



**NORIA
MABASA**
SHAPING
DREAMS

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Noria Mabasa, ndi muvenda o bebelwaho muvhunduni wa Xigalo ngei Giyani kha vunḁu la Limpopo nga 1938. Nda tea uya White City ngei Soweto (Gauteng) u lela vhana vha khaladzi-anga, Simon. Nda vhona ndi songo dzula zwavhuḁi ha khaladzi anga. Tshinwe tshe tsha ntsheḁusa ndi musi ndi tshi vhudza Simon khaladzi-anga nga ha muḁoro wo ḁaho luna nga u tevhekana musi khotsi-anga vho ri siaho fhano shangoni nga 1950 vha tshiri ndi ise maḁi tshaloni tshavho. Nga itsho tshifhinga ndi kho ofha u isa maḁi ngauri vho vha vho no ḁi ri sia.

Noria Mabasa, I am a Venda born in 1938 in Xigalo village, located in Giyani, Limpopo. I relocated to White City, Soweto, in Gauteng to be a nanny for my brother, Simon. My stay there was not pleasant. I had one dream which scared me the most, when my late father, who passed away in 1950, was asking me to bring water to his grave. It occurred four times in a row.

PREVIOUS PAGE:

Self-portrait

2019–20

Clay

24 x 14 x 28 cm

Muñwe wa muzwala o vha a tshi ñi ña u dala hanefho ha khaladzi-anga. Nda mbo ñi mu vhudza uri fhano athi khou ña nahone ndi to tshimbila u ya kerekeni. Nda pfuluwa afho ha khaladzi-anga nda ya u dzula Alexandra ngei Soweto na khotsi-anga a vhongo tsha ña miñoroni yanganga murahu ha u pfuluwa.

I told my brother Simon about the dream, and he didn't entertain it. On another hand, I am scared to follow the instructions from this dream that I had. One of my cousins used to visit my brother, and one day I told him that I am not eating well here and that I walk a long distance to church. I then relocated to Alexandra, Soweto, and I didn't dream of my father anymore.

Ndo dzula tshifhinga tshilapfu Alexandra u swika ndi tshi malwa. Ndo mbo qi malwa nga Vho-Mabasa vha re Mutsonga. Nda mbo qi dzhia tsho ya u humela hayani he nda aluwa ndi tshi lisa mbudzi na kholomo Limpopo ngauri ndo vha ndi sa tsha takalela u dzula Gauteng. Vho-Mabasa vhovha vha sakho tikedza mumbulo wanga ngauri muṭa woṭhe wa havho vovha u tshikhuwani. Nda mbo qi pfulutshela Venḁa he ra fhaṭa hone nga 1965. Nga wonowo ṛwaha nda thoma u lwala lwa tshifhinga tshilapfu he Vho-Mabasa vha thoma u gungula uri ndi kale vha khou ṛṭhogomela ndi sa fholi. Vho-Mabasa vho vha vha tshi kundelwa na u to bika lambadza uri ndi ḁe. Nda mbo qi ṛwalela vhirifhi khaladzi-anga wa ngei Vuwani kha bvunḁu ḁa Limpopo nga nyimele yanga. Khaladzi-anga vho mbo qiḁa vha ndzhia na vhana vvhvhili nda pfulutshela Vuwani. Nda isa phanḁa na u lwala ndi henengei. Nga itshi tshifhinga a hunu muthu ane a khou nnḁa na vhana vvhvhili.

I stayed in Alexandra for a long time until I got married to Mr. Mabasa, who is from the Tsonga tribe. I then decided that I no longer want to stay in Gauteng any more. I want to relocate to Venda, in Limpopo, where I grew up taking care of the livestock. My husband insisted that we stay in Gauteng because his family was based there. But in the end, he agreed to relocate and we got a yard and the house was built. By 1965, I was deadly sick and my husband couldn't even fix a simple soft porridge for me to eat. He started to complain that I have been sick for a long time and I am not getting any better. I then wrote a letter to my brother, who stays in Vuwani, Limpopo, about the living conditions I am facing here in Alexandra. He came and took me, along with my two children, to stay with him in Vuwani. The sickness continues while I am there and I don't have anyone to support me and the children.

Vho-Mabasa vho tuwa vhayo mala vhanwe vhafumakadzi vhavhili. Khaladzi-dzanga ndi vhone vhe vhavha vha tshi mpfelavhutungu vha tshi nea tshelede tshidzumbeni vhalivho vhangha vha sa zwi divhi. Nda mbo di vhamba maano, nda thoma u humbela masipho kha vhatu vthane vha tomba halwa uri ndi kone u la na vhana. Hovho ha vha vhutshilo hanga vhuswa. Vhatombi vha halwa musi vha na masipho vha do vhidzelela nda ruma Joyce uri a yo dzhia ri bike ri le vhutshilo vhuye phanda.

