

PITIKA NTULI

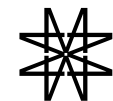
AZIBUYELE EMASISWENI

Return to the Source

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW



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SUMMARY

Artist	Pitika Ntuli
Title	Azibuyele Emasisweni (Return to the Source)
Venue	The exhibition will go live on www.themelrosegallery.co.za on 25 June 2020 at 6:30pm
Dates	25 June to 2 August 2020
Opening Address	Minister of International Relations Naledi Pandor to go live on the viewing room on 25 June at 6:30pm
Artworks	45 sculptures by Pitika created from bone
Collaborations	33 thought and creative leaders have engaged with Pitika and the artworks in poetry, songs, essays, thought notes and the talks programme (detailed hereunder)
Themes	Divining the State of the Nation. African spirituality, indigenous knowledge systems and healing at a time in which this is sorely needed.
Presented by	The Melrose Gallery in association with the National Arts Festival
Curated by	Ruzy Rusike



ABOUT PITIKA NTULI

Following in the tradition of the 'Renaissance Man', Pitika Ntuli is a true artistic, political and academic polymath. Interested in exploring the contradictory relationship between tradition and modernity, Ntuli's witty and dark reflections on our society are captivating and visionary.

He was born in 1940 in Springs and grew up in Witbank in Mpumalanga. While a teacher, artist and critical thinker living under the threat of apartheid in the sixties and seventies, Ntuli was forced into exile in Swaziland and arrested and made a political prisoner until 1978, when international pressure forced his release to the UK.

Having already completed an MFA at Pratt Institute in New York in 1977, he finished an MA at Brunel University in London, in 1985 after which he lectured art at various international and South African universities including; Central St. Martin's College of Art and Wits University. He was an artist in residence in the 1980s and '90s at schools and colleges in London. Among many other leadership appointments at South African universities, he served as Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the UDW.

His contribution to the development of arts and culture in South Africa has been immense. He served as director at the Sankofa Institute for the African Renaissance and, Fellow of the Mapungubwe Institute, among many other fellowships. He was awarded the Arts and Culture Trust – Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013 and the City of Johannesburg named him a 'Living Legend' in 2012.

He has curated several exhibitions. In his capacity as an artist he has staged numerous solo exhibitions in South Africa, Germany and the United Kingdom.

His works grace numerous important corporate, private – such as Paul Simon, USA, and Akufo Addo, Ghana - and public collections such as the African American Institute, New York, USA and Constitutional Court, Johannesburg, SA.

Primarily a sculptor, Pitika's work expresses a sense of haunting loneliness – a distress at the pillaging of a continent and culture through the lens of post-colonialism. His stark skeletal structures are created in any physical medium he can find: metal, wood, stone, and bone and

can range from small to monumental works in granite that weigh in excess of 19 tons.

"In Art, the creative act is a titanic battle between flesh and spirit. Each artwork is a diversion of the flesh, the body. Each time the artist dies, a new work is born, or rather the opposite: each time a work of art is born the artist dies a little. A little death invokes a greater desire to live and thus creates another artwork. When the artist dies finally, she continues to live through her offspring – her children and her artworks."

While there is an element of darkness on display in his work, there is a strong sense of wit and tongue-in-check irony present in each of his sculptures. Pitika is also a poet, often combining classical Eurocentric form and clichés when discussing the destruction and pillaging of the African culture and landscape.

▶ [DOWNLOAD PITIKA'S PROFILE](#)

▶ [DOWNLOAD PORTRAIT SHOTS AND CAPTIONS](#)

MEDIA RELEASE

'Sangoma' Bone Sculptures Test Digital and Art Realms

Pitika Ntuli's Exhibition Debuts at Virtual National Arts Festival

Fixed definitions of 'contemporary' and 'primitive art' have haunted African art history. Launching on June 25 at the National Arts Festival, Pitika Ntuli's novel exhibition *Azibuyele Emasweni*, (Return to the Source), presenting 45 bone sculptures (each with their own praise song) will challenge and test these terms and how art can be enjoyed virtually.

Ntuli's chosen material, animal bones, and approach – that of a Sangoma allowing the material to guide him – invokes ancient African indigenous and spiritual knowledge systems. However, the viewer's engagement with the sculptures will take place virtually on a multi-media platform, where images of them will be seamlessly paired with words, songs and voices.

