



Thapong Arts Newsletter

ARTS FOR ALL

Volume 1, Issue 2
May 2009

The newsletter covering the Arts in Botswana: visual art, drama, dance, music, film and literature.

Artist Snapshot: Mmoloki Matlale



Mmoloki Matlale. *Hope*. Oil on canvas



Mmoloki Matlale grew up in Molepolole and started working at Thapong in 2008. He is a self-taught painter who works predominantly in oils. He is interested in the visual arts because he can reflect his feelings through painting, and it makes him happy.

Matlale says he became serious about his art in 2003 and that

his works are inspired by the culture and natural beauty of Botswana. In his piece *Hope*, Matlale describes it as being the view a lion may have when rest-

ing on the ground, hoping for something. Matlale's hopes for his artistic future are that he will grow in performance and reach great heights in the visual arts field.



Mmoloki Matlale, *a work in progress*, Oil on canvas

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QUOTES

"The artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place; from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web."

- Pablo Picasso

"Colour is my day-long obsession, joy and torment."

- Claude Monet



Patrick Matlapeng

HIFA Arts Marketing Seminar in Harare

Patrick Matlapeng participated in the Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) Arts Marketing Seminar in Harare between 30th April and 1st May, 2009. The seminar was organized by the Arterial Network in association with the Harare International Festival of Arts, the National Council of the Republic of South Africa, and the African Arts Institute. The main aim of this seminar was to discuss and work towards developing a market for the arts in Southern Africa. There were 36 participants in all from Botswana, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and others.

The other aims included: to share common challenges and best practice experience of arts marketing in Southern African countries; to establish a network of individuals and companies engaged in arts marketing in the region; to brainstorm ideas about developing national and regional markets for creative products from the region; to work towards a regional circuit of distribution outlets, festivals and venues; and to establish a team to research and draft a toolkit for arts marketing in Southern Africa.

Patrick reports that the seminar consisted of group discussions initially consisting of individuals from different arts backgrounds: music, visual art, literature, drama, dance, film, and craft; and then groups made up of people from the same artistic background.

Before looking at marketing strategies, four other areas were discussed in detail, namely the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that must be taken into account when developing strategies for sustainable markets for the arts at this time.

Two of the strengths that came to the fore were the uniqueness and inexpensiveness of African products. Four of the weaknesses that came to light were an absence of policy and supportive legislation in most countries and a lack of recognition of the relative importance of the arts and creative industries; secondly, that where there are funds to create products, there is seldom funding to market such products. Thirdly, there is mostly poor investment in infrastructure and skills resulting in products of poor quality unable to compete globally; and last of all, artists and the creative sector are generally poorly organized and networked, and as a result are unable to

lobby effectively at national and international levels.

Of the eleven points listed under opportunities, three of these were: the UNESCO Convention on the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions which encourages greater investment in the creative industries in the developing world and the opening up of international markets for goods from these countries; that while the digital divide on the continent is significant, new technologies create effective ways for networking and communicating at low costs and instantly (i.e. the internet); and the view that although traditional donor agencies continue to support the creative sector, there are huge opportunities with new investors such as China, India and Brazil.

Three of the threats listed include the negative effect of the global economic recession on the growth of the creative industries and tourism including cultural tourism, as the arts are often the first to be sacrificed. The lack of protection of intellectual property and the prevalence of piracy which limits the income for creative producers. And finally, political instability which can pose a threat to freedom of expression and artistic practice.

Patrick believes that the strengths in Botswana include that the government is encouraging the arts in education, beginning in the Primary Schools, to funding, and the purchasing of local works; and that the media helps by covering local arts events. Patrick thinks that two of the topics covered need to be paid particular attention to, that of networking amongst individuals, arts centers and organizations in Botswana and between other countries; and that branding and marketing of artwork and other art genres is important as it helps to sell works. He came away from the seminar full of enthusiasm for helping Botswana to develop an arts market for themselves and in finding ways to educate the public on the arts and art appreciation.

Compiled by Violette Grosse from an interview with Patrick Matlapeng and from the HIFA Arts Marketing Seminar paper.

“Where there are funds to create products, there is seldom funding to market such products.”

From the HIFA Arts Marketing Seminar paper.

“The Arterial Network is an informal, dynamic network of individuals, institutions and funding partners working to support the effectiveness and growth of African arts and culture in civil society and to enhance the sustainability of creative industries in Africa.”

www.arterialnetwork.org

On Public Art

Public art is an area that local artists should think about. Walking around the city of Gaborone one will come across few public art displays. But it is high time for artists to break out of the gallery walls and create art works that could be viewed by a more extensive audience in a different context.

Public art is mostly about history and heritage. To achieve that, artists could depict in an interesting way, a vibrant dialogue about Botswana's history and heritage through the vehicle of sculpture or mural paintings on street walls. This public art could be referred to as monuments that represent the whole nation. It is also a way of making a historical place more memorable.

It is encouraging now that in other parts of Botswana, tribes are starting to work on statues for public art. For example, Batlokwa and Bangwato have made statues which memorialize the history of their tribal leaders.

