

Mbongeni Buthelezi turns junk into art

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Junk can be a beautiful thing if you have the eye for the not-so obvious. From any rubbish littered on the streets to junk in the house, many artists find a use for what others would toss out without a second thought.



One of these artists in South Africa is Mbongeni Buthelezi, who is known as a plastic art specialist. Buthelezi has been developing a unique technique using discarded plastics for 15 years.

Now, his Manyauza, silent messages to my mother exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery is a mid-career retrospective.

Buthelezi showcases a collection of work produced at different periods of his career, including works the public has not seen before. Born in KwaZulu-Natal and raised in Springs, Gauteng, Buthelezi has moulded these two worlds together and tries to make sense of his rural upbringing and urban existence in his work.

The main installation of the exhibition, titled Manyauza, is a worth of 280 small abstract paintings that make up a collage spanning 15m of wall space.

"These small paintings are (silent) messages to my late mother, remembering conversations I used to have with her growing up as a young man, which the exhibition is centred on," he says.

The exhibition is curated with the intention of showing how Buthelezi's earlier experimentation with various media later led him to finding his trademark in plastic.

"My work is intended to show a trajectory and social commentary on daily life. It also shares views of how my work speaks on the subject of history in a rapidly changing society."

Buthelezi uses art "as a form of communication and participates in a global discourse around issues of conservation".

He paints in impastos, solid forms burnt with a heat gun on to thick roofing plastic surfaces.

His painting's subject matter ranges from a series called Childhood in which he explores figurative images, games in the township and images from text books that were stereotypical during his school years.

The church my mother used to go to is a work about his late mother, a landscape with a dusty atmosphere, typical township church structure and two ladies in red-and-white.

Source: Sowetan

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