The words and voices of Sibongile Khumalo, Simphiwe Dana, Zolani Mahola, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Gcina Mhlophe, Napo Masheane and other respected musicians, poets and writers, can be heard and read, while viewing wrap-around footage exploring the details

of the haunting animal bone sculptures. This makes for an unforgettable visual and audio experience. The first of its kind, it has been produced and conceived by the Melrose gallery, Ntuli and curator Ruzy Rusike. It was motivated by the limits Covid-19 and social distancing have placed not only on South Africa's annual art festival but the viewing of art in person.

As a proclaimed healer, Ntuli aims to use the animal bones to explore and 'treat' contemporary problems; from issues plaguing the state of the nation to the strife caused by Covid-19. The eighty-year-old artist has been circling pertinent issues as an academic, writer, activist and teacher but as the title of the exhibition suggests, he is returning to 'the source' of his expression. In turn he is encouraging society to return to the 'source' of African spiritualism and knowledge as the means of resolving corruption, greed, slavery and poverty. Above all, the bone sculptures – a result of Ntuli teasing out human features from the animal skeletons – articulate his desire for humankind to reconnect with nature.

"I do not copy nor work like nature. I work with nature. Bones are vital, as in imbued with life, and it this life that they possess that possesses me when I work. We are partners. Bones, like wood, have definite forms to

work with. I do not oppose their internal and external directions, I externalise their inherent shapes to capture the beauty and the truth embedded in them, in other words I empower the bones to attain their own ideal," observes Ntuli.

Given the novel sculptures and haunting anthropomorphic shapes and Ntuli's standing as a respected artist, activist and academic – he was awarded *the lifetime achiever award in 2013 by the Arts & Culture Trust – Azibuyele Emasisweni*, (Return to the Source) was expected to be one of the main highlights on the visual arts programme at the National Arts Festival, which usually takes place in Grahamstown.

When it was announced the festival would have to transform into a virtual one, the Melrose gallery, Rusike and Ntuli worked at delivering more than just a gallery of images of sculptures.

Pitika turned to his contemporaries, inviting 33 thought and creative leaders – which also include Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Homi Bhabha, Albie Sachs, Shado Twala, Ari Sitas, Nduduzo Makhathini, Ela Gandhi, Buti Manamela, Kwesi Owusu and Lallitha Jawahirilal – to engage with his art, contributing poems, songs, thought notes, essays and dialogues to compliment the sculptures in the online viewing room.

It is anticipated that these *'artistic replies'* will greatly enrich the viewers' experience of the exhibition. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic which is impacting so profoundly it is likely some of the responses will contribute to ongoing discussions and debates about healing.

"Bones have a special potency and subtle spiritual energies; their endurance is legendary. We know who we are, and where we come from as a result of studying bone fossils. Bones are the evidence that we were alive 3.5 million years ago, and they are carriers of our memories," says Ntuli.

Azibuyele Emasisweni doesn't only lead the viewer back in time but through a unique and original use of material, form and symbolism reflects on the spiritual wasteland that might define this era, thereby collapsing those hard lines that were thought to divide ancient and contemporary concerns and art.

Azibuyele Emasisweni, (Return to the Source) will be opened on June 25 by Minister of International Relations Naledi Pandor at 6.30pm. It will run until August 2.

The exhibition can be viewed on www.themelrosegallery.com and other content on www.nationalartsfestival.co.za