The other example is the statue of the first president of Botswana which stands in front of our parliament building. It reminds us of the work done by Sir Seretse Khama. When looking at it one could think of independence and so many things relating to the work he has done. There is also one statue of Sir Seretse Khama in Selebi Phikwe. The Bangwaketse are also working on their statues.

Furthermore, the artist has to recognize that when it comes to public art there should be a shift in his/her approach. The artist has to seriously consider the audience in terms of holding their interest in a historical conversation. It can be in many forms whereby one can use art as a kind of catalyst that would get people to think historically about the place rather than just a sculpture which takes no cognizance of shared idiom and shared language.

Another challenge for artists creating an artwork in a public

space is the move from working independently. An artist has to form a partnership with clients, architects, engineers, historians and urban planners; embracing a variety of skills. An artist has to familiarize him/herself with urban development.

It is important for artists to start working on neglected heritage sites in order for people to realize the stories of the past. The Three Dikgosi Monument at CBD reminds us about the protection that the tree dikgosi gave us from the British government.

In addition, it is in the interest of the public to take care of public art. One should make sure that we preserve the artworks properly because public art plays an important role in our cultural heritage. If they are not maintained, we will lose a part of what represents our traditional views on our cultural background.



Example of public art in Taiwan. Bronze sculpture by Tony Cragg. *Bent of Mind*.

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- Reginald Bakwena

On Abstract Art

The Elements of Abstraction

Dear Artist,

Abstraction ranges from the meaningless abuse of paint to the most lofty and exciting of surfaces. Each effort can be a creative event — a vehicle for the mysteries of the subconscious mind and an opportunity to flirt with pure forms, symbols and metaphors.

It's an art of hiding and disclosing. More than simply playing with the materials, abstraction is a discovery of motifs that happen to be part of a

painter's personal legend. Personality counts.

Abstraction also holds the promise of dreams, fears, fetishes, fancies, intangibles and wills.

The willful artist marches to his own drummer. As in the composing of music, in pure and practical terms, the resulting work will be the painter's own composition. Perhaps one of the best understandings came from Marc Chagall: "Abstraction is something which comes to life spontaneously through a gamut of contrasts, plastic as well as psychic, and pervades both the picture and the eye

of the spectator with conceptions of new and unfamiliar elements."

Abstract art has the power to show us something we may not have seen before. It implies both thought and no thought. Thriving on unconventional tools and a unique sort of energy, it's also a collaboration of mind and spirit. As a form of wizardry and magic, an abstract may speak both to you and for you. More than anything, abstract art can be a conversation piece.

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"Abstract art requires something of the viewer. It demands contemplation. Study. Flights of fancy. Feeling."

- Svante Rydberg

"The abstract artists I admire were grounded in drawing, composition and design, and it shows in their work."

- Jennifer Bellinger

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Arts for All

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Persepolis (2006) - Marjani Sa-
trapi (Iran)

This personal history of Marjane Satrapi presented through an award-winning animated feature is challenging, entertaining and thought provoking. Nomination by France for Best-Foreign Language Film Oscars 2008; top five in Best-Animated Feature at Golden Globes and Oscars.

Won the Jury Prize at Cannes in 2007 and 20 other awards. *Persepolis*, Iran is east of Shiraz,

founded 2,700 years ago by Darius the First; home of Cyrus the Great who united Persia. It is high, at 1,800 metres and there you will find the Gate of All Nations and the Valley of the Kings. It takes off in Tehran only thirty years ago. The tale reflects the revolution in 1978, the civil war and the creation of the Islamic Republic. 114 minutes long. Rated PG-13.

www.maitisong.org

What's On

THAPONG VISUAL ARTS CENTRE

Meleko Exhibition by Wilson Ngoni

Exhibition on until 30th May

DEADLINE FOR THAPONG MEMBER'S EXHIBITION: 5pm Friday 29th May. Contact Thapong for further details on works. Exhibition on from Friday 5th June until Tuesday 30 June.

GABORONE FILM SOCIETY

Russian Film Festival:

7pm Maru a Pula School, AV Centre:
May 19th: Russian Ark (2002)

Unusual Films:

June 2nd: The Edge of Heaven (2006)
June 9th: Persepolis (2006)
June 16th: The Unbelievable Truth (1989)

June 23rd: Waitress (2006)

June 30th: 25th Hour (2002)

MAITISONG at Maru a Pula School

Saturday 23rd May

St Conrads Choir in Concert

Tickets can be purchased by contacting :

SINAH 71845117 (BTC MAIN MALL)

UNOBIA 72926079 (BOCCODOL)

K .K 71525803 (BPC MAIN MALL)

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"Abstraction is an esoteric language," said Eric Fischl. It is a language unique to the individual artist.

In a way, it can be more unique than the similarly legitimate language of realistic work because no matter how realists pull Nature's reality this way and that, they still have Nature's reality, however nuanced. The more modern idea, however it may be seen by some as flawed, is to be the inventor, creator and patent holder of your own Nature.

Painter and art instructor David Leffel regularly asks his students a simple but profound question: "How do abstract artists know when they're getting better?" The answer lies in whether the artist is able to express will. Artists without the ability to express will, will never know.

Best regards,
Robert Genn

From the book "Love Letters to Art" by Robert Genn. www.painterskeys.com