Zwenezwo ndi kho lwala hu kho soko da muñwe mukegulu miḷoroni yanga. Tshifhinga tshoṭhe, hungavha masiari kana nga madekwana ndi tshi ri ndi eḍele vha mbo diḍa miḷoroni. L̄iñwe ḍuvha ndi dovha hafhu u ḷora ndi na khotsi-anga vha tshi mbudzisa uri, “ndi ngani u kho hana lupfumo lune mukegulu wa mapele a khou ṅea?”. Kha muḷoro rovha ri mulamboni khotsi-anga vho dzula kha tombo. Vhori u fhedza u amba nda vha rufalela, vha mbo di doba ṭhanga vha nthwa ngayo kha shaḍa nda thoma u tetemela lushushaho. Nga khathihi fhedzi nda mbo di karuwa fhedzi u tetemela ha sa ime lwa vhege yoṭhe na u amba ndo vha ndi sa koni. Hori I tshi

By then, Mr. Mabasa already has two other women he married. My brothers showed sympathy for me and supported me financially behind my sisters-in-law. I had a plan to ask those who brew traditional beer to give me the sorghum malt residue. That was my new life. There were times that traditional beer brewers will call me when they have sorghum malt residue and I will send Joyce to go and collect some, so that I can cook it as porridge and eat it with my children.

While I was still sick, I started to dream about this particular old woman for few times. Then the other day I had a dream of my late father again asking me why am I refusing the wealth that the old woman with leprosy is giving me. In a dream, I was in the river and he was sitting on the stone. Once he finished talking, I looked away and he picked a reed beside the river and started to poke my shoulder with it and I started to shiver terribly. Immediately I woke up from the dream, however, I continued to shiver for the whole week and I couldn't speak either. The following Friday evening my father came back in a dream and said, “Wake up now and go to Mutheiwana for the ancestral worship.” My child suggested we visit the clinic and the nurse said, “I am not familiar with this sickness.” I was given only the sleeping tablets which I nearly slept on the street. We arrived home. I am still shivering and I still can't speak.

ri Lavhufanu khotsi-anga vha mbo di da muloroni vhari, “Vuwa zwino uye ha Vho- Mutheiwana vha u phasele”. Nwana-anga ari kha ri ye kiliniki. Ri tshi swika muongi ari ene hovhu vhulwadze ha vhu divhi. A nea philisi dza uri ndi kone u edela. Zwe nda fhedza ndi tshi nga ndi nga edela na tshitaratani fhedzi ra swika hayani. U tetemela a hu kho ima na u amba zwi kho konḁa. Vhusiku honoho, Joyce ari “kha ri ye ha Vho-Ramudumo vha re nanga ya tshirema”. Vho maine vha ita zwine vha ita vhari ndi ḁo amba fhedzi u amba zwa bala. Vhusiku honoho vhuthihi ra reila ra livha kerekeni ya tshigubu u ḁoḁa thuso fhedzi zwa bala.

The same night, Joyce suggested that we visit Mr. Ramudumo, a traditional healer. He also didn't give us touchable treatment. He just said I will speak afterwards, but to my surprise I still couldn't speak. We also went to Apostle Church, seeking help, mind you... I can't speak, so Joyce is speaking on my behalf. For the whole night, we were going up and down seeking help. My late father came back again in my dream and instructed me to visit my sister born to one of my father's wives.

Nga Mugivhela khotsi-anga vha vhuya habe muḵoroni vhari kha ndi ye ha mukomana wanga muḵwe wa ḵwana wa mufumakadzi wa khotsi-anga we ra fhedza miḵwaha mivhili ri sa ambi roḵhe. Khotsi-anga vho vha vho mala vhafumakadzi vha sumbe na vhana ro vḵla vhukuma. Nda thoma u vḵilaela uri ndi ḵo ambisa hani na mukomana wanga sa izwi ndi sa kho kona u amba zwa zwino. Ndi tshi swika muḵini wa mukomana wanga zwe zwa mangadza ndi uri tshi to fhira miri ndo livha muḵani ndi thoma uri “Aa!” lu swikaho luraru. Mukomana wanga ari o pfa upfi ndi kho lwala na uri ndi kho amba uri vha buba vha songo ḵohola. Nḵe nda landula izwo zwine mukomana wanga a kho amba. Nda ri nḵe ndo ruḵwa nga khotsi-anga uri ndiḵe fhano.

We have not been talking for almost two years because of some rumours. My father had seven wives and many children. I was wondering how am I going to communicate with her since I lost my speech. Once I arrived at her homestead what surprised me was while I was passing some trees walking toward her house I started to greet saying “Hello!” three times. My sister told me that she heard that I am sick and the reason behind this sickness is because she bewitched me. I told her that was not true I was not talking bad about her. I have been sent by our late father to come and visit her. We then visited the place we perform ancestral worship using water and tobacco, and she performed the ritual on my behalf.

Ra mbo ði ðuwa ra yo phasa hune ra phasela hone havha u fhola hanga. U bva afho nda mbo ði ruma vhana uri vhaye mulamboni vha yo gwa bvumba. Nda mbo ði vhasa mulilo na zwenezwo. Fhedzi ndo vha ndi na ðhoni dza u vhumba vhathu vhapfufhi ndi kho shumisa bvumba zwe nda vhona muḽoroni fhedzi ndo vha ndi tshi ofha uri nda sa vhumba ndi ḽo dovha u lwala hafhu. Nda vhumba na u fhisa avho vhathu vhapfufhi vha vhanzhi na vhathu vha ḽiḽa vha tshi vhona vha kho sumbedza u zwi takalela. Zwa u vhumba nga bvumba zwo thoma nga ḽwaha wa 1965.