▶ DOWNLOAD THE MEDIA RELEASE

QUOTES

1. "Bones are vital to healing as well as for the process of divination. I am a healer. I throw bones to divine the State of the Nation in the season of anomie!"
- *Pitika Ntuli*
2. "In Art, the creative act is a titanic battle between flesh and spirit. Each artwork is a diversion of the flesh, the body. Each time the artist dies, a new work is born, or rather the opposite: each time a work of art is born the artist dies a little. A little death invokes a greater desire to live and thus creates another artwork. When the artist dies finally, she continues to live through her offspring – her children and her artworks!"
- *Pitika Ntuli*
3. "I do not copy nor work like nature. I work with nature! Bones are vital, as in imbued with life, and it this life that they possess that possesses me when I work. We are partners. Bones, like wood, have definite forms to work with. I do not oppose their internal and external directions, I externalise their inherent shapes to capture the beauty and the truth embedded in them, in other words I empower the bones to attain their own ideal."
- *Pitika Ntuli*
4. "Art is about exploring potentialities both of the material and the Self in its emotional, rational and spiritual dimensions of Being! Is it foolishness, obstinacy, foolhardiness, or is it crass perversity to continue to carve a delicate bone piece for hours and hours, for months on end, knowing that it could break into pieces at any time? Is the agony of the thought, the ecstasy of achieving an accomplished work of Art, as a step toward creating the ultimate masterpiece, worth it?"
- *Pitika Ntuli*
5. "The influence of Jazz runs through my bloodstream. Improvisation, as in melding different objects on a single work of art, comes naturally to me."
- *Pitika Ntuli*
6. "As an artist, Pitika, you release the spirit and the story that has rested deep in the bones, and you make the silence of bones – which have no fleshy parts like eyes, mouths, tongues --- speak and sing."
- *Homi Bhabha*
7. "This exhibition is in the tradition of our ancestors and the vision of the Biblical prophet. Pitika Ntuli has made his creative breath enter discarded bones, and they come to life. Pitika is the poet of resurrection, the spirit that once imbued all the great sculptures and pyramids of the ancient Egypto-African Civilization."
- *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*
8. "From unwanted animal bones and other remains, Pitika Ntuli has articulated remote forms of spectral lives with outstanding clarity. The ancestral past has returned to challenge both the artworld and artists, urging them to consider the fragile state of the contemporary."
- *Shaheen Merali*
9. "Azibuyele Emasisweni (Return to the Source) is a significant exhibition for many reasons. It is in essence an important museum show engaging on African spirituality, indigenous knowledge systems and healing and yet it is to be presented online. It presents 45 sculptures created by Pitika Ntuli, the artist and spiritual healer created from the bones that he uses to 'divine the state of the nation in anomie'."
- *Ruzy Rusike*

THE SCULPTURES

The exhibition features 45 sculptures created by Pitika from bone. Although the dominant material used in this show is Bone (elephant, rhino, giraffe and horses), beads, shells, chains, computer circuit boards, pins, animal skins, and marbles were also integrated in the works, a deliberate act of 'picking up' interrupted African creative traditions.

High res photographs of all 45 sculptures from different angles will be presented in the viewing room in static and slide show form with relevant information.

The works are available for purchase.

[▶ DOWNLOAD SCULPTURE IMAGES](#)

PITIKA'S POEMS

Pitika has written and recited 45 poems, one for each artwork. These will be available in the viewing room in text and audio form.

[▶ DOWNLOAD SOME OF PITIKA'S POEMS](#)

THE COLLABORATIONS

Pitika invited 33 thought and creative leaders to engage with him on the exhibition and its themes. These valuable contributions will be presented as poems, songs, thought notes, essays and dialogues in the online viewing room.

The high profile list of collaborators includes the Minister of International Relations Naledi Pandor, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Homi Bhabha, Don Mattera, the Deputy Minister of Education Buti Manamela, Phillipa Yaa de Villiers, Shaheen Merali, Gcina Mhlophe, Sibongile Khumalo, Zolani Mahola, Ela Gandhi, Simphiwe Dana, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Kwesi Owusu, Eugene Skeef, Ahmed Rajab, Napo Masheane, Nalini Moodley, Antoinette Ntuli, Albie Sachs, Florence Masebe, Shado Twala, Juwon Ogungbe, Felix Yaa de Villiers, Ari Sitas, Lallitha Jawahirilal, Sope Maitufi, Ruzy Rusike, Bheki Gumede, and Nduduzo Makhathini.

It is anticipated that these 'artistic replies' will greatly enrich the viewers' experience of the exhibition. We also expect, in light of the pandemic which is impacting so profoundly on every living thing on the planet, that some of the responses will contribute to ongoing discussions and debates about healing, and how we deal with it to come out stronger in the long term.

