

EVERARD READ

SPEELMAN MAKWE MAHLANGU

(b. 1958 Germiston, South Africa, d. 2004)

'I work and draw on ancient mythology and African folklore to create work which focuses on communication rather than confrontation. A real African heritage is depicted in my work through the use of many symbols resulting in a penitent look at the faces of mankind. My painting incorporates symbols and patterns from Ndebele murals and Egyptian hieroglyphics. They often describe things that one cannot see but can only feel. My themes include an exploration into spiritual and mythical ideas of the world to come. The role of music in African life and traditional rituals, African pots, human figures, calabashes and drums emerge from semi abstract shapes. A dream dreaming us.'

Speelman Mahlangu was born in Germiston (in Gauteng, South Africa) on the 1st of October, 1958. He attended Matshidiso Western Province School and matriculated from Katlehong High School. In 1977, he enrolled at the Katlehong Art Centre, where he concentrated on sculpture and drawing.

His paintings were often poetic and lyrical, encapsulating abstracted fragments of traditional African people, animals, design (principally Ndebele) and jewellery, creating anthems to a uniquely African world. Most of his formative years were spent in the apartheid era. Free expression of ideas, especially for a black man, could be lethal and so he satisfied himself in creating his own mythical, benevolent visual world which both spoke to and appealed to our higher human aspirations as a riposte to the brutal realities of the apartheid state, which were ever on display in Katlehong (South Africa's second biggest township after Soweto, established on a forlorn piece of veld south of Johannesburg). The walls of his studio were scrawled with phrases that became the titles of his works: *The Greatness of Human Spirit; Excellence of African Beauty; Language of Ubuntu; It's OK to Dream*. Love poems to a potential world.

Mahlangu's sculpture evolved by isolating sculptural forms in his paintings from the principle subjects and giving them a life of their own in clay, later to be cast in bronze. Stylistically they owed much to the influence of the founders of the Katlehong Art Centre, Stanley Nkosi and Lucas Sithole, and also gave a nod to Ezrom Legae and Sydney Kumalo's work from a generation before. Influences can also be identified in Central and West African sculpture infused with modernist distortions and distillations exemplified by Marini, Brancusi and Moore. Again the titles of his sculptures bear witness to Mahlangu's underlying concerns: *Cry of Comfort; Prayer for Peace; Where We Are at Now; Circle of Peace*.

Mahlangu enjoyed considerable recognition during his lifetime, including an exhibition at the Botswana National Museum and several solo exhibitions at Everard Read. He was also commissioned to enlarge the largest sculpture he ever did, *Prayer for Peace*, an edition of which stands outside the South African Embassy in Berlin. A second edition is in Freedom Park, Pretoria, and the third now in the Norval Foundation gardens in Cape Town.

Mahlangu died suddenly in October 2004 at 46. He is survived by his wife Gertrude and one son, Katlego. In the years preceding his death he had made a body of sculpture including monumental works. He was in the process of moulding the works in preparation for casting them into bronze for an exhibition at Everard Read Cape Town, which finally took place posthumously in 2019. Everard Read continue to represent his Estate.

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SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2022 Forever Riding the Bull, Everard Read, London, UK
- 2019 Legacy of a Gentle Man, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2006 Retrospective, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 2003 Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2000 Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 1997 Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 1991 Botswana National Museum, Gaborone, Botswana
- 1982 FUBA Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
Design Animations, Johannesburg, South Africa

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS & PROJECTS

- 2024 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2023 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Director's Selection, Everard Read, London, UK
Natural Habitat, 16 on Leretholi, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2022 Investec Cape Town Art Fair, with Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
Summer Sculpture, Riverhill Gardens, UK
- 2021 Oasis: 25th anniversary exhibition, Everard Read, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2020 Staring Straight to the Future, online exhibition, Everard Read, South Africa & UK
Journeys of the Mind, Everard Read, Franschhoek, South Africa
- 2018 Opening exhibition of the Norval Foundation, Cape Town, South Africa
- 2017 Bronze, Steel & Stone II, Everard Read, London, UK
- 1995 Commissioned to paint a mural for the Johannesburg International Airport, South Africa
- 1990 Three-man exhibition, Sanderling Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1990 Town Country, Everard Read, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1990 Afrika Now, Sanderling Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1982 Multiracial art, Vaal Triangle, South Africa
Two-man exhibition, Amadlozi Art Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa
BMW Tributaries, touring South Africa and West Germany
Operation Hunger, Southern Sun, South Africa
Volkskas Atelier, South African Association of Arts, Pretoria, South Africa
Awarded first prize for sculpture, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
Market Graphics, Johannesburg, South Africa
Group show, Sanderling Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
- 1980 Awarded first prize, New Signatures, South African Association of Arts, Pretoria, South Africa
- 1977 Solo, DH Williams Hall, Johannesburg, South Africa

COLLECTIONS

Speelman Mahlangu's works are found in private and public collections, including the Frankfurt Museum of Ethnology and the Norval Foundation in Cape Town.