the teachings of the Christian Gospel, I argue that it was his strong sense of Self within the Zulu cultural context that formed the nature of an intense interaction with his patrons, which was of his own explicit choice. Based on an intellectual equality which found no mirror on the political stage outside the interface, the

⁴⁴ Mbembe places victimisation amongst characteristics of that thinking, which include lack of self-reflectivity; a vision of subjugation preventing the budding of Africa's uniqueness ; destiny proceeding from history - thus abrogating responsibility - where reference to violence determines the 'privileged' route for self-determination; desire to destroy tradition coupled with the designation of a proletariat (a 'universal class) as the only authentic agency for emancipatory activity (Mbembe, 2002:243-244).

⁴⁵ Mbembe's *nativism* is described as the 'burden' of difference (Mbembe, 2002:242) with the implicit central theme, cultural identity (Mbembe, 2002:252).

interaction resulted in a strong reciprocity, a cross-cultural discovery of similarities, a sharing of beliefs and mores. It facilitated for *both* parties, albeit covertly, the means for projecting and making public their subversion of the apartheid system, whose political restraints pushed that very interface beyond legality.

Within a creative art-making process which can provide a platform for the expression of personal identity, also in view of newly acquired languages of expression in a range of art-forms and media⁴⁷, I perceive a quest for defining and /or redefining identity to lie within an even more intimate and personal context of selfhood. I regard the quest in the light of seeking confirmation of a fundamental humanity which, in the South African context, was overtly denied black people through segregationist legislative structures, and more or less covertly on a daily basis in culturally interactive urban day-to-day life.

Perceptions about 'origins', as manifest in territorial terms, have been linked to a consciousness of identity (Mbembe, 2002:266). The cohesive clans described by the early ethnographer Bryant includes genealogical reference to the Zondi 'clan' name, (Bryant, 1929: 517,521,523) (see Chapter Two, p. 35,36) while a current debate describes a "fluidity of ethnic designations" linked to explorations of material culture (Klopper, 2002: 39)⁴⁸. Two contributory factors have been named for the consistent perception of a cohesive Zulu identity, the collecting of Zulu material culture as well as the search on the part of white South African artists, before the middle of the 20th century, for an African idiom, 'confirming' with their motifs of indigenous people the notion of the 'vanishing culture' of 'Zulu' indigenes. At the same time a perceived territorial allegiance was conveyed while the art-makers remained on its periphery (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:101). An example of a persistent "monolithic 'Zuluness'" is given in the indiscriminate labelling of artefacts - as 'southern' African or Zulu - connected to the strong European consciousness of Shaka's military

⁴⁶ Mamdani terms Senghor's synthesis the mindset of "conservative nationalism", where 'settlers' are identified with all immigrants, as opposed to "anti-colonial nationalism" where the settler is identified with the 'conquerors' (Mamdani, 2001:22).

⁴⁷ Jack Grossert, Inspector of Arts and Crafts under *Bantu Education* in Natal in the 1940s, gives his notions of evaluation of African art. He believed and propagated that Africans' "own aesthetic goals" should be used as the measure of success or failure of their art, not the criteria applied to western art. He saw in the subject matter of black South Africans the portrayal of their humanity and their emotions (Grossert, 1968:42).

⁴⁸ The Nguni material culture in itself has provided evidence of particular and personal crafted objects showing "identification with and affiliation to the ancestral." Nel sees the re-affirmation of this ancestral group identity in view of similarities or 'preferred tendencies' enduring over centuries, indicating a different value system from western modernist notions related to innovation and change (Nel, 2002:22).

enterprise having defied British colonialism (Nel, 2002:14). An example is a figured stick from Natal, attributed as 'Zulu' in von Sydow's publication of 1923 (Sydow, 1923:154)⁴⁹. This 'Zuluness' is described as a politicised "Zuluisation", where the construct of continuity from the Zulu kingdom to a contemporary 'Zulu nation' is seen as a limiting simplification with regard to histories of regional diversity of the Nguni people (Dlamini, 2001:1).

1.4 Educational Development and Training

1.4.1 'Synthesis'

A discourse involving the espousal of modernist notions by a black South African artist who straddled two cultures from a rural environment via a western education to an urban context, necessitates a brief foray into perceptions about African aesthetics linked to a historical perspective, both before and after western colonial rule.

The western context of educational opportunities in Africa from the beginning of the 20th century consistently posed questions regarding acculturation, viewing African aesthetics in relation to western paradigms. While the assimilation of western culture was being partially resisted as Africans began to focus on their cultural heritage in Central and West Africa⁵⁰ in the mid-20th century, the black population in South Africa resisted its exclusion from western cultures as enforced by government policy (Rankin, 1989:69). The teaching of 'craft' was resisted, associated as it was with the agenda of oppression of the apartheid regime (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:xii) while 'tribal' associations were also made in the case of sculpture (Rankin, 1989:32).

⁴⁹ "*Stockgriff der Zulu* (Südafrika) – Holz, Mann mit Schwarzem Kopfring, Frau mit roter Mütze und Schamschurz" (Sydow, 1923:154) The 20cm figures have strongly stylised facial and body features with very small, thin arms and diminutive hands. The surface finish is smooth and shiny. The male figure is very similar to one whose origins are attributed the Inchanga Valley, Cato Ridge in Natal (Hooper, 1996:83-Fig. W22) .

⁵⁰ Looking at South African sculptural traditions, comparisons are frequently drawn to Central and West Africa from various standpoints (Bryant:1949:375; de Jager, 1973:19; Nel, 2002:35; Thiel, 1984: 246,279; Kasfir, 1999:16). Thiel describes the southern African region as having been without significance in the African art 'scene', (Thiel, 1984:279) speaking of the 'ethnic groups' of southern Africa as having no sculptural art worth mentioning (Thiel, 1984:246).⁵⁰ He points to extant oral traditions finding expression in Biblical story-telling. Nel draws comparisons between Nguni creativity and Central and West African art-making. He contrasts the symbolism intrinsic to everyday objects - which he calls "an intimate and personal form of spiritual belief" - to masks and power figures found in Central and West Africa which "take on a grander, more public aspect" (Nel, 2002:35).

The term 'synthesis' is frequently applied when expressing a convergence of western and indigenous artistic expression, also in view of performance art (Couzens: 1985:56).⁵¹ Zondi's work has been seen as a 'conjunction of western and indigenous traits', both in his style and his technique⁵² (Rankin, 1993:135). In 1960 the pragmatic notion of 'natural synthesis' was expressed by the Nigerian 'Zaria' artist Uche Okeke (Okeke, 2001a:453)⁵³. The use of new tools and means of expression are cited in the search for a modern African aesthetic as artists create within a changed social context, not only after the influential colonial rule but also as they studied and worked abroad (Okeke, 2001:30)⁵⁴. While de Jager recognises a synthesis between African and western figurative sculpture, (de Jager,1973) this notion of 'synthesis' is also implicit in Thorpe's perception regarding the aims of the Rorke's Drift Art Centre as an exposure of students to 'new influences' in an extension of their own heritage (Thorpe, 1994:15). The African sourcing in the work of Cecil Skotnes and Sydney Kumalo are also seen in the light of a 'synthesis' and thought of as highly influential on the work of other South African artists (Sack, 1988:16)⁵⁵.

An "essentially African character" is thought to be retained in art produced in Africa under foreign influences, while the contact with 'Europeans' has been described as a challenge to the 'genius and vitality' of the "...aesthetic ability of the African artist" (de Jager, 1973:18-19). In looking at origins of contemporary African art, Kasfir refers to "a process of *bricolage*" upon the already existing structures, contending that a recognizably 'African' character is imparted by habits and attitudes rather than styles, medium, technique or

⁵¹ Couzens refers to Dhlomo's cousin Reuben Caluza (as the first African to graduate as a doctor of Music) who tried to fuse African folk music - the "language of the soul" he perceived to be the most neglected of the arts - with western music. Couzens points to the Ohlange Choir of Caluza becoming an emotional refuge in 1923 - where pride in being black was expressed in "a patriotic resurgence".(Couzens,1985:56).

⁵² Rankin thinks of Zondi's naturalistic style as rooted in an early interest in making realistic representations of oxen, or drawing images in sand. Therefore while she thinks of Zondi's "concept of representation as 'art'" as developed in a western context, she feels that his tendency towards naturalism is not entirely a foreign cultural imposition (Rankin, 1993:135). Also, his cabinet-maker skills with technological tools were preceded by skills in woodworking taught by his father, with rudimentary tools.

⁵³ "Natural Synthesis' (from *Manifestos and Resolutions*) October 1960'. Okeke acknowledged the fusion of inherited and newly adopted traditions, happy as he was to express his 'Africanness' by making use of new materials and techniques (Okeke, 2001a:453). Pioneer African art developed within the framework of colonial authority in many African countries as people in the literary, the performing and the fine arts began to recognise their predicament under the rule of a foreign culture with its different value system and its other mores. Slowly a notion of being proudly African grew, and the intellectuals leading the discursive thrust developed a sense of pride in that Africanness: there developed a new focus on what being African entailed in the 'modern' world in terms of both their received culture as well as influences from the foreign cultures which had been forcefully planted in Africa.

⁵⁴ "Artistic modernity is rooted in a reordering process of quotation...*Négritude* is a product of this process".

⁵⁵ Sack speaks of Kumalo's "synthesis of the western figurative canon with that of African figurative sculpture" (Sack, 1988:16).

thematic range (Kasfir, 1999: 9). By the end of the century Atkinson thinks of black artists resisting demands for a “formulaic ‘Africanness’” (Atkinson, 1999:16).

1.4.2 Bantu Education

Amakholwa born on mission reserves generally went to schools there. Their assimilation of western learning skills and new languages of expression, both literally and metaphorically, set them apart even further from their rural brethren than their conversion to Christianity had already done.

Art as a subject was not included in the official curriculum of government schools beyond primary school level but found its way into teacher training e.g. at the Ndaleni Teacher Training College (see 1.4.3. p. 23,24). My investigation into the nature of art teaching outside those mission institutions that offered it as a subject, both formally or informally by providing creative spaces, serves to reveal the nature of art and ‘craft’ instruction under Bantu Education. I briefly outline some colonial policies and legislation to elucidate the agenda behind this system of segregation as it also crept into mission stations and their schools, using as my source the work of Jack Grossert (Grossert, 1968)⁵⁶.

Michael Zondi’s visual aesthetic is rooted in a rural KwaZulu-Natal pastoralist economy, with artistic creativity finding expression within the paradigm of received traditions, applied *inter alia* on household utensils made of wood.⁵⁷ In addition, his education within a mission context and his *Kholwa* upbringing gave him an early foundation in the visualisation of images from the Christian gospel. Profound change in social structures and hierarchies had accompanied the advent of mission schooling for children formerly embraced only by rural traditions. Respect and veneration accorded the life experiences and wisdoms of the elders within the received traditions – as the children were gradually integrated into the duties and responsibilities of rural African life in pre-colonial times – were diluted as these children gained a status with western learning skills, which was formerly alien within rural communal living (Agthe,1999:18). Without formal art training, and embraced by a

⁵⁶ Appointed Organiser of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Work, later becoming Inspector for the Native Schools in Natal from 1948-1962

⁵⁷ Zondi’s father was a skilled craftsman of wood (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a). In looking at the creativity of semi-nomadic pastoralist peoples of southeastern Africa, the crafting of personalised, small, portable domestic objects of great aesthetic value and beauty has been scrutinised in terms of social and intrinsic significance, as well as cross-cultural stylistic influences brought about by regional trade, inter-marriage and voluntary or involuntary migration (Klopper and Nel: 2002). Wood is used in some traditional contexts only by men (Nel, 2002:24).

western religious and educational ideology, Zondi's artistic career evolved from his initial mission schooling and vocational training at the Swedish Lutheran Industrial Trade school at Dundee in Natal. Zondi then entered the free market economy, running his own carpentry workshop there for a few years (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a), before returning to Dundee to train as an instructor for woodwork and carpentry. Here he began sculpting in his spare time. After the institution's move to Edendale near Pietermaritzburg in the mid-1950s it began functioning under the aegis of Bantu Education.

Zondi's training in Dundee has its roots in a system of 'industrial or trade instruction' for blacks (Grossert, 1968:58-60)⁵⁸, which found a greater approval by indigenous leaders than purely literary education.⁵⁹ By 1912, 'drawing' and 'industrial work' (clay modelling, paper cutting, weaving, etc.) was included in the syllabi of Natal provincial Native schools. Grossert speaks of the enlightened ideas on education on the part of C.T. Loram, Chief Inspector of Native Education as of 1918, whose recommendation affected the teaching of practical subjects (Grossert, 1968:72). 'Native crafts' were introduced by him in 1917, inspired as Grossert asserts, by the recommendations made as early as 1904 by the Acting Education Adviser to the High Commissioner for South Africa, E.B. Sargent (Grossert, 1968:64;71-72). 'Organisers' for providing guidance for teachers of practical subjects were made responsible for the development of woodwork, metalwork, basketry and 'native crafts'.

For purposes of grants, classification of schools included those for 'trades or handicrafts' at the highest level. In elucidating the concept and perception of education with a 'higher ideal' realised through 'book learning', Grossert claims that in their condemnation of physical work at schools, parents of black children did not distinguish between industrial and manual work,⁶⁰ condemning physical work at schools perceived to be places of 'learning'

⁵⁸ Six years after the establishment of British rule in Natal, the colonial government's frontier policies involved the establishment of schools in the 1850s (Grossert, 1968:57). The secular schooling at missions and hospitals was financed by a 'hut-tax', imposed on the 'Bantu' of the province in 1849 (Grossert, 1968:59). In perceiving to 'civilise' and 'elevate' the 'raw native' from his 'barbarous habits', vocational training for black students was implemented, rather than providing a practical course with 'educational value' (Grossert, 1968:58-60). The aim was to equip blacks to enter the colonial money economy as cheap labour (Grossert, 1968:58).

⁵⁹ Seeing in western education a dilution of their own authority, chiefs and headmen are reported to have been contemptuous of 'literary' and sectarian education, while expressing interest in practical teaching of industrial schools (Etherington, 1971:149-150).

⁶⁰ Christianised parents saw in 'book learning' a stepping-stone to employment (Khumalo, 2003:226).

(Grossert,1968:65-66). Education with a 'higher ideal' should "lift their children out of the primitive way of life and labouring work" (Grossert, 1968:77)⁶¹.

Members of the African Education Commission touring South Africa in 1921 to study Mission education, praised the Natal system for Native Schools. Amongst them was Dr. J.E.K. Aggrey, a West African scholar (Grossert, 1968:73 and McK. Malcolm,1921:176). Recommendations to employ an art organiser and specialist teachers at training colleges were made in 1937 by Mr. Arthur Lismer, a Canadian educator – under the Chief inspector of Native Education at the time, D. McK. Malcolm, who encouraged "original expression by Bantu pupils through their own traditional art forms". Inspector S.R. Dent commented on developments 'on the artistic side' as 'seriously lacking' (Grossert, 1968:75), recommending that qualified art teachers be brought 'into the ranks of field staff' (Grossert, 1968:76). John Nixon of Pietermaritzburg was appointed in 1941 as Organiser in Crafts and Woodwork (Grossert, 1968:79) and later Organiser of Manual and Vocational Training⁶². During the 1950s, Zondi would find encouragement and guidance as well as patronage for some of his first pieces from Nixon. Nixon thought that enthusiasm and interest could overcome an apparent lack of interest in creative art which he perceived, faced as he was with the problem of finding teachers of 'Art and Crafts' (Grossert, 1968:80)⁶³.

The 'very high standard of aesthetic sensibility' attributed to art produced at the Ndoleni Art School, which opened in the early 1950s (Leeb-du Toit,1999:6) is due to Jack Grossert's perception of Africans' art aesthetics (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:7)⁶⁴.

While seeking to promote empathy for the belief systems of Africans in view of their similarities to Christianity, (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:123) Grossert thought that art education facilitated the exercising of critical "emotional and intuitive thinking skills" . This is linked

⁶¹ By 1917, Loram thought that the notion that 'book learning' and education were synonymous had been overcome (Grossert, 1968:66). Grossert contends that in the mid-1930s the problem still existed, with the term 'industrial training' shrouded in ambiguity as to what the activity entailed. Holding the colonists accountable for this, he cites their perception of feeling not only threatened by the expanding productivity of mission industrial schools in view of competitiveness, but accuses them of a lack of resolve to uplift the Bantu beyond the level of "hewers of wood and drawers of water", citing legislation which prevented the sale of the students' work (Grossert, 1968:67-68).

⁶² See also the inclusion of Nixon in the 'Bantu Education Journal' - June 1957

⁶³ Loram had introduced the sale of craft work in 1920– in an attempt at soliciting parental support (Grossert, 1968:81). This was opposed by Nixon .

⁶⁴ Grossert worked together with Anne Robinson nee Harrison (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:7).

to his conviction that graduates would become a “cultural force in African society” (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:8)⁶⁵.

1.4.3 Art-making institutions and Contemporary Artists

Because of Zondi’s lack of direct attachment to any art institution or training environment either formal or informal, his contact with artists of his own time was sporadic. Knowing that he mentored and encouraged many potential art-makers,⁶⁶ my research needs to be directed further and more intensely into a search for people he may have influenced as an informal teacher. Smart Gumede⁶⁷ is cited as one of Zondi’s admirers (Rankin, 1989:107).

Having outlined Zondi’s own educational opportunities and training in carpentry in the context of segregationist policies in South Africa above, my reference here is restricted to a brief mention of art-training or art-teaching institutions country-wide.

I have limited the scope of my inclusion to the mention of some prominent black artists to emerge from the institutions. I focus briefly on artists who worked as contemporaries of Michael Zondi, mainly sculptors working in Natal, many of them of *amakholwa* backgrounds, and particularly in view of the artist’s contact with them or their work.

In the absence of art as a subject in the higher level curriculum of government schools, a number of foreign missions stationed in South Africa provided basic art training or environments conducive to artistic activity. As a result, much of the artistic expression derived from the Christian gospel became sculpted narratives, to which indigenous communities, with their own oral traditions, could relate. In Natal especially, some proficient artists emerged who became extremely prolific.⁶⁸

A lack of demand, particularly for sculpture, on a generally depressed South African art market in the first half of the 20th century, resulted in a boost in the development of sculpture in a new generation of artists, as white sculptors unable to make a living from

⁶⁵ Grossert saw in the religious-inspired work by black artists not only their acceptance of Christianity but further, he thought to recognize in their expression of spiritual emotions, a spiritual growth (Grossert, 1965:3-4). It is in view of the universality of beliefs that he thought the evangelisation of Africa had been successful (Grossert, 1965:5).

⁶⁶ Personal communications with Pat Khoza, Durban Art Gallery, August 2003; Agnes Bodenstein; Michael Zondi.

⁶⁷ Gumede, a graduate from Ndoleni and an honours graduate from the Fine Art School at the University of Fort Hare.

⁶⁸ e.g. Bernard Gcwensa, Ruben Xulu, Vuminkosi Zulu.

their art were forced to opt for teaching (Rankin, 1989:25). A European influence and the study of artists like Rodin and Barlach was thought to be discernible in the students' work. While a modernist reading of African sculpture - with its conceptual strength - was contrasted with students' representative and mostly naturalistic renderings of the human form, their 'truthful' use of material was noted (Leeb-du Toit, 1999: 21-22)⁶⁹.

The Anglican Mission *Grace Dieu*, in the former northern Transvaal, was teaching carving in the European religious tradition to black artists from 1924 (Cormick, 1993:7)⁷⁰. Religious tradition favoured a representational style, a naturalism Rankin links closely to late Medieval and Renaissance styles of Europe (Rankin, 1989:21). Some of the first 'pioneer' artists emerged from the creative environment, e.g. the painter Gerard Sekoto, painter and sculptor Ernest Mancoba⁷¹ and the skilled carver Job Kekana. It was during these years - when the West was still looking to Africa and its colonies to reiterate and qualify its own notion of superiority and 'centrality' - that a British museologist, Kenneth Murray, came to Nigeria at the behest of the Nigerian colonial government to teach art at secondary schools, (Okeke,2001:32) one of the first of a number of western art teachers to come to Africa.

The St. Francis College at Mariannhill near Durban had Sister Pientia Selhorst teaching from 1941 until the 1970s⁷². While participating in various exhibitions staged by Mariannhill from the 1960s⁷³, Michael Zondi was to spend time working as a freelance artist on and off, given residency when he chose, in the studio of Sr. Johanna Senn in 1984⁷⁴.

On the site of the industrial school affiliated to the Wesleyan Mission⁷⁵, the Ndalen Art School⁷⁶ opened in the early 1950s. In view of state-oppositional black liberation politics

⁶⁹ Sculptor John Hooper of the University of Natal, commenting on a 1961 B.I.C.A. exhibition (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:22). Teacher Peter Atkins' "modernist inclinations" are mentioned in view of his awareness of a 'conceptual rendering of the human form' (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:21).

⁷⁰ The Reverend Paterson suggested training carvers in 1924 - in a sub-section of carpentry which grew under sister Pauline (Rankin, 1989:19).

⁷¹ Ernest Mancoba was student at *Grace Dieu* from 1920-24 and a member of staff from 1924-29, from there moving to Fort Hare (Rankin, 1989:21).

⁷² After art was removed from the black matriculation curriculum in the early 1950s, it continued to be taught at Mariannhill "at primary level, with some classes continued into secondary (high) school, as well as a short-lived venue for art production and exhibitions" (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:128).

⁷³ 1974, 1976, 1977 - Mariannhill Art Exhibitions.

⁷⁴ Personal telephonic communication with Sister Johanna, Austria, July 2003. Sr. Johanna always gave artists the full price she was paid for works she sold for them (Personal communication, Denise Allen, 8 August 2003).

⁷⁵ Originally the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Station was established in 1847 - under the Rev James Allison (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:6).

of the time, its affiliation to the Department of Bantu Education was not unproblematic. Like the Art Centre at Rorke's Drift, established almost a decade later, Ndaleneni was primarily a secular art-training initiative and offered a two-year preliminary course for black art teachers at primary level - until 1960, when it became a one-year course (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:4).⁷⁷ The art programme was the brainchild of Jack Grossert and particularly sculpture became Ndaleneni's dominant discipline under Lorna Peirson (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:21 and Peirson, 1999:53). Grossert's perception of Africans' aesthetics saw him develop the course (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:7)⁷⁸ and provide every incentive for art-making within the Bantu Education system - while clandestinely opposing many of the restrictive notions about artistic ability amongst black pupils. Peirson created continuity by initiating refresher courses offered at the school after the two-year course (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:18)⁷⁹.

Michael Zondi's brother Mandlenkosi enrolled at Ndaleneni in 1952.⁸⁰ It is probable that his work will have influenced and encouraged his older brother Michael to begin sculpting (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a). Zondi was beginning to work as an instructor of woodwork at Dundee at the time. Mandlenkosi Zondi's most well-known piece is his *Samson* of 1961, in the Bodenstein collection⁸¹, an entry at the exhibition held at the Durban Municipal Art Gallery in that year, presented by B.I.C.A.⁸², under whose aegis art was thought of as being "outside a western context" (Rankin, 1988:47).

Selby Mvusi was at Ndaleneni around 1953, probably concurrently with Mandlenkosi Zondi. It is therefore feasible that Michael Zondi met him in this context, but certainly he had seen

⁷⁶ Concurrently with the Nationalist Party coming to power in 1948, it was proposed to establish an 'art school' affiliated to the Ndaleneni Teachers' Training College - its informal name became The Ndaleneni Art School (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:4).

⁷⁷ In 1954 the Department of Bantu Education discontinued art as a secondary school subject.

⁷⁸ See footnote 64

⁷⁹ Both at Ndaleneni and Rorke's Drift the mission context contributed in part to the thematic inclination of its students (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:171).

⁸⁰ Another brother, Noah Zondi, was in Lorna Peirson's art class at the Norwegian Mission, Mapumulo. He brought a wood sculpture - a male head - of which he claimed to be the artist. It transpired that it had been sculpted by his brother Michael. I think that there is a possibility that Mandlenkosi Zondi might have made it (Nieser, 2004c). Mandlenkosi taught Art and Craft at Lamontville and Edendale before he held an administrative post at the Appelsbosch Mission Hospital and was in charge of the Occupational Therapy Department (Photocopied typed handout "Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture" Art Gallery, City Hall, Durban, 21-28 October, 1961 - given to Nieser by Bodenstein in October 2003)

⁸¹ Depicted in *Images of Wood* (Rankin, 1989:179) and last shown in the Durban Art Gallery's *Veterans of KwaZulu Natal* exhibition in July-August 2003 in Durban, and December 2003 - Jan 2004 in Pietermaritzburg.

⁸² B.I.C.A. - (*Bantu, Indian and Coloured Art*): "Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by Eric Ngcobo, Michael Zondi, John Hooper, Mandlenkosi Zondi, Wolfgang Bodenstein, Noah Ndlovu, Dan Mahlobo - Art Gallery, City

his art by 1961, when both Zondi's and Mvusi's works were shown at the B.I.C.A. exhibition. Through his studies at Fort Hare⁸³ and Ndaleni, Mvusi's access to ideas and literature are thought to have provided the knowledge of 'alternate art styles', a modernist vision which would have encouraged experimentation. Three years Michael Zondi's junior, Mvusi knew Wolfgang Bodenstien in the mid 1950s, before the latter became Zondi's mentor and friend⁸⁴. Rankin attributes to the work of Ernest Mancoba and Selby Mvusi a "deliberate intention to recreate the spirit of African art" (Rankin, 1989:47)⁸⁵.

The painter and sculptor Eric Bekinkosi Ngcobo also participated in the above-mentioned B.I.C.A. exhibition and was the first black artist to have a solo exhibition in the Durban Art Gallery in 1962 (Rankin,1989:140). Also a graduate from the Ndaleni Art School in 1953⁸⁶, Ngcobo and Zondi did some work together on the sgraffito murals of the Appelsbosch Chapel wall around 1964, doing one each⁸⁷ (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002b) (see also Chapter Two, p. 58, 59). Around this time Ngcobo carved a female head '*Unomkhubulwana*' (*Princess of Heaven*) (Rankin, 1989:140). In the treatment of wood with overt chisel marks⁸⁸, it reveals a clear stylistic similarity to Zondi's sculptural style of the time. In 1965, the director of the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, Dr. M. Bokhorst, expressed the opinion that Zondi and Ngcobo were the most talented sculptors in Natal at the time⁸⁹. Ngcobo taught at KwaMashu near Durban and later became an inspector

Hall, Durban, 21-28 October, 1961, Presented by B.I.C.A., opened by J.W. Grossert, Inspector of Art in Bantu Schools" (Photocopy of typed handout given to Nieser by Bodenstien in October 2003).

⁸³ In 1951 Mvusi obtained a BA degree and a year later the University Education Diploma from the University of Fort Hare (Miles,1996:12).

⁸⁴ His '*High Priest*' was carved for the Bodenstien collection in 1957 (Nieser, 2002a). Mvusi's further studies after a BA degree from Fort Hare took him to the USA. He returned to Africa to teach in Ghana and Kenya (Rankin, 1989:71).

⁸⁵ "Mvusi's sculpture is "new in its derivation and social comment, and individual in its use of abstraction" (Arnott in Rankin,1989:71).

⁸⁶ Art Teacher's Diploma, Ndaleni, 1953 (Photocopy of typed handout for the "Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by Eric Ngcobo, Michael Zondi, John Hooper, Mandlenkosi Zondi, Wolfgang Bodenstien, Noah Ndlovu, Dan Mahlobo, Art Gallery, City Hall, Durban, 21-28 October, 1961, Presented by B.I.C.A., opened by J.W. Grossert, Inspector of Art in Bantu Schools" : given to Nieser from Bodenstien in October 2003).

⁸⁷ The style of the cement reliefs on the arches flanking the apse entrance have been attributed to late 1960s modernism. The gigantic *Prophet* with a young child on the left flank is attributed to Zondi, while the *Mother and Child* with three male figures on the right is attributed to Eric Ngcobo (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:169).

⁸⁸ Thinking it not unlike Mvusi's work, Rankin speaks of a "bold simplification of form reminiscent of cubist heads thus giving it a modern flavour" (Rankin, 1989:51).

⁸⁹ In 1965 Bodenstien sent 14 photographs taken by H. Schlaudraff to Bokhorst for a 'show' of which Bokhorst wrote: "It was generally felt – and I agree - that Zondi and Ngcobo are the two most gifted African sculptors at present in Natal..." (typed letter dated 26 October 1965 from Dr. M. Bokhorst, director of the South African National Gallery, Cape Town, to Dr. W. Bodenstien at the Appelsbosch Mission Hospital, Natal) – original given to Nieser by Agnes Bodenstien, 2003.

of art for inspector of art for schools in Natal for the Department of Education and Culture of the KwaZulu homeland (Leeb-du Toit: 2003,125).

Zondi was familiar with the work of Bernard Gwensa and Rubin Xulu (Leeb-du Toit, 2003: 169). Gwensa worked in the Servite community at Hlabisa in northern Natal for three decades from the mid-1950s. For many years he worked together with Ruben Xulu, both of them doing predominantly commission-work within the mission context. Zondi will have had contact with both artists through their mutual participation in the *Interfaith Bantu Art Exhibition*, held at the Durban Art Gallery in December 1965⁹⁰, (shortly after his own one-person exhibition), as well as the above-mentioned exhibitions organised through Mariannahill during the 1970s.

Zondi once worked together with Duke Ketye (Nieser, 2004a)⁹¹. Using the hardwood tamboti, for which Zondi had a preference, Duke Ketye's *Intertwined* (de Jager, 1992:136), while showing a more pronounced distortion and abstraction than Zondi's work, nevertheless resembles strongly the chisel-marked surface texture that Zondi frequently used.

The Swedish Lutheran Church mission station with the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre laid the foundation in 1962 for one of the most prominent institutions to foster artistic talent amongst black South Africans, developing particularly a printmaking tradition from which emerged talents of international fame, e.g. Azaria Mbatha and John Muafangejo. Related to an emergent national liberation theology, especially during the 1970s, Leeb-du Toit asserts that a "more informed and socially conscious biblically derived art" emerged from Rorke's Drift, than had been the case at the Ndaleni art school (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:170).

Until the late 1950s, decorative and votive art in South Africa's Christian churches was still predominantly imported from Europe. The Roman Catholic Church had spearheaded making use of and nurturing artistic skills amongst indigenous talent for ecclesiastical works for

⁹⁰ Leeb-du Toit notes that this "landmark" exhibition, at a time when few exhibitions focused mainly on African art, "brought together some of the best African and South African liturgical artists" (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:121). Apart from encouraging patronage, dialogue and creativity among black artists, Leeb-du Toit cites the aim of the exhibition as the hope to enrich the Christian heritage by showing "how the different Christian Bantu groups interpret the Gospel message" (*Interfaith* brochure, 1965) (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:122).

⁹¹ Working at Mariannahill until 1965, besides Franz Hodi and Michael Mbebe, as students of Sr. Pientia during the 1960s, Ketye is thought of as developing a "distinctive Mariannahill style" under the guidance of Sr. Pientia (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:118).

church interiors. The sculptor Bernard Gwensa received commissions for religious sculpture at the Good Shepherd Mission, Hlabisa, in northern Natal (under Father Kinch) from the early fifties (Cormick, 1993:7). Sydney Kumalo executed ecclesiastical work⁹², and in 1960 Durant Sihlali created work for a church in Soweto (Cormick, 1993:7). By 1963 Zondi accepted a commission to design and build the Chapel at the Swedish Lutheran Mission hospital in Appelsbosch, near Fawn Leas, in the Greytown district, which included interior furnishings and his most profound ecclesiastical work, a *Crucifix*. The association of Zondi with ecclesiastical art (Cormick, 1993:7 and Sack, 1988:27) can be traced to this one of very few commissions which Zondi accepted, as well as his association with the art studio of the Mariannahill Convent⁹³. This association, especially by exhibition participation, facilitated contact with other artists in Natal, many of them with a *kholwa* background.

In 1975 Zondi exhibited jointly with David Koloane at the Nedbank Gallery in Johannesburg⁹⁴. For Koloane, it was termed his “professional turning point”⁹⁵.

Under the guidance of dedicated teachers *inter alia* Cecil Skotnes, the Polly Street Community Centre in Johannesburg became an art school (Rankin,1989:32 and Kasfir, 1999:101)⁹⁶. Modelling rather than carving was promoted at Polly Street, as wood was not readily available in the urban area, while sculpture was omitted from the teaching plan due to its ‘tribal’ connotations⁹⁷. Foremost amongst the sculptors to emerge from that urban

⁹² Kumalo sculpted and created a crucifix for the church of St. Martin de Porres, Orlando West, and painted the ceiling, modelled the stations of the Cross and statues of St. Mary and Christ in the church of St. Peter Claver, just outside Kroonstad (Elza Miles – e-mail to Kirsten Nieser, 1 April 2004) .

⁹³ Telephonic communication , Sr. Johanna Senn , July 2003

⁹⁴ “Exhibition of Sculpture by Michael Zondi, Watercolours by David Koloane - Opened by Eone de Wet at the Nedbank Gallery Killarney on Thursday 1 May 1975 – open during the month of May” (Original Invitation card given to Nieser by Agnes Bodenstein).

⁹⁵ From 1974 to 1977, Koloane attended art classes at the Bill Ainslie Studios. His professional turning point came in 1975 when he held his first exhibition with Michael Zondi, already an established sculptor in his own right. Two years later Koloane opened the FUBA (Federated Union of Black Artists) gallery in the bustling centre of cultural protest, Johannesburg's Market Theatre precinct. www.artists-press.net/david-koloane/david-koloane.htm - 17k -

⁹⁶ Zondi met Skotnes in September 1960: “we talked a lot and agreed on many points” (Letter, handwritten, dated 27 September 1960, from Zondi to Bodenstein) .

In 1952 Skotnes came to Polly Street as Cultural Recreation Officer – until then the art produced was thought of as ‘leisure-time-activity’ (Rankin, 1989:32). In relation to early African art workshops, Kasfir refers to the “tutor-black learner mould” in Nigeria and Rhodesia as “European hegemony” which she sees ‘dissolved’ at Polly Street by Skotnes’ “less aggressive tutelage”, when compared with other teachers’ insistence on drawing of African traditions. She calls the “inside brokerage” of an apprenticeship system, in which pupil eventually becomes master, “a time-honoured African way”, citing the perpetuation of Polly Street’s ‘actuality’ as an example (Kasfir, 1999:101).

⁹⁷ Rankin quotes Skotnes in explaining that sculpture was scornfully thought of as ‘tribal’ – a part of the ‘cultural ghetto’ which the government was propagating (Rankin, 1989: 32,69). She sees this as a probable reason for South

environment were Ezrom Legae and Sydney Khumalo, to whom Rankin attributes an “awareness of an Africanness” (Rankin, 1989:43). Two of the four South Africans who were represented at the Venice Biennale in 1966 were Michael Zondi and Sydney Khumalo as the two first black sculptors. For Khumalo, sculpture - mostly not in wood - was one of several disciplines. The two artists are thought to have been the first to “establish a truly professional image” (Berman, 1983:18).

1.4.4 Emergence into Modernism

In upholding values of European and British academism, the assimilation of European modernism in South Africa is thought to have occurred some fifty years after its development in Europe (Nolte in *Pemba*, 1996:26). It concurred with the imperial authority being challenged not only by black aspirational imperatives, but equally by white South Africans seeking their own, albeit equally hegemonic, identity in an African context (Hillebrand, 2000:73)⁹⁸.

Additive techniques employed in 19th century European sculpture involved the use of respected simulation- and imitation-skills with materials such as plaster, bronze and marble, intricately fashioned to ‘realistically’ resemble flesh or drapery. These techniques and materials were replaced in part by subtractive techniques in the 20th century (Rankin, 1989:13). A diverse range of materials became the catalyst for the exploration and discovery of new forms which enhanced shape and meaning of objects – a conceptual premise thus replacing a representational one. A western *avant-garde* came to admire the retention in a work of art of the nature of the material itself, the physicality of a surface structure or inherent shape of the material itself. The development of such a visual aesthetic in South Africa was gradual. Particularly in the development of South African wood sculpture, a stylistic consistency is attributed to the representation of the human form sourced in European and British sculpture of the early 20th century⁹⁹ (Rankin, 1989: 39). It took a conservative public until well past the middle of the century to feel less threatened by modernity - expressed in simplification, some measure of abstraction, a ‘truth

African teachers not imposing aesthetic concepts on their black students. In the rest of Africa assimilation of western culture was being resisted, while – as mentioned above (p. 17) - in South Africa the black population resisted its exclusion from western cultures as enforced by government policy (Rankin, 1989:69)

⁹⁸ When the Imperial overtones in art, linked as they were to Britain and British institutions, were being replaced in the form of landscape used as metaphor for an African loyalty, (Hillebrand, 2000:71) it was not Pierneef’s ‘blatantly modernist’ style which caused offence amongst the British-oriented South African art-fraternity, but rather his outspoken Afrikaner patriotism (Hillebrand, 2000:73).

⁹⁹ Examples are the works of Mary Stainbank, Moses Kottler and Lippy Lipshitz

to materials' and conceptualisation. Henry Moore's 'vitalism'- *inter alia* his exploration of the female form, combined with his use of natural sculptural materials - are thought to have facilitated its accessibility and acceptance (Rankin, 1989:39)¹⁰⁰.

An examination and evaluation of the art of Michael Zondi, seen within the context and the extent of modernist influences in South Africa, must simultaneously take into account his personal development from the rural context of a cattle economy - where artistic aesthetics were linked to functional objects - to his self-motivated interface with western patrons, based on his religious acculturation and the artist's espousal of western visual paradigms.

Broadly speaking, Zondi remained within the basic constraints of a representational style in working predominantly from the human figure. Developing his skills and engaging in some stylistic experimentation, he moved from early, laboriously worked and detailed, naturalistic translations of the human form to visual renderings of intellectual concepts expressed in ever more freely worked figures whose forms were determined and shaped by his preferred medium, South African hardwoods¹⁰¹.

Rankin draws from literature on modernism in asserting that a modernist definition of art must embrace innovation that is born of experimentalism involving ideas relating to other art (Rankin, 1989:54). Within a framework of self-conscious awareness, the theoretical base of art-making has been broadened by an intellectualism demanding that such conceptual engagement is crucial. Unless blatant originality is evidenced, stylistic concerns or uniqueness of form have remained outside a discourse around modernism. This intellectual engagement in the individual creative process has made art inaccessible for both artists and an audience outside a small élite with 'sophisticated educational opportunities' (Rankin, 1989:54).

¹⁰⁰ In 1924 Irma Stern's expressionistic work was lambasted as her having a "degenerate spirit" (Hillebrand, 2000:73). By the end of the 1920s, an "initial hysteria" concerning modern painting had subsided into a "cautious tolerance". (ibid.) By the late 1960s, Battiss and the dispersed *New Group* popularised modernity in art.

¹⁰¹ In its link to traditional sculpture, Rankin thinks of the use of indigenous woods as the preferred medium to identify with Africa (Rankin, 1989:42). Bryant makes reference to the detailed knowledge of indigenous woods amongst Zulu speakers (Bryant, 1949:168).

1.4.4.1 Individualism in Western and African Traditions

Historically, in Africa, art served and was defined by a communal patronage base. Makers of 'art' decorated places of habitation and created material objects or sculptures for rites of passage within traditional beliefs. 'Cult' objects were communally owned and a narrative aspect frequently included religious or social texts, which the audience shared with the maker - whose identification was felt to be immaterial. In abandoning traditional beliefs and cosmologies the role of traditional carvers changed, with their work becoming more functional. This was relevant even with a change in the patronage base to kingship, as in the case of the forging of a Zulu 'national identity' by the early 19th century, when the skills of specialised carvers were appropriated and the distribution of artefacts controlled by the court¹⁰² (Klopper, 1992:92).

Art-making as an autonomous practice no longer serves traditional idioms of repetition based within a communal patronage base, where a narrative aspect included religious or social texts, which formerly the audience frequently shared with the artist.¹⁰³ In more recent African history, local communal traditions are rarely the sole sources of inspiration and no longer define the function of art. The basic premise for art-making practices to be freed from constraints imposed by received traditions, with their implicit continuities, is the development of individualism outside social structures which dictate limitations.

Chika Okeke sees dramatic social, political and cultural change as the basis for the individualism of African artists (Okeke, 1994:29). Inherent in this individualism - while it may be viewed as opposing the African communal spirit - is the expression of originality and subjectivity in art, which - while frequently associated with political independence - has also become a link to western modernism. In the 20th century, more than ever before in western countries, art became imbued with more of a sense of adventure. With the adoption of modernist notions, African artists ventured into more unknown artistic territory, at least modifying and richly adapting their earlier known forms of symbolic systems and closely related associated meanings and functions.

¹⁰² Klopper asserts that until the expansion of the Natal trade in the 1850s, skilled carvers – in order to have access to the tools required for fine-made wooden objects - stayed near iron smelters, who were employed by the courts to work the valuable commodity (Klopper, 1992:93).

The expression of individualism was created and fostered in black Christian communities of “commodity-producing families” (Guy, 2003:351)¹⁰⁴. With wood as a material used by Nguni men in artistically fashioning mainly portable and functional utensils, as seen in *induku* sticks¹⁰⁵, or household wares like *isigqiki*, head-rests and *ithunga* or milk-pails, the leap to ‘modern’, individualistic carved sculptures was perhaps less daunting for some artists from rural backgrounds. Nevertheless, it would remain a great challenge in the teaching of sculpture to release black students from a compulsion to create representational likenesses of their figurative work, by working the surface to complete smoothness (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:19). Zondi will be seen to have been no exception.

1.5 Museum and Exhibition Traditions

With traditions of ‘western’ museum spaces rooted in the Enlightenment, a serious critique of the aura of authority of public museums and their role, world-wide, was challenged in the last quarter of the 20th century, as well as in the South African context. The discourse has revolved around defining ‘art’ and the connection between cultural products and the societies in which these products are made and rooted.

Providing a brief background to museum practices in South Africa serves to emphasise not only the historical context within which Zondi’s work was given public exposure in the midst of the apartheid era, but also the significance of the exceptional attention afforded artists like Ngcobo and Zondi in one-man exhibitions in a public institution like the Durban Art Gallery in 1962 and 1965, respectively, with a white élitist audience looking at the work of ‘other’.

¹⁰³ Makers of ‘art’ decorated places of habitation and created material objects or sculptures for rites of passage within traditional beliefs.

¹⁰⁴ See *amaKholwa* in view of individualism (1.2. p.5,6).

While in a post-modern view, individualism may be construed as a device for concealing an inequitable distribution of resources and power by social groups (Scheurich, 1997:122), the successful individualism perceived to help the ‘class’ of an aspiring black intelligentsia was seen in the light of being liberated from the constraints of a communal ‘tribal’ order (Couzens, 1985:16). Therefore it is an absolution from received traditions, combined with the means for individualistic expression, which, for the generation of black ‘pioneer’ artists, was the significant keystone for their espousal of modernist paradigms.

Winters cites Archbishop Tutu’s reference to the sense of community in Africa being stronger than individualism (Winters, 1998:93).

¹⁰⁵ The Zulu *induku*, sticks or staffs used as status symbols by their carriers, served as walking sticks or clubs, as well as more elaborately carved ones for festive occasions, used in dance (Nettleton, 1986: S147). *Induku* with figurative heads were recorded in 19th century Zululand (Sydow, 1923:154 and Nettleton, 1986) are not known in present-day KwaZulu-Natal (Nettleton, 1986:S147). Evidence of a highly skilled carving technique is seen in an *induku* head depicting a smoothly finished and highly polished fist, carved of hardwood, which is thought to have come from Cetshwayo’s homestead (Nieser, 2004b).