[▶ CLICK HERE TO VIEW ZOLANI MAHOLA'S COLLABORATION](#)

[▶ CLICK HERE TO VIEW YVONNE CHAKA CHAKA'S COLLABORATION](#)

[▶ CLICK HERE TO VIEW GCINA MHLOPHE'S COLLABORATION](#)

THE TALKS PROGRAMME

Pitika has invited several thought leaders to join him for a discussion online which will be recorded and uploaded to the viewing room:

1. Pitika and Minister of International Relations Naledi Pandor
2. Pitika and Ruzy Rusike (The curator)
3. Pitika and Ari Sitas
4. Pitika and Zolani Mahola
5. Pitika and Ela Gandhi
6. Pitika and Albie Sachs

One discussion will be live allowing interested parties to register to watch and submit questions or comments to the panel via text messaging.

[▶ DOWNLOAD THE TALK'S PROGRAMME SCHEDULE](#)

THE CATALOGUE

Much of the content will be uploaded to a digital catalogue which will be made available to interested parties. This will include live links to some of Pitika's poems, discussions and collaborators submissions.

We plan to publish a printed catalogue to accompany the exhibition on its museum tour in 2021 which would include all of the content in transcribed form.

THE FILMS

Two short films created on Pitika will be uploaded to the viewing room.

Title: Solitary

"Art and Solitary confinement carry the same birthmarks." – Pitika Ntuli.

This intimate short film provides the viewer with a personal insight into Pitika's mind and journey as an artist. He explains that art is like solitary confinement, where time seems to exist, and that "Art exists in order to conquer time".

Duration: 03:30

Shot by: Zee Ntuli & James Reynolds

Directed and edited by: Zee Ntuli

Sound design by: Lorens Persson at Sterling Sound

Colourist: Terry Simpson

Music by: Chris Letcher

Title: History Written in Stone

Through Belfast Black Granite Pitika Ntuli tells a story. A story that attempts to capture the crucial steps in our revolutionary struggles. The six individual sculptures write our history in stone, and trace the painful steps we took towards finding justice in our beloved land!

Shot & Directed by: Galerekwe Maimane & James Reynolds

Edited by: Zee Ntuli

Music by: Chris Letcher

THE MUSEUM TOUR

It is proposed that the exhibition will tour to museums around South Africa in 2021. The exhibition was supposed to launch at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown before it travelled to Oliewenhuis Art Museum, the Durban Art Gallery and other cities in South Africa. Due to Covid-19 the museum tour will no longer happen in 2020 and we are currently discussing dates with these and other potential venues for 2021.

The museum tour will be announced on our website and social media platforms once dates and venues are confirmed.

THE MELROSE GALLERY (PROFILE)

Dubbed *'The Gallery of the People'*, The Melrose Gallery is a leading Pan African Contemporary space located in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Passionate about African culture and traditions, the gallery has become a home in which artists, collectors and the public gather as a community to present and celebrate their stories, lives and creative practices in contemporary ways.

Firmly grounded in our African identity, and mindful of the value and importance of indigenous knowledge systems and African spirituality, we sit comfortably as part of the global community realizing the significant contribution that our artists and programme offers to the future. We see ourselves as a vessel that supports talented artists by providing a platform to tell their stories, freely express their opinions and to engage with audiences.

For these reasons our space is dynamic, constantly adapting and challenging preconceived ideas and limitations to creative practice. Our spaces often pulse with the energy of dance, poetry and song mirroring the multi-disciplinarity that characterises African Art, as well as lively dialogues around issues that are pertinent and sometimes not so easy to hear.

Our stable boasts iconic names of the likes of Dr Esther Mahlangu, Mam Noria Mabasa, Dr Willie Bester and Pitika Ntuli amongst others. These globally celebrated stalwarts provide a stable foundation for an exciting group of young guards who are swiftly rising from the African Continent.

The Melrose Gallery hosts a programme of solo and group exhibitions each year with well attended openings that are a highlight of the South African arts calendar. We participate in respected art fairs, support many of our artists in terms of biennales and conceptualize and regularly implement important non-commercial exhibitions in association with museums and national galleries.

We pride ourselves in providing a warm and yet professional service to our large and loyal global collectors base.

▶ [DOWNLOAD GALLERY IMAGE AND LOGO](#)

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