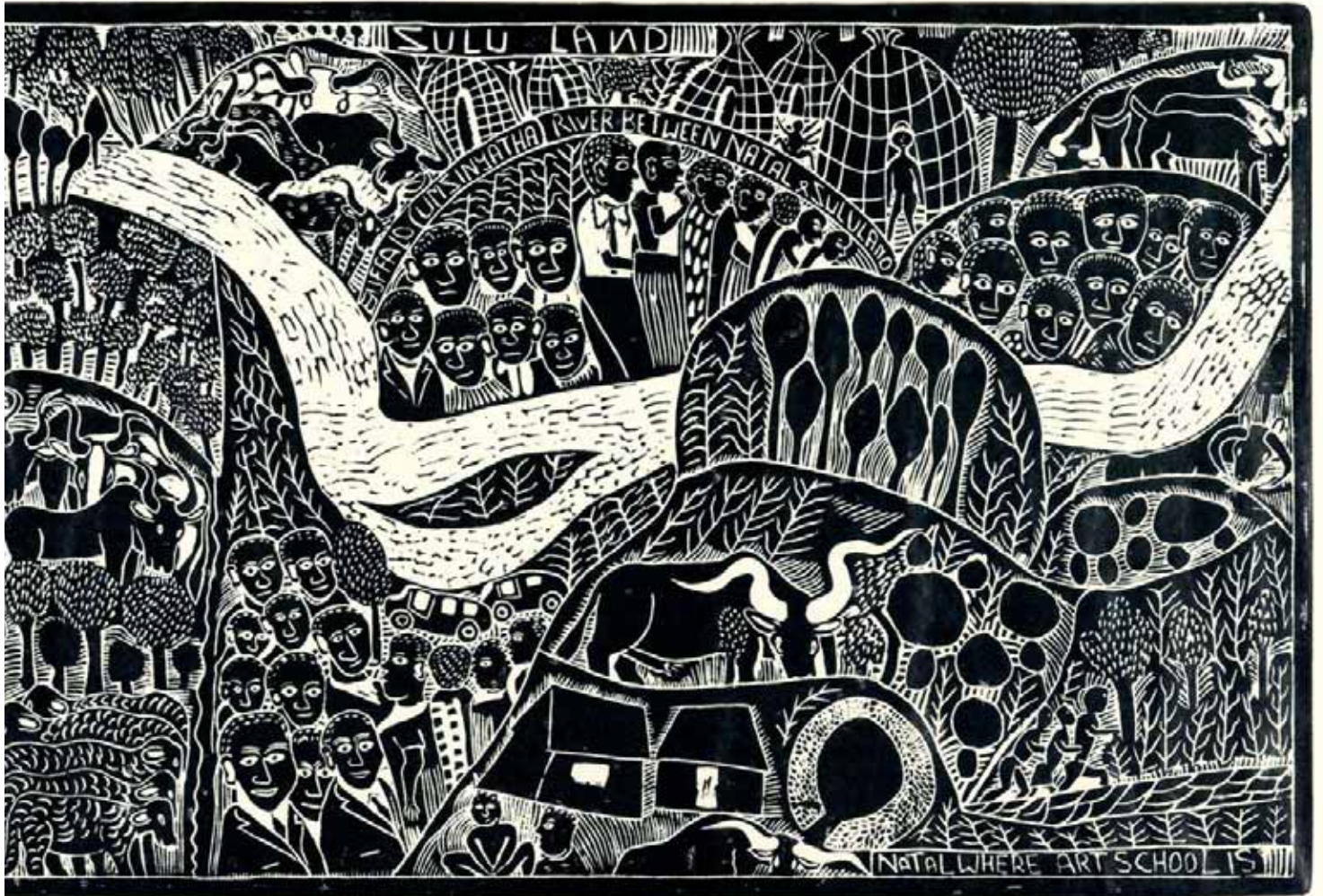




Rorke's Drift

The proliferation of various missionary societies in the 19th century resulted in numerous mission stations being established around the country. While the missionary societies played a pivotal role in the education of local communities, they often also split communities by insisting on conversion from traditional beliefs to Christianity. Traditional belief systems were discouraged as primitive, and conversion was often rewarded with education and related privileges such as employment. One of the lasting effects of the missionary societies on South African art was the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Arts and Crafts Centre. Established in 1962 by Peder and Ulla Gowenius, who were originally sent by their superiors in Sweden to work at Ceza Mission Hospital in Zululand, the ELC Arts and Crafts Centre first opened at Umpumulo and a year later moved to its more famous home at Rorke's Drift. The Centre offered training in weaving, pottery, graphics and painting. Allina Ndebele was in charge of the weaving workshop and Azaria Mbatha was employed as an art teacher. Both spent time in Sweden in the mid-1960s furthering their studies. Initially, artists and crafters were trained to work in the hospital art programme, but a number of printmakers associated with the Centre became prodigious artistic talents, including Azaria Mbatha, John Muafangejo, Cyprian Shilakoe and Vumeko Zulu. While Mbatha steadfastly produced work with clear religious themes derived from the Old and New Testaments, these biblical narratives bear the influence of a distinctly African interpretation and sensibility. Muafangejo's early work is similar in its focus on religious subject matter, but later evolved into social explorations that bear out his own life. David Koloane

Above:
Mbatha, Azaria (b.1941)
Sendung Undated
Linocut print on paper 62/100, 48.5 x 32.5 cm



200

John Ndevasia

1974

John Ndevasia (1943-1987)
Natal where Art School is 1974
Edition 165/200, 45.5 x 68.3 cm

Azaria Mbatha

(b.1941)