Immediately the shivering stopped and I started to speak well. After the ritual at once, I sent the children to go to the river and dig some clay for me. I started the fire. On the other hand, I am shy to create little people using clay. The pictures I saw in a dream. However, I was also scared that I might fall sick again if I don't do this. However, I created a lot of them while burning them in fire and it attracted people. That was the year 1965.

Na nge mutakalo wa vha u kho vhuya tshothe zwino. Nga 1966 ndo mbo qi pfa dziñwe khofhe dzine ndo tori dzhambu zwiṭuku nda vhona tshifanyiso tsha danda lire mulamboni nda mbo qi karuwa na zwenezwo nda livha mulamboni. Nda mbo qi wana vhafumakadzi vhavhili hanengei vha khou ṭamba. Ndi hezwi ndi tshi vha humbela saha uri ndi reme danda I lo. Ndo shumisa mbaḡo u ola tshifanyiso tshanga tsha u thoma sa izwi ndo vha ndi sina tshedzela. Ubva zwenezwo nda isa phanḡa na u vhumba na u vhaḡa zwifanyiso. Ahuna muthu we a pfundzela u vhumba na u vhaḡa zwifanyiso. Ndi to ḡora tshifanyiso nda vuwa nda mbo qi thoma u vhaḡa kana nda vhumba.

I was having a quick nap and I saw a piece of wood in the river and immediately I woke up. I went to the river and found two women bathing. I asked for the handsaw to cut the wood, since I didn't have anything with me. I didn't have a chisel. Then, I used an axe to craft my first sculpture. No one taught me how to do all this. I get my inspiration from my dreams.

Edited transcript of a conversation between Tale Motsepe and Noria Mabasa, which took place at NIROX on the opening of the first installment of Noria Mabasa: Shaping Dreams (28 May 2022). Translated and transcribed by Mukhethwa Patience.



PART I

Nirox Residency Studio

23 May – 6 June 2022



PREVIOUS PAGE:

***People, they
don't listen***

2008

Muhuwa and hide
168 x 105 x 102 cm









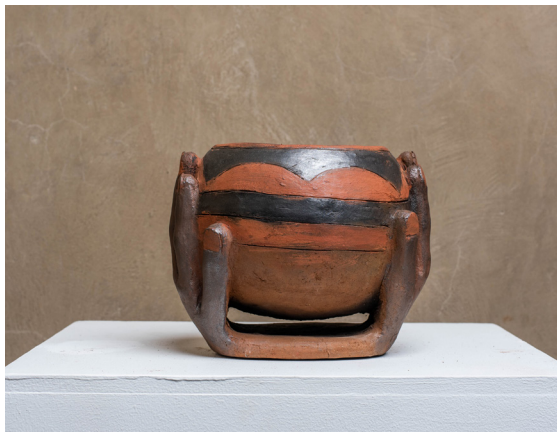




Bird sculpture
2020
Muvumela
48 x 60 x 94 cm



Untitled
(champion's cup)
2021
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
13 x 10.5 x 23.5 cm



Dzhomela I
2022
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
24 (d) x 23 cm



NEXT PAGE:

Dzhomela II
2022
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
23 (d) x 22.5 cm

Dzhomela III
2022
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
21,5 (d) x 16.5 cm





ABOVE (LEFT):

Shangaan girl
2022
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
20 x 22 x 19 cm



ABOVE (RIGHT):

Venda girl
2022
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
18 x 22 x 19 cm

NEXT PAGE:

Woman planting flowers
2011
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
33 x 42 x 65 cm





Man who is thinking

2018

Munianiani

15 x 24 x 46 cm



Fight for me
2005
Mtondo
20 x 20 x 29 cm



ABOVE:

Untitled (passed out)

2016

Clay

50 x 32 x 21 cm

NEXT PAGE:

Miriam

2019–20

Clay, pemba, and pombo

17 x 11 x 52 cm





Mother and daughter

2022

Ironwood

35 x 35 x 88 cm



Mudambi

2022

Vicks

15 x 18 x 74 cm



***Nelson Mandela
and Desmond Tutu***
2019-20
Clay
28 x 17 x 34 cm



NEXT PAGE:

Nelson Mandela
2019–20
Clay
20 x 16 x 32 cm

Old man
(thinking about his pension fund)
2019–20
Clay
11 x 11 x 30 cm





ABOVE:

Relaxing woman

2022

Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo

41 x 25 x 21 cm

NEXT PAGE:

Showing respect

2022

Mtondo

32 x 66 x 100 cm





ABOVE (LEFT):

