
6 July 2017

For Immediate release:

Aspire Art Auctions profiles important black South African art

The upcoming Winter 2017 auction at Aspire in Johannesburg foregrounds work by important black South African artists. Aspire is committed to exposing the work of more such artists in the local secondary market, and the upcoming auction features many fine examples of work in the modern and contemporary idioms.

A major highlight is a work by the influential figure Ephraim Ngatane, *Bicycle Rider*, from 1968.

Comments Aspire Senior Art Specialist Emma Bedford, "It's astonishing to think that Ngatane produced much of his best work in his twenties – a testament to a prodigious talent."

Ngatane is credited with influencing and developing several major talents – notably those of Dumile Feni and Louis Maqhubela – however his concern was for an often politically charged, though equally often celebratory, documentary realism. Ngatane died in 1971 at the young age of 33.

One of the artists influenced by Ngatane, Louis Maqhubela, returns to auction this time, following the huge success of the politically motivated work, *Exiled King*. This sold for R341,040 at the Aspire Autumn auction earlier this year, more than three times his previous record, from an estimate of R60 000 – R80 000.

As an expatriate artist who moved to the UK in the 1970s for primarily political reasons, the themes of exile and flight were never far from his thoughts. The work on the forthcoming auction, *Flight*, from 1967, is a conté, pastel, charcoal and collage work which is stylistically and technically comparable to *Exiled King*, and dates from the period of the artist's success at home before he was forced into emigration by the repressive constraints of the apartheid regime. Maqhubela is also one of the artists who has previously benefited from Aspire Artist's Resale Rights initiative, which sees a percentage of proceeds from sales in the secondary market passed on to living artists – uniquely in the local auction market.

But perhaps the jewel in the crown of these under-represented works by black South African artists on auction in July is Dumile Feni's charcoal drawing *Children under Apartheid* (1987). This significant work

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, the 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."

Aspire's explicit agenda is to bring such important but under-represented works by black South African and other African artists to the secondary market, and to nurture and develop the reputation and value of these works.

Upcoming Auction details:

Aspire's Spring sale on 4 September 2017, at the Avenue, V&A Waterfront offers a breath of fresh air. Visit this beautiful venue to enjoy some choice works, amongst them a rare early Simon Stone mosaic triptych, sure to delight viewers and collectors.

Upcoming Winter Auction | 17 July 2017

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

17 July 2017 | Day Sale | 5pm | Evening Sale | 8pm

Auction preview:

Friday 14 July | 10am to 7pm

Saturday 15 July | 10am to 5pm

Sunday 16 July | 10am to 4pm

Exhibition walkabouts:

Saturday 15 July & Sunday 16 July | 11am

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 Captions

Ephraim Ngatane | Bicycle Rider | 1968 | oil on board | 79 x 109 cm |

Photograph: Nina Lieska | Repro Pictures

Louis Maqhubela | Flight | 1967 | charcoal, pastel, conté and collage on paper | 98 x 70.5 cm |

Photograph: Nina Lieska | Repro Pictures

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

Photograph: Nina Lieska | Repro Pictures

About Aspire Art Auctions

Aspire Art Auctions is a South African-based, specialist auctioneering company formed to respond to the requirements of the country's rapidly growing art industry.

Specialising in historical, modern and contemporary art, the company is headed by a grouping of partners with formidable collective knowledge and expertise – together representing the longest combined secondary art market presence in South Africa.

With collective art industry experience of more than eighty years, Art Specialists Emma Bedford, Jacqui Carney, Mary-Jane Darrol, I Ruarc Peffers and Marelize van Zyl produce curated auctions of top-quality international, African and South African art.

What makes Aspire Art Auctions unique in the local auction world is this knowledgeable team whose exclusive focus on fine art ensures that works of art are presented in comprehensive historical and cultural contexts and on the best possible display platforms.