1.5.1 Art and Artefact - Museum traditions in South Africa

The missionaries as Africa's first ethnographers, who followed in the wake of the economic agendas of 16th century explorers, adventurers and traders, created a vision of an Africa regarded as 'authentic', 'pristine' and 'unspoilt', inhabited by the Rousseauesque 'noble savage'. By the end of the 19th century, when Africa was being carved up for appropriation by European nations,¹⁰⁶ the meteoric rise in studies of indigenous cultures led to the establishment of Eurocentric public museums. A purposeful maintenance of inequality in cultural identity, a 'political imperialism' (Nettleton, 1988:301)¹⁰⁷ was manifest in the distinction between the 'prestigious' status of 'high' or 'fine arts' on the one hand, and 'craft', linked to indigenous cultural practices, on the other¹⁰⁸. This differentiation, while engaging a sustained discourse to this day, would impact directly on exhibition agendas well beyond the middle of the 20th century, making it exceptional for a black artist to be recognized and given exposure in the hallowed halls formerly devoted exclusively to the exposure of European 'fine art'.

Michael Zondi informed Grossert about linguistic distinctions between various names for craftsmen as well as artists (Grossert, 1968:41) (see '*Uchwephesha*', Chapter Two, p. 44, 45). The ethnographically inspired entrenchment of distinction between 'fine art' and 'craft' is variously discussed both in terms of education (Grossert, 1978:vii), of exhibition practices with categorisation along racial lines (Rankin, 1989:19 and Sack, 1988) and in view of political connotations (Rankin, 1989:32 and Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:xii)¹⁰⁹.

From the 1920s, black art had been incorporated in the *South African Academy Exhibitions* in Johannesburg. Linked as this was to white philanthropy, (Sack, 1988: 12,13) their work nevertheless remained under the special dispensation of a separate categorisation, 'Native

¹⁰⁶ The Berlin conference in 1884 marked the beginning of Europeans' (Britain, France, Germany and Belgium) slicing up large regions of Africa and dividing the continent amongst themselves, regardless of ethnic divisions so enforced.

¹⁰⁷ The distinction would become an integral factor in the misappropriation of museum environments for the conveying of socio-political propaganda, especially in the South African context. Implementing Darwinian social perceptions related to race in order to underpin notions of white superiority, the selection and display of objects, particularly in ethnographic collections emphasising 'tribalism' and the 'primitive African' cultures as static 'other', thus frequently reflected ideological agendas attached to endeavours to justify apartheid and Bantustan policies.

¹⁰⁸ Ethnographic and anthropological endeavours in identifying people through their customs and revealing the social context of objects always fell short of a sincere investigation into the art and its context. Schönfeldt asserts, even currently, that analyses of African society and its art-making traditions persistently demonstrate a lack of wanting to understand African art, serving only as "a tool to judge western art" (Schönfeldt, 1992:13).

exhibits' (Rankin, 1989:19)¹¹⁰. The Durban Art Gallery seems to have been the first public institution to stage group and solo exhibitions for black artists (see Eric Ngcobo p.25 above). Generally speaking, providing outlets for the work of black artists remained predominantly the domain of private initiatives or black teaching institutions¹¹¹, as for example, the work from the Ndaleni Art School in Natal during the 1960s and 1970s (Leeb-du Toit, 1999: 27)¹¹².

While widely denying public representation in the arts to black people, the same government that exacerbated their exclusion with educational policies denying the teaching of art at secondary school level, sponsored and invested in travelling art exhibitions overseas, under the auspices of the Department of Information, e.g. 'Zulu Art' shown in Vienna's Museum of Ethnology and the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Brussels (Sack, 1988:18), where one sculpture of Zondi was included¹¹³. At a time when South Africa's political landscape was becoming ever more volatile, Zondi held his second one-man exhibition in Pretoria. Further, his work was shown in the context of an exhibition on Zulu culture which toured European countries and in 1976 he was able to exhibit his work in Paris, under the auspices of the Department of Information.

The group exhibitions during the 1980s and 1990s which included Zondi's work in private and public collections were reflexive of a more inclusive agenda addressing a wider audience¹¹⁴.

¹⁰⁹ 'Craft' traditions were associated with the agenda of oppression of the apartheid regime, (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:xii) just as 'tribal' associations were made in the case of sculpture (Rankin,1989:32)- See also p. 17

¹¹⁰ Apartheid policies exacerbated the fact of a dispossessed South African majority being widely ostracised from the 'hallowed' halls whose monumental Victorian architecture alone emphasised notions of power. The virtual exclusion of the work of black artists from art museums and galleries in South Africa since the inception of the Cape Colony's *South African Museum* in 1825 – or since 1871, when the SA Fine Arts Association staged the first of a series of exhibitions in Cape Town – was only seriously addressed in the latter part of the 20th century. Berman sees 1871 as an arbitrary date to begin recording the 'modern history' of painting in South Africa (Berman,1975:xii). From 11th annual exhibition of 1930, a section of 'nativework' was included:

- Clay models by Hezekiel Ntuli of Pmb. in 1931/32
- Soapstone carving by Sidney Rametsi of Rustenburg, in 1933
- 1934 – inclusion of religious carvings in wood by Thomas Makenna, Eric Chimwaza, Dick Makambula – but the designer was especially annotated: "designed by 'Reverend E. Paterson'".

There was a short lapse in 1939 when two artists, Gerard Sekoto and Joseph Tladi, were listed in the alphabetical artist list, before the reintroduction in subsequent years of the 'native category'.

- 1939 – no 'Native' section – while a soapstone font of Job Kekana was listed under 'crafts'.

¹¹¹ Agricultural Shows, the African Art Centre run by Race Relations in Durban, B.I.C.A., University of Fort Hare.

¹¹² Lorna Peirson arranged for the annual student exhibition to be held at the Methodist Metropolitan Church Hall in Pietermaritzburg (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:27).

¹¹³ Articles featured in *Bantu* Vol. 23 No. 5 June 1976 and the South African Panorama, January 1975.

¹¹⁴ Zondi's work was included in Sack's *Neglected Tradition* of 1988 (Sack,1988:91), Rankin's *Images of Wood* in 1989 (Rankin, 1989:49;71-72;180-181), and Miles' *Land and Lives* of 1997 (Miles,1997:111-115).

1.5.2 Evaluation Criteria

Curatorial practices and evaluation criteria according to which art is judged and selected for public viewing implicitly reflect agendas linked to communal, political or even commercial interests. A lively debate has accompanied the appraisal of African art since its emancipation from the above-mentioned restriction of categorisation within indigenous contexts of ‘natural history’¹¹⁵.

The intrinsic aesthetics and artistic merit of art objects from Africa, once they have been separated from the social and religious circumstances surrounding their creation, remains a constant concern for the evaluation of collections worldwide. This decontextualisation of African *objects d’art*, through ethnographic collecting from the later 19th century, has effected the subjection to scrutiny and judgement of African cultural creativity¹¹⁶. In view of this ‘de-naturing’ of art objects from a traditional context, modern African art has been described as much more genuine or truthful (Thiel, 1984:14)¹¹⁷.

In the early 1960s the South African artist Selby Mvusi (see p.24,25 above)¹¹⁸ opposed what he termed a ‘special dispensation’ to which African art was being subjected. He opposed the implication of an examination outside the ‘mental rigour’ demanded in western art criticism and appreciation, contending that all disciplines were simply bundled as ‘African Art’ resulting in ‘African’ coming under scrutiny, rather than ‘art’ (Grossert, 1968:43-44).

Chika Okeke questions the link of validation criteria for African art to the European civilising mission and whether art should remain accountable to European methodologies (Okeke, 1994:29).

¹¹⁵ Within the Eurocentric discussion of a definition of art, the aesthetic value of anything utilitarian was “covertly suppressed” (Rankin, 1989:11).

¹¹⁶ In collecting “individual and collective histories of artefacts from Southeast Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries”, Klopper shows how meanings ascribed to ritual and domestic items by the communities in which they were created sometimes remained consistent – but also points to complete changes, frequently due to a lack of interest in the original significance, e.g. carved heads of sticks and staffs cut off to become ‘sculptures’ in a western sense (Klopper, 2002:39).

¹¹⁷ Thiel gives Azaria Mbatha’s work as an example of contemporary contextualisation (Thiel, 1984:14).

¹¹⁸ Mvusi and Zondi moved in the same circles at the beginning of the 1960s in connection with an exhibition organised by B.I.C.A., (Bantu, Indian and Coloured Art) before Mvusi’s studies took him to the USA – see also footnote 84, p.25

The placing of 'Third World' arts on a par with western traditions has been linked not only to a collective sense of guilt for past colonial injustice and subjugation, but their "elevation" - above the original status of 'primitive curios' afforded them by the West - is associated with a denunciation of colonialism's notion of superiority (Nettleton, 1988:301). Further, the appropriation of those objects as 'art', which are still made in a 'traditional' context has been attributed to a 'search for exoticism' (Nettleton, 1988:307) involving also an emphasis on the art-maker who is imbued with a western concept of a unique creator-status. The long road to the appreciation of contemporary rural African art is seen to have been facilitated by postmodernist concerns (Rankin, 1989:54)¹¹⁹.

In the last decade of the 20th century, the importance placed on viewing African art from the standpoint of the way in which African artists have experienced and viewed the century (Vogel, 1991:Introd.) relates to Grossert's view of more than two decades earlier - which was regarded as racist in the South African context - that Africans' "own aesthetic goals" should be used as the measure of success or failure of their art, not the criteria applied to western art (Grossert, 1968:43)¹²⁰.

1.5.3 Contextualising Michael Zondi's work within the local art world from the 1960s

From 1960, while Zondi exhibited for a white audience, his representational work was freeing itself technically from the restraints of detailed naturalism. His figures were African types, but had no stylistic connection to African art. Zondi became familiar with the work and doubtless the intention of Mvusi, to whose work Rankin attributes a "deliberate intention to recreate the spirit of African art" (Rankin, 1989:47)¹²¹.

Artists were beginning to emerge from the informal teaching of the Polly Street Art Centre and art teachers from training institutions like Ndaleni, including Michael's brother, Mandlenkosi Zondi (see p.24 above). At this time Zondi met Cecil Skotnes, (see p.27, footnote 96, above) who was among the first white artists to begin a search for an African idiom in more conceptual work. He was a co-founder of the *Amadlozi* group which,

¹¹⁹ "The opening up of an awareness of the validity of a wide variety of styles and sources as raw materials for artists". However, Rankin points out that the complexity of the theoretical issues that have accompanied this long road, defy understanding for the makers to engage in a debate about their own work (Rankin, 1989:54).

¹²⁰ Grossert felt the Eurocentric criteria used in the evaluation of black art to be incongruous and condescending (Grossert, 1968:43-4).

together with the conceptual compositions of Walter Battiss and Alexis Preller of the *New Group*, became a key focus of art-historians (refer to Battiss, 1967). This exploration by artists and teachers seeking a new aesthetic, a “formal abstraction” in African art, (Rankin, 1989: 43)¹²² took place in part in an environment where black artists found guidance and encouragement from them for their art-making. They could employ newly found skills and a new artistic language to depart boldly from received art-making traditions into individualised expression. From the art tuition and guidance given by Sr. Pientia at Mariannhill to artists like Duke Ketye, Franz Hodi and Michael Mbebe during the 1960s, elements like emphasis on pattern and clarity of form, a love for minute detail, as well as fondness for repetition were seen by her as descriptive of an “African idiom” (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:118).

After participation in the Republic Festival exhibition in Bloemfontein where he was awarded a bronze medal, Zondi’s further public exposure at the beginning of the 1960s occurred under the auspices of private initiatives, in part using public facilities. In 1961 he took part in an exhibition, under organised by B.I.C.A., (Bantu, Indian and Coloured Art) staged in Durban¹²³, as well as in the Council Chambers of the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg (Rankin, 1989:71). *Art: South Africa Today* was initiated by the Natal Region of the Institute of Race Relations, in conjunction with the Durban Art Gallery and the Natal Society of Arts, between 1963 and 1975. Selection was on merit and open to all races (Thorpe, 1994:12). In 1963 Sydney Kumalo, Gladys Mgudlandlu and Michael Zondi were represented¹²⁴. It was considered of sufficient national importance to attract for the selection committee two years later, in 1965, ‘eminent art personalities’ – including Dr. M. Bokhorst, director of the South African National Gallery), who bought a Mbatha print and Zondi’s *Woman in Ecstasy*¹²⁵ (Thorpe, 1994:12,13).

¹²¹ See footnote 85, p. 25

¹²² Paradoxically, the Africans’ lack of familiarity with African art is cited as a possible reason for their lesser concern with issues of formal abstraction in African art (Rankin, 1989:43).

¹²³ Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by Eric Ngcobo, Michael Zondi, John Hooper, Mandlenkosi Zondi, Wolfgang Bodenstein, Noah Ndlovu, Dan Mahlobo – presented by B.I.C.A., opened by J.W. Grossert - Art Gallery, City Hall, Durban, 21-28 October 1961.

¹²⁴ Sydney Kumalo, *Girl With a Dove*; Gladys Mgudlandlu’s *Nyanga Pondokkies* and Michael Zondi’s *Rachel* (Thorpe, 1994:12). Thorpe erroneously thinks of *Rachel* as having been bought by the DAG. In her publication, *The Fountain* is labelled incorrectly as *Rachel* (Thorpe, 1994:27). Note: *Rachel* was bought by Wolfgang Bodenstein and is now in the possession of his son, Dr. Johannes Bodenstein.

¹²⁵ *Woman in Ecstasy* is depicted in Thorpe (Thorpe, 1994:13) and *The Neglected Tradition* shows it as ‘*Ecstatic Woman*’ (Sack, 1988:91).

In 1965 Michael Zondi participated in the ecumenical *Inter-Faith* exhibition and *Art: South Africa Today*. It was also the year of his first solo-exhibition, in 1965, made possible by the Durban Art Gallery under the curatorship of Madame Wezynska-Klecynzka.¹²⁶ A year later his '*Calabash*' of 1963 was selected to be shown at the Venice Biennale.

From 1972 Zondi became a full-time artist. Linked to patronage, the 1970s saw him move his workshop to Pretoria. Also, on an itinerant basis, he sculpted at a farm further north near Nylstroom, (now Modi Molle) as well as in the Cape at George, both locations providing his preferred hardwoods.

¹²⁶ Personal communication, Carol Brown, director, Durban Art Gallery, August 2003.

In displaying Zondi's work as individual sculptures placed on various pedestals and plinths in the large exhibition space, the Durban Art Gallery chose to facilitate the viewing of the artworks without a contextualisation of the artist within a 'story-telling' mode (Karp, 1991). This is a part of a broad discourse concerning exhibitions as either "a vehicle for the display of objects" - a predominant view said to be held amongst art museum curators - or the museum as "a space for telling a story" of the cultural-history background (Karp, 1991:12).

CHAPTER TWO: WORKS, 1954 – 1972

“My art is made for the people and the world.
It is my interpretation of God’s creation,
and not something specially made for the Art expert.
Art should not be a mystery,
but should be able to speak to mankind
and represent its creator even when he is long gone.”
(Zondi,1960b:2)

In plotting Michael Zondi’s artistic career, my work places a great emphasis on the artist’s interface with his white patrons. I illuminate the extraordinarily intense, personal level of Zondi’s intellectual discourse with his patrons concerning cultural, religious and political themes within the vicissitudes of a segregated South Africa. This serves not only to reveal how Zondi explored his own stance within a changing urban and western environment in which he chose to be challenged, but equally how his white patrons were able to vicariously stage their own discerning perspectives of a system which, in many respects, they defied. For Zondi, this utopia represented a partial solution to the dilemma of being an artist and an African in the context of an otherwise segregated South Africa. The humanitarian themes of his artistic endeavours were embraced by the core of an élitist white public, while his human rights remained abused in terms of the political integrity of the system in which the interface occurred – and on whose periphery he was otherwise forced to exist.

While Zondi only briefly experienced a physical distance from his homeland – travelling to Paris for a couple of weeks during a politically volatile time in the mid-1970s – the cultural shift experienced in the interface with his patrons will have impacted strongly on his vision and reflection of his own strong cultural roots in rural KwaZulu-Natal¹²⁷, especially in view of a white political hegemony in South Africa, which sought to retain African cultural experiences as ‘other’¹²⁸.

From personal communication with the artist as well as various patrons, I have found Zondi’s notions of ‘clan’ distinctiveness, his adherence to a ‘Zulu’ identity to be very strong. Zondi’s

¹²⁷ Zondi has a strong sense of connection with the concept of ‘home’ at Mtulwa in KwaZulu-Natal: “If I want to go home that’s the only place I go” ..” And when I’m home, I’m home” (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

¹²⁸ In her sourcing of African roots in the work of Azaria Mbatha - who also stems from a devout Lutheran Christian home (Winters, 1998:91) - Winters points to the artist’s reformulation of those roots in view of the new perspective gained through his cultural shift (to Sweden) (Winters, 1998:89,90).

grandfather was a close relative of Bambatha, of the 1906 rebellion.¹²⁹ At a time when national, rather than regional or clan, identity was being propagated in view of unifying ideologies opposing apartheid, this may seem contradictory. At worst, it might even be construed as another ‘successful’ conversion to the thinking of the partially artificial divisive colonial constructs, which were instrumentalised for the perpetuation of colonial hegemony. But that would imply an undiscerning, uncritical position on the part of the artist in his political and social awareness. Zondi’s whole oeuvre - with its consistent emphasis on humanitarian issues - speaks against this. I am convinced that Zondi’s stalwart emphasis of his ‘ethnic’ roots should be seen as a psychological binary for his pronounced intellectual integration into western thought which accompanied his being a *Kholwa*. While the artist will have found an intellectual ‘home’ in the utopia he and his white sparring partners and patrons were creating, a deeper need for *belonging* required a more clearly defined parameter, which he found amongst ‘his’ people.

Michael Zondi’s mission schooling and his training at the Swedish mission’s Trade and Industrial School at Dundee in northern Natal, was followed by self-employment as a cabinet-maker in Edendale, near Pietermaritzburg (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)¹³⁰,

¹²⁹ Zondi has given conflicting accounts of his grandfather’s relationship with Bambatha. Cited as both his cousin (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a) and his brother (Nieser, 2004a). Zondi asserts that, on Bambatha’s death: “one of Bambatha’s wives was allocated to my grandfather” (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a). The name ‘Bambatha Zondi’ is mentioned in connection with a ‘Stick of Authority’, in the possession of Sighart Bourquin used in Dinizulu’s treason trial linking him with the activities of Bambatha Zondi and Chief Siganda Shezi at Nkandla (Berning, 1996: 70).

Describing the Zulu chieftain Shaka as the founder of the ‘Zulu nation’ comprising ‘Nguni Bantu’, Bryant’s definition of ‘nation’ makes reference to that leader’s autocracy and despotism (Bryant, 1929:3,71 and 1949:xi). Using the term ‘clan’ as “a magnified kraal or family” – with clans of common descent making up a ‘tribe’ (Bryant, 1929:72) - Bryant makes mention of the Zondi clan as intruders of “obscure origin” into the ‘Tukela’ region, thinking them of ‘Sutu’ origin, “most likely of Pedi-Tlokwa’ (Bryant, 1929:517) The Zondis are said to have surrendered to Shaka. A later attempt at fleeing failed and the clan broke up and dispersed. In the ‘universal disorder’ of the disintegration of the ‘Zulu nation’ the aba-kwa-Nxamalala settled along a stream, the iNadi, along which dwelt the eNadi – alias aba-kwa-Zondi, to become a brother-clan of the Zondis (Bryant, 1929:523). Michael Zondi knew of his clan having moved to the Zwartkop area near Pietermaritzburg, - a move which Bryant dates prior to 1837.

¹³⁰ In the mid 19th century the Rev. James Allison was given governmental acreage at Edendale. By 1875 the *amakholwa* had established *Unzondelelo*, a self-supporting evangelistic enterprise (Etherington, 1971:119, 307). Etherington uses Vilikazi’s view on Christian teachings, “the value of sustained labour and frugality” making *amakholwa* more amenable to a free market economy. He notes that, despite Government resources going into ‘industrial schools’, few *amakholwa* entered the artisan class. Capital for ownership of workshops was hard to accumulate and, apart from that, the perception was that trades required “too much sitting indoors for men of active habits”. Whites with similar qualifications earned more and it was felt that securing rewards commensurate with the time required to develop the skill was difficult. In this way, commerce became “more desirable” (Etherington, 1971:264-266).

pre-empting his teaching career at his *alma mater* which would become the catalyst for his art-making¹³¹.

Despite little contact with teachers from institutions of formal art training, Zondi mapped out the very personal self-didactic route of an artist who made his own conscious choices, seeking artistic independence and the means for self-expression within the racially divided South African social context. Zondi's career was most decidedly influenced by people who became his friends – patrons who recognized his talent and were able to facilitate a certain foregrounding of the work of this black artist, which would otherwise not have been possible.

After his vocational training at Dundee, Zondi had found local patronage for his jewellery boxes and kists¹³² at Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, in the late 1940s, when he had his own workshop there, catering to a local clientele. Some were adorned with wooden relief panels - depicting rural scenes, or detailed motifs. The kist from the 1950s in the Nixon collection, besides carved inset relief panels of rural scenes, has a relief of two meeting hands, which Zondi would sculpt repeatedly in subsequent works



Fig. 1

Jewellery Box
1955

(see *Give and Take*, (1974) Fig. 31, p. 71). Zondi interprets it as the theme of friendship, mentioning (anachronistically in the case of the Nixon piece) “Dr. Strauss and Dr. Bodenstein, because it is friendship that brought me so far” (Nieser, 2002c)¹³³.

Zondi found initial encouragement from Einar Andreas Magni¹³⁴, the founder of the Trade and Industrial School, to return to Dundee and become an instructor of carpentry, joinery and cabinet work from 1952 (Zondi, 1963a:2). He mentions Magni as ‘an artist’ (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a) and Zondi is presumed to have done non-figurative, decorative relief carving on furniture according to Magni’s designs (Rankin, 1993:133). While also learning

¹³¹ Zondi studied at the Swedish Lutheran Mission’s Industrial School from 1942 to 1944, his fees paid by the priest, Gunnar Helander. After employment in a furniture shop in Pietermaritzburg, Zondi set up his own workshop in nearby Edendale, making kists and furniture (Rankin, 1993:132 and Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

¹³² Made for “girls who were going to get married” (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

¹³³ The clasped hands are on the front of a kist in the Bodenstein collection.

¹³⁴ A Swedish architect and building engineer with artistic talents, who founded the school in the late 1920s (Rankin, 1993:132). After Zondi had done carpentry work in repairing churches for the Swedish Mission stations in 1950, it was Magni’s encouragement which prompted Zondi to return and complete a fourth year in Dundee in 1951 to become a woodwork instructor. Due to Magni’s technical background, it may be surmised that he encouraged Zondi not only to stay as an employee subsequent to his teacher training, but also to enter into building design and construction.

building skills¹³⁵, at the school he acquired the technical adeptness required for carving, *inter alia* in working on furniture pieces with Sven Eriksson, the later principal of the school (Zondi, 1963a: 2), e.g. a Welsh dresser in the Nixon home, for whose top he carved a low-relief Springbok chevron¹³⁶. Eriksson recognized Zondi's talent and not only provided him with his first set of carving tools, but also found patronage for his work in Sweden.¹³⁷ In these early 1950s Zondi's younger brother Mandlenkosi entered the art environment at Ndaleni, which would have further inspired Zondi to try his hand at more artistic work, a field of study which had been denied him due to financial restraints.

Zondi moved with the school in 1956 when it was transferred to Edendale¹³⁸ and came under the aegis of the *Bantu Education* Division of the Department of Native Affairs. He remained there until 1961¹³⁹. By acquiring various further skills with relevant certification in Dundee,¹⁴⁰ Zondi created for himself the platform from which to advance not only his technical occupation but equally his artistic career and his own personal development. He wrote his matric when he was well into his thirties, but his new qualifications did not further his career as a black teacher of carpentry. In placing emphasis on his learning experience and the importance of language and communication¹⁴¹, Zondi resisted being drawn into notions of subjugation inherent in a "cult of victimization" (Mbembe, 2002: 244-5)¹⁴².

¹³⁵ Zondi built a church hall in Dundee. (Zondi, 1963:2)

¹³⁶ Personal communication, Kay Nixon 14 October 2002. Zondi refers to his love of carving into furniture (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)

¹³⁷ Personal communication with Agnes Bodenstein, 16 October 2003 and personal telephonic communication with Jenny Eriksson, Uppsala, Sweden, 21 November 2003

¹³⁸ The school was established on the site of an old wickerwork factory adjoining the farm *Welverdiend* - which had belonged to the Voortrekker leader Andries Pretorius - and extended to accommodate 250 students. (*Bantu Education Journal*, 1957:214)

¹³⁹ In his letter of application to the superintendent of the Appelsbosch Mission Hospital, Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstein, Zondi refers to the principal, Mr. H.R. Hirsche, for a personal reference. In *Bantu Education Journal* of June 1957 the name is given as 'Hirche' (*Bantu Education Journal*, 1957:214).

¹⁴⁰ National Junior Certificate; Elementary First Aid Certificate; Industrial Safety Certificate; Bantu Builder's Certificate and the 5th National Technical Certificate ... with Building Construction as a major subject and English Senior as an additional subject (Zondi, 1963:2). While Rankin cites Zondi as completing his junior certificate in 1956 and "matriculation and the National Technical Certificate III in building in 1962", Zondi notes in 1963 that his 5th National Technical Certificate was "(graded as Matric equivalent)" (Zondi, 1963:2). Had he attained his matriculation certificate, it seems likely that he would have mentioned this in his letter of application for the post of general manager at the Appelsbosch Mission.

¹⁴¹ Asked to comment on the restrictions imposed on education for blacks by the apartheid system, Zondi refers to his luck in having friends "in places like the University of Natal - that helped me, otherwise I wouldn't have been allowed to attend the ...classes". He also refers to friends supplying him with carving tools - confirmed by Agnes Bodenstein (Nieser, 2002a). Speaking of Hooper's departure: "It's a pity that most of those good people have been leaving on account of this apartheid" (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)

¹⁴² See Chapter One - 1.3. *Selfhood*, p. 8ff

One of Zondi's earliest pieces is *Nozizwe*, (1954), a small-scale figurative carving made as a replica of a wood carving by Lazarus Shezi.¹⁴³ As a young instructor of carpentry and woodwork in Dundee, it is thought that Shezi's piece of a kneeling, young rural girl gave Zondi the confidence to begin sculpting¹⁴⁴. The girls wear only skirts and a necklace and have rhythmically stylised plaited strands of hair. While Shezi's figure in light wood has a rather crude finish, Zondi has given his harder, dark wood a smooth finish. Both figures are kneeling in front of an *ukhamba*, while each holds another similar vessel.¹⁴⁵ Shezi's figure has an upright, stiff posture, whereas Zondi has shifted the weight of the torso onto the left knee, in a slight contrapposto, making the figure seem more animated.



Fig. 2
 At left, figure by Lazarus Shezi
 At right Zondi's copy:
Nozizwe
 1954

Michael's association with artists and work produced at the Ndaleni Art School in the following years doubtless influenced his own carvings (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)¹⁴⁶. Zondi's younger brother, Mandlenkosi¹⁴⁷, was one of the first students to enrol at the training school for teachers of primary level art, established in Richmond, Natal in 1952 (see Chapter One, 1.4.3 p. 23, 24).

Related to Zondi's childhood inclination of making realistic representations in clay work or drawings (Rankin, 1993: 135), he began his oeuvre with naturalistic genre figures which denote traditionalist roots, not only by depicting African people. He made use of distinctive

¹⁴³ Rankin thinks of 1952 - the year Zondi's brother, Mandlenkosi, began studying at Ndaleni - as too early for the launching of Zondi's career (Rankin, 1989:72). Jenny Eriksson recalls 1952 as the year her husband, Sven Eriksson - Zondi's colleague at Dundee - began encouraging him to begin sculpting (telephonic communication, Jenny Eriksson, Uppsala, 20 November 2003) (see Rankin, 1989:71-72).

¹⁴⁴ Zondi stated: "Actually, I took up the woodcarving from him - Lazarus Shezi - his home is somewhere in Zululand" (Nieser, 2002c) Zondi copied the piece by Lazarus Shezi, thinking "I can do better!" (Personal communication with Kay Nixon, 14 October 2002). In the Nixon collection there is a small, intricately carved, somewhat naive wood sculpture of a rural scene by Shezi, depicting a man, woman and child threatened by a snake in a tree. Engraved on the back: "Dundee Trade School Lazarus Shezi"

¹⁴⁵ The generic plural term for domestic vessels *isikhamba* made of clay (Bell and Calder eds., 1998:120).

¹⁴⁶ Rankin speaks of a possible inspiration of Mandlenkosi's work on Michael Zondi (Rankin, 1989:179), while Miles cites the artist as having said that he was carving before his brother received tuition at Ndaleni (Miles, 1997:112)

¹⁴⁷ Mandlenkosi later became a teacher of Arts and Crafts at Lamontville and Edendale and by 1961 found employment in Appelsbosch at the mission hospital - see footnote 80, p. 42

Zulu insignia in the form of *isicolo*, a headdress for women, *iziphandhla*, arm and ankle rings, *iBeshu*, a posterior curtain worn by men, etc. Zondi's early female figures comply with the Zulu ideal of corpulence (Bryant, 1949:590) and the depiction of large buttocks is a reflection of Zondi's own preference (Nieser, 2002c). Covertly, Zondi would begin to indigenise Biblical imagery by making use of such reinforcement of Zulu cultural and traditional ideals when visualising scriptures. This is seen as a re-situation of Biblical themes, an association and implicit absorption of Biblical ideology within the recipient culture (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:190) (See *Lot's Wife*, Fig. 6, p. 46 below).

During the 1950s and as late as 1960 Zondi also carved "half-heads or masks...mounted on plates" (Zondi, 1960c:2) wood roundels with Zulu 'types', doubtless produced in accordance with market demands¹⁴⁸.

Bryant's deprecatory comments about the lack of artistic or carving skills of the Zulu¹⁴⁹ have been eclipsed by diverse art-historical research into indigenous material culture of the later 20th century, including Nguni groups along the eastern seaboard. In his traditionalist home, where visual aesthetics were linked to functional objects, Zondi's father repaired and crafted in wood.¹⁵¹ Apart from financial constraints standing in the way of higher academic education (Rankin, 1993: 132), it was perhaps an emotional link to the revered



Fig. 3

Dancing Girl¹⁵⁰
1957



Fig. 4

Zulu Heads mounted on roundels
1959



Fig. 5

Pair of Zulu Heads
1959

¹⁴⁸ Kay Nixon asserts that her father persuaded Zondi not to pursue the carving of a series of heads as roundels - Zulu (personal communication, Kay Nixon, 11 February 2004).

¹⁴⁹ Bryant is deprecatory about Zulu wood-carving: "The Zulus were no great shakes at wood-carving" and about their artistic ability or imagination (Bryant, 1949:406-407).

¹⁵⁰ Engraved on base: 'By M Zondi 1957'

¹⁵¹ The homestead heads of Zulu families carved utensils for household use (Bryant, 1949:376). Zondi's father made and repaired objects (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a) like *uKézo* - spoons; *iTunga* - milk-pails; *uGqoko* - meat plates from soft woods (Bryant, 1949 :168), the latter two termed 'prestige items' (Klopper, 1992:88) while sticks and knob-kieries, *Amawisa* were made of hardwoods: Bryant refers to *umZaca*, stout cudgels

craft of woodcarving which saw Zondi begin tertiary training as a carpenter after leaving school but before gaining his matriculation certificate. Zondi's knowledge of wood¹⁵², his intimate and emotional relationship with trees, is borne out not only by many allusions to wood as something living, but also by a poem, 'The Song of the Trees', written in English¹⁵³.

Zondi received encouragement and guidance for his sculpting from the aforementioned Organiser of Manual and Vocational training during the fifties John Nixon¹⁵⁴ and Jack Grossert (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)¹⁵⁵. A first break from the academic realism of early African pioneer art occurred in Zondi's art when he came under the influence and private tutorship of John Hooper, sculpture lecturer of the officially whites-only Fine Arts Department at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg), under the aegis of Jack Heath. Zondi recalls with enthusiasm his interface with Hooper (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a), whose late modernist work - typified by "a broad expressiveness and conceptualism" (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:170) - encouraged him to depart from his initial style of carving fine detail and giving his pieces a smooth finish.

Michael Zondi informed Grossert about linguistic distinctions between various names for craftsmen as well as artists (Grossert, 1968:41). The nearest to the western term for 'artist' Zondi cited as '*uchwephesha*' - "a man who mystifies by the inborn talent which he possesses and which he cannot transmit to others... one who knows and understands by intuition and who imparts to his craft a powerful emotional quality which others can 'feel' when they come in contact with his work" Hence the word for a work of art is *ubuchwephesha*, but this is "limited to the visual arts such as woodcarving or metalwork" (Grossert, 1968:41). This linguistic affiliation between woodwork and metalwork is

carried by men (Bryant, 1949:168), or *iWisa*, the 'knobkerry', a spherical knob from the "hardest and heaviest woods procurable". He names *umSimbiti* (*Milletia caffra*) *iNqayi* (*Elaeodendron velutinum*) *umNweba* (*Mimusops caffra*) *umPumbulu* (*Mimusops*) *uMozane* (*Toddalia lanceolata*) *umQaloti* (*Strychnos henningsii*) (Bryant, 1949:407-408).

¹⁵² Zondi sought wood for his sculptures in the 'bush' (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a). Bryant refers to the comprehensive schooling in the study of natural science amongst the "Zulu race"- bemoaning that their "nobility of heart, dignity and refinement in manners" were "rapidly dying out before the destructive and demoralising advance of European 'civilisation' (Bryant, 1929:78).

¹⁵³ (Photocopy from Johan van Wyk, given to Nieser in March 2003) Thinking the planting of indigenous trees should be encouraged, Zondi says "chopping down a tree is like injuring somebody" (Nieser, 2002c). "Whoever chops will just injure a tree - at one time I made a ... poem about what the tree thinks or sees"; "Wood is alive, the smell, the touch"; "wood is gold" (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

¹⁵⁴ Nixon had been organiser in Crafts and Woodwork from 1941 (Grossert, 1968:79 and personal communication with Kay Nixon, December 2002 and 'Bantu Education Journal' - June 1957). On the cover page Zondi is depicted sculpting: "Michael Zondi of Edendale, Artistic Woodwork Instructor" (Photo L.M. Pfeiffer (sic.))

¹⁵⁵ See footnote 56, pg.19

significant in view of Klopper's research into the histories of artefacts from southeast Africa (Klopper, 1992). In the early history of the Zulu kingdom, the court appropriated not only the skills of blacksmiths and specialised carvers or sculptors but also the distribution of the artefacts they produced (Klopper, 1992:92). The proximity of the two skills within the context of royal courts resulted from the dependency of carvers on tools made by blacksmiths¹⁵⁶. Using the extremely valuable locally-smelted iron (Klopper, 1992: 93) their skills related directly to the production of weaponry engaged in power politics. The courtly control is thought not to have survived beyond the expansion of the Natal trade in the 1850s, let alone the advent of migrant labour (Klopper, 1992: 93) by which time tools for carving became more freely available from trade outlets¹⁵⁷.

Without making use of preliminary sketches, Zondi would meditate over a log or piece of wood until he could perceive the image "imprisoned in the wood" (Bodenstein,c1968:2). I have repeatedly found evidence of astonishment expressed at the method of Zondi's carving of wood (Bodenstein, c1968:2)¹⁵⁸. The artist's concept of freeing the figure from the block of wood was realized by the use of axes and hatchets, employed with "awe-inspiring speed and impulsiveness" (Bodenstein, c1968:2 and Nieser, 2003k)¹⁵⁹. Zondi thinks of his life's work as containing his 'whole being' (Nieser, 2003a). Using a chisel for the finer details, Zondi had preference for making his own mallets (Nieser, 2003a)¹⁶⁰.

It was through his visual discourse with a very specific choice of themes that Zondi would reach his particularised, predominantly white audience, who were to celebrate his work for more than two productive decades. Theirs was frequently a modernist visual vocabulary and they, too, were largely steeped in Christianity.

¹⁵⁶ The crafting of wood in the traditionalist context was done with knives, small hatchets or sharp pieces of iron, as well as axes "reversed in the handle" to become adzes (Klopper, 1992:93).

¹⁵⁷ Grossert contends that incorporating blacksmithing as a vocational course - as one of the most skilled craft professions in Zulu communities - did not concur with educational programmes of the Bantu education system (Grossert, 1968:64).

¹⁵⁸ Personal communication, 18 September 2003 with Dr. Matthys Strydom, George, former gallery owner who exhibited Zondi's work from the mid-1970s. He is in the possession of a small axe with a metal pipe handle from Zondi.

¹⁵⁹ See footnote 156 above

¹⁶⁰ While mention is made of a hatchet for shaping, Zondi's preference for "his own home-made mallets" was noted in *The Natal Mercury*, Friday, 2 August, 1963.

Hailing from a devout Lutheran *kholwa* family, Zondi's background¹⁶¹ and mission schooling, throughout his oeuvre Zondi was to draw from a foundation in the rendering of images from the Christian gospel found in churches, albeit sparsely in the Lutheran context.

Finding inspiration from the visualising of characters from the Bible¹⁶², Zondi employed his sculptures as didactic vehicles to demonstrate universally valid human morals, for example his early realist figure, of 1959, *Lot's Wife* (also called *Pillar of Salt*¹⁶³), turning into a pillar of salt, used metaphorically to denote disobedience¹⁶⁴. More particularly, with this piece Zondi further upholds the validity of traditional Zulu moralizing as oral traditions in his culture had done, endorsing accounts from the past as guides to the community (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:96), as well as reading Zulu oral tradition and folklore through the Old Testament (La Hausse de Lalouvière, 2000:102). This sculpture initiated the figuration of discursive 'texts' with which – while imparting his messages – in view of the biblical context, the artist also demanded of his audience some measure of *a priori* knowledge. Once again embracing traditionalism and Zulu identity in the *iziphandhla*, in keeping with Zondi's work of the time, the finish of the wood is highly polished. Asked about inspiration for his work prior to sculpting, Zondi commented: "As I read the Bible, I ... visualize the characters in the Bible – that is why I can even show pain...or pleasure where one should see pleasure." (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)



Fig. 6

Lot's Wife
1959

Zondi begins to use his 'texts' as an outlet through which he can address key issues linked to humanity, countering the inhumanity of the divisive system in which he lived. While experimenting with various forms of expression and surface quality – albeit predominantly

¹⁶¹ Zondi's mother was a *kholwa*, and instilled in Michael the idea of equality before a Christian God. "She was never without her bible" (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

¹⁶² See Zondi on biblical inspiration - this paragraph below.

Also: "...when I carved a figure, to my children it becomes a live person, so I have a feeling that there is art in their voice" (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

¹⁶³ Handwritten title on the back of a photograph found in an envelope from Uppsala – filed by Bodenstern, transferred to Nieser in October 2003.

¹⁶⁴ Zondi carved "*Isalakutshelwa*" onto the piece, "*Isalakutshelwa sibonangomopho*", meaning "the foolhardy learn by the flow of blood" (Rankin, 1993:137). Alluding to disobedience, "Zondi says of the piece: ...she couldn't help to turn her head – one can really see how she had to turn back" (Nieser, 2002c).

within the relative parameters of a representational style favoured within the church context in South Africa – Zondi consistently remained committed to rendering empathetic portraits of ordinary people, inspired by his lived reality in the *KwaZulu* context from which he emerged. He was able to depict a wide palette of human emotions, windows on joy, pain and struggle. Frequent expressions of benevolent serenity on the part of female figures – especially those with children – have been attributed to Zondi’s positive attitude to life (Rankin, 1993:137).

With works including mother-and-child depictions, in his individual portraiture, Zondi portrayed ‘his’ people’s aspirations, a marginalized people’s humanity and, in doing so, also his own. A profound and empathetic window on pain and suffering is *Famine* (1960), depicting a mother holding her starving child against her body. Covering it with a cloak, in a gesture of protection, only the head with sunken eyes and the left side of the child’s emaciated torso emerge. Stylistically, Zondi is emerging from his naturalistic, smooth finish, experimenting here with retaining slightly more expressive chisel marks.

Memento Mori, or *The Dying Young Man*, of 1960 (Rankin, 1989:136)¹⁶⁵ is the smaller-than-life-size portrait of a young patient whom Zondi had befriended and who was suffering and dying from tuberculosis (Bodenstein, 1998:2). To show his emaciation prior to death, making use of chisel marks creating flat planes, Zondi has strongly and rhythmically stylised the ribs in almost horizontal ridges, while the head reveals pronounced cheek bones and hollow eye sockets with large lids¹⁶⁶.



Fig. 7

Famine
1960



Fig. 8

Dying Young Man
1960

¹⁶⁵ *Portrait of a Dying Young Man* (Manaka, 1987:34) – reproduced without acknowledgement of the photographer, Heinrich Schlaudraff

¹⁶⁶ Agnes Bodenstein felt that the photographic version of the figure revealed more convincingly the sentiment of death in which everyone at the hospital had been deeply involved – perhaps on account of the lesser-than-life size scale of the piece (Bodenstein, 1998:2).

Zondi's ability for compassion is thought to have had a life-long influence on his work (Bodenstein, c1968:2). Becoming attached to and personalising his figures when speaking of them, Zondi saw a greater significance in knowing to whom his pieces went, than in the price they fetched (Bodenstein, c1968:7).

On a less profound level, Zondi frequently depicted implicitly jolly 'genre' figures, portraits of rural people going about their daily lives, e.g. *Two Boys with a Dog* (1963), or his frequently portrayed musicians, sculpted throughout his oeuvre.¹⁶⁷ Such motifs would have contributed to a positive reception of his work¹⁶⁸ and been motivation for his continued interest in carving them. In some respects, this subject matter may be seen to exemplify the representation of 'self' as 'other' for a "colonial audience" (Nettleton,1998: 86). The pieces were probably an unconscious indulgence in the predilections, on the part of Zondi's audience, for romanticising a 'vanishing' Africa. The works made few intellectual demands on that audience, as their reading could be restricted to the perception that they represented an 'untouched' and 'unspoilt' African continent¹⁶⁹. This was far from the realities of urban strife and restrictive discrimination towards black South Africans, which was rapidly forming the seedbed for Black Consciousness during the 1960s.



Fig. 9

Two Boys with a Dog
1963¹⁷⁰

The market-orientation of genre subject matter does not deny or denigrate the artist's intimacy with, and genuine empathy for, 'his' own rural people. In *The Family Bond*, of 1959, Zondi has carved three torsos out of a log of dark wood. A stylised bundle of reeds,

¹⁶⁷ Miles refers to his predilection for including musicians (Miles,1997:115). There are a number of *Flute Players* I have sourced- see *Flute Player*, 1979 (Fig. 48, p.85) His first bronze medal award was for a flute player (Zondi, 1960a:1-2). There are various versions of concertina players (e.g. see *Wema Blues*, Fig. 30, p.69) A flute player was one of the first pieces to receive an award, a bronze medal, at the Republic Day African Art Exhibition, held at the National Museum in Bloemfontein in 1960 (Zondi,1960a:1-2) (Rankin erroneously cites 1961 (Rankin, 1993:131).

¹⁶⁸ This was the case of Gerard Bhengu's work. See also the appropriation of Bhengu's work, Chapter One - 1.1, p. 3,4

¹⁶⁹ Zondi's friend and patron Wolfgang Bodenstein refers to as 'Paradise Lost' the "empty shell of fond illusions, self-deception and wishful thinking" (Bodenstein, 1977:52).