Standing woman

2022

Mususu

16 x 21 x 145 cm



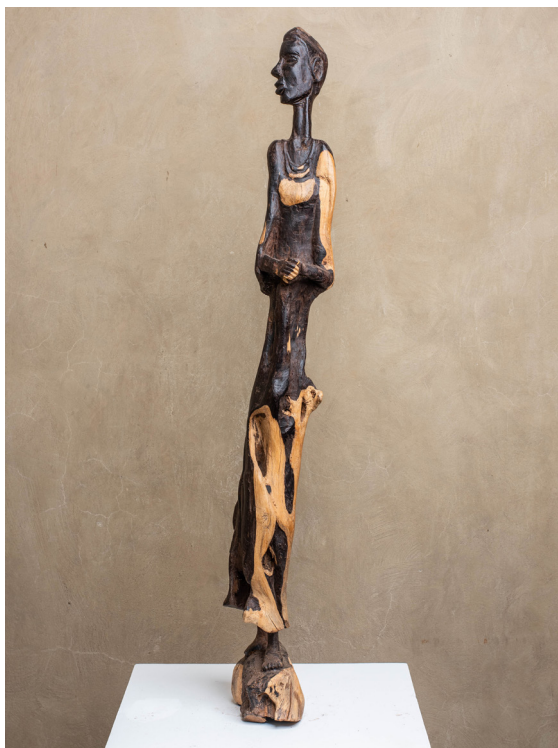
ABOVE (RIGHT):

Thinking woman

2020

Vicks

20 x 16 x 147 cm



ABOVE:

Untitled (asking questions)

2020

Zebra wood
8 x 20 x 63 cm

NEXT PAGE:

Suffering from disease

2020

Zebra wood
41 x 18 x 152 cm





Tsanwani
2004
Clay
30 x 35 x 53 cm



ABOVE:

**Woman
and baby**

2019-20

Clay

13.5 x 12 x 35 cm

NEXT PAGE:

**Untitled (mother and
daughter, lost)**

2019-20

Clay

15 x 14 x 32.5 cm







PREVIOUS PAGE:

Untitled (two birds and a rat)

2021

Clay, luvhundi,

and phomo

35 x 29 x 51 cm

ABOVE:

***Untitled
(Lion and impala)***

2021

Clay

28 x 23 x 22 cm



ABOVE:

***Dog sleeping
under the tree***

2022

Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo

38 x 26 x 18 cm

NEXT PAGE:

***Woman carrying
broom***

2018

Mtondo

10 x 10 x 50.5 cm





*Woman holding
a calabash*
2022
Mutango
42 x 23 x 185 cm

The Exploded View

A brief reflection on curatorial
processes and pitfalls

Sven Christian

Noria Mabasa has been making art since the 1960s, yet public knowledge of her work is still very limited, framed by a handful of people who sought to revise the exclusionary nature of South Africa's institutions in the mid-to-late 1980s and integrate her work into the commercial sphere.

In 1985, when her art was included in the exhibition *Tributaries*, it was categorised as 'rural transitional,' a framework that has a lasting impact on the reception of her work (Mdluli 2015, 60). Unable to grasp the full complexity of her practice, yet eager to find a home for it within the canon of South African art, the term 'transitional' applied to works that did not fit neatly into pre-existing categories such as 'traditional' or 'modern' (2015, 60), but were thought to occupy a liminal zone between the two. Similarly, the term 'rural' — which is often associated with tradition (and therefore, the past) — presented a romanticised view of her work, untainted by the world at large or the passage of time.

Framed through a Eurocentric lens, such categories have led to a variety of misconceptions. Amongst these is the understanding that she began making clay figures for the Domba initiation ceremonies, as opposed to making works that were later used in them, and that she began carving in wood because of Nelson Mukhuba, implying that the impetus came from him rather than of her own fruition, thus undermining her subversive decision to carve in a medium that had been the exclusive domain of men (Klopper 2017).

Other readings tend to emphasise the artist's ethnicity and the mythological associations of her practice at the expense of her everyday lived experience. Offering an alternative to the mythological place of crocodiles in Mabasa's work, for example, Sandra Klopper retells the story of how the artist's granddaughter narrowly escaped the clutches of a large crocodile, and how she was witness to a man being pulled under by another, surfacing moments later while 'trapped in the reptile's jaws' (2017, 125). Such stories open up a complex world of different interpretations that help to ground readings of the artist's practice in the everyday. At the same time, it is clear that we do not understand much about the place of dreams and the role of the ancestors in her work.

To this end, the initial installment of *Noria Mabasa: Shaping Dreams* — held in NIROX's Residency Studio during the time of her residency (23 May – 6 June 2022) — asked what assumptions we bring to the work of Noria Mabasa, questioning the extent to which our knowledge is informed by things that have little to do with the artist.

Its title acknowledges the artist's dreams as a source of inspiration, emphasising her hand in the work's making, her role as a mentor, and her determination to carve out a place for herself in an otherwise hostile world. At the same time, it asks that we question our own myth-making processes, taking the opportunity provided by her residency to talk directly with the artist in order

to enable a deeper and varied conversation with her practice.

Held at the Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture, the second iteration has, in some sense, built on from the various conversations that were had. Its construction reflects some of the challenges that emerged from the initial show, in particular the various ways in which we narrate or tell the story of artworks through curatorial conventions and archival practices that are by-and-large taken for granted in the (Western) art world.

Two moments stand out for me in this regard. The first occurred whilst visiting the artist's home and studio in Tshino, Limpopo – the Vhutshila Arts and Crafts Centre. Having selected works for the exhibition, it came time to gather details related to each – titles, medium, dimensions, and so on. When pressed for titles of her work, however, Mam Noria often opted for the anecdotal, preferring to tell lengthy stories about each work. Frustrated by my insistence on titles, she would often resort to saying things like, "Can't you see? That's a mother and child."

