

Mary Sibande wins young artist award

Mary Sibande, 30, is the winner of the 2013 *Standard Bank Young Artist Award* for Visual Arts. She was brought up by her grandmother in Barberton, Mpumalanga but studied art at the University of Johannesburg, where she won several overseas fellowships and gave her first solo exhibition in 2009. Her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother all worked as domestic helpers. She transformed their experiences into stunning works of art which were draped from buildings in Jo'burg in 2010, turning the inner city into a giant art gallery. Her work will be exhibited in South Africa's major cities in 2013.

Sibande expresses her views on art and the role it has played in her life to Chris Barron of the *Sunday Times*.

"My art has given me the confidence to know that I can do whatever I want to do. It gave me that push. You need a lot of confidence when you're starting out, you don't know if people are going to relate to your stories. I used my art to tell stories about my background, about the women in my family who were all maids. I am the first to go to tertiary level and I felt the need to celebrate these women. I created this alter-ego called Sophie. She's not your regular maid, she aspires, she's a dreamer, a person who wants to move away from her surroundings. But at the end of the day, she's still a maid.

"If you're determined to do what you want to do, it will work out. My mother and grandmother motivated me to be whatever I wanted. They gave me an education because they didn't want me to be like them. It might take time but if you believe in yourself you can achieve your dreams in a way they were not able to. If you allow yourself to be too afraid of what people might think of your work, you will end up not doing anything, you will lock yourself away.

"Art should have a purpose, it should teach. It should be something people can relate to. I do not believe in art for art's sake. There should be something in the art that makes a connection, that inspires something in you, even if it is rejection. There should be some kind of opinion that goes into it. I want my art to make a statement about a common South African story. These are stories my grandmother told me of her life and of being a maid. We all have stories and our stories need to be told. We need to learn from each other, take from each other, give to each other. When she saw my art, she said she didn't know that I was taking notes. For me, that was very special.

"With art you can make something beautiful out of something that is ugly. People are seduced by the beauty but when you go deeper into the work, when you think about it, there lies the ugliness of what it actually is. At first glance it is beautiful but if you follow the idea and the concept you come up against the ugliness underlying it. The work is about moving forward, progression, aspiration. It's like writing a beautiful poem. When you actually think about it, it is depressing. I wanted to create beautiful pictures, but when you get closer you see other factors that exist within that that are not so beautiful.

When art is outside on buildings it shouldn't only be graffiti, it can be fine art. In the black community, a lot of people don't understand what fine art is. With the billboards, we wanted to change the central business district into a giant gallery, an

alternative way of showing art. Take the art to the people for whom art is usually something in a gallery in the suburbs. Art should be something people see when they go to work and come back from work, when they go shopping. It should be all around them.

"Art has taught me to zoom in to things, to pay attention to the little details. Each and every thing around you is important, the way people dress, the way they think about things. Even a button is actually important in a shirt. Everything has a story. I no longer just look at objects, I examine them. Why are they placed in a certain way, why are they this colour, what does it mean?

"Only by questioning things can you move on and forward. Art should make people question things. My art is not necessarily to make people feel better about themselves but to make them question their surroundings, where they come from.

"History has taught me that our past is very painful but that things will be okay one day. My art expresses the pain of the past but not in a painful way. The work has to be beautiful, it has to speak of progress and moving forward. I did not want to make it "angry". There is a lot of anger in people. I want to say yes, you have this history, but if you look you can find a positive corner. If you think of negative things all the time you will end up crazy. Only by seeing the positive are we going to become better people.

"Our responses to certain art works expose where we are now. We're in a very fragile place as a nation. It's going to take time to move away from that. We have to learn to find a way to move forward and progress as people."

Source: *Sunday Times* via I-Net Bridge

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>