¹⁷⁰ (Rankin,1993:134) Photo by Heinrich Schlaudraff

tied together with thick spirals constituting a rope, forms the base from which protrude the outward facing figures of two men, placed higher than the third figure of a woman whose relatively tiny hands are folded in front of her chest¹⁷¹. All three figures face outward, but wear serious expressions suggesting a contemplative mood. The rhythmical strands of stylised grass find an echo in the even strands of the woman's hair. Zondi has made a conceptual link between the raw material grass, an integral part of Zulu cultural practices such as hut construction and basket and mat weaving, and rural people living within strong familial relationships. As in *Lot's Wife*, apart from the intricately chiselled texture depicting the hair of the men, the finish of the bodies is shiny and smooth, in keeping with Zondi's early preference for naturalism.



Fig. 10

The Family Bond
1959

Anxious to test both the market to find out public opinion at home and abroad, as well as his “standard in sculpture” (Zondi, 1960a) it appears that Zondi entered a sculpture in the “Art competition which appears in the ZONK Magazine....at Bloomfontein (sic.) during The Festival” in 1960 (Zondi, 1960a:1-2). He speaks of his “little boy” talking his way to the bronze medal award¹⁷².

While his biblically derived work would represent Zondi's genuine conviction and become a vehicle for his politically motivated discourse, the artist was no doubt aware that such imagery would also find favour with his growing patronage base, e.g. *Adam and Eve*, *Moses*, or his ‘Prophet’ figures. From work as smoothly finished as *Lot's Wife*, Zondi began experimenting with a more animated surface texture,¹⁷³ seen in *Famine* (Fig. 7, p.47) and

¹⁷¹ The uppermost male figure is thought to be the *paterfamilias*, the grandfather (personal communication, Kay Nixon, 24 April 2004)

¹⁷² “My little boy talked his way to a bronze medal...he spoke his message and the judges could not help listening” (Zondi, 1960:2). Rankin mentions a bronze medal awarded for a piece by Zondi at the ‘Republic Festival Art Exhibition’ of 1961 (Rankin, 1989:180) and, more particularly, a *Flute Player*, purchased by the National Museum in Bloemfontein after receiving “a bronze medal at the Republic Day African Art Exhibition ...in 1961” (Rankin, 1993:131). I am making the supposition that Zondi's ‘Little boy’ is the *Flute Player* and that it was exhibited in Bloemfontein in 1960. This is substantiated by the typed handout of the B.I.C.A. *Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture* in the Durban Art Gallery in October 1961, where mention is made of Michael Zondi's ‘bronze medal at the Union Festival, Bloemfontein, 1960’.

¹⁷³ Referring to works of the later 1950s, Rankin speaks of a greater animation through the ‘mark of the chisel’ (Rankin, 1989:48).

attributed to the influence of John Hooper.¹⁷⁴ I consider the influence exercised by Wolfgang Bodenstern as equally profound. Zondi met the German medical practitioner in 1959, where he was superintendent of the Mission Hospital at Appelsbosch, near Fawn Leas, in the Greytown district. Theirs would be a very profound lifelong friendship, which would lead Zondi to other important patrons, mostly in the medical field. As a young medical practitioner in the Ceza district near Nongoma in northern Natal, Bodenstern's interest in the indigenous culture and the arts¹⁷⁵ had brought him to the kraal of the lightning doctor, *inyanga* and prophet of the creator-god *Mvelinqangi*, Laduma Madela in 1957 (see Bodenstern and Raum, 1960). Initially, Madela's ambition to record for posterity Zulu cosmology¹⁷⁶ was facilitated by Bodenstern who supplied him with art materials (Nieser, 2002a and 2003f and Schlosser, 1975:39). Madela's life and work, both as an artist and a religious figure, would become the subject of intensive ethnographic study over more than three decades¹⁷⁷.

Formerly, the work of artists in Africa had been linked to and informed by their received cultural traditions. Creative capacities were not informed by the producer's intellect. Therefore, when Zondi's themes and works were informed by, and became expressions of, individualised intellectual processes, this may be seen as the most far-reaching consequence of his assimilation of a new language, *inter alia* an individualism acquired in the aforementioned western education, which would be imperative for the espousal of modernist paradigms within which he would re-define himself.

In accordance with Bodenstern's own modernist predilections – he introduced to Zondi the expressive work of artists like Käthe Kollwitz, Ernst Barlach¹⁷⁸ and Auguste Rodin (Nieser, 2002a and Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)¹⁷⁹ – Bodenstern encouraged him to work in the

¹⁷⁴ (Nieser, 2002b) Hooper is thought to have helped Zondi to develop a “broader and bolder approach to form” which Rankin thinks of as having become more evident in the 1960s (Rankin, 1989:48). From 1959 the intensive interface between Bodenstern and Zondi began to develop. Bodenstern's stylistic modernist predilections will have reiterated the influence on Zondi of Hooper's stylistic preferences during these years.

¹⁷⁵ Bodenstern is mentioned in connection with the idea to establish an art centre at the Ceza hospital (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003: 231).

¹⁷⁶ Zulu Cosmology derived “from visions of and injunctions by Mvelinqangi, the Zulu creator god, who appeared to him.” (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:179)

¹⁷⁷ In 1957 Bodenstern introduced the anthropologist Dr. O.F. Raum, of the University of Fort Hare, to Madela. Calling themselves ‘disciples’, who in Madela's eyes would facilitate a bridge to the world (Bodenstern and Raum, 1960:167), their initial work prompted further research for more than three decades by the ethnographer Katesa Schlosser, on the art and world-view of this artist-philosopher.

¹⁷⁸ See below, *The Scourge*, p. 51?

¹⁷⁹ Zondi recalls Bodenstern's “favourite” Barlach. Zondi found Rodin's work which he saw in Paris in 1977 (Zondi, 1977b:5) very inspirational, recalling and mentioning, in particular, *Balzac* and *The Burghers of Calais* (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)

manner of a greater truthfulness to the material, to depart from the smoothly finished and polished surface of his representational style. The artist wrote to him in 1960: “I admit going to superfluous details in my work, but they will fall off as time goes on” (Zondi, 1960b:2).

Zondi’s *Adam and Eve*, of 1959, pre-empted the freedom with which he would handle his hatchet- and chisel- marks in later years. At the time of its creation Bodenstein’s approval of the unfinished piece prompted Zondi to leave it thus.¹⁸⁰ Shortly afterwards, Zondi’s younger brother, Noah, brought the *Moses* figure to the Bodensteins (Bodenstein, 1998:2). It is also called *The Leader of his People*, and is sculpted from the same wild olive log as the ‘unfinished’ *Adam and Eve*. Another portrait head, *David* (or *Portrait of a Young Leader*) would emerge from that one piece of wood (Bodenstein, 1998:2).

In this head-only portrait of an elderly man, Zondi has depicted the man with a roughly-hewn beard, leaving the evidence of bold chisel marks. The head lies directly on the chin, the neck only visible from the side and rear view. My feeling that this portrait seems to have strong features resembling those of the artist, was confirmed by Bodenstein. (Bodenstein, 1998:2)¹⁸¹. Very significantly, Zondi’s thematic choice is another indigenisation and contextualisation of a biblical theme. In referring to the leadership role of Moses in guiding his people out of (Egyptian) slavery, as well as his role as intercessor between God and the people, Winters points to the concept of strong leadership in the Zulu culture legitimising the use of power (Winters, 1998:92,93). Leeb-du Toit draws a parallel with the need for



Fig. 11

Adam and Eve
1959



Fig. 12

Moses
1959

¹⁸⁰ It is possibly the piece with the most interesting and turbulent history, both from a technical point of view as well as its subsequent change of ownership. The two seated figures hewn from one piece of wood is small – measuring only 200x220x145mm. When Bodenstein saw it while the artist was still ‘freeing’ it, it was still in the first, very rough stages of completion, but the benevolent tension and movement between the two relaxed, seated figures was already fully evident. Bodenstein expressed his admiration for it and the roughness of the chisel-marks and ‘Zondi did not touch it again’ (Bodenstein, 1998:1.) see also (Nieser, 2003g).

¹⁸¹ Elza Miles asserts it is a portrait of Zondi’s grandfather (Miles 1997:113).

leadership for an oppressed majority in South Africa. Leeb-du Toit associates the implicit hope of freedom of the Israelites with the “relative autonomy of the homelands, of which KwaZulu was one” (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:191)¹⁸². Going beyond restrictive measures taken in 1913 and 1936¹⁸³, the government ‘homelands’ policy during the 1950s was refining legislation which further marginalized black South Africans into ‘reserves’ for which self-government and ultimate ‘independence’ was planned.¹⁸⁴ Further, Moses’ initial acceptance within the enemy camp before being found to be “ethnically foreign and too politically ambitious”, is seen in relation to his having become an outcast (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:190). Both Zondi and Bodenstein experienced difficulties and antagonism towards their interracial friendship (Zondi, 1960g and Bodenstein, 1960) and it could be contended that both felt at times to be outcast from the social context of their ‘own’ people (Nieser, 2003i)¹⁸⁵.

Pertinently, Zondi’s recent interpretation of a Christ figure in the Berglund collection, to the persona of *Moses* (Nieser, 2003e), is also understood in the light of the “enormous pressure and desire of liberation from the apartheid ideology” - Christ as *Saviour* and the truly *Divine Liberator* becomes *Moses* who liberated the Israelites from Egyptian captivity. Berglund speaks of a contextualisation of African liberation theology into a biblical setting (Berglund, 2003:2). Thiel encompasses Zondi’s art within an ecclesiastical debate, particularly in view of such contextualisation of Christian themes in African art (Thiel, 1984: 259)¹⁸⁶.

¹⁸² Leeb-du Toit cites both Mbatha’s selection of themes around Moses in terms of the proclamation ‘Let my people go’, as well as the frequent depiction in the work of Ndaleni students (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:191).

¹⁸³ Unless officially ‘released’, the Natives Land Act of 1913 ended legal entitlement of land acquired by blacks from whites outside ‘reserves’ which later became ‘homelands’ (Horrell, 1973:2). The Bantu Administration Act of 1927 empowered the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development to define tribal land and determine occupation at will (Horrell, 1973:40) and governmental powers to resettle people owning land in ‘black spots’ not adjoining homelands were extended in the Bantu Trust and Land Act of 1936.

¹⁸⁴ Intentions of leading each ‘Bantu nation’ to self-government and ultimate independence was expressed in the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 (Horrell, 1973:50) and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 (Horrell, 1973:50). Zulu nationalists in the Natal Native Congress leadership at the beginning of the 20th century had appropriated the idea of territorial segregation (La Hausse de Lalouvière, 2000:19). The designation and settling of people into specific areas exacerbated problems of families separated from breadwinners who became migrant labourers.

¹⁸⁵ Bodenstein was called “Kaffirboetie”, while Zondi’s friendship with a white man was denigrated amongst his people. Zondi speaks of “the devil sowing hate in this country” (Zondi, 1960)-15-11-60 in response to Bodenstein’s writing: “It may become even more difficult and at times seemingly impossible, that you and I live as brothers – as brothers in Jesus Christ – in a world which does not want us to live like that. The powers of evil and darkness will try their very best to separate us.....” (Bodenstein, 1960).

¹⁸⁶ In Thiel’s *Christliche Kunst in Afrika*, in a text juxtaposed with the image of Zondi’s *The Publican*, the author refers to Sundermeier’s perceptions of African concepts of conscience. Evil and guilt before God is expounded (Thiel, 1984:272), interpreting Zondi’s sculpture as the sinner in prayer, asking God for mercy and forgiveness.

Referring particularly to Charles B.S. Nkosi’s ‘Crucifix’ linocuts, Thiel states that it is common throughout Africa for suffering and suppression to be projected into a messianic, biblical context in waiting for deliverance (Thiel, 1984:259).

The poet and playwright, H.I.E. Dhloho, a personal acquaintance of Zondi, held mission schooling accountable for propagating and associating formal education with political aspirations, participation in a western economy and higher status (Couzens,1985:33). Zondi saw class consciousness as a problem additional to racial misunderstanding in the South African context¹⁸⁷, possibly in view of the implicit nationalism of the educated black intelligentsia which rejected ‘tribalism’ (Couzens,1985:17) and which, by the 1950s, had been forced to depart from their conciliatory acculturation stance of the previous decades in their quest for liberation from segregationist policies. The African ‘Who’s Who’ of 1930¹⁸⁸, as a publication which deals with the “glorification of individual mobility”, encouraging “Christian and civilized standards”, had been a ‘class definition’, a call for acceptance by the whites (Couzens: 1985:16,18).

Zondi’s *Prisoner of Hope*, mentioned and sketched in a letter to Bodenstein (Zondi, 1959:2)¹⁸⁹, is realised in *Invisible Bonds*.¹⁹⁰ This is one of his first, as well as one of the few politicising figures that Zondi was to make. A young man in short trousers – wearing around his waist a belt denoting his rural origins – stands in a slight contrapposto with his arms hanging down, wrists crossed in front of his body. The artist has left out the rope tying his wrists together, which was obvious in two small sketches of a figure he called *Prisoner of Hope*, depicted on the backs of two letter-pages to Bodenstein. Zondi thinks of it as “the most touching figure I ever made”. It was his first covert political statement, another discursive ‘text’, revealing the artist’s awareness of the rigorous social disparities within the apartheid state.



Fig. 13

Invisible Bonds
1960¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Two-page handwritten text by Zondi, filed by Bodenstein, transferred to Nieser in October 2003

¹⁸⁸ *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who’s Who) of Black Folks in Africa*, published in 1930.

¹⁸⁹ Using Bodenstein as a sounding-board: “I wonder what you will say about this figure, but it is the most touching I have ever made” (Zondi,1959:2).

¹⁹⁰ Zondi carved ‘Invisible Bonds by M. Zondi 1960’ onto the base.

¹⁹¹ Borrowed from Sighart Bourquin for the B.I.C.A. exhibition in 1961 (Photocopy of handout for the exhibition).

Figures like *Disappointment* and *Bitterness*, (Zondi, 1960c), sketched by the artist, speak of despair. Carved from the same log as *Invisible Bonds*, Zondi's *Sorrow* was sculpted in order to "add another creation to keep company" with the first piece (Zondi, 1960d:3)¹⁹². It depicts the mother of the young man, entitled *Invisible Bonds*.

Strongly reminiscent of two Barlach figures¹⁹³, Zondi planned at this time a horizontally levitating sword-wielding, robed figure *The Scourge* (Zondi, 1960d:3), also alluding to great suffering. In 1961 Zondi participated in the above-mentioned B.I.C.A. exhibition¹⁹⁴ (see Chapter One, p.36) as one of seven artists including Bodenstein¹⁹⁵. This is where his *Prophet* was shown. With the purchase of this relatively early sculpture, the Durban Art Gallery acquired one of Zondi's most poignant works. This is the portrait of an old, bearded and wrinkled man, which nevertheless has strong elements of self-portraiture. Despite the close attention to fine detail, including the open eyes, the surface texture of the cloak covering the man down to his feet reveals chisel marks, once more evidencing the artist's departure from a smooth and polished surface texture. With the heel of the right foot raised – the weight on the ball of the foot – the artist was perhaps suggesting some movement in what otherwise appears to be a stance of contemplation and composure.¹⁹⁶ As significant as is the composed, thoughtful facial expression, so also are the prophet's hands.



Fig. 14

Sorrow
1960



Fig. 15

The Prophet
1961

¹⁹² Zondi presented it to Sighart Bourquin in 1961 as the 'mother' of the boy represented in *Invisible Bonds* (Nieser, 2003g).

¹⁹³ It is strongly reminiscent of Ernst Barlach's compact, but at the same time seemingly floating *Der Rucher* of 1914 (Groves, 1998:67) as well as later charcoal sketches of the design for the *Güstrow Ehrenmal*, realised in 1969 long after the artist's death (Groves, 1998:102-103).

¹⁹⁴ Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture by Eric Ngcobo, Michael Zondi, John Hooper, Mandlenkosi Zondi, Wolfgang Bodenstein, Noah Ndlovu, Dan Mahlobo – presented by B.I.C.A., opened by J.W. Grossert – Art Gallery, City Hall, Durban, 21-28 October 1961.

¹⁹⁵ Zondi thought of Bodenstein as talented in drawing and he encouraged him to sculpt (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002). "Whoever stayed with me I had to encourage" "the sculptures when he did them – I had to laugh over them, because they have got a special way – he carved like some of the old German wood sculptors."

¹⁹⁶ In the essay contribution for the Veterans of KwaZulu-Natal catalogue. I erroneously spoke of hands resting on an invisible stave "hidden from the viewer by the robe which reaches the ground" (Nieser, 2003g).

While only the fingers of his right hand are visible, they are gnarled and curved over the other hand, held just beneath his chin, almost in a pose of prayer, perhaps holding the cloak around the shoulders. The hands in themselves become the portrait of a man's long life.

With Zondi's pieces coming into a wider public view, he found over the next years encouragement and support from Jo Thorpe, founder and co-ordinator of the African Arts Centre, to whom professionalism and integrity in fostering and furthering the interests of black artists is attributed (Verster in Thorpe, 1994:2). Called 'the culture broker' and accredited with having 'put Durban on the map as a centre of black artistic development' (Mac Gregor in Thorpe, 1994:1), Zondi found very emotive words of thanks for Jo Thorpe and her husband Jim¹⁹⁷ (Zondi in Thorpe, 1994:26).

Zondi's adherence to received Zulu cultural practices was interpreted as his being 'conservative and rooted in tradition' (Bodenstein, 1998:3). It was considered unusual for black artists generally to do self-portraiture (Rankin, 1993:135¹⁹⁸ and Bodenstein, 1998:3) or specific portraits (see *Shaka* and *Aunt of Dingane*, p.66 below). There is possible confirmation of this in the fact that Zondi's portrait lay neglected and hidden in a storeroom before it was discovered and restored (Bodenstein, 1998:3). The portraying of self, being very much a part of the western philosophy of individualism (Scheurich, 1997:122) and revealing a long tradition in western art, it was probably Wolfgang Bodenstein who motivated for its being resurrected and brought to the fore.¹⁹⁹ Individual features like eyes

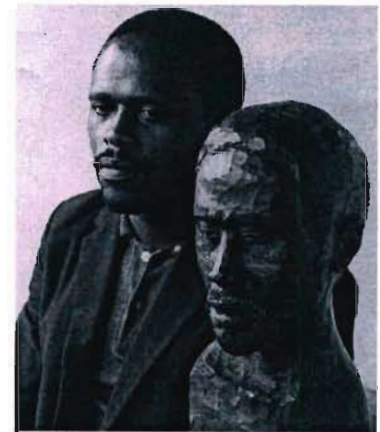


Fig. 16

Self-Portrait
1961

and the moustache are carved in fine detail, while Zondi makes use of relatively broad chisel marks whose flat surface catch the light to create an animated surface texture. Zondi has made the shape of the head more aquiline than his own. There is no distinctive body inscription to denote 'othering' for an audience²⁰⁰.

¹⁹⁷ Thorpe's publication begins with a letter by Michael Zondi (Thorpe, 1994:unnumbered page) as does the section devoted to him (Thorpe, 1994:26).

¹⁹⁸ Rankin notes Zondi and Kekana's self portraits as 'interesting' (Rankin, 1989:72).

¹⁹⁹ In the discourse of redressing the neglect of black South African artists of the past, this interest in self-portrayal finds an echo in Rankin's choice of motif for the title page of her essay on Michael Zondi as published in *OUR ART* 4:1993, Heinrich Schlaudraff's photograph of the artist with his *Self-portrait* of 1961

²⁰⁰ Nettleton refers to 'othering' only in terms of a recognition of racial difference as bodily inscribed (Nettleton: 1998:87).

Art: South Africa Today was an important national exhibition series between 1963 and 1975. It was initiated by the Natal Region of the Institute of Race Relations in conjunction with the Durban Art Gallery and the Natal Society of Arts. Selection was on merit and, being open to all races, it represented the first integration of the work of black artists in a major South African exhibition. Michael Zondi and Sydney Kumalo were both prize-winners in the first of these exhibitions in August 1963 (Thorpe, 1994:26), their names appearing as such in the catalogue (Thorpe, 1994:12)²⁰¹. Dr. M. Bokhorst, director of the South African National Gallery, bought Zondi's *Woman in Ecstasy* (Thorpe, 1994:13; Berman, 1983:415 and Sack, 1988) from the 1965 exhibition.

Zondi's tall, cloaked Biblical *Rachel*, sculpted from red ivory wood, was first shown in the *Art: South Africa Today*, 1963 exhibition. His alternate name for *Rachel* is *The Mother of the Sons* (Bodenstein, 1998:3), giving it a stronger link with paternal traditions in Zulu culture, as well as reverence for mothers. This relatively tall, tragic figure portraying the biblical Rachel, has an elongated neck creating a slight spiral movement up to the turned head. The eyes are closed as the back of her raised right hand covers one eye. The corners of her mouth are strongly down-turned, in an overall expression of great anguish.²⁰² There is only a suggestion of an *inhloko*, a traditional head-piece, worn by Zulu women, created by powerful, broad and expressive planes made by a hatchet. Her body is fairly tightly hugged by a cloak, which reaches from the outer side of her shoulders down to her feet. Zondi has left fine, striated, rhythmical chisel-marks on the draped cloak, giving it a distinctive texture.



Fig. 17

Rachel
1963

During the early 1960s Zondi met Dr. Kurt Strauss, a colleague of Bodenstein's in Pietermaritzburg. Becoming one of the artist's best patrons over the next decade and more by purchasing every piece Zondi brought to his home,²⁰³ Strauss accumulated a

²⁰¹ See footnote 124, p. 36

²⁰² "A voice was heard in Rama, sobbing in bitter grief; it was Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they were no more" (The Gospel according to Matthew:2 in the *Revised English Bible*, 1989 Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press).

²⁰³ Personal communication, Dr. Barbara Bruce nee Strauss, Kalk Bay, 18 January 2003

collection second only to the Bodensteins'. Zondi's industriousness formed the core of the self-sufficiency to which he aspired, perhaps an expression of a tacit abhorrence of the dependency and servitude he observed amongst his people²⁰⁴. The independence which he always sought for his art-making was manifest in his dislike for taking on commission work or taking orders.²⁰⁵ It would appear that within the context of ecclesiastical work he was most willing to make exceptions, e.g. the Appelsbosch chapel project and the request for a Christ-figure in the mid-seventies, ordered by a north-German Lutheran congregation for a celebratory anniversary (see Chapter Three, Figs. 39 and 40, p. 80, 81). Further, a mural executed for the University of Natal appears to relate directly to financial needs (Zondi, 1986:1). Nevertheless, this does not mean that Zondi refrained from repetition of figures or themes. He often carved small figurines as gifts, e.g. his early very small *Madonna and Child* sculptures around 1960 or *Flute Player* figures carved repeatedly throughout his career²⁰⁶. With these gifts he revealed his awareness of the people who fostered his career, with "moral and material support", expressing this also in numerous letters to Bodenstein, as well as other mentors and patrons (Zondi, 1963c)²⁰⁷.

While the chapel at Appelsbosch became a symbol of their friendship, Bodenstein names Zondi as the creative force behind the building, calling it the "Chapel Dream", a "great work of creation" (Bodenstein, 1964:1)²⁰⁸. Although Zondi only came to take up his official employment at Appelsbosch mission hospital in July 1963 - taking on the task of general manager (Zondi, 1963b)- planning had been under way from 1961 (Zondi, 1961:3)²⁰⁹. The

²⁰⁴ Zondi's work ethic is inscribed in his Manager's Report 1963-1965 – handwritten on foolscap pages, filed by Bodenstein, transferred to Nieser in October 2003

²⁰⁵ Working in the studio of Sr. Johanna Senn, Zondi became irritated beyond reason by a woman from Johannesburg wanting something, a sculpture of saints, from him – giving him directives on how they should be worked (Personal communication Denise Allen, 8 August 2003).

²⁰⁶ *Madonna and Child*, small monumental figures presented around Christmas 1960 to both Agnes Bodenstein and Kay Nixon.

Flute Player- Strauss-Bruce collection 1968; Elmarie Snyman née Wittmann, early 1970s (Fig. 48, p.85); Image in newspaper clipping, *The Star*, 2 Nov.1974:Bodenstein collection of 1970 or 1979 (there is a discrepancy of dates (Bodenstein, 1998:7); Wittmann collection of 1979 – (presented to Nieser in September 2003)

²⁰⁷ See Thorpe, 1994:26; In a letter to John Nixon, Zondi expresses his gratitude with the Zulu saying: "Umbeki wenkosi kabusi nayo" – "the one who crowns the king never lives to reign together with the king" but in my way of thinking I can't find myself forgetting (sic.) those who have played a big part in my progress and success" (Zondi, 1963c). Further, in 1965 Zondi presented Hildegard Schlaudraff with a small figure, *Joy of Living*, (renamed *Honigschleckerin*), as thanks for the photography which her husband, Heinrich Schlaudraff did over some years during the 1960s.

²⁰⁸ "Now that, through the grace of God, we have been allowed to experience the consecration of our new Hospital Chapel, we have come to the end of a very unusual chapter in the history of Appelsbosch, namely, the birth of the "Chapel Dream" up to its fulfilment" (Bodenstein, 1964).

²⁰⁹ Zondi mentions Bodenstein and a Mr. Nyström in connection with the chapel plan (Zondi, 1961:3)

ground-stone plaque is dated 10 February 1962²¹⁰ and the chapel's consecration was in September 1964 (Bodenstein, 1964:1 and Zondi, 1965:5)²¹¹ Typical for late modernist churches in South Africa (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:168), the triangular A-frame construction, in alluding to the holy trinity (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002b) is echoed in the interior, in the form of bench decoration and wrought-iron wall-candelabras. By arching the entrance and making a masonry protrusion, Zondi has given it an African character in its resemblance of a Zulu hut, *indlu* (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:169) associated with the 'shades'²¹² (Berglund, 1989:104). Further integration of art, design and architecture is seen in the smallest piece in the chapel, which sprang from Zondi's artistic hand, a round baptismal font with a central bird-motif beaten from copper, surrounded by writing²¹³, as well as two late modernist cement reliefs on the arches flanking the apse entrance. On the left is Zondi's sgraffito relief depicting a gigantic *Prophet* with a young child – while the *isicolo*-wearing *Mother and Child* – with three male figures on the right, is attributed to Eric Ngcobo. Zondi helped Ngcobo with the technicality of working into cement of different colours, each layer revealing a new colour as it was scraped away (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2003b). It was a technique which Bodenstein had seen used by Elli Holm at the school chapel in Hermannsburg (Bodenstein, 1998:3) With strong stylisation, simplification and distortion of the human form, popular in the 1950s and 1960s, there is

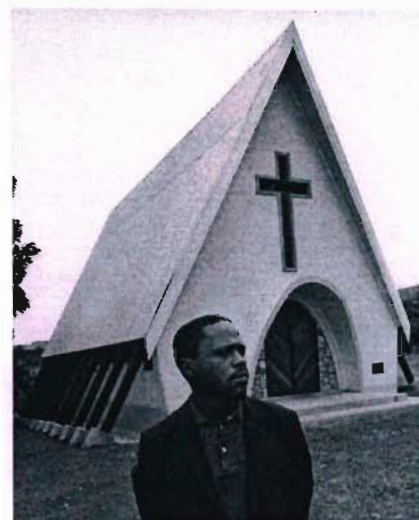


Fig. 18

Appelsbosch Chapel
c.1963

210

Uma iJehova engayakhi indlu basebenzela ize
abayakhayo (ps.127.1.)
KULO UDUMO LUKA JEHOVA
Lelitshe labekwa
Mhla zi 10.2.1962

Ngu W. Bodenstein. Umdwebi nomakhi kungu Michael Zondi

Reference is made to Psalm 127.1 – “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain.”

²¹¹ Consecration of the new chapel by Dean Mhlungu, September 1964 (Zondi, 1965:5), erroneously given as 1963 in (Nieser, 2003g).

²¹² Berglund speaks of a community of ‘survivors and shades’ who do not live separate existences or in distinct realms, but rather in kinship relations of interdependencies (Berglund, 1989:197). The word ancestor suggest “ascendants who are dead...and as a result there is a distance between the living and the dead...not descriptive of Zulu concepts” in their “intimate relationship and association within the lineage between the departed and their survivors” (Berglund, 1989:29). Zondi writes about dreams: “Dreams are inheritance, from generation to generation but if one chooses to dream, let him learn to dream the good as well as the bad, and accept them both” (Zondi, 1961:3).

²¹³ OKHOLWAYO-ABAPHATHIZWE + OYAKU-SINISWA – “The one who believes and is baptised will be saved” (Personal telephonic communication –Dr. V. Msomi, School of Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 14 May 2004).

evidence that Zondi did at least one more mural in this mode in 1964²¹⁴. Zondi's architectural and masonry skills were crowned by his sculpting his most emotive and enervating ecclesiastical piece, the large blackwood²¹⁵ *Crucifix*, which he thinks of as the ultimate engagement for him as an artist (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a). Zondi's consistent path of interracial rapprochement and reconciliation is implicit in the representation of the figure of Christ.²¹⁶ Significantly and unusually for one of Zondi's figures – with his shoulder-length hair and Caucasian features – Christ is not an indigenised figure in the manner of inculturated or re-situated biblical characters with obviously African features. It is Zondi's conviction that it would be “an illusion to think that Christ as a Jew would have been a black man” (Nieser, 2003i). During the intense period of creation, the artist intimately identified with the emotional states of Christ which he visualised and with which he imbued the figure at various stages of sculpting²¹⁷. Zondi displays an intimate knowledge of the

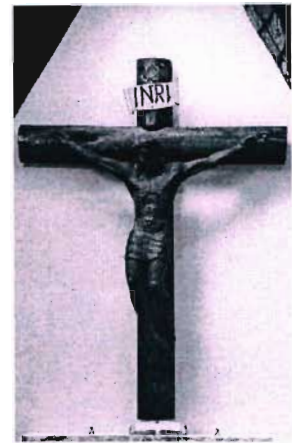


Fig. 19



Fig. 20

Crucifix
c.1963

human form and by this time, more than ten years into his sculpting career, he has command over the technical expertise to translate it. The crown of thorns on a slightly right-turned and lowered head is stylised, the curved arches indicating Christ's diaphragm, as well as the undulations of the ribs, create a rhythmical movement on the torso, while the fine, consistent chisel-marks over the entire body create an animated texture on the blackwood.

The building was funded by the Lutheran church, German donors and donations from the local farming community (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a). In a letter, Bodenstein gratefully

²¹⁴ A black and white photograph in the possession of Nieser shows Zondi in front of a c.3 metre high mural of a strongly stylised female figure carrying a vessel on her head. She is wearing an *isicolo* headdress, Zulu signage signifying marriage. Leeb-du Toit speaks of the *isicolo* as an implicit signifier of the legitimacy for a child (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:88).

²¹⁵ Miles identified the wood as the Australian *Acacia melanoxylon* (Miles, 1997:112). The blackwood tree from which the figure was to be hewn was spotted by Zondi in the Mapumulo region of KwaZulu-Natal, not far from Appelsbosch - and it was felled for him (Miles, 1997:115) Agnes Bodenstein speaks of a 'donation' by the magistrate of Mapumulo (Bodenstein, 1998:3)

²¹⁶ Zondi regarded the Crucifix as symbolising a “bridge between nations” (Zondi, 1975:2).

²¹⁷ The carver felt the pain of the man he was ‘liberating’ from wood : When he carved the perspiration running down Christ's face, he too was perspiring. He would work sometimes until midnight on the piece, entirely emotionally drained by the time he rested his chisel and mallet. The arms of the full-size figure were joined onto the torso (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

alludes to Zondi's 'voluntary financial sacrifice' once funding difficulties were experienced in fulfilling the artist's vision for the chapel and all its accoutrements (Bodenstein, 1964:2). Zondi speaks of an 'African feast' with ritual slaughter as thanksgiving for the completion of the chapel (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a). Within the Christian context of the Appelsbosch mission there was clearly a sanctioning of such cross-cultural practices. Referring to the context of diverse cultures and syncretic forms of religious practice in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, Leeb-du Toit points out that South Africa represents an amalgam of diverse religio-cultural influences and aspirations. Within 'Christian' practice she cites the retention of a traditionalist based cosmogony as well as the "celebration of ancestral intercession and mediation" (Leeb-du Toit,2003:15).

While Zondi has been described as a humorous man, he also suffered greatly, seeing oppression and the injustices towards black people (Bodenstein,1998:4) Sorely aware of the results of emotional indoctrination which constantly threatened their friendship within the political constructs of segregation in South Africa (Zondi, 1960g²¹⁸ and Bodenstein, 1960), Zondi and Bodenstein found in Christianity a mutual refuge, while the artist translated and expressed his concerns and his grief covertly in his work.²¹⁹ Asked whether his work was ever politically or historically inspired, the artist mentions his *Reunion* of 1964 as "the one piece ... which ... made people think" (Nieser, 2002c)²²⁰. *Reunion*, called *Reconciliation* ten years later – in a quarterly article propagating cross-cultural understanding (*Development southern africa*, (sic.) 1974:10) - was carved not long after tumultuous time of

²¹⁸ see footnote 185, p.52

²¹⁹ Speaking of selection of work for the *Art: South Africa Today* exhibitions, Thorpe says: "political expression was not overt among the black artists, whose work was accepted" (Thorpe, 1994:13)

²²⁰ Asked whether he entered into discussions about apartheid with other artists, Zondi replied "Well, not some much, because Apartheid did not appeal to me – although I say Apartheid must have been a blessing in disguise for the underdog, because that's where we learned to be challenged." (Nieser, 2002c) Referring to Apartheid policies in relation to his concept of freedom, Zondi said: "In my mind I thought that everybody on earth has a right to be free, and should we have been free, we should have been a long way by this time. Think of the education, when you couldn't go to certain schools. Should we have done that, gone to all those schools, perhaps I should have been a master surgeon. Instead of carving wood, I would have... done a heart transplant" (Nieser, 2002c).

"I don't know whether I should say fortunately or unfortunately that I'm not involved in politics" (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

protests in South African society, the *Sharpeville* uprising, which was sparked in opposition to the ‘dompass’ laws.²²⁰ The sculpture is of two men in an emotive embrace of friendship, Zondi explaining that the one with the *iBéshu*, the posterior curtain (Bryant, 1949:405)²²¹ and the stick, is himself as a rural person, the other man in calf-length trousers denoting an urban origin, Bodenstein.²²² In showing the unity between a black and a white man, Zondi was addressing and showing defiance of the state-sanctioned racial segregation in depicting that this friendship was possible. He cited his intention: “I wanted to hurt them!” (Nieser, 2003e). It is an expression of the artist’s own anguish at the effect of the apartheid laws in his own lived reality. Bodenstein describes this piece as one of the artist’s “most universally admired works on account of the dignified eloquence of its message: that through Christian love the black man and the white man become reunited in spirit” (Bodenstein, c1968:5). This was particularly poignant after the abovementioned political unrest of *Sharpeville*.

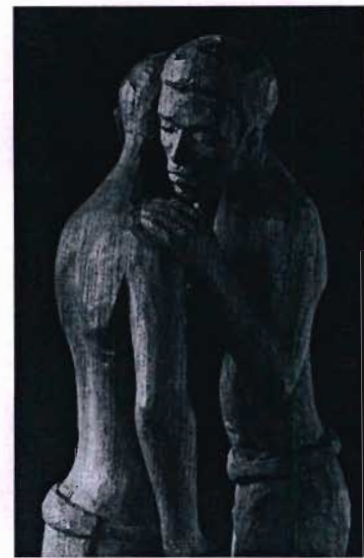


Fig. 21

Reunion
1965 (detail)

While an artist may choose religious imagery in order to express implicit aspects of universal human rights, by placing them into the context of the South African reality, political connotations of conflict and opposition become inevitable in their association with the recovery of past histories – or contemporary practices – of oppression and injustice (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:147,190). Zondi’s *Forbidden Friendship* of 1964 was shown in the 1965 *Interfaith* exhibition²²³ under the title *David and Jonathan*. Zondi once again makes use of a biblically inspired theme as a didactic vehicle, going beyond a demonstration of political



Fig. 22

Forbidden Friendship
1964

²²⁰ ‘Dompass’ was the word used for the identification document which blacks were required to carry as it was linked to official permission necessary for entering into ‘whites only’ areas.

²²¹ *iBéshu* - made from the hide of a calf (Bryant, 1949:405).

²²² “...we used to laugh about it that the man with the skin is myself, and the other man is Bodenstein” (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

²²³ The ‘landmark’ *Interfaith Bantu Art Exhibition* held at the Durban Art Gallery in December 1965, shortly after Zondi’s one-man exhibition, focussed mainly on African liturgical art (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:121).

awareness to covert dissent. Of the two young male figures, one is standing, holding pensively and tenderly in both his hands the head of the other, who is shown in a crouched position on the ground in front of him, his back resting against the knees of that standing figure. As a portrait of two people who conduct their profound friendship 'in the name of the Lord' (Holy Bible, 1999: 321)²²⁴, I interpret Zondi's *David and Jonathan* in the light of his friendship with Wolfgang Bodenstein. Under the system of legislated segregation with concomitant social pressures, about which they exchanged thoughts, he thought of them as "brothers in Jesus Christ" (Bodenstein, 1960)²²⁵. In adhering more to a western concept of a statue (Rankin, 1989:51), it was less frequent for Zondi to sculpt two attached figures from one piece of wood.

Six months prior to his one-man show in Durban, in February 1965, Zondi resigned from his employment at Appelsbosch, citing a lack of creativity in the administrative and organisational tasks assigned to him as one reason, a lack of new building projects another (Bodenstein, 1965). From Appelsbosch, Zondi was commissioned as a building contractor building several churches for Zulu congregations of the Church of Sweden Mission. Sculpting at his workbench during every minute of his spare time, Zondi was preparing for his one-man show, at the same time receiving commissions from patrons overseas (Tilley, 1965).

Zondi's initial exposure to his white South African public at exhibitions like the Republic Festival at Bloemfontein in 1960, the B.I.C.A. group exhibition in Durban, 1961, as well as his participation in the *Art: South Africa Today* exhibitions, was to culminate in his breakthrough as an emergent South African artist in the Durban Art Gallery, under the curatorship of Madame Wezynska-Klecynzka²²⁶, with a one-man show in August 1965. Only Eric Ngcobo had been afforded such an opportunity in 1962 as the first black artist in Natal. It would be immediately followed by his participation in the abovementioned *Interfaith* exhibition.

²²⁴ "...Jonathan became one in spirit with David and he loved him as himself." (Holy Bible, 1999:317 - 1 Samuel 18:1); "And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself." (Holy Bible, 1999:317 - 1 Samuel 18:3); Dialogues between Jonathan and David: ...we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord....(Holy Bible, 1999:321 - 1 Samuel 20:42)

²²⁵ See footnote 185, p.52

²²⁶ Personal communication, Carol Brown, Director, Durban Art Gallery, 19 August 2003.

In the following year, 1966, Zondi's *Calabash* of 1963 was accepted for the Venice Biennale. Obviously responding to the shape of his wood for an evocative effect (Rankin, 1989:40), an exaggeration and elongation of the legs of this tall nude – indigenised by the suggestion of an *isicolo* – reflect Zondi's further departure from naturalistic proportions. Further emphasised by a long calabash, in its tapering from the shoulders to the base of the head, the girl's neck appears to mirror the cone shape of the upper half of the water container she supports with both hands, one each at the gourd's base and the narrow opening.



Fig. 23

Calabash
1963

Around the mid-1960s, Zondi met the South-African born Swedish theologian Axel-Ivar Berglund. By this time Zondi had begun his contextualisation of Biblical narratives, addressing – in figures like *David and Jonathan* – the state's intransigence towards a humiliated and disempowered black majority. Berglund became the principal of the Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo, established in 1965. As a scholar of Zulu culture and belief, Berglund lectured on traditional Zulu thinking, in this way contributing to African Christian theology (Winters, 1998: 96)²²⁷. With syncretism fostered by parental and educational influences, it had been a *kholwa* élite in particular, who had begun to challenge the religious tenets of the Christianity of Lutheranism in KwaZulu-Natal before the middle of the 20th century, finding in it little or no room for retaining aspects of indigenous traditions, a mutual exclusivity between Christianity and Zulu social tenets which had existed in the previous century²²⁸. Recalling Mbembe's 'conditional' conversion in view of the acknowledgement of Africans' 'humanity' (Mbembe, 2002:248) (see Chapter One, 1.2. *Zulu conversion to Christianity*, p.5), it is significant that Lutheranism was no longer primarily concerned with conversion to a Eurocentric religious bias. An inverse re-acknowledgment of aspects of the formerly marginalized Zulu cultural practice was accommodated (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:172). Berglund facilitated the students' identification of their own essential humanity and dignity (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:142 and Berglund,

²²⁷ Berglund speaks of his own learning experience in which he was "at the receiving end and the students my teachers", an experience which prompted him to begin writing his *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Berglund, 2003:1).

²²⁸ The mutual exclusivity of Christianity and Zulu citizenship up to the Zulu war saw those people who had consented to be baptised excluded from being permitted to *khonza*, showing allegiance to the Zulu king, and from participating in festivals or civic duties (Etherington, 1971:191).

2003:1)²²⁹ and in so doing was deemed subversive in the eyes of the state (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:168). Mbembe's denial of humanity is thought to be founded in historically propagated racial specificity linked to individualism (Mbembe, 2002:248). Zondi's and Berglund's intensive philosophical debates over some years were seminal for Zondi's self-understanding, founded as the artist was in his Zulu cultural roots²³⁰. Zondi thinks of his portrayals of that which was human in people as having been free of 'racial' associations (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a). This may be seen in correlation to viewing African interpretations of the human figure in terms of a person's humanity, which has been linked to ancestral veneration (Thiel, 1981: 23-24)²³¹.

From their stance of humiliation and disempowerment, black aspirational politics were voiced by an appropriation of this more liberal and partisan theology of Lutheranism in Natal, while the socially conscious biblically derived art from Rorke's Drift from the 1960s found inspiration from the same source (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:170).

Both in view of the religious syncretism which was concomitant with the abovementioned theological focus, as well as Zondi's frequent reference to traditionalist beliefs concerning medicinal matters²³² or visions with ancestral reference, I contest Grossert's notion²³³ that Zondi's belief in the Christian faith resulted in his losing touch with received belief systems linked to relationships with the shades. Not only is there an amalgam of diverse cultures and syncretic forms of religious practice in KwaZulu-Natal, but also a retention of a traditionalist based cosmogony within 'Christian' practice (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:15). On the occasion of Bodenstein's departure for a one-year sojourn in Sweden in 1962, Zondi was inspired to conduct a ritual sacrifice to ensure his well-being on the

²²⁹ Archbishop Denis Hurley and Alan Paton were Berglund's co-speakers when Berglund presented a lecture at a Race Relations gathering in Durban, entitled "The Zulu People our Neighbours". Zondi, as a member of the audience, responded: "*kwaqala ukungikhanyela ukuthi nami ngingesintu*" which Berglund translates as: "it dawned on me that also I have humanity/dignity/humanness" (Berglund, 2003:1).

²³⁰ Zondi "clings to his Zulu identity with quiet and unobtrusive conviction and self-assurance" (Bodenstein, c1968). Jill Addleson also remembers Zondi as possessing a quiet self-confidence (personal communication, Jill Addleson, 26 February 2003).

²³¹ Thiel perceives African art to hold man's appearance in nature as unimportant. What is relevant is the fact of being human, the *idea* of the whole human being, mentioning also the ancestor, who is dependent for his life after death on the veneration of the living (Thiel, 1981:23-24).

²³² Zondi thinks of himself as an *inyanga*, a traditional healer (Nieser, 2003e).