What became apparent is how deeply ingrained the process of cataloguing works is. It reminded me of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's book, *Silencing the Past* (1995), in particular his writing about how history often arrives prepackaged, cleansed of the messiness of its 'professional character' so as to accommodate 'travel agents, airlines, politicians, the media, or the states, who sell it in prepackaged forms by which the public has come to expect

history to present itself for immediate consumption' (1995: 113).

At the time of the initial exhibition, it had felt wrong to distill Mam Noria's anecdotes into bite-size titles, something which I raised with Nontobeko Ntombela during a public discussion on the day of the opening in May. Her suggestion was quite simple: include the whole anecdote.

Taking Ntombela's lead, the next question was how to go about doing that. Was it a case of simply recording and transcribing what was said? Should the anecdotes be translated into English or left in their original form? Although all of these recordings were translated, the eventual decision was to include only some of the English translations; an attempt to reverse the logic of monolingualism; to foreground the possibility that not everything can be easily understood and consumed; to emphasise that meaningful engagement is as much about the acknowledgement of not being able to understand as it is its inverse; to acknowledge that which gets lost in translation; and to foreground the fact that, through cultural difference, there is much that I and many others who will attend the show simply cannot or will not understand.

Importantly, the absence of English translations also provides an honest reflection on the power dynamics involved throughout the process of putting these exhibitions together, and Mam Noria's insistence that everything be done on her terms.

The second moment occurred on the morning of her exhibition opening in May. I can't recall the exact nature of my question. I think I had asked if she would be willing to talk about her work. Her response was, 'But it's not me.' The implication was that she does not view herself as the author of her work, but rather as a conduit for the ancestors – a direct challenge to the idea of authorship and the prevailing celebration of the artist-genius.

Such encounters with Mam Noria remind me of something that Olu Oguibe said during in a recent webinar, titled "The Question of 'Africanness' and the Expanded Field of Sculpture," namely that:

The encounter between African art and European art, especially at the end of the nineteenth and the turn of the twentieth centuries, stripped the latter of its pretentious and often misinformed allusions to classical Greek and Roman art... [and] liberated European and eventually all modern and contemporary artists globally, and gave them license, as it were, to think of art and form and colour and concept in entirely new ways and without inhibition or limitations on the imagination.

Noria Mabasa's preference for story-telling over titling, her refusal to view herself as the sole creator of her work, or to produce work that can be easily classified and contained, possesses a liberatory potential that extends beyond the practice

of art making to the curatorial, and the ways in which to communicate, document, and archive our cultural histories.

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- Michel-Rolph Trouillot. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Olu Oguibe, 2022. "The Question of 'Africanness and the Expanded Field of Sculpture.'" Webinar, hosted by the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA), The African Centre for the Study of the United States, University of the Witwatersrand (ACSUS-Wits), The African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of Pretoria (ACSUS-UP), and the Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture at NIROX Sculpture Park (24 September 2022).



PART II

The Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture

22 October – 20 November 2022







Vhoholefali a si ha zwino. Kale na kale vhuholefali vho vha vhu hone. Muthu ho vha a tshi ɔi lwala, a tumulwa muraɔo sa cancer na vhulwadze ha swigiri. Kaleni ro vha ri sa ɔivhi nga malwadze-aya uya nga madzina . Musalauno ho ɔalesa vhulwadze ha swigiri. Hovha hu tshivha na ts ilonda tshine tsha sa fhole hune muthu a swika hune muraɔo wonowo wo bvaho tshilonda wa fhedza wo tumulwa.

Disability is not a modern thing. Even in the olden days disability was common, however, we didn't know these diseases by name. A person might get sick with cancer or diabetes which mostly leads to amputation. In the olden days, we didn't know more about these diseases or their names. There are sores which cannot be treated and the only treatment is to amputate that body part with the sore.



Hafha muthu u ɔakani u l ho livha-livha u khou vhidzelela u khou ɔoɔa maɔi.



Tshifanyiso itshi
tsho vhadwa nga
tshifhinga tsha
Covid-19. Hoyu
mulwadze u kho
lwala Covid-19
ndi ngazwo o
qela fhasi.



2010, Muzare, 290 x 150 x 120 cm.

Itshi tshifanyiso ndo tshi vhona muḽoroni. Tsinde ḽo shumiswaho ndi ḽa muhuyu ḽe ḽa vha ḽo hulesa, ḽo kokozwa nga maḽereḽere mavhili u bva ḽakani. Ho vha hu maḽuvha ndi sa ḽori. Nda mbo ḽi vhudza Joyce uri ndi maḽuvha ndi sa ḽori kana u vhona tshithu ndi vho thoma u reḽwe nga ḽhoho. Joyce na khaladzi-awe ḽwana wa mukomana wanga vha ri kha ḽḽe “mmane vha

I saw this sculpture¹ in a dream. The wood used was from a fig tree which was towed from the field by two tractors because of its size. It has been days without dreaming or having visions and now I am starting to have a continuous headache. I even told Joyce and my niece that I am having continuous headaches lately. They said to me, ‘You will

1. Made in 2010, the sculpture referred to was once one large work, later cut into five sections, for practical reasons. These sections are reflected on from pages 57 – 61.