"Perhaps my situation was akin to the mistrust between the Zulu traditionalists and the Zulu converts to Christianity. That the two groups never met, not even occasionally, ensured that an air of suspicion persisted between them."¹

Azaria Mbatha was born in 1941 in Mahlabathini, KwaZulu-Natal, into a family of Christian converts. He was educated at the local school and later attended the Ceza Secondary School. Mbatha fell ill in 1961 and was admitted to the Ceza Mission Hospital where a Swedish missionary couple, Ulla and Peder Gowenius, had started offering an art programme as a form of therapy to the patients. This was where Mbatha received his first art lessons and carved his first linocut. The linocut technique lent itself to the young artist who had been used to cutting and engraving on various surfaces. Mbatha started selling a few prints while still at the hospital. The African Art Centre, which started operating in Durban in 1959 under Jo Thorpe, also sold some of the artist's prints. Very few artists have the support of their families in their careers, but this was even more so for black African artists during this period when in 1962 Mbatha's proud father organised a small exhibition of his work in their home, it was a special occasion.

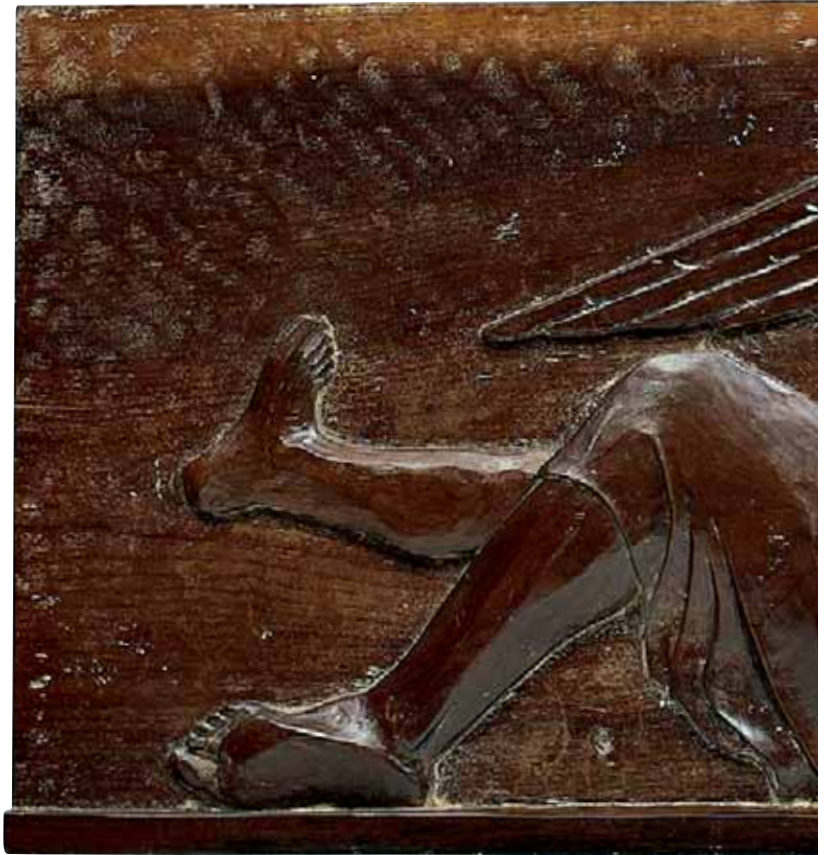
Mbatha has become synonymous with the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) Arts and Crafts Centre at Rorke's Drift. When the ELC Arts and Crafts Centre moved to the Rorke's Drift farm in 1963, Mbatha continued his printmaking education there. He received a bursary to further his studies at the Konstfack, Sweden's largest college of arts, craft and design. It was here in Stockholm, between 1965 and 1967, that Mbatha expanded his printmaking knowledge and was introduced to etching. He returned to Rorke's Drift, where he became a teacher at the Centre for two years and taught in the likes of John Muafangejo. In 1969 Mbatha returned to Sweden, where he first completed a matric equivalent and then enrolled in the fine arts programme at the University of Lund. Mbatha currently lives in Sweden with his family.