²³³ "Zondi is a convinced Christian and the influence of Christian thought on art has also impressed itself deeply on his mind." "The old feeling for the spirits of the trees from which timber has been obtained, the desire for the approval of the *amadlozi* (spirits of the ancestors) and the naming and dedication ceremonies seem to have been superseded by newer attitudes adopted from the whites" (Grossert, 1968:42).

journey²³⁴. A goat was slaughtered and gall was dripped onto Bodenstein's tongue and smeared on his head, while the bladder was inflated, to be worn around the neck – or traditionally to be fixed to the person's head (Bodenstein, 2002a and Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)²³⁵. Further, Zondi's reference to traditionalist welcoming²³⁶ or rites of passage²³⁷ (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a) evidence his strong emotional adherence to received cultural practices, including an African 'feast' to celebrate the Appelsbosch chapel's consecration²³⁸. Zondi is also mindful of traditional medicine (Nieser, 2003e)²³⁹. While emphasising his Christian conviction of being monogamous, in recounting cattle traditions from his own background (Nieser, 2003e) he speaks with acceptance of *ukuLobola*²⁴⁰, the Nguni pastoralist tradition of bride-price (Nieser, 2003i)²⁴¹.

Zondi's *Shaka* is one of his rare pieces with a historical reference, attributed to the artist's own associations with Zulu history²⁴² (Rankin, 1989:72). Zondi has entirely distanced himself from the depiction of a stereotypical heroic Zulu king – as was seen in some of Bhengu's

²³⁴ "You know I felt very much honoured the day when I could do something for Dr. Bodenstein, especially that goat-party – that was almost like a ritual" (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a) Leeb-du Toit speaks of a "celebration of ancestral intercession and mediation" (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:15).

²³⁵ Bodenstein subsequently made a charcoal sketch of the occasion, at which Mandlenkosi, Michael's brother also presided. Protection by the shades is associated with the gall bladder (Berglund, 1989:111). A greater importance is attributed to the gall and washing with chyme than the eating of the meat in ritual slaughtering (Berglund, 1989:129). While gall is poured over the body – not to be washed off, the hands are washed in chyme, gastric juices and partly digested food – to be coloured white and become "like the shades" Affixing the gall bladder onto the head is indicative of the "brooding of the shades" after ritual slaughter (Berglund, 1989: 129,130).

²³⁶ "It was a great honour for my neighbours to see me welcoming the white people in our traditional fashion..." (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

²³⁷ A married daughter with two children should still have a *vuminvula*: "You see right now I still owe something to my family – that one of my daughters – we should have a coming-of-age party" (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a).

²³⁸ Referring to Appelsbosch: "...at the hospital one time after everything had gone on well, we decided to buy an ox and slaughter it in the African way... we had to invite all the tribal people and have to have a big feast" (Leeb-du Toit and Nieser, 2002a)

²³⁹ He repeatedly speaks about a potion containing tortoise to foster longevity. (Nieser, 2003e)

²⁴⁰ At the same time as questioning the forcing of 'our social and moral views on other races', Bryant takes a critical stance towards *ukuLobola*, thinking of it as a commodification and degradation of women (Bryant, 1949: 586), further pointing to the fact that with Shaka's rule, the owning of cows - procured by means of raids - became a symbol of status and wealth amongst Zulu men. Formerly commoners paid *ukuLobola* with copper rings and hoes (Bryant, 1949:591). *UkuLobola* was practised by the Anglican Robert Robertson in acquiring for his mission station girls "by paying for them with cattle" (Etherington, 1971:197).

²⁴¹ Zondi mentions the stir caused by the Lutheran Rev. Hellander, a personal acquaintance, writing 'Black Rhapsody', propagating the acceptance of polygamy (Nieser and Leeb-du Toit, 2003a). In consideration of established relationships of kinship and the economic factors involved in the system of plurality of wives and their concomitant status, there were voices amongst the missionaries in favour of the toleration of polygyny in the later 19th century, amongst them Colenso (Etherington, 1971:105-106, 158-160).

²⁴² Zondi has named another carving, *Shaka- Between Good and Evil*. The title denotes Zondi's contemplation of the responsibility inherent in leadership.

work of more than twenty years earlier,²⁴³ where a glorious Zulu past was appropriated in the evocation of nationhood and leadership (Zaverdinos, 1995:36) (see Chapter One, p. 3,4). The somewhat compassionate bust of a young man turning his head to one side, depicts a thoughtful *Shaka* at a point of decision. Perhaps with Zondi's own abhorrence of violence, it is a critical statement pertaining to the Zulu leader's choice of a reign of despotism. There are no external markers indicating his ethnicity. Zondi interprets a moment of what he assumes could also have been the "reality of the living sitter..." (Nettleton,1998:87).



Fig. 24

Shaka
1965

Another example of a specific portrait, making reference to a woman's prominent role within a Zulu cultural

context, is the portrait figure of the '*Aunt of Dingane*' – presented as a gift to the Eshowe Museum by the artist in 1965²⁴⁴. The female head with a pronounced *isicolo*, given the same chisel-scratched surface texture as the cape of *Rachel*, is labelled '*Keeper of the Isigodlo*' in the museum.²⁴⁵ Finding a counterpart for the mythical *Queen of Sheba*, to which Zondi makes a later reference (see below, p.65), by depicting Queen Makabayi as the ruler of the Qulusi royal homestead in early 19th century Zululand, Zondi is assimilating Zulu cultural expression into the historical appreciation of his western audience and their idiom of progress (La Hausse de Lalouvière, 2000:100).



Fig. 25

Aunt of Dingane
Makabayi Ka
Senzangakhona
1965

With *Makabayi Ka Senzangakhona*²⁴⁶ he is invoking a Zulu past, weaving it "into a west fabric of a sense of history and universality" (La Hausse de Lalouvière, 2000:102-103), akin

²⁴³ *Shaka after Angas* (Zaverdinos, 1995:16) or *Portrait of a Warrior* (Leeb-du Toit, 1995:36).

²⁴⁴ Rankin makes reference to perceptions about 'fine art' in South Africa – where in the Eshowe Historical Museum such a piece as Zondi's was referred to as part of a collection of "traditional African carvings" (Rankin, 1989:72).

²⁴⁵ "The *isigodlo* was the area in the royal capital where the king, his wives and children, and the girls and women who served them, lived. The term is also used to refer to the serving girls and women themselves, as are the terms 'seraglio' and 'harem'" (Wood, 1996:156).

²⁴⁶ 'ka Senzangakhona denotes King Shaka's paternal lineage (Berning, 1996:56). It appears in *Images of Wood* as *Mkabayi Ka Snzagakhona*, (Rankin, 1989:72) probably a printing error.

to the ethnic references in Bhengu's work, mentioned above. While seldom seeing a lack of representational intention in Zondi's work, his semi-abstract *Laughing Duck* of 1965 is exemplary of the artist responding subjectively to the natural form of the wood (Rankin, 1989:40 and 1993:135), in the manner of a 'found object' – while the sculpting of an animal is also unusual.²⁴⁷ His *Queen of Sheba* of the same year shows a similar abstraction, where each arm of a branching log is used for the head and both hands, respectively, the latter emerging directly from the flowing drapery. Zondi has varied the surface texture of the wood from broad to smaller chisel-marks, in accordance with the direction of growth.

At a time when Zondi was working for a small clientele of "white connoisseurs", he gave a 'private lecture' on his work in the home of Graham Ellis Esq. (Grossert, 1968: 51) in March 1967 in which he explained his personal aims in his work: Grossert summarises these aims, describing the sculptures as "allegories in wood, often with poignant and moral overtones." Grossert notes that despite the Zulu subject matter, stylistically there are no links in his work to "traditional carving in Africa". (Grossert, 1968:42)



Fig. 26

Laughing Duck
1965



Fig. 27

Queen of Sheba
1965

²⁴⁷ *Laughing Duck* was carved at Madadeni, 'the place of the ducks' near Dundee during the artist's time of building contracting, and was sold out of the one-man exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery to a buyer from New York. "Dr. Koz, New York", pencilled in by Bodenstein on the back of a photographic enlargement by Heinrich Schlaudraff

Zondi's tall figure, *Robed Woman*, (1968), shows him restricting his artistic manipulation almost entirely to the top third of the wood. In keeping with his unvarying representational intention he sculpts the head and narrow shoulders of a female figure while leaving the lower robed section of the piece to follow the natural growth of the wood, giving it a smooth surface to emphasise an undulating vertical edge along the front of the 'cloth'. The pronounced *isicolo* which she wears diagonally on her head, is carved with broad, bold chisel marks catching flat planes of light, and forms a right angle with an exaggerated, long neck. Equally, the facial features are made up of bold planes reminiscent of stylisation seen in African masks. The standing female holds her robe around herself with her left hand, whose fingers only just emerge from the cloth, in a pose reminiscent of *The Prophet* of seven years earlier.



Fig. 28

Robed Woman
1968

Zondi experimented throughout the 1960s, with an ever freer use of the chisel. From the mid-1960s broader faceting came to define not only stylized clothing of his figures but also facial features. *Queen* of 1969 demonstrates Zondi's use of broad, flat chisel marks in characterising planes of the face. After his sojourn in Paris in 1977, Zondi would find a greater confidence in making use of broad planes to create an entire figure.



Fig. 29

Queen
1969

Overtly a genre portrait of a musician, Zondi's *Wema Blues* indicates that the artist concerned himself with life in single-sex hostels in the urban context of migrant labour in the city of Durban – as well as the political agenda behind such a system (Nuttall, 1991:20). Zondi visited workers at the Wema hostels south of Durban, yearning

for their families and normal social conditions in their homes in rural Natal (Bodenstein, 1998:6). A figure resting on its haunches is playing a concertina, holding the instrument up to his left ear. His closed eyes and his smile suggest a state of thoughtful dreaming. The piece has a dark charred surface which originates from a blowtorch, an effect with which Zondi experimented for a while around 1970 (Bodenstein, 1998:6). Perhaps he was alluding to a continuity from scenes of traditional rural life, as depicted in the shallow reliefs carved through charred light wood in northern Natal²⁴⁸.



Fig. 30

Wema Blues
1970

By the time of Zondi's exposure in the Durban Art Gallery, he was receiving many private commissions and needed to sculpt in his spare time, apart from his building projects for the Church of Sweden Mission. By 1966, Wolfgang Bodenstein took up a new post of Medical Officer of Health at the Umlazi Township in Durban. One year later, Zondi took up a post at the Durban branch of the Department of Information,²⁴⁹ facilitated by Bodenstein (Bodenstein, 1998:4). His work involved liaison between the Department and rural people, promoting educational and agricultural development. This posting enabled him to travel widely in rural areas of Natal. His working hours were flexible and therefore he was able to further his art career in his own time. He lived with the Bodenstein family in Montclair, using their garage as a workshop. In 1970 Bodenstein's career took him to Pretoria, where he was given a portfolio for education in the Ministry of Health.

For Zondi, it was here in 1972, in his mid-forties, that he took the plunge into free-lancing, without other sources of income.

²⁴⁸ For example the work of artists like Tivenyanga Qwabe (Rankin, 1989:11).

²⁴⁹ Ogilvie states that between 1967-1972 Zondi was 'Programme promoter for African Arts and Crafts' (Ogilvie, 1988:767).

CHAPTER THREE: WORKS, 1972 – 1987

Michael Zondi's public exposure, and a growing demand for his work in the decade of the 1960s had seen him explore a wide range of themes, from genre to the translation of biblical characters, indigenised within the KwaZulu context, to which he remained emotionally strongly attached. Revealing an awareness of past Zulu history²⁴⁷, he also hinted at his consciousness of the current political status quo in covert references to oppression and forced racial separation²⁴⁸.

Stylistically he developed rapidly away from his preoccupation with smooth surface structures and the great attention to detail found in more naturalistic figures like *Lot's Wife* in the late 1950s (Fig. 6, p. 46) and *The Prophet* of the early 1960s (Fig. 15, p. 54). His bolder use of chiselled surface texture and a concern for retaining the character of the logs from which his figures emerged were augmented by incorporating into some pieces the raw wood. In addition he began to make use of distortion for expressive purposes,²⁴⁹ including some pieces which reveal experimentation with large facets, like *Queen* of 1969 (see Fig. 29, p.68).

In 1972 Zondi became a free-lance artist, establishing his workshops in close proximity to his patrons. In Pretoria he was invited to establish a studio at the home of the Bodenstein family in the eastern suburb of Val de Grace (Bodenstein, 1998:5), while his family and his home remained in Natal, at Mtulwa²⁵⁰. With no formal alternate employment, Zondi's sculptural productivity drew many visitors to his workbench in Pretoria²⁵¹.

From Zondi's initial meeting of Bodenstein - who had been patron of the arts in Ceza, in northern Natal - the friendship that developed between them extended in the following two decades to people around Bodenstein. While their motivation of patronage and support for facilitating the working environment of this sculptor lay in their admiration for an unusual talent, there was also an awareness of the positioning of the creative voices in South Africa, during the politically volatile 1970s. In an opening speech for an exhibition of three black

²⁴⁷ Portraits of *Shaka* (mid-1960s) and *Aunt of Dingane* (1965) Figs. 24 and 25, p.66

²⁴⁸ *Invisible Bonds* (1960) Fig. 13, p.53 and *Reunion* (1964) Fig. 21, p.61

²⁴⁹ *Calabash* (1966) Fig. 23, p.63 and *Robed Woman* (1968) Fig. 28, p.68

²⁵⁰ From September 1972 Zondi's address in letters was Umlazi, a township near Durban.

In a handwritten biography by Zondi - (photocopy acquired from Wolfgang Veldsman in October 2003) - Zondi writes "Present home at Mtulwa": I postulate that this biography was written in connection with the 1974 exhibition for two reasons: Wolfgang Veldsman, from whom I have it, assisted in setting up the show (Nieser, 2003d and 2003m) also, the biographical details concur with information in the *Hoofstad* newspaper article of 7 November 1974.

²⁵¹ It appears that he was not successful in seeking re-employment in the Department of Information in April 1974 (Zondi, 1974a).

artists²⁵² in the mid-1970s, the surgeon Johan van Wyk revealed his alertness and implicitly proffered support for notions of black selfhood, seeing in art expressions of lived realities, and citing the romantic notions around the *Négritude* movement of Leopold Senghor²⁵³ as they pertained to aspirations of liberation in South Africa (see also 1.3.2, p.13ff.).

With Zondi's introduction to Piet and Chen Veldsman, who lived on a farm near Nylstroom²⁵⁴, their hospitality extended to an offer of studio accommodation whenever he chose to work at the farm. This is how, when visiting on and off for almost a decade, the *bushveld* of the Northern Transvaal became Zondi's source for his most valued South African hardwoods (Nieser, 2003c)²⁵⁵. During his sojourns in the Northern Transvaal Zondi was acutely aware of his presence amongst people of a different indigenous group from those of his Zulu 'home' (Nieser, 2003c).

The lid for a box carved from scarce *pypsteel* wood (*Vitex rehmannii*) depicts two hands carved in low relief. **Give and Take** is Zondi's symbol of friendship. He would frequently sculpt panels for boxes and doors when he had suitably thick planks of wood²⁵⁶, making gifts of many of them.



Fig. 31

Give and Take
1974

As seen in Chapter Two, Zondi's intimate interface with his white patrons during the apartheid decades involved the artist's integration into the home-spheres of the Bodenstein and Veldsman families, and later the Wittmanns in George. This integration and the intellectual exchange generated in these contacts implicitly represented a defiance of the discriminatory policies of the apartheid state. While the artist possessed an acute

²⁵² Simon Monaheng, Mothabena Phoshoko and Ranko Pudi

²⁵³ Senghor was presented with a Zondi sculpture: invoice from Zondi, (c/o Amandel Ave.(Bodenstein) to Govt. of Bophutatswana: One Yellowwood Sculpture (Cape Yellowwood): Title: "The Tochbearer" (sic.), sent to President Leopold Senghor ...R220,00.

Van Wyk cites Leopold Senghor's definition of *Négritude*:

'...it is rooting oneself in oneself, and self confirmation: confirmation of one's being. Who would deny that Africans too, have a certain way of conceiving life and living it? A certain way of speaking, singing and dancing, of painting and sculpturing and even laughing and crying!' (Photocopy of undated, handwritten speech-notes by Johan van Wyk for the opening of an exhibition of three black artists in the mid-1970s - presented by van Wyk to Nieser in March 2003)

²⁵⁴ Piet Veldsman and Wolfgang Bodenstein had been fellow students at the University of Pretoria

²⁵⁵ At a time when Michael Zondi was working with indigenous, preferably aged hardwoods, near Nylstroom, these latter years of the 1970s saw an increased productivity of wood sculpture in this area – where the origins were traditional carved figurative images used in rites of passage amongst the Venda, while market orientation was the cause for the surge in production (Rankin, 1989:45).

²⁵⁶ Door panels would become a popular item at the exhibition in Paris (Zondi, 1977a).

political awareness (Berglund, 2003:1), Zondi's suffering in seeing oppression and injustices towards black people did not find overt expression in his work. Rather, his largely unfrontational pieces prompted his audience to consider moral issues, as the artist remained consistent in his stance of *rapprochement*.

In his communication with Zondi, Bodenstein brought into his equation of inevitable conflict in southern Africa, western history and philosophy. He cited the ancient Greek civilisation where the underdog eventually asserted "his fundamental and valid human aspirations", freeing himself from centuries of restrictive colonialism and initiating the cultural rebirth of Athens. He spoke of those liberating forces as "mankind's heritage" (Bodenstein, 1977:51). Prompted by such topics of discussion between the artist and Bodenstein, Zondi became familiar with western classical literature (Nieser, 2002a) and this inspired him to sculpt figures from Greek legends⁴⁴ (Nieser, 2003h), like *Orpheus*, of 1972, in portraying the universality of human desires and traits. Zondi sculpted an

introverted *Orpheus*, with just his torso with an elongated stringed instrument, already more a modern-day violin than the simpler lyre. Orpheus the musician and poet, represents the arts – which in turn serve to reconcile people of all creeds. Thought to have frequently represented thoughts by singing his poems, the mouth of Zondi's *Orpheus* seems slightly ajar, as in song. Zondi, too, wrote poetry and possibly identifies himself with this classical figure whom the Christians referred to as the 'Prince of Peace'. It is debatable whether the artist also contemplated Orpheus' violent death at the hands of frenzied Maenads (Hammond and Scullard, 1979: 758, 636).

Zondi indigenises the tall standing figure of *Socrates*, of 1975, casually holding with his hand a cloak over his left shoulder. Known for his sense of duty and his intellect, this son of a craftsman (a sculptor or stonemason) is thought to have preached morality and codes of conduct to the youth of Athens. It was perceived that he had a corrupting influence, as the young men began to critique the political *status quo* (Hammond and Scullard, 1979:997-998). Zondi creates the philosopher as a contemplative, bearded African man in whom I see an element of self-portraiture. Zondi has left only slight marks of his chisel on the otherwise rather smooth Jarrah wood.



Fig. 32

Orpheus
1972



Fig. 33

Socrates
1975

Apart from exposure in and around Pretoria, by the mid-1970s Zondi was attracting the attention of a renowned Gallery in George. A colleague of Bodenstein's from the Health Ministry in Pretoria, Dr. Werner Wittmann, had moved there.²⁵⁷ Wittmann, with whose family Zondi developed another intensive personal friendship over the years, created the liaison to the Strydom's gallery and in August 1974 Dr. Matthys Strydom invited Zondi to live and work in George²⁵⁸. Zondi's work was subsequently included at annual exhibitions towards the end of the years 1974-1976 (Deane, 1978:200 and Nieser, 2003j). By November 1974 Zondi had been able to accumulate enough work for his second major one-man exhibition, at which he showed 35 pieces²⁵⁹ (Rand Daily Mail, Nov.2, 1974), sold out before the opening. (The Star, Nov.2, 1974) Zondi's new patron, Johan van Wyk was instrumental in facilitating the exhibition venue and inviting the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Education, Mr. Punt Janson, to give the opening address. Initially to be staged under the auspices of the University of Pretoria, the venue was changed at the last minute.²⁶⁰ The rector of the University of South Africa (UNISA) readily agreed to provide the new venue (Nieser, 2003b). Alluding to racial segregation, while speaking of Zondi's creativity in "the hour of humiliation" (Rand Daily Mail, November 2, 1974), Janson encouraged people to become familiar with the work of black artists and to buy their work, not for reasons of doing them a favour, but for their intrinsic value.²⁶¹

C. Hagg critiqued Zondi's work on show, particularly in view of the artist's above-mentioned interface with his white patrons, conflating this with his views on African expression in the work of black artists. He made the assumption that black artists in general face the 'problem' of retaining "the spirit of Africa" (Hagg, 1974). Asserting that influences of missionaries and western training represented a "dualism" with the African spirit – which he felt to have a 'destructive power' – Hagg speaks of Zondi's "resultant mannerism...superficiality, sentimentality, lack of maturity and thought..." in the treatment

²⁵⁷ Personal communication with Werner Wittmann, George, 17 September 2003

²⁵⁸ In 1974 Strydom was preparing for his 6th exhibition that November and he names available indigenous woods: "inheemse houtsoorte: stinkhout, geelhout, ysterhout, boekenhout, hardepeer, kershout ens." Letter dated 21 August 1974 – from Matthys Strydom to Bodenstein.

²⁵⁹ The number was extended to 43 by handwritten entries, probably by Bodenstein (exhibition handout)

²⁶⁰ The rector of the University of Pretoria thought that it would be inappropriate for his institution to be seen to host an exhibition for a black man.

²⁶¹ (Beeld, 4 November 1974) – The newspaper features a photo of Zondi and Janson, with *Orpheus* (1972) (Fig. 32, p.72) from the Bodenstein collection. While this piece also featured in a follow-up article on the exhibition, in *Development southern africa* (sic.) 1974/4, the two men in conversation were also featured in the *South African Panorama* of February 1975, with a standing 'mother and child' figure in the background.

of his subject. His recipe for Zondi, in order to 'find his real self', is "total seclusion from white influences' to solve 'Zondi (sic.) problem' (Hagg, 1974).

Inherent in denying black artists and their work an identity other than broadly and indiscriminately 'African', was the romanticising and concomitantly segregationist notion of an 'exotic other'. Selby Mvusi spoke of a 'special dispensation' in the evaluation of art from Africa (see 1.4.2. p.34). Hagg's foregrounding of alterity echoes segregationist ideology, and may be linked to Mbembe's notion of racial specificity denying humanity (Mbembe, 2002:248). Further, it implies an imposition of 'nativist' thinking, that of 'a peculiar self' of the African related to the uniqueness of an authentic African culture (Mbembe, 2002: 242, 252), rather than the abovementioned appraisal of difference conducted within a 'greater universality' (see 1.3. *Selfhood*). This prescriptive hegemonic attitude towards the work of black artists would filter into equally insistent, albeit covert, expectations as regards socio-political commentary of artistic expression in the conflict in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s – to the exclusion of a scrutiny of the artworks themselves.

The issue of an identification with Africa, to be proudly African, and the intensive exploration of selfhood by intellectuals around romantic Panafricanism from the 1940s in central and West Africa (see 1.3.2. *Négritude*, p.13), had involved an investigation into what it entailed to be African in the 'modern' world, in terms of both received cultural elements, as well as influences from foreign cultures which had been forcefully planted in Africa. The *Amadlozi Group* ('spirit of our ancestors') around Cecil Skotnes and Sydney Kumalo, emerging in a South African urban context in the early 1960s, was described as having sought an 'Africanness' that was still romanticised as 'a spirit of emergent Africa' (Berman, 1975:210)²⁶². Around 1960 the Nigerian Uche Okeke's pragmatic notion of 'natural synthesis' acknowledged the fusion of inherited and newly adopted traditions in expressing such 'Africanness' - making use of new materials and techniques (Okeke, 2001:453). This was reflected in the *Amadlozi Group's* 'African sourcing', especially with Kumalo's blending of "a western figurative canon with that of African figurative sculpture", thought to have been highly influential on the work of other South African artists (Sack, 1988:16).

²⁶² Zondi met Skotnes, the Cultural Recreation Officer of what became the Polly Street Art Centre, in September 1960. "We talked a lot and agreed on many points" (Handwritten letter dated 27 September 1960 from Zondi to Bodenstein) (see also Chapter One, footnote 96, p.27)

The discussion around such ‘synthesis’ has persisted to this day. Uche Okeke seeks to find a modern African aesthetic within changed social contexts in Africa, by incorporating influences gained through studies abroad, and by the use of new tools and means of expression (Okeke, 2001:30. Zondi’s woodworking skills, learnt with rudimentary tools in the rural context of his parental home, preceded his use of more refined ones. His representational style is sourced in the naturalism to which he aspired in childhood clay work and drawing, so that, while it developed within a western context, his art is thought of as a ‘conjunction’ of western and indigenous characteristics (Rankin, 1993: 135).

Zondi was never subject to having to resist inherently hegemonic “formulaic ‘Africanness’”, thought to be demanded of the work of African artists by the end of the 20th century (Atkinson, 1999:16). His almost self-didactic path, chosen outside formal art-making institutions and distinct from an avant-garde seeking fundamental artistic innovation, is more reflective of an ‘African character’ thought to be reflected in habits and attitudes, rather than styles, media, technique or a thematic range (Kasfir, 1999:9).

Trans-cultural communication appears as a recurring theme, not only in Janson’s opening speech but also newspaper clippings and journal articles at this time of anger and frustration on the part of black South Africans, regarding the intransigence of the state²⁶³. With his comprehensive publication a year earlier, (1973), de Jager had contextualised the phenomenon of art-making within South Africa’s socio-political climate, seeing art as a vehicle of communication to forge trans-cultural understanding (de Jager,1973:30)²⁶⁴. Zondi’s theme of reconciliation is cited in the same journal publication (Development 1974\4:10)²⁶⁵, on whose front cover the artist is shown with his *Reunion* of 1964 (Fig. 21, p.61), here named *Reconciliation*. Speaking of a breakthrough for a black artist in having a one-man exhibition, the text refers to a “rapidly changing climate towards black-white understanding”, calling Zondi’s art ‘a true voice of all Africa’.

Making reference to his predominantly white patronage and addressing issues of progress and development of communities, Zondi calls for support from black artists’ “own people”, as well as furthering a “wider education”, where insight into the values of art can promote

²⁶³ The Soweto uprising of 1976

²⁶⁴ de Jager sees art as a language to foster trans-cultural understanding and change, seeing ‘acculturation’ as reciprocal (de Jager, 1973:17), an influence of one to another culture irrespective of dominance.

²⁶⁵ *Development –south Africa* (sic.), a science-based, non-political journal primarily focused on the development of environmental and human resources of the black populations of South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. Zondi, “A man in love with...the idea and inevitability of reconciliation” (Development 1974\4:10)

its role in development and “bridge-building among all people” (Zondi, 1974b). During these years much work by black South African artists was being purchased by foreigners, who left the country with it. Bodenstein and van Wyk facilitated the sale of Zondi’s work to an international clientele (Nieser, 2003d)²⁶⁶.

Zondi’s humour sometimes found its way into his sculptures. Perhaps pre-empting art-historians’ verbosity in trying to decipher or analyse the pose of a tall female figure sculpted from dark hardwood, Zondi gave it the idiomatic name “*Scratch my Back*,” adding “and the more I scratch, the more it itch”²⁶⁷. It was shown in the 1974 one-man show in Pretoria. Utilising the length of the log, he employs expressive distortion in creating an elongated torso strongly stylised by making use of broad faceting. The figure stands in a somewhat twisted contrapposto. One forearm rests horizontally across the body below her breasts, while the other stretches up, reaching backwards.



Fig. 34

Scratch my Back
1974

In May 1975 Zondi exhibited his sculptures together with watercolours by David Koloane in the Nedbank Gallery in Killarney, Johannesburg.²⁶⁸ During these years Zondi was making extensive use of wood from the bushveld, spending several months at a time on the Veldsman farm. Zondi’s choices for the figures he carved were partially determined by found, dry pieces of wood of varying shapes and sizes²⁶⁹.

Zondi’s figures sometimes ‘grew’ out of root-woods, with minimal work done on the base, as

²⁶⁶ Johan van Wyk arranged for Zondi’s work to be exhibited in connection with two symposia in Pretoria and Johannesburg (Nieser, 2003b and typed letter of 22 April 1974 to Zondi from van Wyk).

A sculpture of Zondi’s is mentioned in 2003, in connection with the return of Pretoria township art in 2003, from a collection purchased by an Australian diplomat between 1973 and 1976 (Nevin, 2003:1). Termed ‘lost art’ in view of the works leaving South African soil, the artist Michael Maapola speaks of a “visual history of apartheid’s battleground in the locations” (Nevin, 2003:1).

²⁶⁷ Personal communication, Johan van Wyk, March 2003 – van Wyk bought the piece.

²⁶⁸ Original invitation card given to Nieser by Agnes Bodenstein, October 2003; the exhibition was described as the “professional turning point” for Koloane.

“His professional turning point came in 1975 when he held his first exhibition with Michael Zondi, already an established sculptor in his own right.” ... www.artists-press.net/david-koloane/david-koloane.htm - 17k -)

²⁶⁹ (See *Laughing Duck*, Fig: 26, p. 67)

a torso emerged from the top. A small *Root-Figure* is positioned with one splayed leg, influenced by the wood's outward thrust, as the upper body twists, the figure turning sideways. While one arm is bared with the hand on the heart, the other is entirely covered, its shape merely a suggestion below drapery which Zondi has worked minimally, retaining obvious, small chisel marks, leaving the gnarled texture of the root to form the back of the figure.

Another sculpture revealing the artist's subjective response to the natural form of found stinkwood is the twisted shape of the *Contortionist* of the mid-1970s. In its appearance of a body falling sideways, a curved torso predominates, lurching from one bended leg, whose foot seems to be wedged, almost trapped under the weight of the rest of the body. The head of the figure continues the arc of the torso, coming to rest hanging downwards, covered by one arm as though in an attempt at protection. Thematically the sculpture, through its tortuous movement, suggests fear or pain – through a stylisation of the arrangement of limbs whose cohesiveness has been sacrificed in favour of expressiveness. This is a rare departure from Zondi's customary, more realistic rendering of the human form. A few years later, in 1982, he would sculpt a similar figure which he called *Pain*. While still suggesting strong contortion of the body, Zondi returns to a more conventional representational and 'readable' depiction. Bodenstein's terminal illness was diagnosed during this year, and he spent many hours contemplating human suffering in *Pain*. Agnes Bodenstein makes reference to the fitting base of equally tortured wood, which the artist, Poshoko, chose and made for it (Bodenstein, 1998:8). Bodenstein shared his political and social concerns and his philosophical premises with a circle of friends, which



Fig. 35

Root-Figure
mid-1970s



Fig. 36

Contortionist
mid 1970s²⁷⁰



Fig. 37

Pain
1982

²⁷⁰ The title was given by Johan van Wyk.

included Zondi. His multi-cultural thinking is clearly demonstrated in the entire breadth of his sentiments and emotions in the *de la Harpe Memorial Lecture*, presented to the College of Medicine of South Africa in October 1976, with the title *The Role of Human Care as Catalyst in Transcultural Communication* (Bodenstein, 1977), which he gave on a number of other occasions in South Africa.

Very poignantly, he departed for Santa Barbara, to deliver the lecture in the United States of America on the day the Soweto uprising began in Johannesburg (Bodenstein, 1998:7). Zondi presented him with a tiny *Memento* sculpture²⁷¹, to accompany him on his journey. Utilising and retaining fully the natural shape of the wood,²⁷² this very small, triangular piece of root-wood only shows a few broad chisel marks near the apex, from which emerges a head with finely carved features, the triangle becoming a ‘cape’ which flows down from the head.



Fig. 38

Memento
1977

Bodenstein’s *The Role of Human Care as Catalyst in Transcultural Communication* focuses on humanitarian issues related to understanding amongst people of differing cultural traditions – in the context of South Africa’s cultural and racial dichotomy. His foremost source, in view of a philosophical discourse related to pain and hope – which he associated with the South African situation – was Teilhard de Chardin, the theologian and “evolutionary thinker” who has been compared to Marx and Darwin (Jones, 1975:15). De Chardin foregrounded that capacity of which only man is capable, namely reflection (Jones, 1975:22)²⁷³ and its corollary, self-criticism. These were some of the tenets on which the liberation theologians of Lutheranism in Natal had founded their location of attributes regarding behaviour and mores in other cultures and belief systems, on which it formerly was supposed to have a monopoly.

While still “honouring and cherishing” his western roots, Bodenstein felt his western identity to be tenuous, feeling it had undergone “a metamorphosis into the new dimension of *belonging to Africa*”. Such an African identity embraced for him a sense of “unifying wholeness” in its “absence of the dichotomy between worlds material and spiritual, between

²⁷¹ Nevertheless, it is inscribed MZ '77

²⁷² See *Root-Figure*, Fig. 35, p. 77

²⁷³ “...the power acquired by a consciousness to turn upon itself” (Jones, 1975:22).

individual and society...” which he thought was both distinctively African and the continent’s most precious heritage (Bodenstein, 1977:52,53).

Bodenstein never lost his optimism for a positive resolution for South Africa’s future. In the 1976 context of his being a civil servant working in the government’s Department of Health, he judged South Africa’s segregationist legislation to be the “veritable climax of anti-communication”. He spoke of its innate temporality and self-limitation, regarding enshrined ‘norms’ as disastrous (Bodenstein,1977: 51). In what Bodenstein terms the “privilege and agony” of being “totally and irrevocably involved in so much turmoil, dilemma, ferment, despair and hope” (Bodenstein, 1977: 55), he thinks of “trans-cultural communication” as the most critical factor on which his country’s destiny hinges. In looking at artistic expression, de Jager’s inclusion of this theme (de Jager, 1973), a year earlier, will have been influenced by Bodenstein²⁷⁴. It is probable that Janson’s comments regarding racial détente – which influenced media reports concerning Zondi’s exhibition – were also, in part, a reflection of the lively political debate concerning apartheid policies in Bodenstein’s circles, which included top civil servants.

In referring to the central issue of his paper, Bodenstein likens his more scientific term of ‘human care’ to theology’s ‘Christian love’ (Bodenstein, 1977:57) and relates its function to an interface between cultures in South Africa.²⁷⁵ His lecture reveals his opinions on themes ranging from paternalistic notions of development for the other, ‘human belonging’ and his vision of a ‘complete human being’²⁷⁶. Addressing issues of servility, prejudices and taboos, Bodenstein links meaningful change in South Africa to western political, economic and

²⁷⁴ Apart from their discourse, Wolfgang Bodenstein made Schlaudraff’s photographic record of Zondi’s work from the 1960s available to de Jager (de Jager, 1973: 31)

²⁷⁵ In regarding and building bridges between the great variety of value systems, Bodenstein saw the quality of existence and progress linked to *cultural objectivity* – an objectivity in which was inherent the difficulty of its interfering with “conditioned responses in respect of value yardsticks and value judgements” hidden in the subconscious (Bodenstein, 1977: 57).

²⁷⁶ “By way of human activity and thanks to it, a new earth is gathering, isolating and purifying itself” (Teilhard de Chardin,1975:96). Bodenstein was aware of “derision or pity” in the face of his optimism as regards a “catalytic potential” in South Africa – believing that, against all apparent odds, the committed desire for a “resolution and self-fulfilment” within the country in dealing with the human dilemma – the “first pages of a serene new chapter towards the realisation of our vision of the Family of Man should be written *here right in our midst*” (Bodenstein, 1977:55). In speaking of a ‘new order’ Bodenstein wrote: “If ... all our labours, every single day, and under all circumstances, are rendered in a spirit that is “tenacious, patient and gentle”, then indeed will all those “places of pain” reap the solace of “a new order”. Within a group of colleagues and friends, sustained by the remarkable spiritual qualities of Dr Molly Walker of Durban, and Michael Zondi, the profound Zulu artist, we have been striving for the last ten years, to live and serve by this motto day by day. All I can say is that it has opened doors and hearts never dreamt of, and that the promise of Teilhard’s vision is far from utopian, but intensely and dynamically real, as long as Christ is the source and centre” (Bodenstein, 1977:57).

cultural hegemony (Bodenstein, 1977:51)²⁷⁷. He draws on concepts of both care and faith from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (Bodenstein, 1977: 57), speaking of absorbing evil and having trust and faith (Bodenstein,1977: 56)²⁷⁸.

Looking at Bodenstein's life in the medical and civil service, his energy and commitment, shown in his interaction with his fellow South Africans across cultural barriers, exemplifies de Chardin's romantic vision of renewal for this 'place of pain.'²⁷⁹ Bodenstein's respect for the work of de Chardin might well be attributed to the fact that, like Bodenstein, he was as much involved with pragmatic work in the sciences²⁸⁰, as he was a versatile thinker steeped in a profound Christian belief. His faith informed his scientific endeavours, and *vice versa* - a synthesis of scientific and religious paradigms creating his world-view. Thought of as a mystic who places 'man' at the centre of the world (Jones, 1975:14,15), the central role of the spiritual in de Chardin's thinking (Jones, 975:20) finds its place in the world-view of African peoples and their fundamental precept of spirituality.

"Everything that becomes suffers or sins" (de Chardin, 1975:2). In view of the liberation theology of South African *amaKholwa*, the contextualisation of a messianic Christ may be related to Teilhard's vision of suffering. He saw in suffering the price that needs to be paid for progress and renewal, and, further, compensation in the conquering of moral evil (de Chardin, 1975: 4,5). Straining - with bended knees and a leaning gait - under the weight of a cross which seems heavy beyond measure, walking up the steps of Golgotha, this ***Cross-Bearing Christ*** was a commissioned piece for a Protestant church in Hermannsburg Northern Germany,



Fig. 39

Cross-bearing Christ
mid-1970s

²⁷⁷ He thought the proviso for meaningful change was "decolonisation in its widest sense", the "crumbling of the West's virtually world-wide political, economic and cultural hegemony" (Bodenstein, 1977:51).

²⁷⁸ The theologian believed in a "successful outcome for man's earthly achievement" Teilhard had said "I love the world around me too much not to have confidence in it"(Teilhard de Chardin, 1975:12).

²⁷⁹ Bodenstein translated and contextualised Teilhard's notion of renewal in the latter's reference to the slaughter and carnage in the 1st world war - at Verdun.

"As I looked at this scene of bitter toil, I felt completely overcome by the thought that I had the honour of standing at one of the ...spots on which, at this very moment, the whole life of the universe surges and ebbs - places of pain, but it is there that a great future (this I believe more and more) is taking shape" (de Chardin in Bodenstein, 1977:55).

²⁸⁰ Teilhard de Chardin was a scientist who spent 20 years in the field of palaeontology in Mongolia.

during the mid-1970s²⁸¹. In accord with their name, “community of the cross”²⁸², the theme of Christ carrying the cross seemed more appropriate than a ‘*Christ Crucified*’ (Cassier, 1980:1). Above the entrance of the church’s oak portals is the motto: *Ohne Kreuz keine Krone*, without the Cross, no Crown. Hence the placing of Zondi’s Christ in a wall recess, with masonry suggesting steps.



Fig. 40

**Cross-bearing
Christ**
(detail of Fig. 39)
mid-1970s

Cassier sees in the features of Zondi’s Christ a neutral racial type, in keeping with Christianity’s acceptance of anyone who wishes to be embraced by the faith (Cassier, 1980:2). She further denies that the figure is ‘a Jew from the time of Herod’ (Cassier, 1980:3) – contrary to Zondi’s specific reference to Christ as a Jew (See *Crucifix*, Figs.19 and 20, p.59). Using emotive language, Cassier indicates both feet of Christ on uneven ‘painbearing’ earth, which the artist has integrated into the sculpture (Cassier, 1980:3). In her reading of the open mouth, the introverted, half-closed eyes as those of a man who is carrying out the will of God in anticipation of his resurrection, Cassier interprets Zondi’s Christ on his path of obedience – bearing the cross as the earthly believer should (Cassier, 1980:4). The artist’s lengthy contemplation of wood prior to sculpting suggest that the emotive use of red striations, appearing like blood from the crown of thorns, is not coincidental.

Sr. Johanna Senn, of the Mariannahill Order of the Precious Blood (see also below, p.88), finds in Zondi’s elongated, tall figures a ‘convincing simplicity’, using the term ‘*noble Gelassenheit*’, suggesting a calmness, patience or composure (Cassell’s German-English Dictionary, 1972: 184)²⁸³, which she attributes to blacks in situations of deep despair, a perception she possibly contrasts with a far more overt visual language found in European expressionism.

²⁸¹ A cousin of Bodenstein’s, Annegret Cassier, facilitated this commission work to be placed into the entrance hall below the belfry tower of the *Große Kreuzkirche*, Hermannsburg, in celebration of the church’s 100th anniversary (Cassier,1980:1).

²⁸² *Kreuzgemeinde*

²⁸³ Implicit in *Gelassenheit* is also resignation (Cassell’s German-English Dictionary, 1972:184)

In 1974 Zondi was asked to sculpt a figure from a stinkwood log which Chen Veldsman had inherited from her father (Nieser, 2003c). He used half of it for *Tall Lady* (1974), an extremely elongated figure with one hand resting at her neck, a relaxed stance he frequently chose for figures.

Between 1974 and 1977 Zondi participated in cultural events sponsored by the Department of Information, his erstwhile employer. Zondi's *Mother and Child* of wild olive wood was included in an exhibition,²⁸⁴ *'Kultur der Zulu'* beginning in Austria, then moving to France, Belgium and Switzerland, between August 1974 and June 1975²⁸⁵. It was sponsored by the government's Department of Information and the Bantu Development Corporation. While such an exhibition was doubtless intended to position Zulu cultural traditions within a historical context, it also implicitly cemented notions of ethnic specificity within South Africa, serving in the justification of the government's homelands policy. Household utensils, clothing, beadwork and antique military paraphernalia, as well as photographic material related to current Zulu leadership were on show. Besides imparting a general impression of Zulu life in a traditional context, art included *inter alia* paintings of Zulu 'types' by Barbara Tyrrell, a bronze *Praying Woman*, (1960), by Sydney Kumalo, and Cecil Skotnes' 43 woodcuts *'The Assassination of Shaka'*²⁸⁶.



Fig. 41

Tall Lady
1974

In 1977, from mid-February until mid-March, Zondi had the opportunity of representing South Africa (as the only African country) and promoting South African wood at an international exhibition in Paris, *L'Homme et le Bois (Man and Wood)*, at Orly airport, together with the graphic artist Raymond Andrews, whose work Zondi admired (Zondi, 1977b:3). Government sponsorship was under the auspices of the Cultural Section of the Department of Information.²⁸⁷ Artists and artisans showed their work, but also actively

²⁸⁴ Although Zondi had only one piece on show, the June edition of *BANTU* included a photograph by H. Schlaudraff of the artist sculpting his *Adam and Eve* of 1959, as well as a general view of vitrines with the *Mother and Child*

²⁸⁵ Museum of Nations in Vienna between August and October 1975, in Lille, France, in November, Royal Museum Tervuren, Brussels, and Switzerland (Basson, 1976).

²⁸⁶ Skotnes spoke on Zulu culture at the press conference and the opening at the first venue in Vienna (Basson, 1976a and 1976b).

²⁸⁷ Organised by the Aéroport de Paris in conjunction with the Museum of Man and the radio station "France Inter", Orly South showed 'valuable objects...from five continents', while Orly West became 'the home of artisans from Argentina, Greece, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Tunisia, Venezuela and Yugoslavia'. The Russians were absent as they had defected to the West (Report 30/3/2/34-A by the Information Counsellor, B. Angelis, Paris, 21 March 1977 – p.1, for the Department of Information.)

produced pieces during the exhibition, to which an estimated 600 000 visitors came. In an “emergency letter” to Bodenstein, Zondi denigrates European wood²⁸⁸ and requests that, with the next flight back to Paris, Bodenstein should send him Mthomboti, Mvuli and Kiaat wood. After an initial meeting with the South African ambassador and “people from Information”²⁸⁹ Zondi visited the Museum of Modern Art at the Pompidou Centre. Zondi was deeply impressed by Rodin’s work and visited the Rodin Museum “almost every day” (Zondi, 1977b: 2,4)²⁹⁰.