do lora.” Duvha lenelo mathabama nga iri ya vhuṭanu, ndi kho pfa ndo neta nda mbo ḡi dzula kha sofa ndiri ndi awele zwiṭuku. A thi anzeli u awela ndi na tshikha. Li tshi kovhela ndi thoma nga u bvula zwiambaro zwa tshikha nda ṭamba nda kona-ha u awela. Nda ri ndi awele zwiṭuku ndi hezwi hu tshi ḡa tshifanyiso itshi muḷoroni. Na zwenezwo nda mbo ḡi karuwa nda dzhia tshedzela nda thoma u edzisa tshi tshifanyiso tshe nda vhona muḷoroni nga uri musi u tshi shuma nga miḷoro wa vhona tshifanyiso u tea u thoma u vhaḡa na zwenezwo. Muthu o waniwa bulasini nga muvhuru na muthusi wawe vhe vhavha vha khou tshimbila hanefho. Nga khathihi fhedzi vha mbo ḡi posa u yo muthu o wanalaho bulasini ngomu dangani ḡa ndau. Nda u dza fhedza nga uyo muthu. Luvhone lwo duga vhusiku hoṭhe ndi kati na tshifanyiso itshi.

dream aunty.’ That same day, during the sunset around 5PM, I was feeling tired while I was walking and I decided to rest a bit on a couch. Usually, I freshen up and change my dirty working clothes before resting, but that day I rested wearing my working clothes. While taking a quick nap I saw a picture in a dream and suddenly I woke up and picked up my point chisel and started to craft. These things of getting inspiration from the dream – once I have a dream or vision I must immediately start to sculpt what I see. The picture I saw was of a man found on a farm and thrown in a lion cage by the Afrikaans farmer and his assistant. The man ended up being eaten by the lions. The lights were on the whole night while sculpting this piece.

PREVIOUS PAGE:

2010
Muzare
300 x 170 x 70 cm.





PREVIOUS PAGE:

2010
Muzare
220 x 170 x 120 cm

ABOVE (LEFT):

2010
Muzare
170 x 115 x 76 cm

ABOVE (RIGHT):

2010
Muzare
129 x 90 x 39 cm



Tshifanyiso itshi tsho
vhaḡwa nga tshifhinga tsha
Covid-19. Hoyu mulwadze
u kho lwala Covid-19 ndi
ngazwo o eḡela fhasi.

NEXT PAGE:

2010
Muhuwu
95 x 33 x 16 cm

2022
Oak
110 x 57 x 50 cm





Vhoholefali a si ha zwino. Kale na kale vhuholefali vho vha vhu hone. Muthu ho vha a tshi qi lwala, a tumulwa muraḁo sa cancer na vhulwadze ha swigiri. Kaleni ro vha ri sa ḁivhi nga malwadze-aya uya nga madzina . Musalauno ho ḁalesa vhulwadze ha swigiri. Hovha hu tshivha na tshilonda tshine tsha sa fhole hune muthu a swika hune muraḁo wonowo wo bvaho tshilonda wa fhedza wo tumulwa.

Disability is not a modern thing. Even in the olden days disability was common, however, we didn't know these diseases by name. A person might get sick with cancer or diabetes which mostly leads to amputation. In the olden days, we didn't know more about these diseases or their names. There are sores which cannot be treated and the only treatment is to amputate that body part with the sore.

PREVIOUS PAGE:

2002
Muonze
47 x 22 x 6 cm



Ndi mufumakadzi ane a khou tambula. Vhana vha shavha vhabebi. Mufumakadzi u kho țanzwa nguvho, hatsha kona o neta. Mufumakadzi muhulwane u ȝo shuma mishumo yoȝhe e eȝhe zwine zwa kula nungo ngeno munna wawe o shavhela bvunȝuni ȝa Gauteng.



This resembles a woman who is suffering. Children are afraid of their parents. This woman is washing the blanket and she is tired. The wife does all the house chores, alone, which is tiring, while the husband fled to Gauteng.

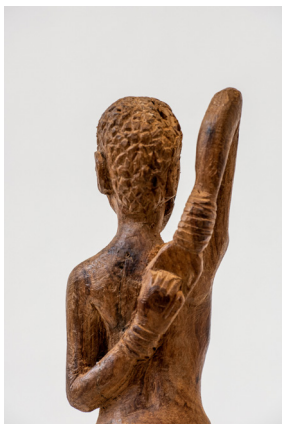
2018
Munianiani
35 x 24 x 8 cm



2002
Zebra
21 x 50 x 7 cm



Hedzi ndi ngoma dza Vhavaṅḁa. Hafha ndi ndaṅiso musi wa khomba. Khomba u dzuzwa nga u to rali. Musi musidzana a sathu u ya ngomani ana swili vha mu ṅea ndaṅiso yo raliho. Hafha u vha a sina muthu ṅe a ḁo mu imelela kana umu lwela ngauri huvha ho ḁala vhasidzana na vhakegulu. Ahuna zwine a ḁo ita, u ḁo tea u takuwa a ite izwo zwire afho.



This is during the Venda initiation school for maidens. It resembles the punishment which the stubborn maiden gets. At this event, no one can defend or protect her, other than to sit like this sculpture. Such events are crowded with maidens and elderly women, especially grandmothers.