Mbatha had the privilege of knowing and living in two worlds – Christianity, as well as African traditions and traditional beliefs. Both these elements feature prominently in his work. *Revelation of St John* (c.1965) is designed in the artist's characteristically highly decorative style and is subdivided into three panels with elaborate human and animal forms in a narrative sequence. The sense of tradition and heritage is enhanced by the bead-like motifs. Mbatha employed biblical text as metaphor for sociopolitical conditions under which communities existed, as exemplified by the well-known portrait of the *Fourteen Stations of the Cross for Africa*. **David Koloane**



73/100

Arma mbata



Religion and spirituality in South Africa

Religion has been an integral part of the making of contemporary South Africa. South Africa is a country with a diversity of religious and spiritual groups. The history of religion in South Africa is characterised by the dominance of Christianity for a period of over 350 years. During the colonial era, Christianity and Western culture informed public discourse on morality, ethics and governance. The legal system that was adopted betrays this notion. The by-product of Christianisation and Westernisation of state apparatus was discrimination against other religions. The public profile of African knowledge systems declined and African religion became an “underground praxis”.¹ Settler travellers, traders, and missionaries deemed Africans a people without religion, and if they had a religion it was of an inferior status (superstition, animism, totemism, ancestor worship, etc.). The encounters between Christianity and African religions resulted in significant religious innovations in the form of African Indigenous Churches (AIC). These churches emerged as a result of discrimination from mission churches – aspects of African culture were deemed ‘heathen’ practices – as well as a desire by Africans to govern themselves. The Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and the Nazareth Baptist Church (NBC) are two of the biggest churches that emerged during this era.

The apartheid period provided an arena where religion was used as a justification – legitimating both apartheid and the struggle for liberation. Various religious bodies were divided in terms of their support for and opposition to apartheid. Apartheid ideologues used the Bible and Christian tradition to justify separatism and white domination. By contrast, those purporting theologies of liberation (liberationist African and black theologies) used the same tradition to legitimise and justify their opposition to apartheid. In 1985 the ZCC invited President P W Botha to address its Easter gathering where thousands of people were present. There were mixed reactions to this.

Above:
Kottler, Moses (1892-1977)
Jacob Wrestling with the Angel Undated
Stinkwood panel, carving in relief, 43.5 x 140 x 5.5 cm