Given that European art had found new paradigms for art-making in the conceptualism found in African art – taking the first steps on the road to the abstraction of the 20th century – it is perhaps not surprising that Zondi found in Cubism elements with which he could experiment in his sculpture. His *Portrait of Zondi’s Mother*, sculpted in 1977 clearly shows the use of the kind of broader faceting of *Queen* (1969) (Fig. 29, p.68). The artist makes frequent mention of his mother in relation to her deep Christian faith. The headdress is a simple cloth, conveying the unpretentious but deeply spiritual person he saw in her as a ‘prayer woman’ (Nieser, 2003e), who enjoyed a high status in her church (Bodenstein, 1998:3). Zondi has softened the edges of his broad chisel marks. After his sojourn in Paris, Zondi immediately began to translate into his three-dimensional forms the pronounced faceting of analytic Cubist which, in the early part of the twentieth century, had challenged notions about what constitutes the real, demanding of the viewer’s own associative capacities the reconstruction of



Fig. 42

**Portrait
of Zondi’s Mother**
1977

The transportation of the artists and their equipment seems to have been facilitated by the marketing manager of South African Airways (Zondi, 1977a:2), while the trip was under government sponsorship (Zondi, 1977:6)

²⁸⁸ “Whatever wood is there is very poor and wet yet it costs almost four times as much as in S.A.”; (Zondi, 1977a:1) “it would be a pity to waste good S.A. workmanship on cheap foreign woods” (Zondi, 1977a:3).

²⁸⁹ The co-operation of ‘our artists’ was noted by the ‘Information Councillor’ in her report as “one not so unimportant aspect of our participation at an exhibition of this nature”. Further, it is stated that the South African artists were “well-liked and highly esteemed”. While Zondi makes reference to politicised questions from visitors (Zondi, 1977b), the report stated “No-one was interested in politics...” but subsequently makes mention of “one French-speaking West African gentleman”, who is cited as having shown surprise that a black South African would want to return to South Africa after having managed to “escape”. (Report 30/3/2/34-A by the Information Counsellor, B. Angelis, Paris, 21 March 1977 – page 2, for the Department of Information.)

²⁹⁰ “Rodin might not have made money, but his works are far more than what money can buy. A treasure not only to the French people but to the whole universe. To see them and touch them was like an opening to another world” (Zondi, 1977b:5). Zondi is subsequently reported to have spoken of recognising in his own work an added symbolism and feeling for art (Pretoria News, 7 April, 1977).

fragments.²⁹¹ While never departing from the basic human form, Zondi's representational style during this time was partially diluted, reaching what for him would be the limits of stylisation and a degree of conceptualism. This exploration with cubist faceting, where a juxtaposition of large surfaces of chiselled wood create flat planes of light to create the figure, brings Zondi closest to what may be termed something "specifically African" in his work²⁹².

The figures I have sourced in four different collections are thought to be 'unique' pieces by each of the collectors as they recognize a departure from Zondi's style done prior to his Paris sojourn, and celebrate his venture into broad faceting and a greater abstraction. Carved from the common *Rooikrans* acacia, the faceting of the face of *Portrait of a Woman*, (1977), is not more pronounced than in some of Zondi's more freely executed portrait busts from the late 1960s, but the features emerge from head-gear which has no representative definition in its broad planes of chiselled wood. On one side Zondi has left the bark entirely untouched. The hand, however, placed below the chin, has been reduced to a minimal number of flat planes suggesting a fist.

In the *Portrait of a Young Man*, (1977), Zondi has used stronger faceting for the features, leaving equally few and flat planes to suggest a relaxed, curved hand under the chin, as in *Portrait of a Woman* (Fig. 43). The eyes seem closed. Zondi's figures from the early 1960s onwards suggest introversion by means of this use of closed eyes or a downward gaze, avoiding a particular visual engagement in any one direction. There is also the possibility of the African conventions of respect, where social hierarchies



Fig. 43

**Portrait
of a Woman**
1977²⁹³



Fig. 44

**Portrait
of a Young Man**
1977

²⁹¹ Artists like Archipenko and Duchamp-Villon had attempted to translate the facets of analytic Cubist painting into three-dimensional form.

²⁹² Rankin thought that apart from Zondi's consistent use of African models, "there is nothing specifically African about Michael Zondi's sculptures" (Rankin, 1989:49).

²⁹³ Wittmann claims that this was the first piece Zondi did after his Paris sojourn.

determine the measure of eye contact (Nettleton, 1998:86)

While Zondi remains relatively strongly representational in creating with small facets the face of this standing female figure, *Woman*, (1977), his exploration of flat geometric components creating 'readable' shapes of the torso, demonstrates his most courageous departure from his figurative expressionism into modernism. The body is created with a minimum number of interlocking, juxtaposed flat facets, demanding of the viewer that he interprets the stance from the rhythmical play of light over the planes.

A year later, in 1978, Zondi employs a similarly bold use of light in *Prayer*, in the manner of cubist faceting, but allegedly he had to be encouraged to leave the piece as it is, in his view 'unfinished' (Nieser, 2003j).

It is almost as though the artist wanted to prove that he could achieve this figuration by new means, before he returned to the personal style of carving, for which he was known before his sojourn in Paris, seen in *Boy* (1978), carved from sleeper wood. Here Zondi returns to his 'safe' haven of his former style, again using smooth surfaces, as in this cloak from which protrude exaggerated, dominantly large hands.

A flute player had been one of the first pieces to receive an award, a bronze medal, at the Republic Day African Art Exhibition held at the National Museum in Bloemfontein in 1960 (Zondi, 1960d)²⁹⁴. The *Flute Player* of 1979 (Fig. 48 overleaf) is an example of Zondi's continuity in creating



Fig. 45

Woman
1977



Fig. 46

Prayer
1978



Fig. 47

Boy
1978

²⁹⁴ Rankin erroneously cites 1961 (Rankin, 1993:131)

²⁹⁵ When Zondi was given an audience with the king and the artist mentioned what in van Wyk's opinion was a modest price, the king began to haggle. Zondi immediately took his piece and departed, later giving it to Johan van Wyk (Nieser, 2003b).

unchallenging, simple genre figures, as he did throughout his oeuvre.

Two Young Men of 1979, a very large and heavy sculpture of leadwood, in the van Wyk collection, was initially made for the King of Swaziland (Nieser, 2003b). I understood that Zondi had a free choice of subject matter²⁹⁵. While one man is crouching on the ground, wrapped in a cloak from the shoulders down, the other is standing with slightly bended knees, perhaps in a position of respectful waiting. The standing man, with a wrap-around attire, is holding an enormous knobkerrie with both hands, the knob-end of the stick facing upwards and resting near his chest. Zondi has worked both the body and the cloak with evenly-sized chisel marks, creating a textured surface which in parts form a visual rhythm. This sculpture shows no evidence of Zondi's exploration of cubist forms, as he has returned to his representational style.

Zondi's *Nude*, sculpted in 1979 as a gift for one of his daughters, is remarkable in its return to the kind of smooth, polished surface texture which he had used twenty years earlier. He had departed almost entirely from this style in favour of an intensive exploration of the textures created by his chisel marks, as well as incorporating untouched wood surfaces into his sculptures. Further, in this piece he has departed radically from the subject matter for which he had become known over two decades and more. Not only is the girl with long, straight flowing hair a European type, but Zondi displays an overt nudity that is equally foreign to earlier work. I first saw the piece in Zondi's presence and, with a deprecatory gesture, he commented: "They call that modern" (Nieser, 2003a).



Fig. 48

Flute Player
1979²⁹⁶



Fig. 49

Two Young Men
1979



Fig. 50

Nude
1979

²⁹⁶ This figure was presented to Nieser by Frieda Wittmann, September 2003.

While the University of Fort Hare and the University of Bophuthatswana were the only institutions that had established art education degrees for black South Africans by the late 1970s (Sack, 1988:18), the ‘enormous gulf’ between black and white artists, as well as the persistent exclusion of black students from ‘white’ art-institutions, was analysed, lamented and addressed by artists and art-historians at the conference on *The State of Art in South Africa* in 1979 in Cape Town (Sack,1988:24). Taking action against imbalances in educational opportunities for the peoples of South Africa, it was decided to boycott state-sponsored exhibitions. A politically volatile South Africa prompted Zondi’s fears and hopes, and his *Undoing Shackles* is another political visual ‘text’ of 1980. The standing man is holding in both hands a thick rope with which he seems to have been shackled. He is wearing a severe facial expression. His eyes are closed. His western clothing in the form of a shirt is seldom seen in Zondi’s figures, and is here perhaps indicative of a servile or enslaved context from which the man is now freed. Zondi makes use of his customary distortion, enlarging the hands, while the surface texture is chiselled, but the overall effect is one of relative smoothness.

Possibly an exploration of status within paternalistic Zulu culture, Zondi’s *The Daughter speaks and the Father Listens* is a tender portrait of a man with his daughter, sculpted in 1983. The man’s enormously exaggerated hand becomes a cradling trough from which the figure of the girl emerges while he appears to be listening attentively. The girl’s embrace of the man with one hand, while the other rests on his chest indicates both intimacy and a relationship of trust and love. Zondi has created an overall textured surface by employing a fairly large chisel for his finish. I see in this piece a strong element of self-portraiture, reflecting Zondi’s intimate relationship with his



Fig.51

Undoing Shackles
1980



Fig.52

The Daughter speaks and the Father Listens
1983

daughter, Sibusisiwe.

Bodenstein made a memorable last visit to Zondi's 'home' at Mtulwa during 1981, prior to major surgery (Bodenstein, 1998:7). Here Zondi gave him *Sacred Harvest*, a genre theme repeatedly carved since the late 1950s. A rather stocky female figure with a vessel containing fruit on her head is depicted with great attention to detail of hair and the contents of the vessel. The smooth finish of her bare torso suggests a strong stylistic affinity to Zondi's work of the early 1960s. As the piece is undated (Bodenstein, 1998:7), it is possible that it hailed from that time and was finished by Zondi only in 1981. During 1984 Bodenstein died.

Zondi was never as directly influenced by art-making institutions within the mission or church contexts, but always remained relatively intimately associated with such religious institutions. This was due to his own deep faith, his building contracting work during the 1960s, as well as through exhibition opportunities during the 1970s²⁹⁷. Zondi chose to spend a part of the year 1984 with Sr. Johanna, using the studio without having to pay rental. In exchange, he granted her first option on pieces that he made,²⁹⁸ while some work was able to be marketed through Mariannahill. Sr. Johanna's own artistic discernment had been forged within the modernist paradigm. She describes Zondi as a 'classicist' of African expression (Senn, 1983:300), drawing comparisons in his work to Rodin and Barlach, but emphasising his rootedness with Africa.

The 1980s were marked by much political unrest in South Africa and the states of emergency also indirectly affected rural people. Zondi speaks of needing 'travelling papers' "in these troubled times" and in a letter requests his friends²⁹⁹ to pray "for our country and its people" (Zondi, 1986a). In 1986 Zondi further reports "We are still harassed by unrest in Natal which has claimed lives and homes of relatives and friends (but only in cities)" (Zondi, 1986b).

²⁹⁷ For example, artists like Ruben Xulu, worked out of the studio of Sr. Johanna at Mariannahill, or Bernard Gcwensa under Father Kinch at Hlabisa.

²⁹⁸ There is a *Mary* by Zondi next to the altar of the chapel in the *Tre Fontane* guest house at Mariannahill.

Zondi experienced some health problems during 1986 (Zondi,1986a and 1986b), but he was able to execute a mural in the new Education Department of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus,³⁰⁰ one of his few commissioned works. There was a glass window in the proximity of the relief sculpture, affording a view into a room where child behaviour could be studied. I am making the assumption that the theme ‘family’ was therefore suggested to the artist. Zondi chose a high relief sculptural panel inelegantly divided geometrically into different heights, possibly to accommodate wall units which are now no longer present. Two adults and three children were carved out of laminated meranti.³⁰¹ The western-clothed figures display a stiffness and in part a lack of ease in movement, revealing how Zondi experienced difficulty in the translation of three-dimensional form onto a two-dimensional surface, which demanded foreshortening. Zondi’s *Portrait of a Young Man* is, until now, the latest work I have sourced, dated 1987. A rather narrow head, just less than life-size, has been hewn in broad chisel marks, while the man’s neck up to the clavicles is smoother, albeit still revealing textures from the tool that carved it. The expression of contemplative serenity – indicated by the closed eyes, belies the unrest and grief which Zondi experienced in Natal during the year 1987, culminating in that December with a violent death in Zondi’s family and women and children finding refuge in Zondi’s home at Mtulwa³⁰².



Fig.53

Family
Relief Panel
1986



Fig.54

**Portrait
of a Young Man**
1987

³⁰⁰ “After the recovery of my shoulder I had a tryout carving a mural for the University of Natal which came out without a hitch which helped me ease my financial problems” (Zondi,1986b). The plaque indicates that the piece was commissioned.

“In Memory of Ralph van der Schans 1972-1984”. Van der Schans was Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

³⁰¹ After completion, the wood began to weep, seemed raw and dry and needed major attention (Personal communication, Henry Davies , September 2003) .

³⁰² “through the stupidity of our local tribal chief, a tribal fight broke out in our area, - men, women and children “burnt to death”. Further, Zondi’s brother lost a son: “Jonathan’s eldest son stabbed to death” (Zondi, 1987).

Zondi was a revered tutor³⁰³ but, while he always established studio-workshops wherever he found employment in work dedicated to his other skills besides carving (Nieser, 2004), he never fulfilled his vision of founding his own art school. This appears to have been a strong urge after returning home from Paris, when he was seeking “South African talent”, in a bid to establish a multi-racial art school in ‘one of the homelands’ (Pretoria News, 7 April, 1977).

After his first stroke in 1992, Zondi was still able to make small sculptures (Zondi, 1992), recovering enough to seek ‘piles of Mthomboti logs’ near Eshowe (Zondi, 1993). In 1995 he suffered his second stroke, losing the use of his left hand. In that year the artist moved into a house in Edendale, near Pietermaritzburg. His perception of Natal was that it was still “in a state of grief and devastation” (Zondi, 1995).

Zondi’s work was included in *Land and Lives*, an exhibition which toured South Africa during 1997, accompanied by Miles’ publication of the same name (Miles, 1997). Zondi travelled to Johannesburg for the opening and visited Agnes Bodenstein in Pretoria (Nieser, 2003d). In asking for the addresses of his friends, Zondi comments about a visit in Pretoria with Agnes, “I felt the presence of Wolfgang and other departed friends of the old days”³⁰⁴.

³⁰³ Personal communication with Pat Khoza, Durban Art Gallery, August 2003.

³⁰⁴ Dawie Chamberlain, Dr. Barry, Dr. Witmann (sic.), Dr. Labuschagne, Mr. Walter, Dr. Hesse, Piet Veldsman, Dr. Kustner (Zondi, 1998:2).

“I’m planning to contact old friends in Durban like Whysall’s the camera people, Dr. Barker at Edington, Miss Manley in Cape Town...the Ericksons (sic.) in Sweden and others overseas” (Zondi, 1998:5).

CONCLUSION

In repositioning Michael Zondi's oeuvre within the context of a current discourse of 20th century South African art, this dissertation has shown how his artistic oeuvre and his choice of themes and motifs was intimately linked to the kind of western education within a missionary context which also enabled a literary élite in South Africa to effectively address and become involved in opposing the intransigence of the state as regards humanitarian concerns.

Michael Zondi's work, inspired as it was by his own rootedness within his indigenous culture, may be seen to exemplify a black artist's capacity for assimilation and integration of contemporary cultural concepts, ideas and political concerns related to identity within a new urban context, in this way dispelling notions of cultural rupture. The intellectual environment of cultural exchange he chose as an artistic platform for articulating his humanitarian concerns, reached a white élitist audience with links to state institutions. While his work found great acclaim, the artist was able to define himself in terms of his Christian faith by adopting a conciliatory role in cross-cultural communication and inter-racial *rapprochement*.

With modernist influences leading the artist stylistically from an "imitative naturalism" (Rankin, 1989:47) of the human form to more expressive uses of his medium, the indigenisation of Zondi's subjects served to relate his work to his African roots. At the same time, a Christian sourcing of themes he chose to demonstrate his dissent towards socio-economic and political discrimination, creates links to black theology. This was fostered by the artist's enduring contact with some representatives of Lutheranism in Natal, who were forcefully demonstrating their inclination towards a more partisan political stance.

In seeking reasons for Zondi's relative neglect under a new South African dispensation, his popularity during the apartheid era with a white audience may be seen as a contributing factor, at a time when during the 1980s the focus shifted to those artists who chose to express more forcefully and expressively than Zondi, their struggle and their dissent.

Further, Zondi was affiliated to the Department of Information.¹ When black political cadres in South Africa were calling for an armed liberation struggle he was consistently seeking inter-racial *rapprochement* from within the system he despised.

From an artistic point of view Rankin cites “unmistakable development and change” – as the expectation of an *avant-garde*. This she considers not only as a concept which is not valued in African cultural traditions, but also “not a strong trend in Zondi’s sculpture”, (Rankin, 1989:137) seeing it therefore as a possible factor accounting for his slipping from public interest during the 1980s. Zondi’s path did not take him into formal artistic learning environments which might have prompted him to experiment and choose more definitely some alternate styles. Further, in examining more current market trends and expectations, Rankin cites some factors as the driving forces behind the motivations for purchasing. While some are seen as patronising, among them may be a desire to redress the neglect of the past,² wanting to overcome Eurocentricity or seeking ‘exotic other’.³ (Rankin, 1989:47)

Zondi’s frequent recall of friendship which he presently reveals, clearly reflects the emotional ties he nurtured during his career of *rapprochement* practiced within his Christian faith. During the 1970s the apartheid state’s demonstration and perpetuation of political intransigence frequently stood in contrast to its apparent propagation and the voicing of *rapprochement* towards black South Africans. The extent to which Zondi’s endeavours of reconciliation were the instrument of appropriation by such state bodies feigning bona fide intentions, needs further consideration. Conversely, given that reconciliation has remained a key factor on the current political agenda in the rebuilding of a post-apartheid state, Zondi may now experience a measure of vindication in the path he chose and expressed in his work.

¹ Zondi’s employment and his representing South Africa in Paris under the auspices of the Department of Information, as a state department.

² Sr. Johanna Senn whose own artistic discernment was forged within the modernist paradigm, refers to Zondi as a ‘classicist’ of African expression. While drawing comparisons in his work to Rodin and Barlach, she emphasises his rootedness with Africa, commenting on the sincerity of his expressionism at the same time as speaking of it as covert (Senn, 1983:300).

³ Rankin thinks of a “crudity of technique or sentimentality of subject” sought in African art which would be unacceptable to an audience of western art (Rankin, 1989:47).

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- Zondi, M.G. (1992) Handwritten letter dated August or June 1992, Mtulwa Clinic from Zondi to Agnes Bodenstein. Filed by Bodenstein, transferred to Nieser in October 2003
- Zondi, M.G. (1993) Handwritten letter undated, received 19th April 1993 by Agnes Bodenstein from Zondi, Emtulwa Clinic. Filed by Bodenstein, transferred to Nieser in October 2003
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Appendix 1
A selection of general publications
and reference works on South African art
(by date of publication)

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- Rankin, E. (1994) *Images of Metal - Post-War Sculptures and Assemblages in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Miles, Elza (1997) *Land and Lives - A Story of Black Artists*, Cape Town: Human and Rousseau.

Appendix 2
Publications with text inclusion
of Michael Zondi
(by date of publication)

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- De Jager, E.J. (1992) *Images of Man, Contemporary South African Black Art and Artists*, Alice: Fort Hare University Press
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- Miles, Elza (1997) *Land and Lives - A Story of Black Artists*, Cape Town, Human and Rousseau

Appendix 3 List of Illustrations

Photo Credits: All asterisked figure numbers are photographs taken during the mid-1960s by Heinrich Schlaudraff

All other images were taken by Kirsten Nieser

Figure No. in text	Text on Page	Title	Year	Dimensions in millimetres
<u>Chapter Two</u>				
Fig. 1	40	Jewellery Box	1955	145x320x190 Figure height 65
Fig. 2	42	Nozizwe	1954	150x65x85
Fig. 3	43	Dancing Girl	1957	550x150x150
Fig. 4	43	Zulu Heads mounted on roundels	1959	100x190x120 Plate diameter 300
Fig. 5	43	Pair of Zulu Heads	1959	200x120x100
Fig. 6	46	Lot's Wife	1959	670x200x130
Fig. 7*	47	Famine	1960	Unknown
Fig. 8*	47	Dying Young Man	1960	210x100x100
Fig. 9*	48	Two Boys with a Dog	1963	Unknown
Fig. 10*	49	The Family Bond	1959	360x200x170
Fig. 11*	51	Adam and Eve	1959	200x220x145
Fig. 12*	51	Moses	1959	200x120x190
Fig. 13	53	Invisible Bonds	1960	640x100 x 95
Fig. 14	54	Sorrow	1960	605 x 120 x 100
Fig. 15*	54	The Prophet – Durban Art Gallery	1961	height c. 750
Fig. 16*	55	Self-Portrait	1961	420x170x125
Fig. 17	56	Rachel	1963	945x190x170
Fig. 18*	58	Appelsbosch Chapel	c.1963	-
Fig. 19*	59	Crucifix	c.1963	Approx. life-size
Fig. 20*	59	Crucifix (detail of Fig. 19)	c.1963	-
Fig. 21*	61	Reunion (detail)	1965	650x205x150
Fig. 22	61	Forbidden Friendship <i>or</i> David and Jonathan	1964	510x90x170
Fig. 23	62	Calabash	1963	750x90x110
Fig. 24*	65	Shaka	1965	340x240x100
Fig. 25	66	Aunt of Dingane – <i>Makabayi Ka Senzangakhona</i>	1965	Approx. height c. 250
Fig. 26*	66	Laughing Duck	1965	Unknown
Fig. 27*	67	Queen of Sheba	1965	Unknown
Fig. 28	67	Robed Woman	1968	985x100x120
Fig. 29	68	Queen	1969	350x175x270 (without base)
Fig. 30	68	Wema Blues	1970	410x130x140

Figure No. in text	Text on Page	Title	Year	Dimensions in millimetres
<u>Chapter Three</u>				
Fig. 31	71	Give and Take	1974	125-310-200
Fig. 32	72	Orpheus	1972	640x200x160
Fig. 33	72	Socrates	1975	785x112x110
Fig. 34	76	Scratch my Back	1974	680-100-120
Fig. 35	77	Root-Figure	mid-1970s	400x140x200
Fig. 36	77	Contortionist	mid 1970s	200x260x130
Fig. 37	77	Pain	1982	270x260x190
Fig. 38	78	Memento	1977	195x180x95
Fig. 39	80	Cross-bearing Christ	mid-1970s	Figure height c.800
Fig. 40	81	Cross-bearing Christ (detail)	mid-1970s	Long axis of cross c.2000
Fig. 41	82	Tall Lady	1974	690-70-65
Fig. 42	83	Portrait of Zondi's Mother	1977	280x120x140
Fig. 43	84	Portrait of a Woman	1977	450 x 190 x 220
Fig. 44	84	Portrait of a Young Man	1977	310-120-140
Fig. 45	85	Woman	1977	650-130-110
Fig. 46	85	Prayer	1978	350 x 95 x 180
Fig. 47	85	Boy	1978	430x180x160
Fig. 48	86	Flute Player	1979	355x80x80
Fig. 49	86	Two Young Men	1979	850-380-220
Fig. 50	86	Nude	1979	330x220x140 (without base)
Fig. 51	87	Undoing Shackles	1980	670-150-120
Fig. 52	87	The Daughter speaks and the Father Listens	1983	380x165x130
Fig. 53	89	Family - Relief Panel	1986	2670x2325
Fig. 54	89	Portrait of a Young Man	1987	395x195x195

Appendix 4

Illustrations Figures 1-54

Fig. 1
Jewellery Box
1955



Fig. 2
At right - Nozizwe
1954
At left - Lazarus Shezi's
figure



Fig. 3
Dancing Girl
1957





Fig. 4
Zulu Heads
mounted on
roundels



Fig. 5
Pair of Zulu Heads
1959



Fig. 6
Lot's Wife
1959



Fig. 7
Dying Young Man
1960



Fig. 8
Two Boys with a Dog
1963



Fig. 9
The Family Bond
1959

Fig. 10
Adam and Eve
1959



Fig. 11
Moses
1959

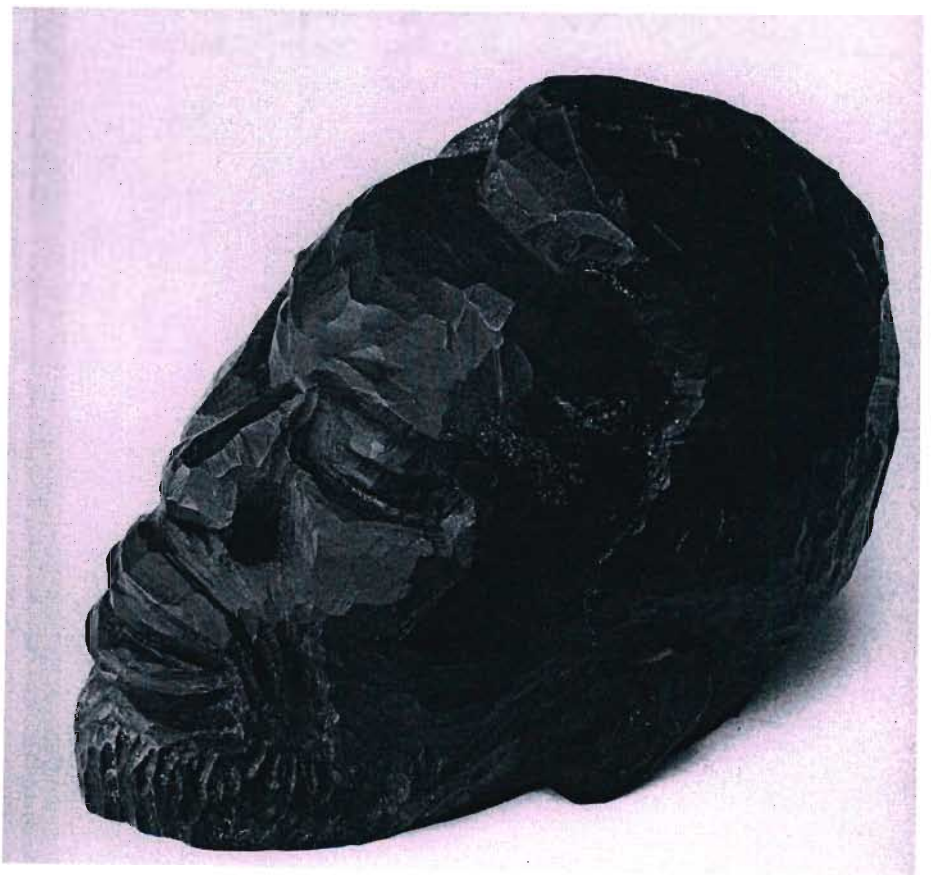


Fig. 12
Famine
1960





Fig. 13
Invisible
Bonds
1960



Fig. 14
Sorrow
1960



Fig. 15
The Prophet
1961



Fig. 16
Self-Portrait
1961



Fig. 17
Rachel
1963

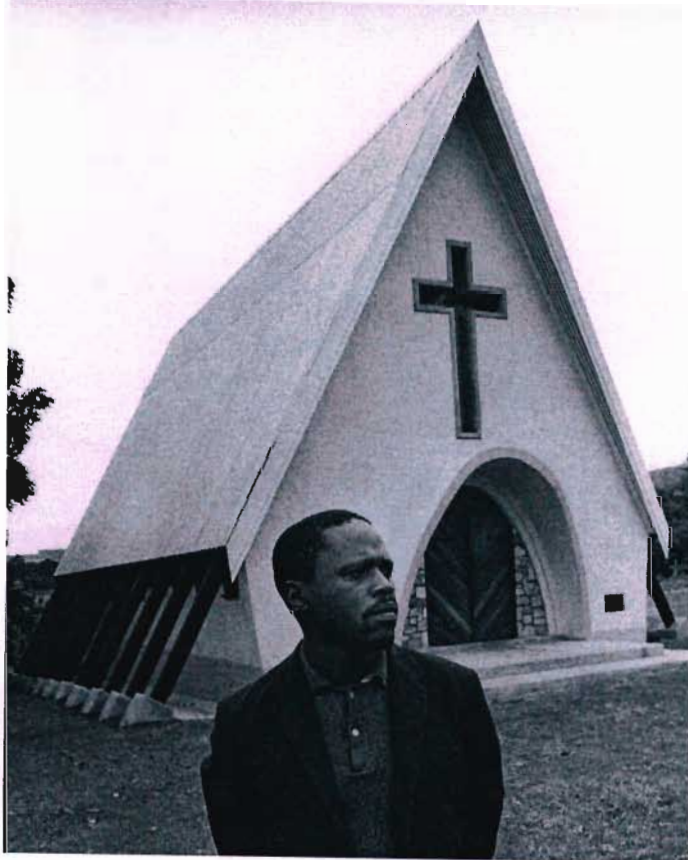


Fig. 18
Appelsbosch Chapel
c.1963

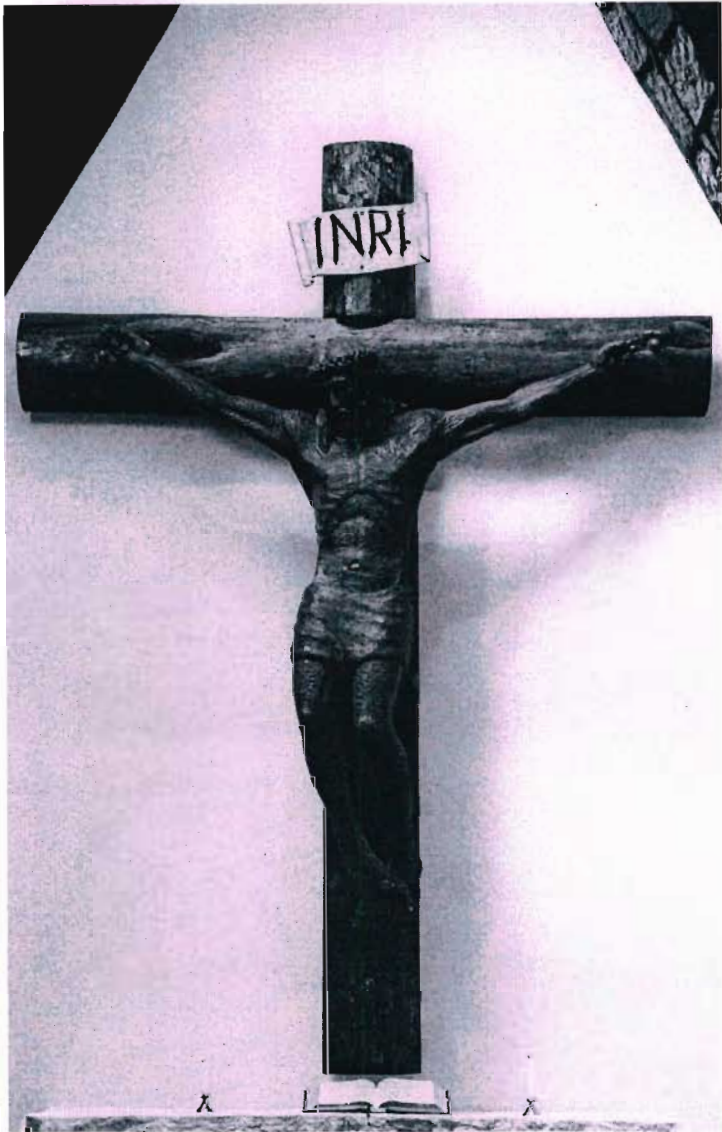


Fig. 19
Crucifix
c.1963

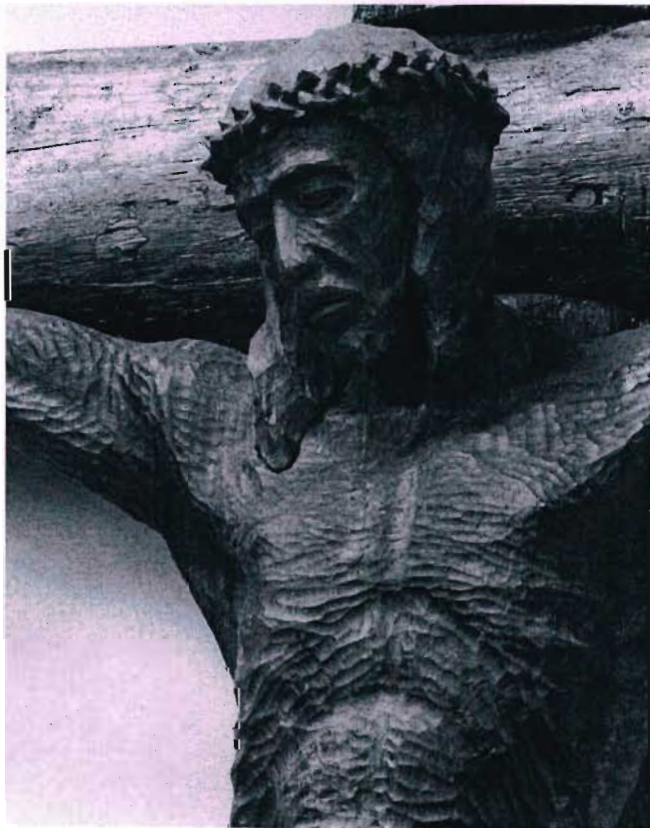


Fig. 20
Crucifix
c.1963

Fig. 21
Reunion
1965



Fig. 22
Forbidden Friendship
or
David and Jonathan
1964





Fig. 23
Calabash
1963



Fig. 24
Shaka
1965

Fig. 25
Aunt of Dingane
Makabayi Ka
Senzangakhona
1965



Fig. 26
Laughing Duck
1965

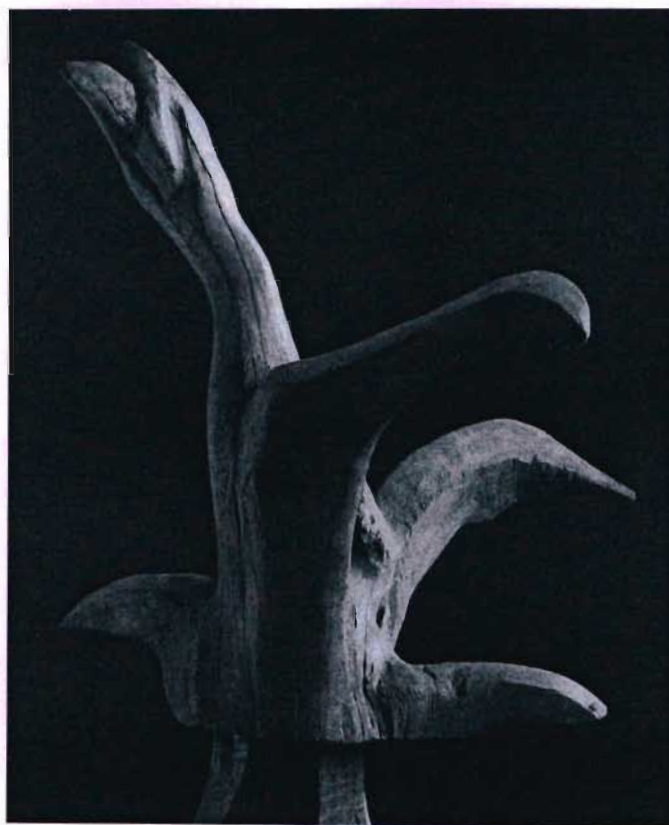


Fig. 27
Queen of
Sheba
1965



Fig. 28
Robed
Woman
1968

Fig. 29
Queen
1969



Fig. 30
Wema Blues
1970



Fig. 31
Give and
Take
1974



Fig. 32
Orpheus
1972



Fig. 33
Socrates
1975





Fig. 34
Scratch my Back
1974



Fig. 35
Root-Figure
mid-1970s



Fig. 36
Contortionist
mid-1970s

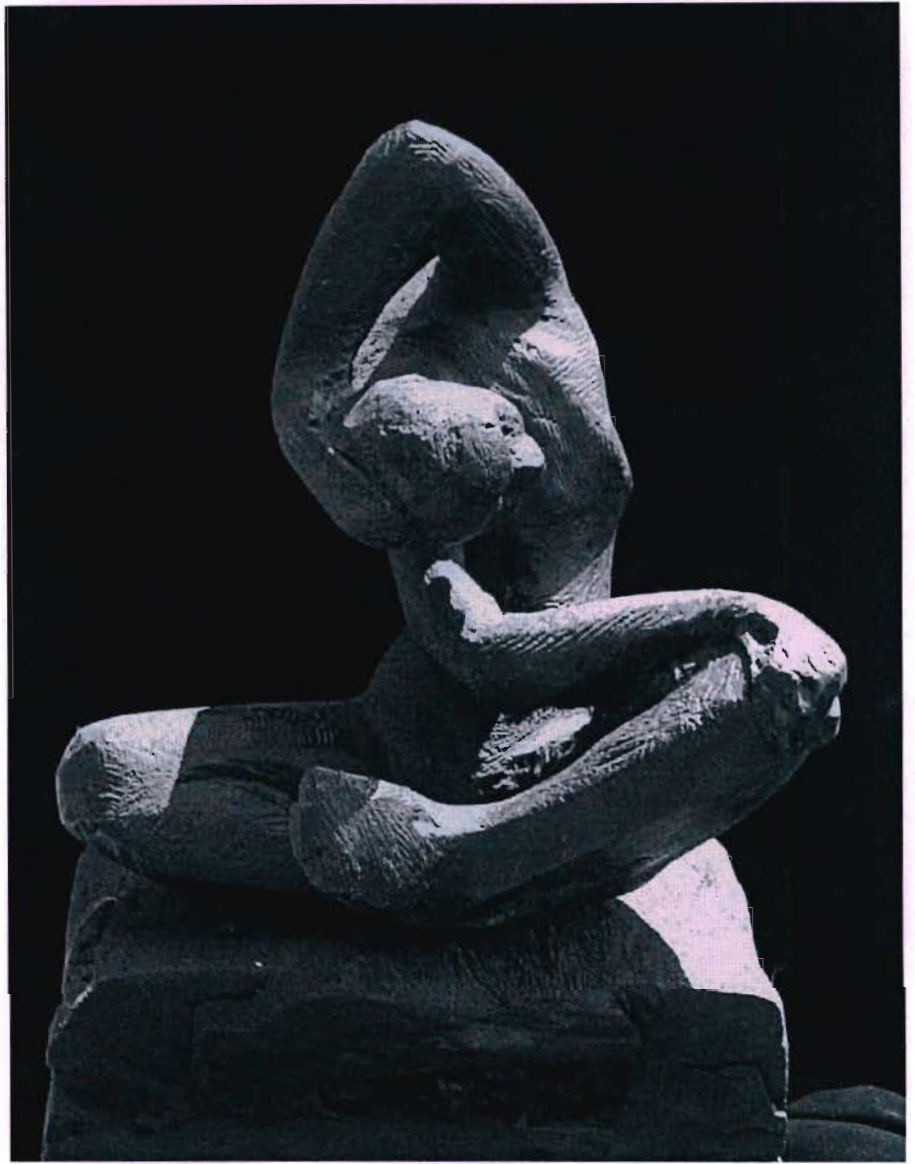


Fig. 37
Pain
1982



Fig. 38
Memento
1977

Fig. 39
Cross-bearing Christ
mid-1970s



Fig. 40
Cross-bearing Christ
(detail of Fig. 39)
mid-1970s





Fig. 41
Tall
Lady
1974



Fig. 42
Portrait
of
Zondi's
Mother
1977

Fig. 43
Portrait of a Woman
1977



Fig. 44
Portrait
of a Young Man
1977



Fig. 45
Woman
1977

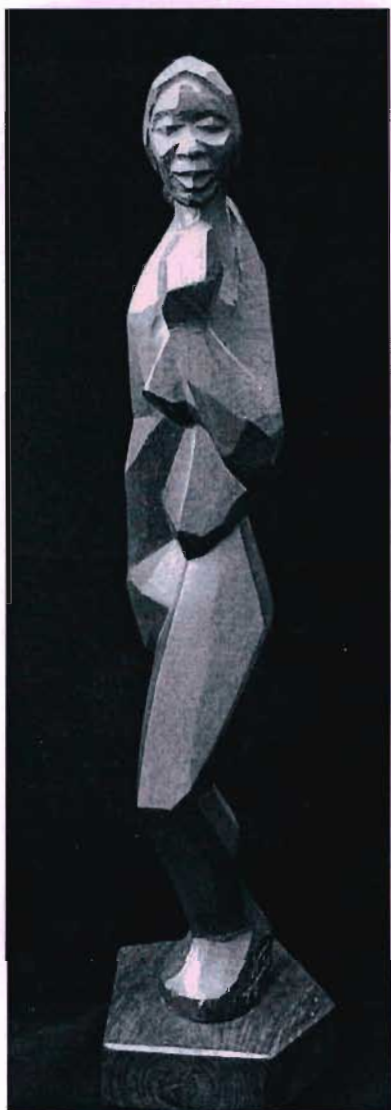


Fig. 46
Prayer
1978



Fig. 47
Boy
1978



Fig. 48
Flute Player
1979



Fig. 49
Two Young Men
1979



Fig. 50
Nude
1979



Fig. 51
Undoing Shackles
1980



Fig. 52
The Daughter speaks
and the Father Listens
1983



Fig. 53
Family
(Relief Panel)
1986



Fig. 54
Portrait of a Young
Man
1987



Michael Zondi
South African Sculptor

Research Methodology

by

Kirsten Nieser

Supervisor: Dr. Juliette Leeb-du Toit

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic requirements
for the degree
Master of Art in Fine Art
in the School of Language Culture and Communication
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Pietermaritzburg
2004**

Introduction

In researching the artistic oeuvre of Michael Zondi as a sculptor and seeking to position him within the matrix of contemporary South African art, I have contextualised his work in terms of past and current discourses pertaining to developments in and perceptions about art in general. In addition, I cite socio-political circumstances pertaining to education as well as other events particular to the segregated society in which he lived for most of his life as a black South African artist.

As the active career of Michael Zondi spans approximately three decades beginning in the middle of the 20th century, my analysis is a qualitative historical one. It has also involved research into the extant literature, biographical and anecdotal documentation from various sources, as well as the evaluation of his artistic oeuvre from extant photographic material as well as my own image recording. The resultant synthesis of information in my research aims at having generated tentative new knowledge¹ about Zondi in view of not only a re-evaluation of his work, but also in terms of a contextualisation of his life and work.

Hermeneutics of Ontology and Epistemology

As my work is concerned with interpretation, not only of art but also of a man's life and his times, I have sourced notions around a postmodern view of epistemology. "Epistemology" is defined as a "theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope". (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2002:389). More embracing of the researcher as a persona, Quayle speaks of "the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known (knowledge)" (Quayle,2003:1), and Scheurich's definition is "the study of how we know ... or, of what the rules for knowing are". (Scheurich, 1997:29) With an implicit cultural bias ascribed to the researcher, he thinks of epistemology as "the search for methods and formulations which enable us to be assured of the truth of our beliefs." (Scheurich, 1997:50)²

¹ See below page 14, 'the knowledge project' .

² In view of his postmodern concerns, Scheurich indicates Plato's fine distinction between *doxa* – 'what we believe to be true' and *episteme* 'what we know is true'. Given his discourse around assumptions - and that the Greek word *doxastikos* means 'conjectural' (Concise Oxford Dictionary,2002:350), it is evident why Scheurich asserts that a classical definition of activities in the social sciences should be described as doxalogical rather than epistemological (Scheurich, 1997:29,50).