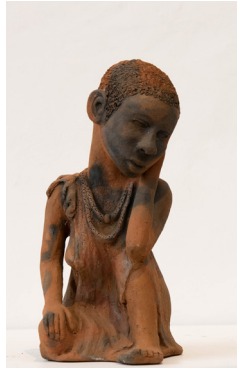
2018
Mtondo
29 x 11 x 10 cm



Hafha muthu u çakani
u kho livha-livha u
kho vhidzelela u khou
toða maði.

PREVIOUS PAGE:

2017
Clay
30 x 12 x 15 cm



2004
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
46 x 23 x 29 cm



2012
Muhuwu
55 x 42 x 28 cm



2018
Clay and phomo
43 x 19 x 13 cm



2010
Mtondo
20 x 20 x 15 cm



Hoyu u khou rabela o ãi funga.

2015
Clay
23 x 21 x 12 cm



Hoyu muthu o awela.

2015
Clay
15 x 14 x 10 cm



2022
Vicks
63 x 13 x 14 cm



2022
Muhuwu
80 x 18 x 15 cm



2022
Oak
182 x 48 x 26 cm



2018
Mtondo
28 x 13 x 16 cm



2020
Clay, luvhundi,
and phomo
29 x 38 (d) cm

Joyce Mabasa

The artworks on the following pages were made by Joyce Mabasa, Mam Noria's daughter. Joyce Mabasa's idiosyncratic approach is reflected through the use of small bulbous shapes that protrude from her pots, and the way she bends and moulds the surfaces of the clay prior to firing.



Joyce Mabasa
2010
Clay and phomo
37 x 35 (d) cm



Joyce Mabasa
2010
Clay and phomo
55 x 35 (d) cm



Joyce Mabasa

Clay pot

2005

Clay, luvhundi, and phomo

39 (d) x 36 cm



ABOVE:

Joyce Mabasa

Clay pot

2017

Clay, luvhundi, and phomo
25 (d) x 28 cm

NEXT PAGE:

Joyce Mabasa

Fish pot

2001

Clay, luvhundi, and phomo
67 x 40 x 73 cm



Dreaming Tree

Ashraf Jamal

Noria Mabasa understands creation, making art with clay and wood, as the outcome of dreaming. As such, her work is informed by a realm that is profoundly unintelligible, unless, like Sigmund Freud or Jacques Lacan, one believes that dreams, the unconscious, possess a structure. As Freud problematically pronounced, 'The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind.' I am sceptical. The desire for structure, intelligible form, reason, is neither 'royal' nor inherently well founded.

The current collapse of reason, the Enlightenment and its democratic scaffolding, is a reminder that one cannot structure the unconscious. That said, it is also unsurprising that we should seek to reassert this folly. As Pankaj Mishra notes, 'Well-worn pairs of rhetorical opposites, often corresponding to the bitter divisions in our societies, have once again been put to work: progressive vs. reactionary, open vs. closed, liberalism vs. fascism, rational vs. irrational.' However, Mishra resumes, 'as a polarised intellectual history plays catch-up with fast moving events that it failed to anticipate, it is hard to avoid the suspicion that our search for rational political explanations for the current disorder is doomed.'

Systems fail us. In this case, they are built on a binary foundation that exclude far more than they

include. To attempt to structure the unconscious is vanity – worse, hubris, which in Greek tragedy leads to psychic and social destruction. My point? That we tread carefully, compassionately, tenderly, when presented by the thoughts and feelings of an artist wholly unconcerned with moral intention. Noria Mabasa makes no claim on behalf of her art, other than its integral social consistency, its connection to a greater inscrutable world. It is true that myth – acculturation, socialisation, history, faith – assumes an abiding role. Myth holds an integral presence in the making of a given artwork, but to assume that presence as something intelligibly sentient is to mistake the elemental and noumenal role in Mabasa's creative world.

African art, past and modern, is typically thought to emanate from some primal state, some unconscious realm, which the West – the self-assigned cradle of Reason – has deemed beyond the pale, beyond reckoning. This disavowal, by the likes of Chinua Achebe – specifically with regard to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – was considered unconscionable because he assumed that Africa must possess a Reason for Being. My point, however, is that it is precisely Europe's underdevelopment of Africa – its disregard for the myths which founded its creative practices – that has ironically proved a boon. Why? Because, by refusing Africa a

Right to Reason, the West admitted Africa's criticality as its unstructured unconscious, its radical Other.

Now, given Pankaj Mishra's realisation in *Age of Anger* that Reason is 'doomed,' it behoves us to reconsider Africa's neglected tradition – those artists, like Noria Mabasa, who are rarely considered and who embody an art that refuses, resists, or simply ignores the desire to be seen and understood, or worse, misunderstood, typically as a curiosity, a curio, a product of a craft, a thing of clay or wood acquired at a drive-by – in passing. Again, this diminution proves a strength, because yet another Western folly – the distinction between high and low art – has literally fallen by the wayside. Despite a neo-fascistic, neurotic, and hysterical return to absolutes, we have become increasingly heterodox. This newfound sensibility is well positioned to recognise the deceptive innocence and instinctual strength of Noria Mabasa's art.

