

June 2017

Aspire commemorates Youth Month with important Feni work

Specialised national art auction house Aspire goes into its Winter 2017 auction on 17 July in Johannesburg with a roster of artworks proving its credentials as an authority in the fields of modern, historical and contemporary South African art. One of the most poignant works on the forthcoming auction is one which is entirely appropriate for Youth Day on June 16, South Africa's national public holiday commemorating the role of the country's youth in fighting against and ultimately overcoming apartheid.

Dumile Feni's charcoal drawing *Children under Apartheid* (1987) was commissioned for a campaign against child abuse in the United States, and was subsequently exhibited for some years in the UN buildings in New York City. In the 1980s NYC was Feni's home, after being forced into exile by the apartheid government for his commitment to the depiction of degradation and enslavement under that regime. After being exhibited elsewhere in the US for some years, this important work has now, appropriately, been returned to SA and entrusted to Aspire to go to auction.

Art critic Athi Joja has this to say about this delicate and tragic piece: "the drawing depicts figures peering from behind jail bars. Suppose these are the young victims of state brutality and subjugation, caged inside apartheid's prisons – their fate murky and unpredictable, their cardinal sin being the unflinching petitioning for self-determination... Until his death in 1991, Feni's work grappled with deep existential questions and the dynamics of human vulnerability that have made his oeuvre as rigorous as it is aesthetically inviting."

Feni's repatriated work takes its place alongside important art by a group of artists loosely grouped under the curatorial label "Neglected Traditions", comprising black South African artists, either in the country or in exile, whose lack of access to institutional networks under apartheid led to them being unfairly excluded from routes to exhibition, markets, academic consideration and potential career success. This group, whose works feature on Aspire's forthcoming auction includes Louis Maqhubela and George Pemba, among others.

Says Aspire's Director Ruarc Peffers: "We are proud to be considered an authority on this crucial aspect of South African art history, something we see as a necessary corrective to the gaps in our cultural and artistic heritage, and something which links these artists in the Neglected Traditions group to other contemporary artists also on auction. And of course, all work that sells on the auction will attract Artist's Resale Royalties for living artists, as per our ongoing commitment to contribute to a sustainable and more inclusive South African fine art world."

Upcoming Auction | 17 July 2017

The Park House of Events on 7 | Hyde Park Corner | Johannesburg

For gratis and obligation-free valuations, and to consign works of art to the upcoming Cape Town auction, before end July, please contact:

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Image Caption

Dumile Feni | Children under Apartheid | 1987 | charcoal | 247.5 x 133 cm |

Photograph: Nina Lieska | Repro Pictures