In looking at ontology, Quayle defines it as “the nature of reality and how it can be studied.” (Quayle,2003:1) In thinking of epistemology and ontologies as culture-bound, “socially conditioned and historically relative or contextual”, Scheurich asserts that the manner in which shapes and frames are seen determines “and even creates” what is seen.³ He cites time, place, society and history determining factors in our outlook and hermeneutic activities⁴, and quotes Habermas in his assertion that any interpreter acts within a context of his own tradition, which in turn has shaped his subjectivity. (Scheurich, 1997: 33)

While the contextualisation of Zondi’s oeuvre embraces theoretical knowledge, my research, as a cross-cultural hermeneutic enterprise in the appraisal of a body of art-work and the times in which it was produced, requires a sustained awareness of my own cultural bias from an essentially Western standpoint.

Personal Motivation

Besides the presence of two Zondi sculptures in my childhood home - linked to personal encounters between the artist and my parents - my research four decades later was prompted by an initial collection of my father’s⁵ photographic material, showing a selection of the artist’s oeuvre from the late 1950s until the later 1960s. This record – which included the negatives⁶ - was in the possession of Agnes Bodenstein in Pretoria, where I fetched it in early 2002. By the end of the year I made my first contact with Michael Zondi.⁷ On subsequent visits to Agnes Bodenstein I began making a digital record of her substantial collection of Zondi-carvings. In October 2003 I received from her a file of newspaper cuttings, exhibition records and carefully archived written personal communications between the artist and the Bodensteins over a period of three decades. The care with which this archive was compiled over decades indicates not only the Bodensteins’ reverence for Zondi’s work, but also a consciousness of custodianship. This

³ HOW I see (epistemology) must precede WHAT I see (my ontology) (Scheurich,1997:29,50)

⁴ “Competing truths and excluded truths are socially and historically located” (Scheurich,1997:33)

⁵ Heinrich Schlaudraff

⁶ The negatives were sent to Agnes Bodenstein by the Schlaudraffs in the winter of 1989, on their return to Europe.

⁷ Interview together with Juliette Leeb-du Toit, 7 November 2002 in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. Four days later, on the 11th November, Zondi accompanied us to the Appelsbosch Mission Chapel which he designed and built between 1962 and 1964.

relates to Wolfgang Bodenstern's concerted efforts in working towards a publication of his art which did not materialise during his lifetime.

'Black' Art

The habitual categorisation and description of artists according to race, as black or white, rooted in the decades before the new constitution in South Africa, has in part persisted. De Jager addresses in both his publications (de Jager,1973:17 and de Jager,1992) the issue of making a distinction between the art of white and black South Africans,⁸ as does Sack's in *The Neglected Tradition* (Sack,1988)⁹ of fifteen years later. Rankin thinks that the *South African* context in particular, poses racial overtones to any categorisation of art known elsewhere. (Rankin,1989:8)¹⁰

In my own discourse this same 'divide' serves to underscore the divergent circumstances under which black artists were able to be creative, outside the formal art institutions of their white contemporaries - from which they were barred. Further, my categorisation in which aspects of a racial divide is inherent, serves to structure my discourse, while simultaneously creating a framework within which to operate and draw comparisons. It is my intention therefore, that the inherent paradox of making use of categorisations – some of which clearly refer to the very 'racial' divide which lies at the core of notions and attitudes, political expediencies and injustices perpetrated by segregationist policies in South Africa – should find its justification in the foregrounding of pragmatic consequences for art-making within a whole system of socio-economic inequality.

Photographic Material

Taking into account the almost 50 year-old photographic basis of my work (see above) and in view of the fact of my using digitally generated as well as 35mm negative

⁸ He queries whether 'black art', used as a term, can be distinguished according to any specific common identity. He cites as his reason for categorising 'black art', the fact of black artists having spent decades "living *apart*" - reflecting as artists do, "values, moods and perceptions". (de Jager,1992: Preface and Acknowledgements)

⁹ The exhibition *The Neglected Tradition* showed predominantly the work of one particular group, namely black South African artists, with only some white artists who were active in a cultural interchange, in 'integral' and 'shared' relationships with black artists. (Sack,1988:7)

¹⁰ Regarding divisiveness as a South African reality (leading to potential misinterpretation) - her statement "Different criteria are sometimes applied in assessing the historical relevance of black and white artists." (Rankin, 1989:8)

photography in conjunction with my interviewing, I have briefly explored issues pertaining to 'photo-elicitation'. (Prosser and Schwartz in Prosser ed.,1998: 123)¹¹

My photographic records include the almost 50 year-old extensive photographic basis of my work i.e. enlargements of sculptures by Michael Zondi, a small number of photographs given to me by patrons of Zondi,¹² newspaper images, and my own collecting of data in the form of digitally generated images as well as photographs from 35mm negatives in conjunction with my interviewing.¹³

Seen as 'flexible tools' in data collecting, the camera and photographic material are useful in 'backward mapping', as with found historical documents. But Prosser and Schwartz point to the importance of contextualisation when attempting interpretation and assessment of the significance of photographs,¹⁴ and stress the need for complementing initial interpretation of found images. Banks' discourse around 'visual anthropology' focuses on sensual and emotional issues (Banks in Prosser ed.,1998:11)¹⁵ gleaned from the analysis of photographic material. Analysis may take place during the research process in order to facilitate the exploitation of new inferences (Prosser and Schwartz in Prosser ed.,1998:125)

¹¹ photographs used as an interview device

¹² Prof. Johan van Wyk: Video & photographic record of Zondi at work and Zondi's work during the 1970s and 1980s

- Piet Veldsman: photographs of Bodenstein and Zondi's demonstration exhibition in the Nylstroom library

- Dr. Trebot Barry: photographic record of work of the 1970s including an exhibition milieu

- Lennart Eriksson : photograph of Zondi's mentor Sven Eriksson

- Johanna Senn: 'slides' (positive photographic images) of Zondi's sculptures at Mariannhill

¹³ Taking into account my use of a variety of photographic images for documentation, interpretation and elicitation of further information, I have briefly explored issues pertaining to the incorporation of photographs in my research generally, the taking of photographs as a device during interviewing as well as making use of photographic material, both during the interview and for visual information about sculptures.

¹⁴ During interpretation it is important to consider information such as the relationship between the photographer and the subject, why a photograph survived when others did not: and the photographer's intention in making the image (Prosser and Schwartz in Prosser ed., 1998:123)

¹⁵ Banks cites the anthropological shift in focus from the study of abstract systems to a more in-depth consideration of human experience –a 'visual anthropology' (referring mainly to film-making - and the in-depth analysis and systematic presentation thereof (Banks in Prosser ed.,1998:11) in the study of visual forms and visual systems in their cultural context – thus the focus is on the body, the emotions and the senses. (Banks in Prosser ed.,1998:9)

Harper in turn challenges the idea of analysis altogether, and refers to a more experiential postmodern perspective incorporating validity criteria linked to the circumstances of creating the photographic material. (Harper in Prosser ed.,1998:31) ¹⁶

Interviews:

My method of acquiring qualitative data related to the personal perspectives of the artist and persons with whom he was in contact has been, as Scheurich calls it, to hold a “purposeful conversation”. (Scheurich,1997:61)

I have made taped recordings of any personal communication with Michael Zondi and most of his patrons when circumstances enabled me to do so, and I have transcribed these taped conversations, making a deductive analysis of the content in terms of relevance to my discourse within specific themes.

Linguistic Access

Zondi is a Zulu speaker, a language in which I have no proficiency at all. However, in my communication with the artist have I found the artist’s command of the English language to be profound. I have in my possession also hand-written communication by the artist, with various patrons in English, particularly an exchange between Zondi and his foremost friend and patron, Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstern. Zondi uses English far beyond a perfunctory exchange of messages. Rather, he employs it as a tool to express ideas, thoughts and emotions to the extent that while communication with him in his own language would no doubt enhance my understanding of the artist and give him a much broader and differentiated means of expression, for my purposes there has been no cause to consider translations. These however remain mandatory in sourcing implications of titles given to his sculptures in the Zulu language.

My technique of conducting questionnaires has been entirely informal. Flexibility and adaptability are seen as strengths of data-collection through direct questioning.

¹⁶ Harper points to a ‘new ethnography’ challenging the idea of analysis, with postmodern methods taking research back to experience. (Harper in Prosser ed.,1998:31) Going beyond mere description of physical features in a photograph, Harper incorporates issues of validity linked to knowledge about the manner in which the photograph came into existence: “All images, despite their relationship to the world, are socially and technically constructed”. (Harper in Prosser ed.,1998:29)

(Kerlinger,1964:467)¹⁷ While my questions have been and will be pointed at some particular phenomenon or occurrence in the work and life of the artist, my interviewing has not constituted a fixed agenda or theoretical framework into which I feed the information. Both in personal communication with the artist as well as with individuals who have some association with him and his work, either personally or as owners of sculptures, I have remained free from a set pattern of directive questions. This informality has enabled me to lead on from answers, be flexible to immediately clarify points that might be vague, and follow up on areas of interest. Most importantly it has proven effective in affording me the opportunity of finding out new information outside my current leads.

The Lutheran theologian, Axel-Ivar Berglund, who taught at the Mapumulo Theological College in Natal in the 1970s, points to the necessity for overcoming “own understandings and assumptions”¹⁸ in view of being sensitively receptive to “people’s self-interpretation” (Berglund, 1978)¹⁹, interviewees’ cultural interpretations as well as to perceptions being transmitted in art (Berglund, 2003:2)²⁰.

My interviewing has been directed at gaining an overview of the artist’s life in order to facilitate the forging of links between his personal circumstances and the themes of his oeuvre. While creating my own limitation of not including in my work familial biographical facts about Michael Zondi, I have sourced information pertaining to the artist’s personal history through personal communication with the artist and communication with individuals who were friends and or patrons during his working life. Further, besides investigating written communications by the artist, I have sourced handwritten and typed notes and letters by patrons as well as newspaper clippings.

James Scheurich’s third chapter is devoted to a “*Postmodernist Critique of Research Interviewing*” (Scheurich,1997:61) His perception of interviewing in the context of post-

¹⁷ Kerlinger refers to the interview as “man’s oldest and most often used device for obtaining information”. (Kerlinger,1964:467)

¹⁸ see Scheurich below (Scheurich,1997:85,140,141)

¹⁹ Berglund, Axel-Ivar in his dedication – *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism* - to “*Monica Wilson, who taught me to listen to peoples’ self-interpretation*”

²⁰ Berglund to Nieser: “Do remember that the key to what you are undertaking is your ability of setting aside own understandings and assumptions, replacing them with efforts to see how the artist/s himself/herself/themselves see their cultural logical details and how these are expressed in art. What message does this Zulu art convey: is the message the same as that which the artist wished to visualize?”

modern research methods²¹ deals with the power-relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Scheurich,1997:3), a concern with the de-contextualisation of recorded interviews as well as his notion of “postmodernist reconstruction”. (Scheurich, 1997:70) In mentioning different forms of art or literature reflecting “a new understanding of reality”, Scheurich proposes a postmodern stance in research as regards techniques and procedures of research interviewing, whereby the presentation of interviews might include highlighting the “indeterminacy of interview interactions.” (Scheurich, 1997:74) It is within such indeterminacy that I have conducted my process of questioning, counting on new avenues being opened in my understanding of the artist as well as his perception of the socio-economic context within which he was able to be creative.

While gleaning some insight into the circumstances of Zondi’s childhood, his educational and career development as well as personal friendships linked to patronage, my questions were specifically aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of Zondi’s personal perceptions of the socio-economic conditions for black South Africans, emerging from South Africa’s politically motivated policies of segregation as they affected the artist during his adult life. Relating this political awareness to exchanges and discussions with other artists and intellectuals of his time, I have investigated in how far the syncretism of his deep Christian faith with received ancestral veneration from his traditional roots is linked to his subject matter and his creativity.

In view of the discussion about empowerment of the interviewee, Scheurich – in what he calls a “postmodernist reconstruction” - gives some idea about his notion of a less “paternalistic” (Scheurich,1997:70-71) process than that expressed in the ‘giving’ of more control over the interpretation of the interviewee’s words. In drawing our attention to the issue of power inequities in the interviewing process²², Scheurich speaks of the interruption of the dominance (of the interviewer\ researcher) by a certain resistance on the part of the interviewee. In the case of my research with Michael Zondi, his “controlling some or part of the interview” has in fact been a clear aim of my process of interviewing, as it is often in conscious contradiction that we are prompted best to formulate and

²¹ *Postmodernist Critique of Research Interviewing* (Scheurich,1997)

²² He speaks of a dominance–resistance binary in terms of research methods (Scheurich,1997:72) ‘resistance’ used for a slave\master relationship – “a closed determination” as opposed to freedom

communicate to others our thoughts and feelings. Therefore I have seen an active response-participation in the process of my interviewing as a key to making discoveries in unravelling the artist's perceptions, as well as those of people whose lives he touched.

Given the fact of Zondi's advanced years and of his having suffered two major strokes, I am aware that his selective memory sometimes results in contradictions or inconsistencies.²³ As speech and writing are open to interpretation, Crapanzano refers to a duality in hermeneutics²⁴ (Crapanzano in Clifford and Marcus, 1986: 52) while Scheurich points to the ambiguity and instability of the relationship between language and meaning: (Scheurich, 1997:61ff) involving as it does in interviews, contextual and interpretive concerns.²⁵ The transcribing of interviews into texts Scheurich terms a 'de-contextualisation'. In making the transcriptions, I have been aware of inflection, the potentially significant nuances related to tonal variations, voice timbre and rhythm, as well as having my own memory of gestures and body-language involved in the responses of the interviewees. In order to facilitate later research, by means of careful labelling and filing I shall preserve the spoken word on the cassette tapes.

Contending that "the written representation is largely a mirror image of the researcher and her/his baggage." (Scheurich, 1997:74) Scheurich suggests that within a process of re-conceptualising research, this baggage - which he asserts every researcher brings into the process of interviewing - should be highlighted (Scheurich, 1997:73) My 'control' over the transcribed words (Scheurich, 1997:70) will be limited to drawing comparisons with the writings and perceptions expressed in relevant extant literature - or by interviewees - in connection with the same phenomenon or occurrence as discussed in the past. The reinterpretations I have chosen - or might choose to make - will however, be influenced by a personal view.²⁶

²³ Zondi's memory seems to be largely intact for incidents which took place decades ago, while the short-term memory is erratic.

²⁴ He thinks of hermeneutics as both a cruel, destructive, violent act as well as a fertile, fruitful and creative one. (Crapanzano in Clifford and Marcus, 1986:52)

²⁵ Scheurich points out that sign and signification are only loosely linked i.e. what is said need not have a direct link to that which is being indicated or meant.

²⁶ Scheurich asserts that the "interpretative moment" occurs throughout the research process. (Scheurich, 1997:73)

During interviewing, Zondi has consistently rejected my suggestions of his having been a victim of apartheid (Nieser,2002)²⁷ This observation, that Zondi would not be drawn into what Mbembe calls a ‘cult of victimisation’ (Mbembe, 2002:244)²⁸ saw me investigating in some depth that author’s perceptions around the forging of African identity in view of the legacy of slavery, colonisation and apartheid in general. Further, with some art-making in South Africa motivated strongly by political concerns²⁹, I investigated forms of discrimination and segregation within the South African political and art-making context in particular, in view of Zondi’s very convert expression of political awareness and dissidence.

Empirical Method

Sourcing of Material

Beginning with photographic material of Zondi’s earlier work, which is in my possession, I find myself in an ongoing process of sourcing and recording photographically (35mm film and digitally) his work in mostly private collections, predominantly throughout South Africa – with some works being located in Germany and Sweden.

My research has enabled me to trace examples of Zondi’s works by identifying and visiting the private homes of former patrons of the artist or the location of commissioned works in South Africa and Germany. Through personal communication I have been directed to other patrons and collectors, as well as being helped to locate works which have changed hands by bequest or sale. Further, I have sourced some works in public collections.

Making cross-reference to works in various private collections I have ascertained stylistic and thematic links between carvings, identifying particular predilections during periods of creativity and tracing technical and conceptual development in the work. In the case

²⁷ Zondi said in an interview “...Apartheid did not appeal to me – although I say Apartheid must have been a blessing in disguise for the underdog because that’s where we learned to be challenged.”

²⁸ Mbembe’s “cult of victimisation” (Mbembe,2002:244) belongs within what he calls the Marxist-nationalist thinking, permeated as he perceives it to be, by tension between *voluntarism and victimisation*. More particularly, he places victimisation amongst characteristics of that thinking which include lack of self-reflectivity; a vision of subjugation preventing the budding of Africa’s uniqueness ; destiny proceeding from history –precluding responsibility - where reference to violence determines the ‘privileged’ route for self-determination; desire to destroy tradition coupled with the designation of a proletariat (a ‘universal class) as the only authentic agency for emancipatory activity. (Mbembe,2002:243-244)

²⁹ Arnold cites as one motivation for art production in South Africa the “wound of victimhood” (Arnold in: Atkinson and Breitz,1999:38)

of the arts, the notion that research is a process of inquiry that is ‘organised, systematic and logical’ (Punch,2000:7) is partially contradicted once knowledge is derived from ‘sense-experiences’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary,2002:379) i.e. once empiricism is involved. Interpretation and individual, subjective predilections play a role in historical interpretation.

Literature

The dearth of biographical publications on the work of black South African artists as late as the beginning of the 21st century prompted me to investigate South African 20th century art-historical literature in general, providing an overview as regards inclusion, especially in view of the peripheral role of sculpture in current art historical writing and Zondi in particular³⁰. My search included some periodical and magazine material.³¹ Further, I reviewed publications specifically in view of Zondi’s inclusion, either in a more detailed discourse or merely as a name listed in view of collections or exhibition participation. More significantly, I review texts in which Zondi has a special focus³².

My brief account of the socio-political discourse in which black literary figures were involved between the 1920s and 1940s (Couzens,1985) serves to root Zondi within the sentiments and political leanings amongst black South Africans of his youth and early adulthood, of which he was aware.³³

I have developed a perception that in his constant reference to his Zulu ethnic roots Zondi possesses a strong sense of self. This prompted me to source some references referring to ‘ethnicity’: Bryant’s seminal research on Zulu culture (Bryant,1929;1949 and 1964) and his genealogical reference to the Zondi clan occasioned me to explore the concept ‘Zuluisation’ (Dlamini,2001). Clifford cites “Western mythic opposition” as an expression of the West’s ambivalence about “the ‘primitive’ ”³⁴ (Clifford in Clifford and

³⁰ Sack addresses the issue of recognition - beyond their own communities - by art lovers in SA and abroad while “official histories and art museums” neglected to represent the work (Sack, 1988:7)

³¹ *Native Teacher’s Journal*, *Bantu*, *South African Panorama*, *Development Southern Africa*, *Reader’s Digest*

³² de Jager,1973 and 1992; Rankin,1989 and 1993; Miles,1997

³³ Zondi knew Herbert Dhlomo personally: personal communication with Zondi.

³⁴ This is exemplified in the controversy over two opposing constructs of Samoan society - Mead’s ‘Apollonian’ cultural balance, relating to the rational, ordered and self-disciplined aspects of human nature – written in 1923 versus Freeman’s ‘Dionysian’ focus on the sensuous, spontaneous and emotional side of human nature - of 1983.

Marcus,1986:103) and speaks of “an earlier tendency to map descriptions of the other onto conceptions of the “*premiers temps*”. (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:101) Bryant’s work on Zulu genealogy gives an example of this as he frequently alludes to ‘known’ allegories - a Western ‘familiar’ - when describing other. (Bryant,1929:383)³⁵

Leeb-du Toit’s work places Zulu ethnicity into a more recent perspective, (Leeb-du Toit,1997) while Fischer’s postmodern viewpoint lays emphasis on the emotional component of identity. (Fischer in Clifford and Marcus,1986:198).

I have related this to Zondi’s successful attempt at espousing certain Western paradigms of other, as he was able to straddle the cultural hiatus between his traditional and modern urban contexts – rather than breaking a ‘cultural chain’ of someone who has left their ‘roots’ (Lang and Heiss,1975:66).

Related to ethnicity, I have included in my search some perspectives and notions pertaining to issues around identity (Leeb-du Toit,1997:16ff ; Fischer in Clifford and Marcus,1986:196-198; Dlamini, 2001) including Zondi as it does, in the context of Christianised and Western-educated Zulus – *kholwa*³⁶ (Etherington,1971). These South Africans, mostly from Natal, in their aim of being granted recognition within an intractable apartheid state, had the concomitant role of acting as spokespersons for blacks’ aspirations - voices of dissidence towards that state, especially literary figures. (Couzens,1985) The interpenetration of history with the social sciences, (Barzun,1962:219) is a link I have made in terms of the historical socio-cultural framework within which I have contextualized the artistic oeuvre of Michael Zondi.

The West has been found to be strongly visualist³⁷ to the exclusion of perceptions related to other senses. (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:11) In view of Africa’s strongly inspired and expressive creativity in spheres other than the visual arts, this factor doubtless plays an important factor in evaluation and judgement of art from a Western

³⁵ For example, when speaking of governance systems amongst Zulu clans, he alludes to the British “House of Commons” and “House of Lords” (Bryant,1929:72)

Referring to “ancient Philistines or Greeks” (Bryant,1929:79) or Greek mythology – “Homer’s heroes” *Iliad*, “Menelaus and Paris” “Iris and Helen watching” (Bryant,1929:80) Pilate & Herod (Bryant,1929:383)

³⁶ *Kholwa* is a term for Christianised Zulus (Etherington,1971)

³⁷ In studies revealing the hierarchical ordering of the senses in different cultures, vision predominates over sound and interlocution, of touch, smell and taste.

perspective. As museum curatorship and practices relating to bias and selection play an important role in the foregrounding of an artist, I have sourced changing notions about criteria for the evaluation of art, exhibition policies, and museum agendas. (Rankin and Hamilton,1997) My investigation into patronage is linked to the profound level of Zondi's interface with some of his mentors and patrons, which played a central role in his personal development as an artist. Therefore I have sourced some notions relating to art education and African aesthetics³⁸ as well as trans-cultural communication as put forward by Wolfgang Bodenstern (Bodenstern,1977), with a brief foray into the latter's reference to Teilhard de Chardin's notions on suffering. (Jones,1969 and de Chardin, 1975)

With increasing urbanisation for black South Africans from the early 20th century - and Zondi's working life straddling rural and urban contexts, I have explored the literature in view of the socio-economic changes as they impacted on art-making, including factors of patronage pertaining to markets.

Further, in order to be able to better ascertain historically linked critical and judgemental stances towards art-making in Africa – intimately linked as these are to public reception, foregrounding and patronage - I have explored references pertaining to the Euro-centric perceptions of the distinction between art as 'fine art' and 'craft' as determined by perceptions inherited from categorisations linked to the ethnographic enterprise. These have constituted a profound influencing factor in the exclusion of art-making practices of indigenous South Africans. (Hillebrand, 2002; Sack,1988:15; Rankin,1989:19). In general publications on art I sought evidence of the acknowledgement of indigenous art-making practices as 'art', to discern implicit judgement towards black art-making, prior to and after changing perceptions resulted in the inclusion of material culture in art-historical literature towards the end of the 20th century. (Klopper, 1992; Klopper and Nel, 2002) Perceptions range from political agendas of the misappropriation of 'craft' (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:xii) to a denial that 'art'-making of any note existed at all in Southern Africa. Here de Jager's historical perspective (de Jager,1973:19) stands in contrast to his seemingly enlightened perception regarding the work of black artists in the 20th century.

³⁸ Grossert,1968 and 1978; Klopper and Nel, 2002

Investigating Zondi's educational opportunities necessitated a look at educators' perspectives and notions surrounding the teaching of 'craft' and art-making and appraisal of art (Grossert,1968), leading further to curatorial practices which influenced the foregrounding of his work. (Verster in Thorpe,1994). In view of Zondi's inclusion in group exhibitions which "blurred or erased" former boundaries in the arts between skilled and untrained artists' work (Leeb-du Toit,2000:22)³⁹ I have briefly explored such curatorial agendas.

With Zondi belonging to a new generation of Western-educated black South Africans I have investigated state education policies and institutions related to art education , as well as training opportunities within a mission context. In relating a denial of training for black artists to perceptions about 'inherent' artistic ability, I include Clifford's perceptions about the 'allegory of salvage' in the ethnographic discourse. (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:112ff)

I sourced thematic content of black art-making in view of associations to the Christian Gospel and liberation theology (Leeb-du Toit,1993), which led me to a personal communication with the theologian Axel-Ivar Berglund⁴⁰. Further, in view of the South African segregation policies from the early 20th century, the consequences of which determined Zondi's life-style, I have explored evidence of, and perceptions about, political commentary as manifested in the art-making of black South Africans in the literature, with a brief foray into so-called 'township art' which occurred parallel to Zondi's career, as well as perceptions related to identity, representation of self and the politicising of art in the more recent past. (Atkinson and Breitz,1999)

I have included in the context of thematic exploration elements of style, technique, media and materials. Lastly, I have sourced a few references regarding cross-cultural understanding. Fischer thinks of humane values finding a reservoir within the dynamics created by inter-cultural knowledge (Fischer in Clifford and Marcus eds.,1986:201)

³⁹ Leeb du Toit speaks of a "forum for diverse art trends" with frequent cross-cultural dimensions and experimentation as 'inclusive and hybrid' – critiqued as prompting an inability to discern strengths and directions and a confusion about applied criteria. (Leeb-du Toit,2000:22)

⁴⁰ Berglund was at the Mapumulo Theological Institute in the 1970s

Othering - Ethnographic Writing

If *ethnography* is defined as “the scientific description of peoples and cultures with reference to their particular customs and characteristics” (Concise Oxford Dictionary, South African 2002 p397) – then my focus on a black South African artist - with cultural roots in the particular Zulu tradition, while simultaneously living within another cultural context - must reveal my awareness of the current manner in which the discourse surrounding present writing of ethnographic texts is being conducted.

In selecting some notions put forward within the post-colonial discourse by Edward Said (Said,1985), I have shown concern about my research possibly being construed as ‘culture domination’ (Scheurich,1997:85)⁴¹, as yet another form of ‘othering’.⁴² For this reason I address opinions about research methods - called ‘the knowledge project’- and embrace some postmodern notions, (Scheurich,1997:85,140)⁴³ particularly in view of assumptions made or applied (Scheurich,1997:85). Linked to this is the issue of bias (Kerlinger, 1964: 468)⁴⁴ as well as a more recent perception concerning the potential for power misuse in the process of interviewing.

I have referred to the publication devoted to aspects of ethnographic writing, *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus,1997). In view of writing within extant conventions and restraints which determine ethnographic writing, it is seen to be struggling against “received definitions of art, literature, science and history”. (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus, 1986: 6,7)⁴⁵

⁴¹ Scheurich thinks of research as a theoretical construct in the study of the Other, the results of which culminate in a reformation or reshaping of that Other, reflecting the values and interests of its creators. He challenges from within the ‘mainstream research community’, the legitimacy of research which arises “out of other social histories” (Scheurich,1997:141)

⁴² Post-colonial discourse has described “othering“ - a term introduced for describing the identification of difference, the deciphering of another culture, stereotyping, assuming boundaries and realities, assuming collectivism amongst people which may be totally fictitious. e.g. the false construct of ‘Zuluisation’ (Dlamini,2004)

⁴³ Scheurich referring to research he calls the Knowledge Project which he sees not as being about increasing knowledge” but “about the Same appropriating the Other”: “The heart of the Western knowledge project (which Nietzsche called the ‘will to power’) is research” – the purpose being to “study the World (the other), organise that world through a theory (reform or reshape the other into the Same), and produce a written text communicating the victory of the Same over the Other” (Scheurich,1997:85)

Scheurich contends that in the construction of knowledge by academics and public opinion leaders – ideas, assumptions and norms of the cultures in which they were socialized influence that knowledge. (Scheurich,1997:140)

⁴⁴ Evaluation validity must be seen with an awareness of interviewer bias (Kerlinger,1964 *Interviews and Schedules as Tools of Science*: 468)

⁴⁵ Ethnographic writing is determined in at least six ways:

1. contextually – it draws from and creates meaningful social milieux

While much of Scheurich's discourse refers to modernism, he asserts that 'post modernism' is Western civilization's best attempt to date to critique its own fundamental assumptions – particularly those that constitute reality, subjectivity, research and knowledge (Scheurich, 1997:2) ⁴⁶. In asserting that primary assumptions are always integral to research, he calls for retaining an awareness of “philosophical or civilisational assumptions” that structure everything about the act of researching, from the manner in which we think about and do research, what we think it is and what the value of the outcome might be. Scheurich speaks of 'elitist powerbrokers' determining individual subjectivity. He thinks of a range of 'unquestioned' epistemologies⁴⁷ as racially/ culturally biased, resulting in an 'imperial arrogance' or even an 'anonymous imperial violence'.

Power and 'Truth'

The notion of power and 'truth' seem as much a concern in ethnographic writing as in interviewing. Clifford speaks of 'constructed' truths in 'cultural fictions' of the past, where exclusions and rhetoric become lies by:

- silencing incongruent voices
- deploying a consistent manner of quoting – “speaking for” translating the “realities of others”
- excluding purportedly irrelevant personal or historical circumstances
- figures and allegories selecting and imposing meaning

In speaking of 'authority' within ethnographic rhetorical strategies, Crapanzano thinks of it as an 'illusionary bond' with the reader (Crapanzano in Clifford and Marcus,1986:53), as illusionary as the concept of 'validity' within research methodology as seen by Scheurich⁴⁸.

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2. rhetorically- it uses and is used by expressive conventions
 3. institutionally – one writes within, and against specific traditions, disciplines, audiences
 4. generically – it is distinguishable from a novel or a travel account
 5. politically - the authority to represent cultural realities is unequally shared and at times contested
 6. historically – all the above conventions and constraints are changing determinations which govern the inscription of coherent “ethnographic fictions” (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:7)

⁴⁶ He cites assumptions about “doing good works, creating ‘useful’ knowledge, helping people, critiquing the status quo and opposing injustice”. (Scheurich,1997:1-4)

⁴⁷ – positivism , interpretivism , criticalism, postmodernism.....

⁴⁸ The myriad “constructions” of validity in Scheurich's view, are simply “masks that conceal a profound and disturbing sameness” (Scheurich,1997:80) - with justification for a validity statement expressed in concepts like “quality, trustworthiness and legitimacy” (Scheurich,1997:80) Scheurich offers a new imaginary of 'validity' in that practices should be “respectful and appreciative of the Other” without the idea of conquest. (Scheurich,1997:88) Scheurich calls the concept of 'truth' or 'trustworthiness' an “enactment of modernist

By transcribing the spoken word from taped interviews, and making interpretive use of that information within my own texts, Clifford's notion that writing is a way of "storing and manipulating knowledge" becomes relevant, as he thinks of writing as an empowering process. Simultaneously Clifford thinks of a corruptive element in writing, due to its loss of immediacy and the loss of "the presence and intimacy of speech". (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:118) At the same time however, he speaks of the current "mode of authority" of discursive strategies of ethnographers as undergoing change, by their naming and quoting informants more fully and introducing personal elements into the text. (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:109)⁴⁹ Implicit in this is the practice in writing, of providing a less adulterated forum for oral information with the author's commenting voice 'muted and marginalized' (Fischer in Clifford and Marcus,1986:201).⁵⁰ Fischer's postmodern discourse on ethnicity revolves around autobiographical writing in which he forges together, in juxtaposition, multiple sets of voices to speak for themselves. (Fischer in Clifford and Marcus,1986:201)

Re-writing South African Art History

My research aligns itself with redressing the perception of former neglect of black artists in South Africa. Because of the nature of 'revisiting' the work of black artists in its historical context, the re-writing of South Africa's art and architectural history is a central concern amongst local art historians⁵¹. In this context I have explored notions on writing (Degenaar, 1987 and Nettleton, 1987). Ongoing work by art historians seeks to bring about a textual and contextual transformation of art-work. Scheurich links assumptions (see above) to what he terms a yearning to transform⁵² Clifford asserts that few topics are written about for the first time, saying how researchers hide, discredit or marginalize other texts on the same topic (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus, 1986:117)

bias – an exclusionary, damaging bias" instrumentalised for predicting and controlling in the domination of Other. (Scheurich,1997:86)

⁴⁹ These voices he sees as reflecting moments in history, of cross-cultural representation (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:109) Clifford speaks of creating a story among other stories" – (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:109)

⁵⁰ Clifford asserts that in the West, the passage from oral to literate "is a potent recurring *story* of power, corruption, and loss". (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:7)

⁵¹ The Third Conference of the SA Association of Art Historians in September 1987 was dedicated to this topic

⁵² Within what Scheurich calls "The Western *modernist* imperium" he aligns our assumptions with "restless civilisational immodesty" associated with a yearning to transform, which he asserts slips into research 'silently' and 'unseen'. (Scheurich,1997:90).

In early art-historical writing, the sparse discourse about black artists was conducted as an outside point of view - frequently merely describing other. This is also applicable in the case of visual art production of white South Africans who portrayed indigenous people as other. In view of ethnographic writing, Tyler rejects this ideology of “observer-observed”, taking up the spirit of the postmodern notion of foregrounding dialogue as opposed to monologue - placing an emphasis on the collaborative, cooperative nature of the ethnographic situation, where the product of discourse becomes a “polyphonic text”, where there is no such thing as a final word. (Tyler in Clifford and Marcus,1986: 126)

My research explores many cross-cultural elements. Zondi can be described as having straddled cultures – a traditional rural background and a Western and christianised one. I have discerned and described from Zondi’s philosophy and work, his concern for seeking cross-cultural contexts in which cultural diversity may be overcome – while desisting from forfeiting his own ethnic identity. The rediscovery of otherness and difference within the cultures of the West are seen as linked to ethnographic study as “an emergent inter-disciplinary phenomenon”. (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus, 1986:23) As a consequence – the entrenched Western concept of finding ‘truth’ is compromised in cultural studies which can no longer unravel “the whole truth, or even claim to approach it.” (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:25) This is linked to Crapanzano’s notion about the ethnographer, who, while having to make his argument convincing, need not tell the whole truth.⁵³ (Crapanzano in Clifford and Marcus,1986:53)

Clifford sees cultural analysis as being always “enmeshed in global movements of difference and power” as “human ways of life increasingly influence, dominate, parody, translate and subvert one another.”(Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:22). Referring to the understanding – or misunderstanding - of other ‘cultural languages’ amongst people, Scheurich speaks of a damaging and unknowing enactment of ‘deep’ civilizational or cultural biases (Scheurich,1997:1) and demands for a culture to see itself “interwoven, interdependent, historicized, modest and respectful of the full circle of all that is.” (Scheurich,1997:6)

⁵³ Crapanzano thinks of the ethnographer as not understanding the subtlety of Hermes’ promise to Zeus that while he would not lie, he would not tell the whole truth either. (Crapanzano in Clifford and Marcus,1986:53)

Data-collection and cultural description is included amongst anthropological research methods relying on the standpoint of the observer as being outside⁵⁴. (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986: 11) Related to the above observation about visuality in the West, Clifford points to Western ‘cultural’ fact-finding as relating to observation, rather than being *heard, invented in dialogue or transcribed* (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus, 1986:12)⁵⁵

Concluding remarks

I am particularly aware that the current status of my research has not extended to finding those ‘many artists’ who have cited Zondi as an informal teacher and mentor (Rankin,1989:36)⁵⁶. Also, while creating my own limitation of not including in my work familial biographical facts about Michael Zondi, I am aware of the incompleteness of my work – aware of untold omissions. I prefer to see it in the light of its heuristic value - encouraging others to fill the gaps I have left - rather than describing the omissions as ‘errors’. (Dane, 1990:27\28)⁵⁷. Other researchers’ observations will reduce my omissions, and reveal and help to further objectify the work of Michael Zondi in the context of South African art. In terms of a Western linear approach to time, our being “a part of the ongoing movement of humanity“ (Lang and Heiss,1975:65) should encourage further exploits into a historical methodology – that ‘known past’ of which Barzun speaks as changing and growing under capable research – (Barzun, 1956:142).

⁵⁴ looking at, objectifying, “reading” a given reality (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:11)

⁵⁵ Without visual pre-figuration – be they texts or objects – the dynamics of “cultural poetics “ may be realized as an “interplay of voices” (Clifford in Clifford and Marcus,1986:12)

⁵⁶ with the exception of Pat Khoza

⁵⁷ Dane asserts that a right\wrong dichotomy cannot be easily applied to research ethics, (Dane,1990:38) and he sees the processes of selection and interpretation as being subject to errors of omission and incompleteness (Dane,1990:27)

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Michael Zondi
South African Sculptor

Literature Review

by

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Introduction

In art-historical writing in South Africa one factor contributing significantly to the dearth of literature on the art-making of black artists, in general, is the emphasis on European art-making traditions, stemming from the hegemonic colonial enterprise.

Historically linked to cultural location determined by colonial powers in Africa – including as it did religious and educational content – indigenous cultural practices and belief systems, and their vehicles of expression,¹ were consigned to ethnographic and anthropological investigations,² particularly from the later nineteenth century until well past the middle of the 20th century. Even currently Arnold thinks of the term “South African” as burdened with ideological and ‘provocative’ political entanglements which defy description or justification free from emotion (Arnold, 2002:55,56). She finds “conflict between domicile and culture” implicit in its use within current discourses on art in this country. This legacy of the abovementioned alien cultural location in South Africa’s past has been of great significance for art publications.

In my search for reference to the black sculptor Michael Zondi in the available literature, I initially aimed at finding information about any black sculptors in South Africa. In writing about and contextualising Michael Zondi as a *black* South African artist, paradoxically I shall be making use of the very categorisation along a ‘racial’ divide, which lies at the core of notions and attitudes, political expediencies and injustices perpetrated by segregationist policies in this country. Such notions contributed significantly to the scarcity of biographies on black artists in this country, a dearth I intend to address with my research. The distinction between the art of white and black South Africans – as also addressed in de Jager’s³ ‘early’ publication of 1973 (de Jager, 1973:17) serves to underscore the sorely divergent circumstances under which black artists could be creative, outside the formal art institutions when compared to their white contemporaries. The purpose of creating various categorisations into which I feed information from diverse sources of literature is to give

¹ In addition to complex migratory patterns, Nel holds the ethnographic vision - rather than an artistic one - accountable for the art-historical neglect of art production in the southern African region (Nel, 2002:13).

² This deciphering of other cultures was appropriated -in its assertion of the superiority of western cultural paradigms- for administrative control and the exertion of authority within ‘Native Policy’ (Leeb-du Toit,1998:102).

³ De Jager has been called a “pioneer chronicler” in the field of 20th century black art in South Africa (Rankin, 1989:70).

structure to my discourse, while simultaneously having a framework within which to operate and draw comparisons.

A select few general publications on art-making in 20th century South Africa (See Appendix One) were the initial basis for my seeking information on the black sculptor, Michael Zondi. In view of the scarcity of biographies on the art of black South Africans, my examination centred on seeing how far these publications include acknowledgement of indigenous South African art at the onset of the colonial enterprise. I was also concerned to establish at what point the focus on entirely white artists' work gradually shifts to a general inclusion of the work of black artists, until publications during the last quarter of the 20th century embrace black art-making practices in South Africa as their specific focus.

Rankin discusses the inferior role which sculpture has played in South African art-historical writing, as compared with two-dimensional art (Rankin, 1987:148ff). She puts forward some reasons, differentiating between the agenda behind public commissions as opposed to private works⁴. In view of the neglect of sculpture, Berman's reprinted publications on South African art are cited as influential in perceptions about this art form.⁵

I am acutely aware that my research might be construed as yet another form of 'culture domination, or 'othering'⁶. For this reason I address in my methodology, amongst other post-modern notions, the issues of ethnographic writing by various authors (Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

⁴ When Rankin speaks of public commissions embodying nationalist aspirations and ideals of the SA way of life as one mode adopted for the promotion of South Africa's art – stressing content, (Rankin, 1987:154) she thinks that the analysis of "innate aesthetic qualities" are sought more often in private works – with its emphasis on form - which aims at comparisons with international standards.

⁵ Rankin cites as "widely influential" the first edition of Esmé Berman's numerous reprinted publication *Art and Artists of South Africa*, which totally excluded sculpture until the 1983 reprint, where it was still not being afforded the "dignity of individual entries". She attributes such neglect to the secondary status of sculpture "in the popular idea of art" in South Africa (Rankin, 1987:148,149).

⁶ Post-colonial discourse has described "othering" - a term introduced for describing the identification of difference, the deciphering of another culture, stereotyping, assuming boundaries and realities, assuming collectivism amongst people which may be totally fictitious. eg. the false construct of 'Zuluisation' – see (Dlamini, 2001) p. 12,13 below

Part One

1.1 General Publications on South African Art: their focus⁷

An early emphasis on the work of white South Africans shows their focus on Eurocentric themes located in a colonised Africa with a frequent depiction of ‘other’. A shift in art-historical writing in South Africa occurred very gradually to focus more on the work of black artists, once the latter emerged from urban and western-inspired art-training institutions, albeit rarely to practice art full-time.

Berman refers exclusively to the art of white South Africans up to the 1970s and *their* description of ‘other’, “white and coloured” people (Berman, 1975: xiii), decades after ‘pioneer’ black artists like Gerard Bhengu and Arthur Buthelezi had begun to depict indigenous Africans as ‘other’ for a white audience (Nettleton, 1998:86)⁸.

The exploration by artists and teachers like Walter Battiss, Alexis Preller and Cecil Skotnes seeking an ‘African’ inspiration for their own art, with groupings like the *New Group* or the *Amadlozi* Group (‘spirit of our ancestors’) in 1963, would impact on general art historical writing from the mid 1970s (Berman, 1975:132 and 210). Prompted by the innovative departures from the depiction of other on the part of white South African artists, to seeking “formal abstraction” in African art (Rankin, 1989:43)⁹, the literature focuses increasingly on black artists emerging from institutions under the guidance of teachers like Skotnes in the urban art-making environment of Polly Street in Johannesburg, or Rorke’s Drift. These formative explorations of the 1960s remain a focal interest for art historians in general publications almost 25 years later, especially in view of emergent black artist’s like Ezrom Legae and Sydney Kumalo from the Polly Street Art Centre (Kasfir, 1999:100).

While Zondi’s colleague Sydney Kumalo, the sculptor and painter from Polly Street finds mention in publications from 1960,¹⁰ Michael Zondi is only included in the 1969 publication

⁷ See Appendix One

⁸ A representation of themselves as ‘others’ found patronage with a colonial audience on whom artists became dependent (Nettleton, 1998:86)

⁹ It has been proposed that a lesser concern with issues of formal abstraction in African art on the part of individual makers may be attributable to the African’s lack of familiarity with African art in general (Rankin, 1989:43).

¹⁰ Alexander’s bilingual *Art in South Africa, Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Work since 1900* shows Kumalo’s *St. Francis* as the only black artist in a section on sculpture. In 1963, Jeppe’s reference book, *South African*

of the South African Association of Arts with reference to his exhibition participation in Bloemfontein and Durban and his participation in the Venice Biennale in 1966 (South African Association of Arts, 1969:83¹¹).