At an exhibition at the Norval Foundation in Cape Town – *When Rain Clouds Gather: Black Women Artists, 1940-2000*, curated by Nontobeko Ntombela and Portia Malatjie – I was especially struck by two vividly different articulations in Mabasa's art, between her use of clay and wood, and their markedly different economies. Her works in clay were emphatically workings of paired and singular hands; figures

cupped, contained, exclamatory, incisive, alarmingly enunciative – declarative. These works are the curiosities, the curios, exercises in dicta and pronouncement. An archetypal pair, in this regard, are her *South African Policemen* (1987), made from enamel paint on fired clay. The figures are black and white. They are observed by the artist – seen. But what is she seeing? Serfs of power, certainly. Agents of apartheid. But something far more significant is also constitutive – an alarmingly sweet naivete, even innocence. This is evident in their miniature scale, the figures' upstanding rigour, but most of all in their inherent bafflement. Power, as Michel Foucault reminds us, is always fallible and embattled. Mabasa grasps this realisation, but to assume that she is setting up a critique of power is to slant their more complex declaration. Mabasa makes no statement. She sees the world directly, subtly, and gently. While her clay figures are types, they are also, as such, human indexes.

At the Norval exhibition, a very different economy is operational in Mabasa's works in wood, a medium she deliberately refuses to wholly control. Most famously, it is the works in wood salvaged from a flood which signal this turn. In them, singularity is exchanged for the collective, the rigour of identity and identification replaced by biomorphic and fluid urgencies – Apollo by Dionysus. The work I'm

referring to, *Natal Flood Disaster* (1988), was created a year after Mabasa's South African Policemen, yet they are sui generis, wholly other to each other. Or so it seems, because, of course, Apollo and Dionysus are not merely opposites. No being is ever singularly a type. As for clay and wood? Both are organically expressive. The key difference, which I consider vital, is that clay demands control while wood resists it. How so? Clay is a paste, liquid and earth, amphibian. It demands a rendering, fixing – an explanation. How else can we, equally amphibian, understand ourselves if not by subtracting our complexity, by explaining ourselves to ourselves? Is this not why we are drawn to the clichéd and idiomatic? Why we seek structure, or value the knowable?

The title of a second exhibition, *Shaping Dreams*, at the recently opened Villa-Legodi Centre for Sculpture at NIROX Sculpture Park – captures this wager between the conscious and unconscious, control and the impossibility thereof. Yet as pointed out by the exhibition's curator, Sven Christian, it not only 'emphasises her hand in the work's making,' but asks that we 'question our own myth-making processes.' Wholly dedicated to the work of Mabasa, *Shaping Dreams* includes a wider range of the artist's work, yet the centrepiece – intentionally untitled, accompanied instead by

the story of a man, discovered on a farm and thrown into a lion cage by the farmer – is not unlike those made from salvaged driftwood. In it, a very different story emerges. Here figures are no longer erect, nominal, exclamatory. Rather, they are prostrate, levelled, as hapless as the substance from which they emerge. I am reminded of Gericault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19), of forlorn and tragic moments, beings without resolve, abject, enmeshed in a complex, writhing, serpentine realm, without beginning or end.

There is a sculptural precedent for Mabasa's entangled animal-human forms – the human tree of life. There is also a sub-Saharan lore that informs this connectivity – Ubuntu – that we are whom we are because of others. In the case of this centrepiece or Mabasa's *Natal Flood Disaster*, however, there is no implacable conviviality. Rather, an unease pervades and shapes their mood – a profound sense of unfinished lives, interrupted endings, suspended yearnings, worlds within and between.

To understand Mabasa, I think-intuit-feel the need to present this key discrepancy between form and formlessness, Apollo and Dionysus, this world of apparitions and another of ghosts, the simulacral and the noumenal. As to its final veracity, I cannot say. After all, I began this reflection by being sceptical of

structure, that of the unconscious in particular, yet I too have found myself weighing a perceived polarity in Mabasa's work – between clay and wood, form and formlessness, being and nothingness, life and death, appearances and ghosts. Is this the saccadic condition we all inhabit – between dream and wakefulness? If so, are we not all mere sleepwalkers? And is this not Mabasa's point – that we are caught, always, between realms, denied fullness and certainty? Is this not the crux and matrix of her art?

This last conclusion, in which I challenge my polarised view of work made in clay and wood, and a heightened sense of a greater indeterminacy, is vouchsafed by Sven Christian, who reminds me that the contrasting styles are transposed in a number of works on show at the Centre – the wooden forms more static, the clay forms more fluid. Both wood and clay possess variable frequencies, both are terse and fluid, both Apollonian, both Dionysian – both elemental.

Structure is the language which is placed onto clay, or drawn from wood. But in the beginning and end, in a moment of making, a far more profound structure comes into play, which the great Welsh cultural analyst, Raymond Williams, termed the 'structure of feeling,' that is, 'a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but

each in an embryonic phase before it can become a fully articulate and defined exchange.' To understand Noria Mabasa is, I feel, to recognise this intimated order, which cannot be contained. For if Mabasa's art is 'embryonic' it is because its materiality and its sociality is deeply naïve, or innocent, resistant to synoptic answers – pure.

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