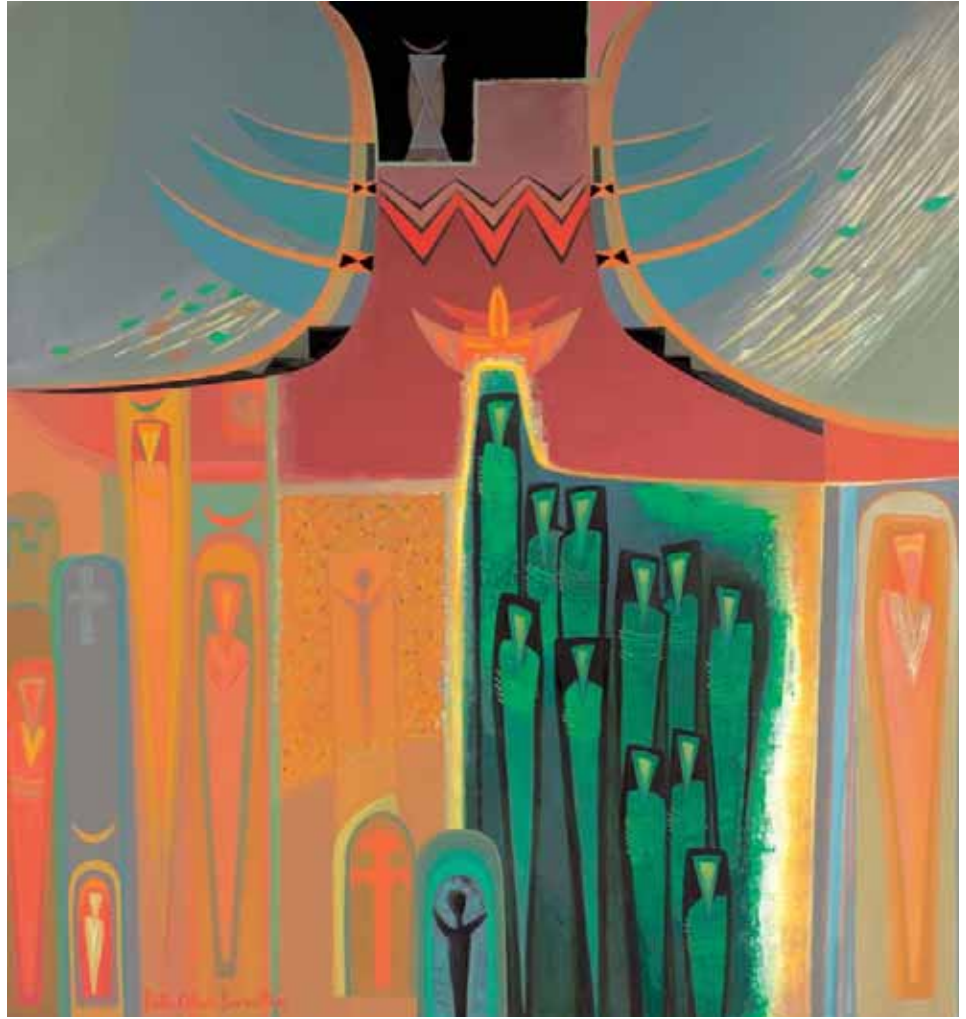
Above:
Konqobe, Percy Ndithembile (b.1938)
Dancing Shaman 1989
 Bronze 3/5, 53.5 x 42.0 x 23.5 cm

Opposite:
Lekgetho, Simon (1909-1985)
Witch Doctor Divination 1961
 Oil on board, 61 x 74 cm

The 1993 Interim Constitution ushered in an era of religious openness and tolerance. Significant national rituals, such as the presidential inauguration, now have different religious faiths offering prayers. The praise singer has become a permanent feature of such gatherings. Since 1994 South Africa has experienced a number of religious and spiritual changes. African people who were previously shy to embrace their indigenous religion came out and practised it, without any fear of being stigmatised. The New Age movement, which does not see itself as religious but spiritual, has also emerged more publicly. Islam, Judaism and Hinduism continue to grow. Islam's growth in South Africa is largely due to the influx of Africans from the rest of Africa.

Apart from the impressive presence of Apostolic, Zionist and other mainstream churches, South Africa has also experienced a phenomenal growth in Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Before 1994 Pentecostalism was not popular among black people. However, it was very much alive among white people. There were a number of these mega-churches that preached the prosperity gospel but never made any clear pronouncements on apartheid and other sociopolitical issues. There was a perception that these churches approved of the National Party government and its apartheid policies. The situation changed somewhat after the 1994 elections with some of these Pentecostal churches becoming more involved with the new dispensation. White churches, based in the former white suburbs, are generally wealthier and have less difficulty in preaching the gospel of prosperity. However, people like Mosa Sono, leader of Grace Bible Church in Soweto, find it difficult to deliver a similar message, given the poverty experienced by members of his congregation.





Above:
Cilliers-Barnard, Bettie (b.1914)
Cosmic Meditation 1985
 Oil on canvas, 180.5 x 180.5 cm

Opposite:
Mthethwa, Zwelethu (b.1960)
Spiritual Dancers 1994
 Oil pastel on paper, 67.8 x 98.5 cm

African knowledge systems assert that reality is beyond human potential to exhaust. In other words, no single system of thought is capable of giving answers to all human questions. Jacob Olupona, leading scholar in African religion and culture, said that “African spiritual experience is one in which the ‘divine’ or the sacred realm interpenetrates into the daily experience of the human person so much that religion, culture, and society are imperatively related”.² In other words, there is no clear distinction between the sacred and the secular.

It is within this context that various African art forms need to be understood. African systems of knowledge production are secretive. Robert Baum has argued that:

In many African societies, knowledge is seen as transformative. People who could not use the power they acquire through learning in a way that benefits the community receive only limited instruction. For the uninitiated, the immature and the outsider, knowledge is restricted to what elders decide should be the public presentation of their religious thought.³

The fact that there are forms of knowledge that are deemed “dangerous” for people who have not grown to an appropriate level is very helpful in our quest to decode information behind the art **Sibusiso Masondo**