Implicit in criteria for a black artist's inclusion in the art-historical discourse of the 1970s appears to be evidence of either a 'formulaic africanness' (Atkinson, 1999:16) or overt political expression as it occurred within the aegis of such art-making institutions. With a European focus on a "formal characteristic" of traditional African art and Modernism showing some measure of abstraction, the representational mode, called "figurative expressionism" (de Jager, 1973), in which black sculptors like Michael Zondi preferably worked, is seen as a reason for their work being overlooked (Rankin, 1989:43). Paradoxically, the Africans' lack of familiarity with African art is cited as a possible reason for their lesser concern with issues of formal abstraction in African art (Rankin, 1989:43)

EJ de Jager's 1973 publication *Contemporary African Art in South Africa*, is one of the earliest records devoted entirely to the art of black South Africans. Locating and contextualising the phenomenon of art-making within South Africa's socio-political climate, the author discusses issues of culture - the emergence of an African paradigm in art (de Jager, 1973:19) - and the forging of trans-cultural understanding.¹² The issue of new media for African artists is discussed¹³. A fairly comprehensive text, as well as a relatively large section of pictorial images, is devoted to Michael Zondi's sculpture¹⁴. More emphatically,

Artists 1900-1962, sees Sydney Kumalo included in a separate 'Sculpture' section (Jeppe, 1963) - Jeppe's criteria for inclusion were one-man exhibitions; public works; or contribution to teaching and therefore includes also Louis Maurice, Selby Mvusi and Lucas Sithole. In 1970 Berman still entirely excludes sculptors, including Kumalo in her publication on painting in 1975 (Berman, 1975).

¹¹ *Register of South African and South-West African Artists 1900-1969*, (1969) South African Association of Arts.

¹² De Jager terms 'culture' as something "integrative and functional" in character and sees art as a language to foster trans-cultural understanding and change. He refers to art as a vehicle of communication on the basis of equality - albeit with some paternalistic overtones e.g. seeing the African "with a sympathetic and understanding eye" (de Jager, 1973 :29,30) He thinks of 'acculturation' (an influence of one to another culture) as reciprocal, irrespective of dominance.(de Jager, 1973:17,18). He quotes from Senghor to reveal aspects of African selfhood as expressed within the romantic *Négritude* philosophy - which he calls Neo-Africanism (de Jager, 1973:19) He speaks of 'acculturation' as reciprocal (de Jager, 1973:17), an influence of one to another culture irrespective of dominance.

¹³ De Jager sees new media as beneficial to African art, qualifying his use of 'contemporary' in terms of the use in art of western technique and media (de Jager,1973:18).

The espousal of the use of western media by black Africans concurred with the use of old media in new ways (de Jager,1973:17).

¹⁴ I attribute this to de Jager's personal contact with Wolfgang Bodenstern (de Jager, 1973: 31), who had at his disposal the photographic record of Zondi's work from the 1960s - as made by P.H. Schlaudraff.

in his later publication de Jager positions his perceptions regarding content and meaning in the art of black South Africans from his anthropological viewpoint, considering in his discourse the religious-cultural aspects in both the ceremonial-ritual functionality of traditional art-making in Africa, as well as modern-day art in South Africa under the restrictions of apartheid (de Jager, 1992: Preface and Acknowledgements). He perceives black art an '*expressive culture*', reflecting 'values, attitudes and collective perceptions' of a common urban socio-economic background in its lack of freedom and separateness (de Jager, 1992:4,5).

Equally focussed on white South Africans' depictions of other as Berman in the 1970s (Berman,1970 and 1975) is Fransen's 1981 publication, *Drie Eeue Kuns in Suid-Afrika* (Fransen, 1981)¹⁵, including black artists specifically in view of their western media and styles, with Sydney Kumalo as a sculptor¹⁶.

By 1983 Berman's publication has become a comprehensive review of exhibitions and their participating artists from all disciplines with relatively extensive mention of Zondi (Berman, 1983)¹⁷.

Matsemela Manaka's text represents the first art historical publication by a black author (Manaka, 1987). His focus is the foregrounding of the work of black artists in the year before Sack's *Neglected Tradition*, discussed below. Manaka spans artistic endeavour from San rock-art to 'present-day creations.' Thinking of sculpture as 'the spiritual centre of African arts', he sees it providing a link between traditional and contemporary artistic expression (Manaka,1987:11). Naming Lucas Sithole and Sydney Kumalo with their 'expressionistic' and 'idealistic' portrayal of African life', Manaka

¹⁵ There was also an English version.

¹⁶ Fransen's publication was to be used in high schools and 'teacher-training'.(Fransen,1981:viii) It is noted for being the first 'comprehensive South African art historical publication in Afrikaans. 'Three centuries' of western art are divided into the Dutch, English and South African 'periods'. The latter includes descriptions by white artists of other, while last 20 of 200 pages is dedicated to indigenous art-making , including black artists in view of their 'western' styles – a derivative of 'European expressionism' (Fransen, 1981:208)

¹⁷ Berman speaks of Kumalo and Zondi as establishing a professional image (Berman,1983:18) – she lists Zondi amongst exhibition participators (Art-South Africa-Today, Durban 1963 with an award for Zondi)(Berman, 1983: 299\300); Republic Festival 1965 (Berman, 1983:516); South African Art, National Gallery of Rhodesia, Salisbury, Dec.1977 (Berman, 1983:517); Black Art Today – Soweto,1981 (Berman,1983:64) Berman includes a photograph of Zondi at work – entitled 'wood carving' (Berman, 1983:396) and depicts his *Ecstasy* – in the SANG collection. Berman describes the Venice Biennale as prestigious – participation of South Africans sponsored by the Government as of 1952 – Zondi is named as having participated in the 1966 Biennale (Berman, 1983:474)

sees Solomon Sedibane's and Zondi's work as "a close observation of African human faces and figures" (Manaka, 1987:11) (see also 1.2. below).

Michael Zondi is included in the 100 artists represented in the exhibition catalogue, *The Neglected Tradition*, in which Sack affords sculpture a separate subtitle – *New Generation Sculpture* (Sack, 1988:27ff). Addressing factors pertaining to economic and political matters, as well as religious and educational concerns in the lives of the people involved in art-making, Sack (Sack, 1988) divides 'pioneers' of the 1920s and 1930s into different lifestyles with either a rural or an urban background – or artists who moved between the countryside and the city (Sack, 1988:9). He points to three key factors which they shared – traditional backgrounds, exposure to European cultural influences and the confrontation with a capitalistic economy controlled by whites, bringing about profound transformations due to changes in material conditions, but also through a new and different patronage for 'arts', as well as confrontations with educational values formerly not known (Sack, 1988:9).

The last general publication on South African art which includes specific essays on Michael Zondi is the Foundation for Education, Science and Technology's *Our Art IV* of 1993,¹⁸ and Miles' *Land and Lives* (Miles, 1997).

1.2 Text Inclusion of Zondi as a 'Pioneer' Artist¹⁹

Including as he does many images of Zondi's work in his publication of 1973 (de Jager, 1973)²⁰, de Jager is indebted to Zondi's main patron, mentor and friend, Dr. Wolfgang Bodenstern for biographical and some interpretative information on the artist (de Jager, 1973:31) He augments biographical data about Michael Zondi²¹ by stylistic evalu-

¹⁸ In *Our Art IV* a total of 25 contributions include four essays on the work of black artists, one of them Rankin's essay on Zondi (Rankin, 1993); Dina Cormick on Gwensa and Xulu; Marilyn Martin on Lucas Sithole; Beverley Paton on John Muafangejo

¹⁹ See Appendix Two

²⁰ The *Publican; Crucifix* – Appelsbosch; Dissertation, Chapter Two, Figs. 19 and 20, p.59) *Rachel* (Chapter Two, Figs. 17, p.56); *Mother and Child; Ecstatic Woman; Head of a Young Woman; Woman Bathing; Portrait of a Dying Man (Dying Young Man*, Chapter Two, Figs. 8, p.47)

²¹ Expressions like "personal" and "sincere", speaking of the expression and interpretation of "human experience and life...", referring to life as his "real teacher": etc. stem from Bodenstern's text (Bodenstern, c.1968:1,2). De Jager writes of Zondi's work as "uncomplicated with a direct but well-developed style" (de Jager, 1973:28).

ation and thematic content (de Jager, 1973:28) naming him and Sydney Kumalo as the first “to establish a truly professional image” amongst black sculptors (de Jager, 1973:27)²². De Jager refers to Kumalo’s work in terms of a ‘new synthesis’ of traditional African sculpture, amalgamated with medieval European sculpture²³ (de Jager, 1973:27). In addition to biographical data on Zondi, de Jager makes reference to Zondi’s self-education after formal schooling and career training.²⁴ In closing he details exhibition participation (de Jager, 1973: 28).

Sr. Johanna Senn whose own artistic discernment was forged within the modernist paradigm, refers to Zondi as a ‘classicist’ of African expression (Senn, 1983:300)²⁵. While drawing comparisons in his work to Rodin and Barlach, she emphasises his rootedness with Africa commenting on Zondi’s covert but sincere expressionism which I link to concerns regarding his neglect. Thiel’s discourse in *Christliche Kunst in Afrika* (Thiel, 1984) embraces Zondi’s art from the perspective of biblically derived imagery and indigenisation of Christian themes in African art (Thiel, 1984:259)²⁶. This may be linked to perceptions regarding the appropriation of Christian themes for an African liberation theology as described by the Lutheran theologian and teacher Axel-Ivar Berglund (Berglund, 2003:2).

Manaka comments on Sedibane’s and Zondi’s work as “a close observation of African human faces and figures” is vague. Including two images of Zondi’s work²⁷, in asserting that their “realistic portrayal of human faces and figures” is a “highly lifelike” treatment of anatomical features, (Manaka, 1987:11) Manaka fails to recognize that Zondi has departed

²² De Jager devotes text to and depicts images of the work of Lucas Sithole, Ezrom Legae and Solomon Sedibane (de Jager, 1973: 28\29).

²³ “the crystallised gestures that were developed out of medieval European sculpture by the Expressionists” (Watter) (de Jager, 1973:27).

²⁴ “he has continued to enlarge his knowledge, with remarkable perseverance, through private study in many fields” (de Jager, 1973: 28)

²⁵ Besides Zondi, and in the sphere of art education fostered within the mission context, Senn cites activities and style of artists like Franz Hodi, Duke Ketye and Joseph Dlamini – while naming Bernard Gcwensa, Ruben Xulu and Joel Mbuyisa. With some of these artists participating in the 1965 Interfaith exhibition in Durban (Senn, 1983:299) she cites some of them as participants at the Mariannhill exhibitions, 1974, 1976, 1977 (Senn, 1983:299).

²⁶ Referring particularly to Charles B.S. Nkosi’s ‘Crucifix’ linocuts, Thiel states that it is common throughout Africa for suffering and suppression to be projected into a messianic, biblical context in waiting for deliverance. (Thiel, 1984:259)

²⁷ The sculpture images Manaka has included are “Michael Zondi Head of a Young Woman – Sneezewood 1964” (Manaka, 1987:34), a mirror-image of *Head of a Young Girl* 1968 seen in de Jager (de Jager, 1992:125) and “Michael Zondi *Portrait of a Dying Man*, Umthombothi” (Manaka, 1987:34), an unacknowledged photograph by Heinrich Schlaudraff of Zondi’s *Dying Young Man* of 1960, (Dissertation, Chapter Two, Figs. 8, p.47), also known as *Memento Mori*

from such a style in favour of a far more expressionistic and broad use of his chisel by the mid-1960s.

Under 'New Generation Sculpture' Sack separates arbitrarily into categories 'fine art', 'transitional art' and 'ecclesiastical art'. He includes – and seemingly restricts - Michael Zondi into the latter category²⁸ (Sack, 1988:27). This is misleading not only in view of the complex nature of church patronage between the 1930s and 1970s to which he refers under that category,²⁹ but also in view of Zondi's subject matter such as the South African national Gallery's *Ecstatic Woman* and the Durban Art Gallery's *The Prophet*, (Dissertation, Chapter Two, Fig. 15, p.54) both from the earlier 1960s, to which Sack himself refers (Sack, 1988:91). A short biographical text on Zondi, as well as exhibition participation and awards are included (Sack, 1988:133).

Rankin's *Images of Wood* of 1989 is the most comprehensive evaluation until then of South African wood sculpture, and was followed in 1994 by another exhibition catalogue *Images of Metal* (Rankin, 1994) The text on Zondi within the sections on individual artists in *Images of Wood* (Rankin, 1989) is mainly biographical, with images of *Shaka*, (Dissertation, Chapter Two, Fig. 24, p.65) *Lot's Wife* (Dissertation, Chapter Two, Fig. 6, p.46) and *Reunion* (Dissertation, Chapter Two, Fig. 21, p.61), as well as reference to awards, exhibition participation, collections and references (Rankin, 1989:180,181).

While contending that statuary from wood in South Africa before the 20th century was rare, Rankin acknowledges the carving of pieces of utilitarian or symbolic value as indigenous to South Africa. (Rankin, 1989:11). She addresses the perceptual and conceptual dualities in art-making between the West and Africa, also citing technical influences³⁰, with the new 'truth to material' ethos in the West enabling stone and wood to become a preferred medium of the subtractive technique. Rankin sees a lack of concern shown for traditional African art objects as the reason for black artists espousing the

²⁸ - amongst artists like Ernest Mancoba, Bernard Gwensa and Ruben Xulu.

²⁹ Under 'ecclesiastical art' Sack further includes Ernest Mancoba, Bernard Gwensa and Ruben Xulu

³⁰ Rankin cites Picasso's three-dimensional work with stunted proportions and an angular treatment of surfaces (Rankin, 1989:13)

western concept of art once they moved outside their art-making traditions, with white patronage an additional factor (Rankin, 1989:18)³¹.

With particular reference to Zondi in her catalogue essay, Rankin thinks of 1952 as too early for the launching of his career (Rankin, 1989:72). She cites people who were influential in developing Zondi's technique³² - from early, smoothly finished work to a later 'more animated' surface (Rankin, 1989:49). Naming the use of elongation for expressive purposes, she thinks of a stylistic affinity with European Medieval sculptural traditions³³, as did de Jager (de Jager, 1973:27). In his concern with 'emotional states of mind', Rankin mentions pieces with (Zulu) historical references³⁴, but asserts that there is "nothing specifically African" about his work. (Rankin, 1989:49) This is true for his naturalistic sculptures of the 1950s and the early 1960s which show a preoccupation with verisimilitude. However, the stylisation achieved by a broad use of chisel marks in facial faceting in a portrait like his *Queen*, (1969) (Chapter Two, Fig. 29, p.68) would seem not entirely divorced from African modes of three-dimensional sculpture.

After his reflection on 'pioneer painters'³⁵, de Jager speaks of a 'transition' to the late 1950s and early 1960s as "lean years in the history and development of black art in SA." Given that under *The Sculptors* (de Jager, 1992:106) he devotes an extensive section to Michael Zondi, it seems a little contradictory when he asserts that the only known artists "of any significance" to join the pioneers and shift away from them with 'figurative expressionism', were Eric Ngcobo in Natal and Gladys Mgudlandlu in Cape Town"(de Jager, 1992:20). The discourse on Zondi, as in his first publication (de Jager, 1973), is sourced in Bodenstein's writing (Bodenstein, c.1968). Beginning with biographical data pertaining to education and training, de Jager mentions Zondi's work at the Appelsbosch mission. While describing the artist's personal traits, he reveals the artist's concern with expressiveness in the

³¹ Easel painting emerged in the 1930s in the work of Mohl, Bhengu, Pemba and Sekoto while the work of sculptors remained more obscure- with some historical records preserved in the Academy catalogues (Rankin, 1989:18).

³² Rankin quotes Grossert as having been told by Zondi that he had been influenced by his brother Mandlenkosi. (Rankin, 1989:71) She finds little evidence of influences from John Hooper of the University of Natal (trained at the Royal college) while she cites later influences by Bodenstein (Rankin, 1989:71-2).

³³ Rankin thinks of an "affinity with medieval carvings or European folk art" rather than contemporary art and the depiction "in simple naturalistic forms an unaffected message about the universal human condition". (Rankin, 1989:49)

³⁴ e.g. *Shaka* (Dissertation, Chapter Two, Fig. 24, p.65) and *Aunt of Dingane – Makabayi Ka Senzangakhona*, Dissertation, Chapter Two, Fig. 25, p.66)

³⁵ Sekoto, Pemba, Bhengu, Mvusi and Mohl

human form and describes his style and technique³⁶ (de Jager, 1992:124). While referring to sculptural traditions elsewhere in Africa, de Jager makes mention of current research into material culture and art-making of the 'Zulu and Venda' (de Jager, 1992:106)³⁷.

Rankin includes photographic material³⁸ in referring to thematic, stylistic, and technical attributes of Zondi's work in her essay in *Our Art IV* (Rankin, 1993:130-137), citing influences and expressive concerns within his representative style. Apart from biographical details describing his education and training and reflecting his rootedness in his own culture, she addresses the issue of Zondi being "comparatively little know" despite his wide exhibition participation and award honours for his work from the 1960s (Rankin, 1993:131).

Land and Lives - A Story of Black Artists (Miles, 1997) in conjunction with the Johannesburg Art Gallery's exhibition in 1997 was the most inclusive reference up to that time on the work of Michael Zondi, after Rankin's essay contribution to *Our Art IV*, (Rankin, 1993) Miles distinguishes in her publication between the pioneers – (born before 1930) with no formal training (*'Breaking Ground'*) and those with formal education in more urban environments. She places Zondi into the socio-political framework of his generation of growing from rural roots to the encounter with Christianity and literacy. With some detailed references to his familial background, his schooling and his carpentry training within a mission context Miles points to his self-initiative in further study as an adult. She refers repeatedly to Zondi's affinity to and knowledge of wood and trees – and details the process of work in the Appelsbosch chapel.

Miles refers to the work of Rodin as having influenced Zondi – and contends that he also worked in stone (Miles, 1997:113). His technique of carving (Miles, 1997:114) is discussed in some detail. Imagery of pain, suffering, death is mentioned. Miles also refers to his predilection for including musicians (Miles, 1997:115) as also his 'expression of ideas' using the human body as a vehicle. Zondi's religious syncretism – in keeping with the discourse

³⁶ Zondi's style with "relatively solid forms with a certain degree of abstraction" and a "strong use of various planes", achieved with chisels of 'varying depth and width'- and 'always neatly finished' (de Jager, 1992:124)

³⁷ Presumably Klopper, 1992 and Nettleton, 1985

³⁸ The photographic images – as those in de Jager's 1973 publication are from the record made in the 1960s by P.H. Schlaudraff, at the time of publication in the possession of Agnes Bodenstein.

regarding acculturation within the mission context in KwaZulu-Natal (Leeb-du Toit, 1993) is mentioned by Miles in view of ancestral beliefs (Miles, 1997:115).

Within the framework of general texts on black South African artists published after the mid-1970s therefore, Zondi's oeuvre finds a relatively thorough contextualisation by three authors, de Jager, Rankin and Miles who all sourced sculptures and photographic material from Wolfgang and Agnes Bodenstein, the collection and accumulated file material which formed the foundation for my own research. While Zondi's inclusion in Senn's text, based on her own interface with the artist, further places him within a broader perspective in 20th century modernism, (Senn, 1983) Thiel (Thiel, 1984) and Sack (Sack, 1988) refer only to particular works related to specifically religious subject matter or from the stance of exhibition participation respectively.

Part Two

2.1 Identity and Selfhood

A world of increasing mobility has made personal and group identity "provisional and flexible" (Arnold, 2000:55). Frequently implicit in seeking personal identity in South Africa are notions linked to ethnicity. In view of my perception that Zondi possesses a strong sense of self linked to his ethnic roots as a Zulu³⁹, I have explored references in the literature pertaining to notions around specific ethnicity, Zulu identity as well as selfhood. Given that Zondi had an acute political awareness - and made the personal acquaintance of Herbert Dhlomo⁴⁰ - I have included some notions about identity and ethnicity around the socio-political discourse of the black intelligentsia between the 1920s and 1940s (Couzens, 1985), in an exploration of issues around the urbanisation of black people, with resultant political confrontations in view of segregationist policies in Natal (Couzens, 1985 and Nuttall, 1991).

2.1.1 Zulu Identity

Zondi's strong sense of belonging within Zulu culture prompted my search for notions about ethnic cohesiveness. Mbembe links perceptions about 'origins', as manifest in territorial

³⁹ Zondi made reference to his roots by the use of rendering specific body adornment recognizably Zulu.

⁴⁰ The work of H.I.E. Dhlomo is seen to exemplify the duality of the culture of black South Africans during the times of the influx into cosmopolitan city life.

terms, to a consciousness of identity (Mbembe, 2002:266). Implicit in Bryant's reference to nationhood linked to Shaka's kingship (Bryant, 1929:3, 71)⁴¹ is the existence of cohesive 'clans'. He provides the genealogical reference to the Zondi 'clan' name⁴² (Bryant,1929: 517,521,523). Klopper makes reference to the "fluidity of ethnic designations" (Klopper, 2002:39)⁴³, while Leeb-du Toit points to "laboured attempts to locate identity...often vicariously in relation to ethnic cultural paradigms" (Leeb-du Toit, 2000:22)⁴⁴. She cites as one contributory factor for the perception of a cohesive Zulu identity, the collecting of Zulu material culture, as well as the search on the part of white South African artists, for an African idiom - 'confirming' with their motifs of indigenous people the notion of the 'vanishing culture' of 'Zulu' indigenes. At the same time a perceived territorial allegiance was conveyed while the art-makers remained on its periphery (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:101).

2.1.2 Cultural Identity and Ethnicity

Leeb-du Toit uses ethnicity as implying "the presentation and focus on the specific traits of a group of persons that derive from a particular race" (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:20). Fischer's notion of ethnicity as a "deep-rooted emotional component of identity" which may be used during times of retrospection "to gain a vision for the future" (Fischer, 1986:198), is borne out by an appropriation of the 'tribal' dimension of ethnicity in the recall of a heroic past for the purpose of invoking cohesion linked to national aspirations for the future - (Couzens,1985:146 and Nuttall, 1991:34), as seen in the case of a marginalized black literary élite from the beginning of 20th century South Africa (Leeb-du Toit, 1995:35,36)⁴⁵. Currently the construct of continuity from the Zulu kingdom to a contemporary 'Zulu nation' is seen as a politicised "Zuluisation", belying the regional diversity of the Nguni people (Dlamini, 2001:1). Dlamini points to it as a false *raison d'être* for museums within the process of transformation (i.e. cultural diversification) in South Africa, calling for museums to

⁴¹ – Bryant defined as nation "a collection of tribes, clans or individuals, not necessarily mutually related, but deprived of independence and subject to a single common ruler".

⁴² Bryant defined a tribe as made up of clans of common descent, a clan defined as "a magnified kraal or family"(Bryant, 1929:72).

⁴³ In giving a reason for the difficulty of attributing artefacts to specific regions, she refers to ethnicity in terms of a political process of the grouping of people where differentiation between them involves the inescapable 'idea' of cultural difference (Klopper,2002:48).

⁴⁴ see Dlamini's 'Zuluisation' (Dlamini, 2001) below.

⁴⁵ Fischer contends that ethnicity is something beyond customs and characteristics within groups of people, that may be transmitted from one to the next generation - as he thinks sociological literature misleadingly suggests (Fischer, 1986:197) Rather, he thinks of it in terms of a person's essential being beyond consciousness, with every generation having to re-invent it for itself.

embrace in their displays academic notions (from the 1970s and 1980s) regarding exploration of pre-colonial identities and their significance for 'Zulu' identity and stereotypes. Material culture should be drawn on to visualise academic statements and Dlamini goes on to analyse and critique the symbolic messages and concepts relating to identity as conveyed in the Natal Museum's *Sisonke* display (Dlamini, 2001:1-6ff).

Implicit in Fischer's discourse concerning identity and retrospection is that a fear of uniformity and anonymity within the present urban milieu has given the impetus for re-inventions of an ethnic 'vision' or identity – which he sees as able to contribute in a renewal of self as well as the group within what he romantically terms a “richer, powerfully dynamic pluralist society” (Fischer, 1986:197).

Zondi made constant reference to concepts of reconciliation and rapprochement, not only in his art, but in verbal and written communication also. This stance links him to acculturation endeavours of a black literary élite which prompted me to explore briefly the romantic *Négritude* philosophy around Leopold Senghor, in its espousal of the idea of 'synthesis' between African and European cultural practices before the middle of the 20th century.

I have looked at Zondi's refusal to be engaged in a role of victimhood related to discriminatory apartheid laws in the light of Achille Mbembe's current writing (Mbembe, 2002). Mbembe's historicist interpretation embraces what he terms '*nativism*' around the discourse of African selfhood and the 'reinvention' of self-identity. He perceives the manipulation of what he terms Marxist-nationalist thinking, i.e. notions of autonomy, resistance and emancipation in cultural and political spheres,⁴⁶ to be based on slavery, colonisation and apartheid (Mbembe, 2002:240-241)⁴⁷, leading to an assertion of alterity within the parameters of 'the fiction' of race (Mbembe, 2002:252-253). These embrace notions of subjugation or “victimisation” preventing *inter alia* self-reflexivity⁴⁸ (Mbembe, 2002:244).

⁴⁶ Mbembe speaks of a superficial Marxist-nationalist rhetoric concerning autonomy, resistance and emancipation. He accuses the ex-colonised of surreptitiously re-appropriating issues of identity and difference - thematics which he attributes to Hegelian philosophy (Mbembe, 2002:244) - whereby distinctions are made between the native and “the non-native Other”- on which authenticity is then based (Mbembe, 2002:245).

⁴⁷ Mbembe's *nativism* is described as the 'burden' of difference (Mbembe, 2002:242) with the implicit central theme, cultural identity (Mbembe, 2002:252).

⁴⁸ More particularly, he places victimisation amongst characteristics of that thinking, which include lack of self-reflexivity; a vision of subjugation preventing the budding of Africa's uniqueness ; destiny proceeding from history – thus abrogating responsibility - where reference to violence determines the 'privileged' route for self-

Zondi concerned himself with issues related to humanity which formed a central theme in his discourse with Axel-Ivar Berglund, amongst others. Pertinent to separation of people according to racial criteria within the apartheid state in which Zondi lived, Mbembe creates a historical link between racial specificity and a denial of humanity. Referring to western paradigms rooted in the Enlightenment, his discourse incorporates notions of conversion to Christianity on the part of the African experiencing the “civilising mill”, as well as African individuality outside ‘tribal’ parameters (Mbembe, 2002:248).

2.1.3 Socio-Political Perspectives - Dhlomo’s ‘New African’

While Zondi thought of a specific rural Zulu context as ‘home’, he spent most of his working life in more urbanised environments. The socio-political landscape of cities and their migrant labour accentuated discriminatory conditions and policies towards black South Africans. Zondi was acquainted with H.I.E. Dhlomo⁴⁹ and became witness to living conditions of migrant labourers. I explored acculturation on the part of a black intelligentsia, predominantly converts to Christianity in Natal, *amakholwa*, their voicing of aspirations in the light of state intransigence.

Draper’s publication around the 19th century Anglican Bishop Colenso (Draper ed., 2003) provides some insight into the mission context of conversion, education and expectations of an upwardly mobile black Intelligentsia espousing individualism (Guy, 2003:351). Nuttall’s focus on (Nuttall, 1991) the urban political and social development in Durban reveals how, in the decade of Zondi’s birth, the 1920s, segregationist policies in South Africa lead to an instrumentalisation of ethnicity in terms of

determination; desire to destroy tradition coupled with the designation of a proletariat (a ‘universal class) as the only authentic agency for emancipatory activity (Mbembe, 2002:243-244).

⁴⁹ H.I.E. Dhlomo was the first major black South African playwright – and the most representative - of what Couzens terms the ‘lost generation’ of the 1930s and 1940s (Couzens,1985). As a member of a mission-educated, acculturated black petit bourgeoisie, thinking of art as ‘universal’, (Couzens,1985:163) Dhlomo wrote in English, advocating education and ‘progress’. In making borrowings from the West and using English as a ‘*Bantu lingua franca*’ Dhlomo saw the modern role of drama as a liberating force - helping to liberate women from tyranny of custom and tradition- useful also in countering oppression. He thought art to be more than racial or national : “great art is universal, reflecting the image, the spirit of the All-Creative Being who knows neither East nor West, Black or White, Jew or Gentile, time nor space, life nor death” (Couzens, 1985:163). Couzens quotes him as saying he could not produce “a national literature with tribal language” (Couzens, 1985:351). Couzens speculates that Herbert’s writing in English was an expression of his desire for assimilation into a general European society. His initial conciliatory attempts in seeking ‘approval’ from intransigent policy-makers eventually turned into a vehement albeit passive resistance against the deepening segregation ideology, thinly veneered by placatory tactics.

politicising regional specificity.⁵⁰ Couzens' discourse (Couzens, 1985) gives a detailed background of the mission context as he links 'self-definition' of a black intelligentsia with a definition of 'class' and the espousal of "individual mobility" in seeking of approval from the ruling Europeans (Couzens, 1985:16,18). Couzens' discourse around a rejection of tribalism feeds into Leeb-du Toit's analysis of the art of Gerard Bhengu and its appropriation for agendas of both segregationism and nationalism⁵¹ (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:16-17) as discussed below in 1.2.4. This gains relevance in view of Zondi's reference to specifically Zulu cultural symbols. His persistent cross-cultural reconciliatory endeavours as well as his employment in the Department of Information reflect his espousal of western paradigms manifest in the idea of 'progress'. Mbembe links an acceptance of the 'civilising' mission and a championing of a concept of 'progress' to the formation of nationalisms, thinking that this lies at the root of failing to inquire into the roots of servitude (Mbembe, 2002: 249,250).

2.1.4 Custom

Mbembe refers to *custom* as an institutional 'native' order he calls the "thesis of non-similarity". He sees difference being inscribed within custom, in order to function and be contained within a colonial framework of hierarchical inequality (Mbembe, 2002:247). Mbembe thinks of the principle of ontological difference persisting but sees in its recognition - as a 'natural inequality' - the legitimising factor for discrimination and segregation (Mbembe, 2002:247). Mbembe cites the creation of specific forms of knowledge like racial and tribal studies - which served to 'canonise difference' in an attempt to eliminate the perceived ambivalence of custom. In being made into something specific, *custom* served to designate the lack of correspondence with the western 'civilised' world (Mbembe, 2002: 247,248)

⁵⁰ The attempt to revive pre-colonial social formations was made in order to obstruct social transformation and militancy amongst an urban population seeking to define itself in terms of Black Consciousness.

⁵¹ The black intelligentsia around H.I.E. Dhlomo used Gerard Bhengu's art to affirm a heroic 'Zulu' past with a view to mobilising a national unity in opposition to segregationist policies of the South African government. On the other hand, Bhengu's depiction of distinctive 'tribal' 'other' in the eyes of white patrons substantiated the notion of an ethnic identity appropriated to maintain the notion of difference to justify segregation (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:16-17).

Couzens sees Dhlomo dividing Skota's 'class' into the 'collaborator-extremist' and the 'true progressive' (Couzens,1985:34) and reveals how Dhlomo expresses his political stance of dissidence in a number of his writings, invoking – as he frequently does with ancestral inclusion – a 'heroic' past (Couzens, 1985:146). In doing so he gives a foundation to blacks' aspirations for the future, while at the same time addressing past and the current issues of governmental intransigence towards the rights of black South Africans. In the literary circles it was thought that traditions, social customs and laws that stood in the way of 'progress' should be vehemently opposed . It was not only Dhlomo who recognized the hidden agenda of the colonial government encouraging 'tribalism'⁵², putting Shepstone's erstwhile and later Hertzog's policies of segregation under scrutiny.⁵³

With the above-mentioned educated class rejecting 'tribalism', the 'tribal' dimension of ethnicity depicted in that which Leeb-du Toit terms the narrative and 'emblematic' art of Gerard Bhengu began to acquire subversive associations linked to their national aspirations (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:18). H.I.E. Dhlomo's encouragement for Bhengu's art may be seen also in view of Mbembe's 'narrative of liberation' which he thinks was created around what he terms a 'dual temporality' between tradition and nationalism – the 'glorious past' and a 'redeemed future' (Mbembe, 2002:249-250). Leeb-du Toit points to the 'colonial' agenda - from the beginning of the 20th century - in the forging of a "controversial Zulu ethnic identity" in the wake of political, economic and cultural expediency where the artificial and 'controllable' colonial construct of a rural order with chiefdoms and appointed rulers⁵⁴ belied the fact that the cultural identity of the so-called 'Zulu' majority was not cohesive and may initially even have been weakened by it (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:16-17).

2.2 Curatorship and Museum Practice

The Durban Art Gallery staged a one-man show for Zondi in 1965. Allegedly this would not have been possible at an institution like the South African National Gallery⁵⁵. The host of his

⁵² Couzens cites Selope Thema noting in 1942 in *The Menace of Tribalism* that "the enemies of our freedom and progress do not like to see our tribal system destroyed" (Couzens,1985:137).

⁵³ Dhlomo saw as the chief defect in Shepstone's policy of tribal control, the introduction and recognition of colour bars – linked as this is to Mbembe's abovementioned *nativist* thought and the 'burden' of difference (Mbembe, 2002:240-42). Further, in Shepstone's system of indirect rule he opposed power being given not to educated 'true' leaders but to many 'chiefs' Dhlomo perceived to be backward (Couzens,1985:144).

⁵⁴ The Native Administration Bill of 1927 acknowledged tribal chiefs as leaders (Nuttall,1991:45).

⁵⁵ "As you will know that the National Gallery is not allowed to organise one man shows by living artists" but he hoped that a group show of African sculptures would be able to tour the United States - Letter to WB - dated 26 October, 1965 – Dr. M. Bokhorst , South African National Gallery .

second one-man exhibition in Pretoria in 1974 had to be changed due to ‘racial’ concerns⁵⁶. Given the fact of the artist’s early exposure through a public museum – in the ‘sealed’ space outside his own traditions⁵⁷, I have investigated some historical aspects of museum traditions and their agendas.

An examination of curatorial practices in South Africa, with their implicit reference to voices from the political arena both before and after the new constitution of 1994 – lends insight into criteria for inclusion or exclusion of artwork. In the contextualisation of an artist like Zondi – who found an élitist white patronage niche during the apartheid era – these criteria play a role in examining the dearth of literature on artists whose prolific output enjoyed popularity over three decades prior to 1994.

2.2.1 National and Government Sponsored Exhibitions

Berman thinks of the first of a series of exhibitions organised in Cape Town by the SA Fine Arts Association in 1871 as an arbitrary date to begin recording the ‘modern history’ of painting in South Africa (Berman, 1975:xii).

As the only record of otherwise undocumented artworks, Rankin gives information about early exhibition practices in South Africa in view of categorisation and the participation of black artists. She lists some *SA Academy Exhibitions* in Johannesburg from the 1920s with their ‘Native exhibits’ (Rankin,1989:19)⁵⁸, and includes the 1936 *Empire Exhibition*, with Mancoba producing sculptures of ‘ethnic’ or recognizably African origin (Rankin, 1989:23). Sack links these exhibition opportunities for black artists with white philanthropy, while also mentioning black patronage (Sack, 1988:12,13) Leeb-du Toit makes mention of outlets

⁵⁶ Personal communication with the organiser, Dr. Johan van Wyk, Simonstown, March 2003.

⁵⁷ I believe that while Zondi’s work certainly underwent hermitic sealing off from life’s realities outside the museum walls, the *humanity* he most consistently expresses in his sculptural oeuvre, regardless of the specific theme or subject he might have chosen, had immediate relevance.

⁵⁸ From 11th annual exhibition of 1930, a section of ‘nativework’ is included:

- Clay models by Hezekile Ntuli of Pmb. in 1931\32

- Soapstone carving by Sidney Rametsi of Rustenburg in 1933.

- 1934 – inclusion of religious carvings in wood – but white ‘designer’ mentioned besides the carver. Eg. Thomas Makenna, Eric Chimwaza.

Dick Makambula – designed by ‘Reverend E. Paterson’.

- 1939 – no native section – Sekoto, Tladi listed in alphabetical artist list while the soapstone font of Job Kekana was listed under crafts.

- 1940-42 – reintroduction of ‘Native Exhibits’

for work from the Ndaleni Art School during the 1960s and 1970s⁵⁹ (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:27). Patronage by galleries and museums is associated with the issue of a ‘fine-art’ tradition and its criteria of uniqueness and individualism (Sack, 1988:10,12). Sack thinks of the foundation for a ‘fine art’ tradition amongst black South Africans as having been established by the 1940s, when art reflected a response to Christianisation and a money economy (Sack, 1988:15). This is somewhat contradictory, as under ‘*New Generation Sculpture*’ Sack separates arbitrarily into categories ‘fine art’, ‘transitional art’ and ‘ecclesiastical art’ – with the latter misleadingly including Michael Zondi (Sack, 1988: 27).

By the 1960s national exhibitions were open to black artists. Thorpe speaks of the selection criteria and names catalogue entries of black prize-winners for the important national exhibition *Art: South Africa Today* (Thorpe, 1994:12)⁶⁰ between 1963 and 1975 (Thorpe, 1994:12)⁶¹. The show was considered of sufficient national importance to attract ‘eminent art personalities’ into the selection committee in 1965 – including Dr. M. Bokhorst, (director of the South African National Gallery) who bought Zondi’s *Woman in Ecstasy*⁶². (Thorpe, 1994:12,13)

While responsible for educational policies that denied art education for blacks, Sack makes reference to government sponsored travelling art exhibitions - ‘*Zulu Art*’ to Vienna’s Museum of Ethnology and the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, Brussels (Sack, 1988:18). Articles in *Bantu* (Vol. 23 No. 5 June 1976) and the South African *Panorama* magazine (January 1975) appeared to highlight it.

2.2.2 Challenges facing Museums

⁵⁹ Agricultural Shows, The African Art Centre run by the Institute of Race Relations, B.I.C.A. (*Bantu, Indian and Coloured Art*) University of Fort Hare. and the annual Ndaleni show in the Methodist Church Hall in Pietermaritzburg, Natal during the 1970s

⁶⁰ *Art: South Africa Today* was initiated by the Natal Region of the Institute of Race Relations in conjunction with the Durban Art Gallery and the Natal Society of Arts. Selection was on merit and open to all races.

⁶¹ Sydney Kumalo with *Girl With a Dove*; Gladys Mgudlandlu’s *Nyanga Pondokkies* and Michael Zondi’s *Rachel*. Thorpe (erroneously) thinks of *Rachel* as having been bought by the DAG – it is *The Fountain*, labelled incorrectly as *Rachel* in Thorpe (Thorpe, 1994:27).

Note: *Rachel* was bought by Wolfgang Bodenstein and is now in the possession of his son, Dr. Johannes Bodenstein in Cape Town .

⁶² Image depicted in Thorpe (Thorpe, 1994:13).

Over the two decades from the time of Zondi's first one-man exhibition, the idea of defining *what* art is, what should be exhibited as 'art' and investigating its relationship to the society which produces it, were discourses which experienced an ever increasing momentum. The role of museums was being internationally challenged with a view to making visible what connects cultural products with the society in which these products are made and rooted. King challenges the 'aura of authority' of public museums (King, 1987:59) and focuses on the role and nature of art historical writing and art criticism, in view of presentations made in traditional 'western' museum spaces⁶³.

In discussing the role of museums in SA having to overcome the legacy of "underpinning settler ideologies and later, apartheid" with its ethnic separation – in their paper Rankin and Hamilton seek to examine their new role since 1994 – of incorporating in their agenda 'nation building' in view of the challenge posed by diversity (Rankin and Hamilton, 1997:41). They reflect on galleries established around the turn of the 20th century, "claiming superiority of (imported) European 'high art' traditions". They point to mid-century incorporation of the work of local white artists with "settler interpretations" of South Africa while the 'indigenous view' was still ignored – linked to a "denial" of their having art at all (Rankin and Hamilton, 1997: 41). Museums as repositories of objects, reinforced visually and materially ideologies based on the dominance of western concepts and notions of a primitive African other – now may use those objects in offering new ways of speaking about and reconstructing histories of the colonised⁶⁴ – correcting "western biases of archives and libraries" (Rankin and Hamilton, 1997: 44).

2.2.3 Academic work and exhibitions at the turn of the 21st century

During the 1980s there began a prominent foregrounding - in exhibitions - of the work of black artists. Till describes *The Neglected Tradition* a 'watershed exhibition' (Sack, 1988:5) which addresses the paucity of information until then about active black artists. It includes work of Michael Zondi as does the *Images of Wood* exhibition in the 1989. Art was

⁶³ These presentations are made with all the implications of pre-selective bias and possible political agendas of which there is a tradition in such institutions since the Enlightenment in the West.

⁶⁴ Beaded apparel is used to 'speak' as "non-verbal texts" of 'personal relationships' and cultural interaction.

made accessible through what was termed Steven Sack's 'non-Eurocentric' curatorship targeting a community audience⁶⁵.

Former boundaries in the arts between skilled and untrained artists' work "blurred or erased" (Leeb-du Toit, 2000:22)⁶⁶ as, for example, in the inclusive, privately sponsored *Tributaries* exhibition of 1985, Rankin's inclusion of anonymous work in *Images of Metal* (Rankin, 1994) and exhibitions like *Jabulisa* in 1996 and 2000 in KwaZulu-Natal. In what was termed a 'benchmark exhibition' with 'seminal significance' (Berman, 1993:351). Burnett's *Tributaries* addresses issues of institutionalised distinction between 'art' and material culture, consciously including rural art in South Africa⁶⁷ – in a wide range of disciplines and media. Sack speaks of the "autonomous aesthetic" of work shown 'outside the art world' which was instantly marketed and commercialised (Sack, 1988:27) while Kasfir speaks of "the formative moment" of decontextualising and 'reframing' of tourist curiosities or rural souvenirs to 'legitimate art' (Kasfir, 1999:41).

Botha in turn addresses creative initiatives and agendas in view of the *Tributaries* exhibition. He speaks of black artists having been sandwiched in a "precarious binary" between economic necessity (in a market "controlled by white sensibilities") and a "black nationalist cultural imperative that insisted upon a specific political legitimacy." (Botha, 2000:9) Verster thinks of the aftermath of the *Tributaries* exhibition as 'cataclysmic', speaking of 'trophies of plunder' – when irresponsible dictates of fashion thrust formerly entirely anonymous art-makers into limelight, then to forget them again just as suddenly (Verster, 1994:2-3).

Sack speaks of functional objects undergoing "reassessment and re-accommodation" in the 'fine art' arena (Sack, 1988:24) – art being taken into new social contexts beyond museums and galleries – as centres of artistic activity like community workshops as well as formal

⁶⁵ Sack sees the re-examination of the written history and a re-evaluation of SA art over six decades – "tracing the development and influence of black SA artists" as an initial and seminal step for much further research.

⁶⁶ Leeb du Toit speaks of a "forum for diverse art trends" with frequent cross-cultural dimensions and experimentation as 'inclusive and hybrid' – critiqued as prompting an inability to discern strengths and directions and a confusion about applied criteria ((Leeb-du Toit, 2000:22).

⁶⁷ Burnett wanted to remedy - in the ongoing, dynamic process of art-making - the exclusion of rural art in South Africa: Not only the "colonial anachronism" of an "inflexible distinction between art and ethnology" was laid to rest in this particular celebration of South African creativity, but also the sharp institutionalised distinction between 'art' and material culture ('craft').

Burnett, Ricky, *Tributaries – a view of contemporary South African Art*, BMW Kulturprogramm, Johannesburg, 1985.

institutions with black educators and administrators are established (Sack, 1988:25) By the end of the century the research of academics over the past decade and more had brought the former narrow definition of ‘material culture’ into the current of art-historical writing and research e.g. Nettleton, 1985 and Klopper, 1992), evidenced around the turn of the 20th century in publications such as *Art and Ambiguity* (2001)⁶⁸ and *The Art of Southeastern Africa* (Klopper and Nel, 2002) Concurrently, perceptions about the role of museums began to change (Rankin and Hamilton, 1997) (See 2.2.2, p.19 above). After marginalisation during the apartheid era following “the euphoria of post-independence South Africa” (Leeb-du Toit,2000:21) publications like Leeb-du Toit’s *Ndalen- A Retrospective Exhibition* 1999 – with its focus on the work of black artists from one teacher training centre, as well as the Natal Arts Trust ‘celebration of creativity’ *Jabulisa 2000 - The Art of KwaZulu-Natal*, display a diversity of media and techniques; as also *Ubumba; aspects of indigenous ceramics in KwaZulu-Natal* (Bell and Calder, 1998), which focused on Zulu material culture. Bringing further new dimensions into the discourse surrounding creativity are publications like *Untold Tales of Magic: Abelumbi* (Addleson, 2002) concerning the metaphysical and ‘magic’ in art. New perspectives can be seen in publications like *Engaging Modernities: Transformations of the commonplace* (Nettleton, 2003) where the notion of modernity is expressed in work emerging from the consumer-culture, including re-use of materials – the resultant art being regarded in no way less ‘authentic’ (Nettleton, 2003:14).

2.3 Patronage – Evaluation

In viewing art as a way of “communicating responses to the world” (Arnold, 2000:56), Arnold points to the fact that the significance of an artist is linked to the art world ‘and its infrastructure’⁶⁹. With Zondi’s clientele predominantly amongst a white élite, I investigate some issues of patronage and curatorship in relation to earlier ‘colonial’ subject matter of white South African artists. This serves to link Zondi’s early foregrounding of his work in a

⁶⁸ Nel sees the exhibition *Art and Ambiguity* as having given the small pieces of mostly utilitarian art production in the Southern African region an “identifiable Gestalt” (Nel, 2002:15).

⁶⁹ “Painters are born but they are made significant through their relationships with the art world and its infrastructure of academics, art schools, galleries, dealers, collectors, critics and art historians (Arnold, 2000:56).

public institution⁷⁰ to his exposure to an elitist white patronage base with their historically forged artistic predilections.

Further, my investigation into patronage is linked to the profound level of Zondi's interface with some of his mentors and patrons, which played a seminal role in his personal development as an artist. Therefore, besides finding Bodenstein mentioned by Rankin and Hobbs⁷¹, as well as Schlosser (Schlosser, 1975:39 and personal communication, July 2003) – I have sourced his notions about trans-cultural communication (Bodenstein, 1977) – incorporating Teilhard de Chardin's notions on suffering (Jones, 1975 and Teilhard de Chardin, 1975)

2.3.1 'Colonial' Other

In view of evaluation and reception of art by local patronage - Hillebrand links 'colonial' subject matter of early 20th century white artists in South Africa to their training within the imperial British establishment (Hillebrand, 2000:68)⁷². Later art by whites would become expressive of opposition to that establishment in its espousal of the agenda of nationalistic Afrikaner aspirations (Hillebrand, 2000:71 and Brown, 1978:52). Botha sees in the hybridised work of the white artists of the time a lack of challenge in view of social and political concerns, sponsored and endorsed as they were, by what he terms a "toxic but benevolent state" seeking to "secure white privilege and cultural continuity" (Botha, 2000:8).

Given the South African context of segregation, socio-economic factors were the major cause for predominantly white patronage for the work of black artists working outside their own communities – with a target audience prescribed for work done in the mission context. (Rankin, 1989:24) Comparisons between sculpture and painting are considered in view of associations with 'craft' and preference for paintings (Rankin, 1989:19,27).

⁷⁰ A one-man exhibition was held in 1965 in the Durban Art Gallery under the curatorship of Madame Wezynska-Klecynzka, - Personal communication, Carol Brown, Director, Durban Art Gallery, 19 August 2003.

⁷¹ In the Rorke's Drift publication Bodenstein is described as "strongly supportive of black artists" (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:17) – mentioned in connection with the Gowenius couple⁷¹ meeting Zondi and him. Bodenstein is later cited in connection with interpretations of Laduma Madela's work (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003: 43) as well as an idea for an art centre at the Ceza hospital (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:231).

⁷² Art in the London National Gallery and cultural conventions such as the Royal Academy's Summer exhibition formed the yardstick against which all contemporary 'colonial' art was evaluated (Hillebrand, 2000:68).

Leeb-du Toit links the motivation for some patronage of black artists' work to emerging 'liberal' ideals in the acknowledgement of black aspirations as they championed cross-cultural interaction,⁷³ as in the case of Bhengu's work, who on the other hand also found limited patronage for his work amongst a black literary élite (Leeb-du Toit, 1998:103). H.I.E. Dhlomo saw white liberalism in the light of collaboration with the status quo and gain for personal ends (Couzens, 1985:36). In view of concurrent policies of segregation, Dhlomo saw enslavement of Africans by 'the superior race', the 'Zulu-speaking' whites in Natal – in their encouragement of blacks to remain tribal while lauding their chiefs, customs and laws (Couzens, 1985:35) .

Issues of a new mobility for black artists and the attachment of art-making to a market economy (de Jager, 1973:3,18) finds mention in view of sales and marketability of work⁷⁴ (Grossert, 1968:43⁷⁵; Sack, 1988:9 ; de Jager, 1973:21 and Senn, 1983:299)

With Zondi's covert reference to ethnic specificity in his work, I was prompted to investigate the way in which the location of such preferences in the work of black artists was received by audiences. Leeb-du Toit's discourse around art-making is presented in relation to ethnic, 'tribal' and cultural perceptions born of endeavours to understand so-called 'primitive societies', from within anthropological and ethnographic paradigms – linked as these ultimately are, to the policy-making of the colonial government in general, in maintaining control over indigenous peoples (Leeb-du Toit,1998 and Nettleton,1988:301) In sketching the population distribution in urban areas around Durban and Pietermaritzburg in economically hard times during the early decades of the 20th century,⁷⁶ she places educational policies pertaining to art- and craft-making in KwaZulu-Natal in the interface between the aspirational political agendas of a black intelligentsia seeking to galvanise nationhood on the one hand, and a dominant white leadership seeking to sustain economic

⁷³ Bhengu's commissions from Killie Campbell – as an amateur ethnographer who collaborated in providing the artist with authentic details for his imagery (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:17).

⁷⁴ For those people who moved into urban areas, a resultant forced embrace of the money economy within a capitalist system demanded wage labour for paying of taxes. In view of these financial constraints, art was both sold as unique images as well as being mass-produced , becoming a commodification within a cash economy (Sack, 1988:9).

Sack addresses the issue of commercialism – unlike white artists whose training institutions were closed to blacks, the latter were under economic pressure to create saleable art for survival (Sack, 1988:16).

⁷⁵ Grossert saw a divide between the art-makers and 'their' people: while apparently lauding the ability of black artists to adapt and adjust to new circumstances, Grossert bemoaned the fact that the lure of sales through galleries was widening the cleft between an 'esoteric' group of artists and the majority of urban blacks, as well as those in "Bantu homelands" (Grossert, 1968:43).

⁷⁶ 'itinerant and displaced' urban blacks amongst predominantly white people.

and political dominance on the other (Leeb-du Toit,1998:106). The covert politicising and ideological embroilment of art informed by and reflecting the respective perspectives are shown to mirror educational principles of ‘Native Education.,’ with particular reference to Art and Craft teaching (Grossert, 1968). The organiser and later inspector in for art in Bantu Education, Jack Grossert⁷⁷, – who also gave Zondi encouragement from the 1950s - was able to influence the teaching of art through his perceptions of African aesthetics and art-making, to embrace a greater measure of creativity and expressiveness.

While asserting that art patronage in ‘most African countries’ is local - apart from occasional outside interventions, Kasfir points to South Africa as an exception, thinking of it as having “a largely indigenous, mainly white and educated, patron/collector base” with ‘homelands’ as “repositories of ‘authentic’ African culture for white city dwellers” (Kasfir, 1999:41). Late 20th century concerns revolve around art as a ‘global player’, marketing intervention and the commodification of art (Botha, 2000:10-12).

2.3.2 Neglect - Dearth of Literature

Sack addresses the issue of the dearth of literature on black artists despite their recognition beyond their own communities, afforded them by art lovers in South Africa and abroad, while “official histories and art museums” neglected to represent the work (Sack, 1988:7). In view of Zondi’s early museum exposure, this is only relevant to him in view of publications. As a prolific artist with one-man shows and regular group exhibition exposure he sold his work throughout South Africa and to patrons from abroad over more than two decades. Rankin alludes to this very contradiction in attesting to his being ‘comparatively little known’ – despite his wide exhibition participation and award honours for his work – tendering some explanation (Rankin, 1993:137)⁷⁸.

⁷⁷ Appointed Organiser of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Work for the Native Schools in Natal from 1948-1962.

⁷⁸ Although she cites the sensuous quality of wood and its suitability of size as incentive for private ownership (Rankin, 1989:27). Rankin gives as one reason for Zondi being outside the focus of the art-world by the 1980s – after being given recognition during a time of fewer black artists being foregrounded - as its new interest in the avant-garde as well as an expectation of unmistakable ‘development and change’ in artistic work. She denies Zondi’s work a strong sense of development and adds that within a traditional African cultural context, change is not a valued concept (Rankin, 1993:137).

In linking patronage to changed social conditions, Sack addresses the issue of markets⁷⁹ (Sack, 1988:9,10). Using Bhengu's 'indigenous' scenes as examples of commissions received by the early pioneer artists from white patrons, Sack expounds on demands made by such patronage for the portrayal of the 'exotic' Other (Sack,1988:10)⁸⁰. This has some measure of validation for Zondi's early 'Zulu types' mounted on roundels and, to a limited degree, in his consistent creation of simple genre figures for which there was an easy market.

In his portrayal of the social traits of his people, Leeb-du Toit thinks of Bhengu's subject matter as reflective of "the milieu and context of black South African art" and points to his multi-cultural audience (Leeb-du Toit, 1995:33). Related to commissions for book illustrations, friezes and wall paintings, Sack refers to expectations and perceptions of patrons linked to materials and media: wood and clay were perceived to suggest a 'sense of the traditional' (Sack, 1988:12). This notion is rooted in the status wood enjoys in Nguni art-making traditions (Nel, 2002:24).

2.3.3 Evaluation

The buyers' market is closely affiliated to historically linked perceptions regarding trends, 'fashion', taste and the understanding and evaluation of art. In view of the white clientele for black artists' work, de Jager perceives African symbolism as being at times ambiguous for European audiences (de Jager, 1973:21), while Grossert⁸¹ contends that understanding African art requires the observer to identify with "those for whom the work was made" and to abandon European evaluation (Grossert, 1978:viii)⁸² Seeing in the subject matter of black South Africans the portrayal of their humanity and their emotions, Grossert perceived Eurocentric criteria applied in the evaluation of black art to be incongruous and condescending (Grossert, 1968:43-4)⁸³ and cites Selby Mvusi's critique of African art

⁷⁹ - a community-based market for functional crafted objects on the one hand, and white commercial markets for 'curios' on the other.- with increasing demand leading to mass-production - with outlets through the church, agricultural shows and a developing fine art market, fostering new artistic activity. Sack gives some examples incl. Qwabe.

⁸⁰ This is linked to the notion of a 'vanishing Africa', an 'unspoilt native', of traditionally clad peoples - 'tribal' life (Sack, 1988:10).

⁸¹ Inspector of Arts and Crafts under *Bantu Education* in Natal in the 1940s.

⁸² He implies that characteristics of forms need points of reference in specific cultures. When Europeans - with their own "prevailing aesthetic attitudes" - have difficulty in understanding African art, Grossert points to expressive rather than naturalistic shapes and forms, akin more to language, as the reason for this.

⁸³ He believed and propagated that Africans' "own aesthetic goals" should be used as the measure of success or failure of their art, not the criteria applied to western art. This was construed as racist.

being given a “special dispensation”,⁸⁴ de Jager decries the judging of African life experiences as inferior. (de Jager, 1973:20) Highlighting in African art the *preoccupation with man* (sic), quoting Raum “The essence of man, the very nature of man, reveals itself in his emotions”. De Jager notes how Africans “rarely attempt to portray experiences and life of persons from other race and culture groups” (de Jager, 1973:21). This is true for Zondi, other than the portrayal of Christ.⁸⁵

2.3.4 New Curatorial Practices

As discussed above, during the 1980s various curatorial issues involving inclusion of formerly marginalized art were addressed. For the 1989 *Images of Wood* exhibition, Rankin gives an account of and justification for the inclusion of the work black South African artists⁸⁶ as a distinct group, in this overview of a century’s sculptural art-making in South Africa⁸⁷. She substantiates exclusions - down to pragmatic availability of information on artists⁸⁸.

In order to position South African art on the national and international stage, Leeb-du Toit calls for exhibitions like *Jabulisa 2000 - The Art of KwaZulu-Natal* to become a forum for comparative assessment and evaluation of the art, as well as for the critical reception by the public both in SA and abroad (Leeb-du Toit, 2000:21).

2.3.5 African Aesthetics

Sculptural traditions in Southern Africa are frequently compared with Central and West African traditions from different perspectives. Early observations mention Zulu carving traditions (Bryant, 1949:375); more recent work embraces an awareness of African aesthetics after the middle of the 20th century (de Jager, 1973:19; Thiel, 1984: 246,279¹), while current explorations refer to perceptions regarding expressive aesthetics and Nguni creativity

⁸⁴ Mvusi, Selby in: *Towards a Contemporary Art in Africa* (I.N.S.E.A.), Symposium 1963 - (Grossert, 1968:43) : In 1963 Selby Mvusi spoke of the work of black artists being subjugated to a kind of “special dispensation”, being examined outside the “mental rigour” demanded in western art criticism and appreciation: all disciplines were simply bundled as “African Art” resulting in “African” coming under scrutiny, rather than “art” (Grossert, 1968:43,4).

⁸⁵ He feels Christ as a Jew would not have been a black man (Personal communication, Zondi, August 2003).

⁸⁶ Some white artists were included, who were active in a cultural interchange, in ‘integral relationships’ with black artists.

⁸⁷ A conscious exclusion of sculpture that was primarily functional or decorative, i.e. applied art, choosing the “independent art object” (Rankin, 1989:9). including however, some representation of rural ‘anonymous’ carvers’ works, in this way providing the necessary historical context for work of black sculptors.

⁸⁸ In the case of photographic material on Zondi, Agnes Bodenstern was the main source.

(Kasfir, 1999:16 and Nel, 2002:35). The intensive exploration of Zulu material culture gave new insight into the aesthetic exploration of the personalised, small, portable domestic objects of semi-nomadic pastoralist peoples of southeastern Africa (Klopper and Nel: 2002) and revealed their social and intrinsic significance in view of ancestral veneration. (Nel, 2002:23) (Klopper, 2002:44). Formerly the aesthetic value of utilitarian objects was “covertly suppressed” (Rankin, 1989:11). This exploration is relevant to my work in view of Zondi’s visual aesthetics from his rural pastoralist background.

2.3.5.1 ‘Synthesis’

Concerns relating to assimilation, acculturation and the absorption of western paradigms within received traditions find expression in the term ‘synthesis’ by various authors. Rankin discusses political implications of exclusion from western cultures in the South African context of segregation (Rankin, 1989:69). Zondi’s work is seen in view of a ‘conjunction of western and indigenous traits’ (Rankin, 1993:135). Sack speaks of the ‘discovery’ of African art beginning a trend of “synthesis” between a western ‘figurative canon’ and African figurative sculpture, manifested in a highly expressive figurative tradition, the ‘African sourcing’ of Skotnes and Kumalo which he terms influential (Sack, 1988:16)⁸⁹. Bhengu’s artistic expression ‘grafted’ onto European prototypes is seen as a ‘synthesis’ (Leeb-du Toit, 1995:33) which is also implicit in Thorpe’s perception of teaching at Rorke’s Drift (Thorpe, 1994:15).

Couzens cites a ‘fusion’ in African performance arts related to expressions of black patriotism in the early 1920s (Couzens, 1985:56), while, by the 1960s, Uche Okeke’s concept of ‘natural synthesis’ refers to ‘Africanness’ in terms of a simultaneous absorption of modernist influences (Okeke, 2001:453)⁹⁰. The search for a modern African aesthetic on the part of Africans is connected with materials, new social contexts as well as study abroad (Okeke, 2001:30). Referring to African art in general, Thiel perceives African art to hold man’s appearance in nature as unimportant – what is relevant is the fact of being human, the **idea** of

⁸⁹ Sack speaks of Kumalo’s “synthesis of the western figurative canon with that of African figurative sculpture”

⁹⁰ Pioneer African art developed within the framework of colonial authority in many African countries as people in the literary, the performing and the fine arts began to recognise their predicament under the rule of a foreign culture with its different value system and its other mores, and slowly a notion of being proudly African grew, the intellectuals leading the discursive thrust - developing a sense of pride in that Africanness: There developed a new focus on what being African entailed in the ‘modern’ world in terms of both their received culture as well as influences from the foreign cultures which had been forcefully planted in Africa.

the whole human being, the ancestor, who is dependent for his life after death on the veneration of the living.

Rankin points to a lack of concern shown for traditional African art objects on the part of black artists, which is thought to have led them to espouse western art concepts once they moved outside their art-making traditions (Rankin, 1989:18). Seeing content and style of art as a product of history, she calls for meaning to be contextualised (Rankin, 1987: 157)⁹¹. De Jager recognises an “essentially African” character in the art of black South Africans despite foreign influences (de Jager, 1973:18-19) and he thinks of the recognition of aesthetics to be independent of a de-contextualisation of objects from their creative origins (de Jager, 1973: 19). Ascribed meaning is discussed in terms of changing localities of art objects (Klopper, 2002:39 and Thiel, 1984:14)

2.4 Art Training

2.4.1 The White Élite

Art Education as an élitaire white institution after primary level saw the development of art training for black artists within a mission context⁹² or through government teacher training institutions within the system of Bantu Education. Tertiary art training for South Africans in the colonial ‘centre’ abroad (Hillebrand, 2000:68) represented a prestigious route open only to whites who then formed associations and cultural bodies for the promotion of their arts. (Brown, 1978:52) Only the University of Fort Hare and the University of Bophuthatswana eventually established art education degrees (Sack, 1988:18) In view of the persistent exclusion of black students from ‘white’ art institutions, a conference in Cape Town on *The State of Art in South Africa* in 1979 addressed the ‘enormous gulf’ between black and white artists. The conference passed resolutions pertaining to a boycott of state sponsored exhibitions (Sack, 1988:24).

2.4.2 ‘Inherent’ Talent

⁹¹ It is important that content should not predominate over stylistic considerations, nor form be stressed to the exclusion of meaning “ – but “Meaning is not located in the art work alone. Art is a product of history and must be understood in its social context”.

By its nature sculpture demands that we acknowledge that “art occupies a place in life” (Rankin, 1987:157).

⁹² A general education within the mission context was held accountable for propagating and associating formal education with liberty and higher status – and the winning of confidence and goodwill of the rulers (Couzens, 1985:33). In her investigation into biblically influenced art in KwaZulu-Natal, Leeb-du Toit illuminates aspects of the cultural contribution made by the missionary enterprise, particularly in view of the arts and crafts (Leeb-du Toit, 2003).

Couzens cites the perception on the part of paternalistic educationalists that black people possessed an 'inherent' talent for art, as the reason for the denial of formal training beyond primary school level (Couzens, 1985:50)⁹³, a notion rejected by a black intelligentsia around H.I.E. Dhlomo as separatism, inequality and imposed 'tribalism' in the mid 1940s. (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:38)⁹⁴ Sack holds Skotnes' fear of 'destroying something' accountable for the informality of his teaching (Sack,1988:15), something Kasfir reiterates more than a decade later in speaking of the notion of 'contamination' (Kasfir,1999:98). In connection with woodcarving at Ndaleni, Leeb-du Toit cites the perception of it being one of the "inborn capacities" of black students (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:8) linked to African 'cultural identity'.

Imagery depicting indigenous peoples and ceremonies as ethnic 'other', like the work of Gerard Bhengu, is seen in 1973 as a 'sensitive' insight into 'Zulu people', "unspoilt by the influence of any contemporary trends" (de Jager, 1973:23), while at the end of the century it is seen in view of having exacerbated notions of the Zulu culture being 'finite and static'(Leeb-du Toit,1997:17) in terms of the western myth of 'nature versus culture'⁹⁵ appropriated for reinforcing a sense of superiority and difference (Leeb-du Toit, 1997:37)⁹⁶ 'Ethnicity' in art is critiqued as a "perpetuation of notions of tribalism and difference" echoing the "colonial and segregationist policies of the time" (Nettleton, 1988:301).

⁹³ Dr. C.T. Loram, Natal's first *Chief Inspector for Native Education* around 1920 propagated 'practical' education for blacks is quoted as saying that blacks should 'develop along their own lines' (Couzens,1985:50).

⁹⁴ Couzens cites H.I.E. Dhlomo in 1947 calling 'insidious' the notion of keeping African artists 'natural' and 'unspoilt', by a denial of further art training (Couzens, 1985:253) (Zaverdinos, 1995:3) Dr. D. McK. Malcolm – authority on Zulus and later lecturer at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg presented work of Gerard Bhengu to Prof. O.J.P. Oxley of Fine Art at Natal Technical College who denied him entry, encouraging him to "develop his own technique" (Zaverdinos, 1995:9).

Dhlomo wrote about the artist Gerard Bhengu: "that many a lovely flower of African genius is left to blush away its sweetness in obscurity through lack of training" (Couzens, 1985:250), while speaking of his Neither-Nor category of African as "the 'unspoilt nigger' so loved – who in his tribal home is a dignified country squire ... [who] composes his poems and songs, maintains his tribal traditions and love"(Couzens, 1985:32).

⁹⁵ This is the notion of a decadent and corrupting European culture in opposition to an inherent purity of other communities. Bryant's early work on 'Zululand' refers to a 'destructive and demoralising advance of European 'civilisation'' (Bryant, 1929:78).

⁹⁶ Leeb-du Toit intimates that there might have been a mindful agenda in preventing the 'artist-narrator' Bhengu from developing a self-conscious art of critique, drawing attention to the irony of the potential subversion implicit in his metaphorical bucolic scenes (Leeb-du Toit, 1995:39).

This may be linked in ethnographic writing to Clifford's notion of the 'vanishing primitive'⁹⁷ and what he terms allegory of salvage' in 'redemptive ethnography', as he questions its efficacy in saving the 'lost other' (Clifford, 1986b:112,113).

2.4.3 Art Training Initiatives

2.4.3.1 The Mission Context

Rankin foregrounds the importance of encouragement for art-making from mission schools (Rankin, 1989:20)⁹⁸. The Anglican Mission *Grace Dieu* teaching art was one of the first of overseas Christian missions stationed in South Africa which provided basic art training for black students, with carving taught in the European religious tradition (Rankin, 1993:7)⁹⁹ favouring the skilled naturalism of a representational style akin to late medieval and Renaissance styles (Rankin, 1989:21)¹⁰⁰. In a later move away from this naturalistic realism, de Jager sees in the "originality, sincerity and power of expression" an "authentic figurative expressionism", thinking of it as a fundamental quality of 20th century South African black sculpture.

Cormick names the mission institutions in view of their commissioning work from black artists (Cormick, 1993:7) including Zondi at Appelsbosch¹⁰¹. Zaverdinos foregrounds the embellishment of churches with the work of black artists in the mission context fulfilling the need of making imagery more accessible for black congregations when produced by 'indigenous' people (Zaverdinos, 1995:8)¹⁰², referred to also by Rankin (Rankin, 1989:19).

⁹⁷ Clifford thinks of 'conventionalised' patterns of retrospection as an encoding of fragility, threat and transience – where 'loss' is lamented : a perception that the 'primitive', non-literate underdeveloped, tribal societies are constantly yielding to progress and 'losing' their traditions (Clifford, 1986b:115).

⁹⁸ The Anglican Diocesan Training College *Grace Dieu* with Ernest Mancoba and Job Kekana Rankin's research into the archives of the Church of the Province reveal the aim of enabling black artists to learn techniques well - there is mention of "submission to the discipline of technical training" - in order to show that the "African artist has his own means of expression" (Rankin, 1989:20).

⁹⁹ The Reverend Paterson suggested training carvers in 1924 – in a sub-section of carpentry which grew under sister Pauline (Rankin, 1989:19).

¹⁰⁰ Examples: Mancoba's – '*Head*' and '*The Future of Africa*' (Rankin, 1989:22-23).

¹⁰¹ From the early fifties Bernard Gwensa received commissions for religious sculpture (Cormick: 1993 p.7). Until then, decorative and votive art in South Africa's Christian churches had been imported. By the late fifties the Roman Catholic church commissioned black artists to produce work for church interiors eg. Sydney Kumalo sculpted and created a crucifix for a church in Kroonstad. In 1960 Durant Sihlali worked for a church in Soweto (Cormick, 1993:7) and by 1962 Michael Zondi had completed his chapel and crucifix at Appelsbosch, Natal.

¹⁰² The mission context is mentioned in terms Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood who were called "keen teachers of art and craft" (Zaverdinos, 1995:8).

Naming carved wood as the predominant medium of the 'ecclesiastical' art made under church patronage up to the 1970s (Sack, 1988:12)¹⁰³. Sack speaks of the overtly Christian themes as "fairly static", due to the use of rectilinear carving blocks (Sack, 1988:27)¹⁰⁴. In countering the notion that image-making within the missionary enterprise was entirely coerced and elicited, Leeb-du Toit speaks of religious ethos 'as part of human nature' central to peoples' continuities (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:16,17), but at the same time she terms the making of "oversimplified readings of art as religious" a "hegemonic act", thinking that secular functions should be gauged in "ostensibly religious objects and works" (Leeb-du Toit, 2003: 22).

2.4.3.2 Ndaleni, Polly Street, and Rorke's Drift

Initiatives like the urban Polly Street Art Centre and the Ndaleni Art School find broad mention in the literature in their role of fostering the development of South African art. Seeing sources for art-making in clay modelling in black communities, and mentioning the denial of formal art education, Sack foregrounds encouragement and opportunity for individuals, mentioning educators like Grossert who pioneered black art education at Ndaleni (Sack, 1988:11,12)¹⁰⁵. Issues around rural and urban backgrounds of artists experiencing profound transformations are addressed (Sack, 1988:9).

De Jager gives these Polly Street and the Ndaleni early acknowledgement in their role of fostering the development of South African sculpture (de Jager, 1973), while Sack mentions particularly the more intellectual, expressive teaching of Lorna Peirson at Ndaleni Training College¹⁰⁶ (Sack, 1988:12). Leeb-du Toit focuses in detail on Ndaleni¹⁰⁷ (Leeb-du Toit,

¹⁰³ Sack names the Diocesan Training College, Pietersburg and St. Peters Secondary School as fostering the inclusion of ecclesiastical subject matter in the work of artists like Bernard Gwensa and Ruben Xulu, also including Michael Zondi while he names Ernest Mancoba, in his search for 'Africanness' as an exception (Sack, 1988:12).

¹⁰⁴ He contrasts these with the 'dynamic movement and the inclusion of natural forms' of work carved in Gazankulu and Venda from unprocessed timber, including the roots of trees (Sack, 1988:27).

¹⁰⁵ Grossert thinks of Africans following 'intuitively' "traditional aesthetic norms common to African art" (Grossert, 1978:viii), which relates to that which Mbembe thinks of as an attempt to locate 'a general denomination', an *Africanity* "in a set of specific cultural characteristics" (Mbembe, 2002:255-256).

¹⁰⁶ established under the guidance of Jack Grossert in 1952.

¹⁰⁷ On the site of the industrial school affiliated to the Wesleyan Mission, the Ndaleni Art School opened in the early 1950s – affiliated to the Department of Bantu Education. It offered a two-year (as of 1960 a one-year) preliminary art training course for training black art teachers – (Leeb-du Toit, 1999: 4) at a time the Department of Bantu Education in 1954 discontinued art as a secondary school subject. Placing the teacher training institution Ndaleni into the context of art teaching in South Africa, Leeb-du Toit sketches the history of the school where the mission formerly had an 'industrial' school. The art course for future primary school teachers

1999). Apart from a ‘realist idiom’ she recognises a conceptual expressiveness within an exploration of African aesthetics (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:17-18) and indicates that teachers at Ndaleni exerted a European modernist influence¹⁰⁸ in the rendering of the human figure in solid, truncated forms, with only a schematic indication of details (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:21). She speaks of a gravitation towards an expressionistic modernism”, “rudimentary monumental forms” showing the influence of Henry Moore (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:11)¹⁰⁹. Speaking of ‘conscientised’ work appearing, she cites the avoidance of overt political or protest themes in view of scrutiny by the Bantu Education Department (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:30). The school is mentioned in connection with Mandlenkosi Zondi, the brother of Michael (Rankin, 1989:179 and Miles, 1997:112)¹¹⁰.

The kind of smooth and polished finish on sculptures which Zondi’s early work shows is associated with a “professional” attitude to carving (Rankin, 1989:31)¹¹¹. At Ndaleni students often created a smoother finish than some teachers would have liked¹¹², (Leeb-du Toit, 1999: 19) while, Khoza, a former student spoke of the desirability of smoothness. She learned to use harder woods and retain on the surface traces of fine hatching under Zondi’s tutorship (Nieser, 2003b).

and influences of teachers are detailed while art education as perceived by the art educator, Jack Grossert - Appointed Organiser of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Work for the Native Schools in Natal – from 1948-1962 – augmenting the ‘Crafts and Industrial’ training of the ‘Native’ schools in place since 1912 -are discussed in depth. His perception of Africans’ art aesthetics saw him develop the art course together with Anne Robinson nee Harrison (Leeb-du Toit, 1999: 7) and provide every incentive for art making within the Bantu Education system - while clandestinely opposing many of the restrictive notions about artistic ability amongst black pupils.

¹⁰⁸ Especially Peter Atkins, a graduate of the Slade School of Art whom Leeb-du Toit describes as an “eclectic English modernist” who encouraged particularly sculpture (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:10).

¹⁰⁹ Students had seen Moore’s work at exhibitions, as well as that of Rodin and German expressionists like Käthe Kollwitz (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:17). In Arttra June 1962 Hooper writes of an exhibition sponsored by B.I.C.A. – commenting on the carvings of one of the three ‘Natal artist’ as having been influenced by ‘European standards’, speaking particularly of Rodin and Barlach as influential in the carving. Hooper commented that the human form was being employed to express “emotions, activities and sentiments” from everyday lives – saying also that there is a striving for ‘truthful interpretation of proportions, anatomy and facial expression”. Leeb-du Toit notes Hooper’s “modernist reading” - as she calls it – of African sculpture, emphasising as he does its conceptualism – the simplification of form to express an idea – and its ‘subtle distortion’ (opportune when simple tools are being used.) Further, truth to material was emphasised by Hooper (Leeb-du Toit, 1999:22)

¹¹⁰ Rankin speaks of a possible inspiration of Mandlenkosi’s work on Michael Zondi (Rankin, 1989:179) while Miles cites the artist as having said that he was carving before his brother received tuition at Ndaleni (Miles, 1997:112)

¹¹¹ Lorna Peirson, who taught at Ndaleni for 18 years, tried to instil the aesthetic of the wood’s worked surface, leaving chisel marks, but students preferred the smooth sandpapered finish. – Rankin proposes this feature of the Ndaleni sculpture to be what people call the “Ndaleni style” (Rankin, 1989:31).

¹¹² Moon speaks of the integrity of wood carving at Ndaleni – and an “empathy” with the wood medium – demanding “assessment as an art work”. He gives as a source of confidence for students the restriction imposed by the size and shape of wood pieces or sleepers (Moon, 1999:77).

Sack's focus on art-making at the Johannesburg City Council's *Polly Street Recreational Centre* in the 1950s places emphasis on Cecil Skotnes' teaching¹¹³, as does Kasfir in view of his "inside brokerage" of an apprenticeship system (Kasfir, 1999:101). Rankin cites availability of material determining the techniques employed for sculpture. With bricks and clay readily available in the urban context of Polly Street, modelling rather than woodcarving was promoted (Rankin, 1989:32). Manaka sees wood as the preferred medium in the Northern Transvaal and Natal due to its availability, while he also cites clay and 'inorganic' metal as the preference in urban creativity (Manaka, 1987: 11-12). In the latter environment Sack sees watercolour as an affordable material suited to short classes as time restrictions are a factor in the teaching of sculpture (Sack, 1988:16). Related to commissions for book illustrations, friezes, wall paintings, Sack refers to expectations and perceptions of patrons linked to materials: wood and clay were perceived to suggest a 'sense of the traditional' (Sack, 1988:12).

Sack cites fundamental differences between Polly Street and the Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift of the 1960s and 1970s (Sack, 1988:23)¹¹⁴. He links relief printing at the latter institution to early 'pioneers' work in a traditional context e.g. Qwabe's carved relief panels (Sack, 1988:10). Thiel refers to art-making at Rorke's Drift in view of a new communality becoming the driving force behind individual creativity (Thiel, 1984:284).

2.5 Black Liberation Theology and Politically Inspired Art

In view of Zondi's artistic dialogue which was in part biblically inspired, as well as his dialogue with the theologian Axel-Ivar Berglund I was prompted to investigate in more depth the phenomenon of the liberation theology (Thiel, 1984:282 and Berglund, 2003),

¹¹³ Sack describes "alternative education initiatives" linked to activities for blacks in their leisure time – to the Johannesburg City Council's appointment of Cecil Skotnes as Cultural Recreation Officer in the Polly Street Recreational Centre – due to his intervention becoming known as an Art Centre - Over a ten year period building up confidence for sponsorship –creating a venue for inter-cultural activity which included teaching (Sack, 1988: 15)

¹¹⁴ Sack sees the political engagement as one factor in the closure of the Rorke's Drift fine art school in 1982 - when 'new educational initiatives' in the Cape and Transvaal made Rorke's Drift seen to be 'dispensable' (Sack, 1988:23).

linked to the shift from the proselytising theology of Lutheranism in Natal to the search for mutual ‘humanitarian’ traits across the cultures¹¹⁵.

Leeb-du Toit explores the phenomenon of acculturation in the mission context of Natal (Leeb-du Toit, 1993), giving the historical background of Eurocentric proselytising within the colonial enterprise. Art patronage and the shift of perceptions about the art-making within a Christian context is shown to lead to later developments towards black liberation theology’s espousal and concomitant secularisation of biblical themes, for the purpose of opposing the intransigent segregationist state policies. (Leeb-du Toit, 1993: 8)¹¹⁶ She links the voicing of political dissent in South Africa to support tendered by clergy, based on the fundamental moral tenets entrenched within Christianity (Leeb-du Toit, 2003:13,14). Thiel’s discourse regarding the contextualising of problems within ecclesiastical artwork addresses the didactic function of Christian art aimed at ordinary people (Thiel, 1984:14,34). He addresses the use of censorship in South Africa with the symbolic language of art-making used as a vehicle for protest and subversion (Thiel, 1984: 282)¹¹⁷.

Some notions regarding the politicising of art in the South African context in the more recent past are explored in Atkinson and Breitz (1999). Taking into account that Zondi only rarely or very covertly expressed his acute political awareness in his work, I have nevertheless explored references to the artistic expression of dissent in South African art-making which occurred parallel to Zondi’s career, as censorship and strong curtailment of the movement of black people in the 1960s and 1970s affected all cultural activities in black society as well as its art-making, culminating in the Black Consciousness Movement and the education crisis of 1976.

This was a time when Zondi’s work was being foregrounded in view of the artist’s reconciliatory stance. Rankin refers to Zondi’s sculpture after the brutality of the Sharpeville uprisings, his ‘*Reunion*’ – also called ‘Reconciliation’– (*Bantu*, Junie 1976 Deel XXIII Nr. 5)

¹¹⁵ The eschewal of a search for origins in favour of seeking human similarities and cultural differences Clifford thinks of as having replaced “historical allegories with humanist allegories.” in 20th century cultural anthropology (Clifford, 1986:102).

¹¹⁶ The Lutheran church began forging a shared identity in recognizing the essential ‘humanity’ in Zulu culture.

¹¹⁷ Thiel contends that many of the Christian scenes were possibly not intended to preach the gospel, but to make statements and protest against absolute systems. He sees in Azaria Mbatha’s work reconciliation between black and white – Christ having died for both (Thiel, 1984:283).

She thinks of Zondi “visualising his own image in traditional dress” - becoming one of the two figures in his “soul searching” piece (Rankin, 1993:136-137).

The urban ‘Township’ subject-matter has been foregrounded as the most prominent form of art-making in view of expressing indictments towards an intransigent state with its main source the urban art centre at Polly Street. Urban realities and social commentaries are seen to supersede a preoccupation with formal concerns (Berman, 1975: 210). Township art is seen as reflective of social reality and repression as well as “sentimental self-pity” (Sack, 1988:17)¹¹⁸. Botha sees ‘ghettoism’ as having centralised Black artists’ experiences into a ‘niche market’ and describes ‘township art’ as the aesthetic which “permeated Black South African pain under Apartheid” (Botha, 2000:7), while Verster refers to indiscriminate patronage for this art.¹¹⁹ The inclusion of socially conscious printmaking at Rorke’s Drift in an “anti-apartheid... .. visual language of self-awareness” as encouraged by Peder Gowenius¹²⁰ (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:163,164) is seen by Sack as responsible for the demise of the fine art school in 1982 (Sack, 1988:23)¹²¹.

Kasfir sees in the narratives of the freedom struggle’s social realism a ‘tethering’ of artistic subject matter to the human form, to the detriment of artistic experimentation in South Africa (Kasfir, 1999: 96-97 and 155)¹²². Arnold thinks of art in South Africa as having been degraded to social commentary rather than rendering visible ideas created by the human imagination (Arnold, 1999:37)¹²³, while Gwinsa speaks of the need for political correctness

¹¹⁸ Referring to Dumile’s violent, ‘turbulent imagery’ within a ‘township’ paradigm, Sack cites symbolic work of ‘great beauty and mystery’ (Sack, 1988:18), produced as a counter against that “imagery of hopelessness” (Sack, 1988:17) In his avoidance of any direct political reference, Sack refers to Legae’s symbolism as “a more complex and subtle response to political repression”, as also Shilakoe’s etching technique: Sack speaks of a ‘highly personalised idiom’ (Sack,1988:22) in his “philosophical and mystical portrayal of the human condition”, avoiding overt protest while making an implicit representation of hardships of people. This is relevant in Zondi’s commentary also.

¹¹⁹ Verster speaks of an “indiscriminate, over rich and uneducated public gobbling up township art as a way of expiating guilt” (Verster, 1994: 2).

¹²⁰ Peder and Ulla Gowenius were the founders of the ELC Art and Craft Centre at Rorke’s Drift

¹²¹ Nevertheless Sack addresses the issue of accountability of artists working inside and for communities – in that they are able to preserve a relationship between their lived experience and their art in contrast to artists of western tradition remaining independent (Sack, 1988:27).

¹²² According to Kasfir, during the late 1970s the freedom movement led by the ANC regarded the human subject as the only one “worth exploitation” – binding it to more ‘narrative realism’. Kasfir speaks of a ‘Leninist-derived position’ of artists being ‘cultural workers’, “actively resisting an oppressive regime” (Kasfir, 1999:155).

¹²³ She speaks of a “conflation of representation and art” and a ‘vociferous’ intrusion of politics into the cultural arena. Arnold thinks of art as a liberating force for artists, taking them beyond limitations imposed by their own experiences - art-making therefore involving interpretations of life and nature by means of engaging in experiences with imagination. Arnold challenges the idea that an artist is able to “represent (or speak for) “the other” (Arnold, 1999:37).

in view of representation in South Africa (Gwinsa, 1999:141)¹²⁴. Sachs, in turn, champions total artistic and creative freedom (Sachs in Atkinson and Breitz, 1999:221). Richards addresses somewhat venomously the issue of a ‘new’ South Africa being exported as a cultural commodity in fulfilment of international market demands (Richards in Atkinson and Breitz, 1999:167)¹²⁵.

2.6 Trans-Cultural Understanding

In viewing ‘acculturation’ as reciprocal, an influence of one to another culture irrespective of dominance, art is seen in terms of fostering trans-cultural understanding and change (de Jager, 1973:17 ; Manaka, 1987:11¹²⁶ and Zondi, 1974). In the years immediately prior to the severe political unrest of 1976, the media coverage of Zondi’s one-man exhibition in Pretoria focuses on trans-cultural understanding and bridge-building.

Personal written communication between Zondi and his friend and foremost patron, Wolfgang Bodenstein, reveal their strong awareness and articulation of political intransigence as it affected their lives in apartheid South Africa. Given the intensity of the interface between the ‘acculturated’ Black artist and a white man who expressed his ‘Africanness’, I have explored more closely Bodenstein’s world view as expressed in his lecture *The Role of Human Care as Catalyst in Trans-Cultural Communication* (Bodenstein, 1977), focusing as it does on humanitarian issues related to understanding amongst people of differing cultural traditions. As he used Teilhard de Chardin as his foremost source in view, of a philosophical discourse related to pain and hope, I have made references to Jones’ investigation of Teilhard’s work (Jones, 1975).

Bodenstein is described as “strongly supportive of black artists” (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:17) during his time as a young medical doctor at the Ceza hospital in Natal, where he developed ideas for an art centre (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:231). Schlosser speaks of

¹²⁴ In his discourse related to legitimisation of representation, Gwinsa holds it to be mandatory for self-definition to be linked to past histories and politics, citing historical disempowerment strategies in effecting inequality (Gwinsa, 1999:141). He perceives that speaking on behalf of “is to declare a position of authority” (Gwinsa, 1999:143).

¹²⁵ “Cultural ‘Africa’ is in demand, and ‘liberated’ South Africa has become a significant site for the scramble to export a (re)nascent cultural ‘Africa’ to international markets (Richards in Atkinson and Breitz, 1999:167).

¹²⁶ Manaka sees ‘acculturation’ as “a voluntary fusion of two cultures without any force or any form of domination determining the fusion” (Manaka, 1987:11).

Bodenstein's interest and involvement in helping aspiring artists in KwaZulu-Natal as early as the late 1950s (Schlosser, 1975:39 and Nieser, 2003a) Bodenstein is cited in connection with interpretations of Laduma Madela's work (Hobbs and Rankin, 2003:43) revealed also in his own publication (Bodenstein and Raum, 1960:166ff)¹²⁷.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the colonial enterprise which had determined cultural location, the literature on South African art, until the last quarter of the twentieth century, laid an emphasis on European art-making traditions.

Definitions and categorisation of art versus 'craft' were linked to ethnographic and anthropological investigations. Based on hegemonic perceptions, such differentiation was misappropriated for propagandistic agendas in public institutions in South Africa, determining the content of exhibitions which largely excluded the work of black artists from the art world.

The authors of publications which begin to address the dearth of literature on the art of black South Africans from the 1970s (e.g. de Jager, 1973) justify their separate categorisation of the work of black and white artists *inter alia* in view of the history of discrimination as it also affected art education in the country. In endeavouring to re-write art history in South Africa, publications from the 1980s review the creativity of black artists, as parameters of art-making were broadened and fully embraced expressiveness in material culture.

Rankin provides some insight into the neglect of writing on sculpture in particular (Rankin, 1987:148ff). Besides de Jager's publications of 1973 and 1992, exhibition catalogues included the work of black sculptors e.g. *The Neglected Tradition* (1988), *Images of Wood* (1989) or *Land and Lives* (1997). While a number of biographical publications began to focus on individual black artists working in two dimensional media, also in conjunction with exhibitions, e.g. Gerard Bhengu (1995) or George Pemba (1996), there is none which devotes an entire text to a black South African sculptor.

¹²⁷Bodenstein supplied art materials to Laduma Madela, philosopher, lightning doctor and prophet of the creator-god *Mvelinqangi* (Nieser,2003a).

A continued concern with ideological and emotional concerns related to policies of segregation during the apartheid era and its aftermath appear to continue affect art-making and the evaluation criteria for art to this day (Arnold, 2002:55,56).

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