







Identifying the city

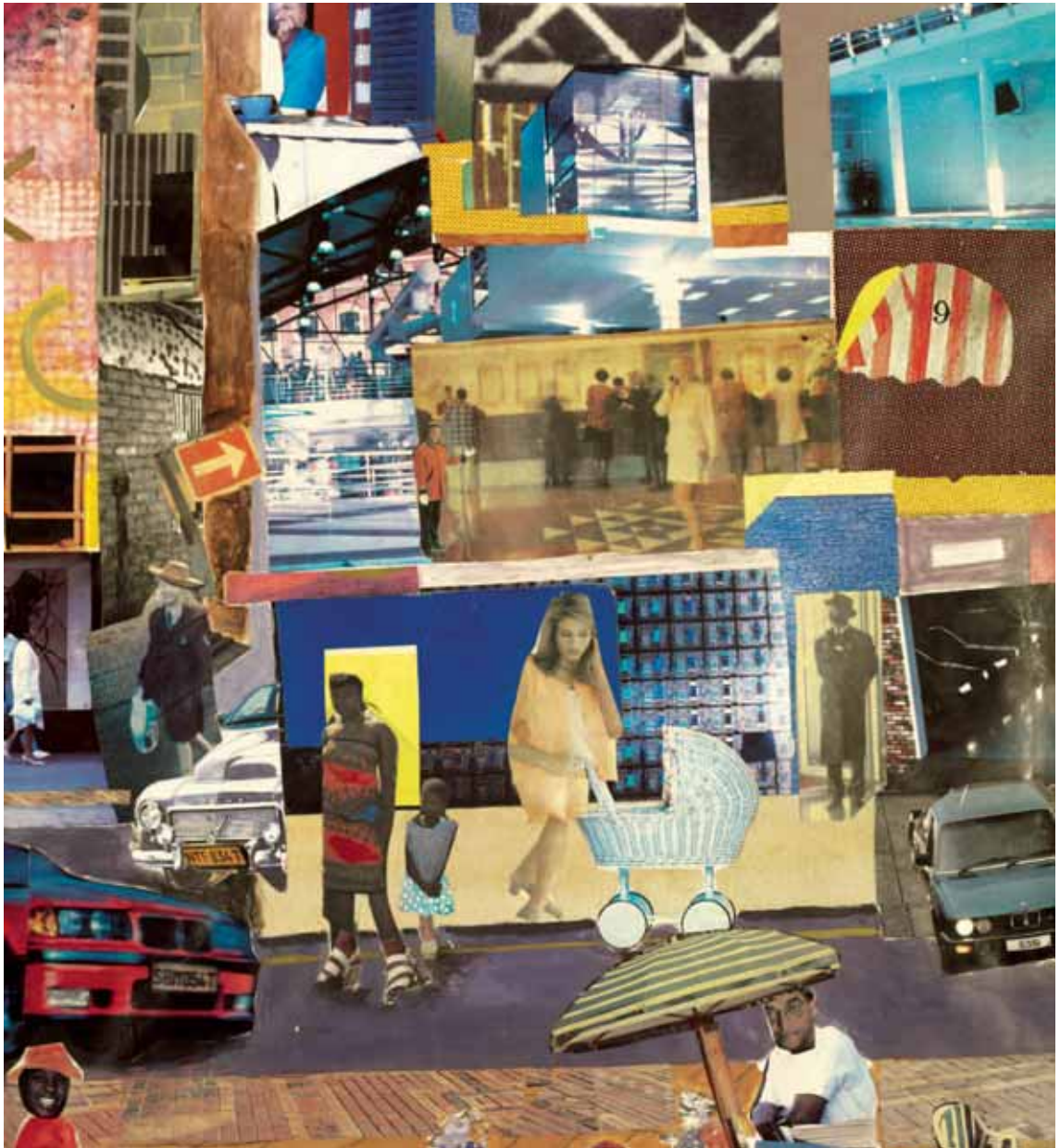
While most well known for his flat geometric abstractions of Bushveld scenes, J H Pierneef also produced views of cities and mines. His *Johannesburg* (1940) is noticeable for its rigid pencil-drawn geometries that constitute the high-rise buildings as an impenetrable band across the middle plane of the paper. It is a consciously modernist vision of the city, and one that harnessed international architecture to align the identity of Johannesburg with European capital cities. This imagining of the future of the city is further accentuated by Pierneef's organisation of the foreground of the work into wide-open roads, trees and low-rise buildings. The limited use of colour in this work is primarily reserved for the designation of red-painted tin roofs whose architectural form dates back to the 19th century. Importantly, and in character with so much architectural drawing of the time, the entire work is devoid of human presence. This is in stark contrast to Sam Nhlengethwa's *Working for You* (1996), a mixed media collage of the city that is quite literally dominated by the presence of people. Where apartheid's many laws attempted to regulate the presence of people in the city, the post-apartheid urban centre has not only become more people-centred, but also derives much more of its identity from the people who inhabit its spaces. Nhlengethwa has effectively collaged paper cuttings to create a less regimented image of city buildings and streets. The overlaid elements of competing scales together imagine a city that is vibrant with the energy and activity of human habitation. **Rory Bester**

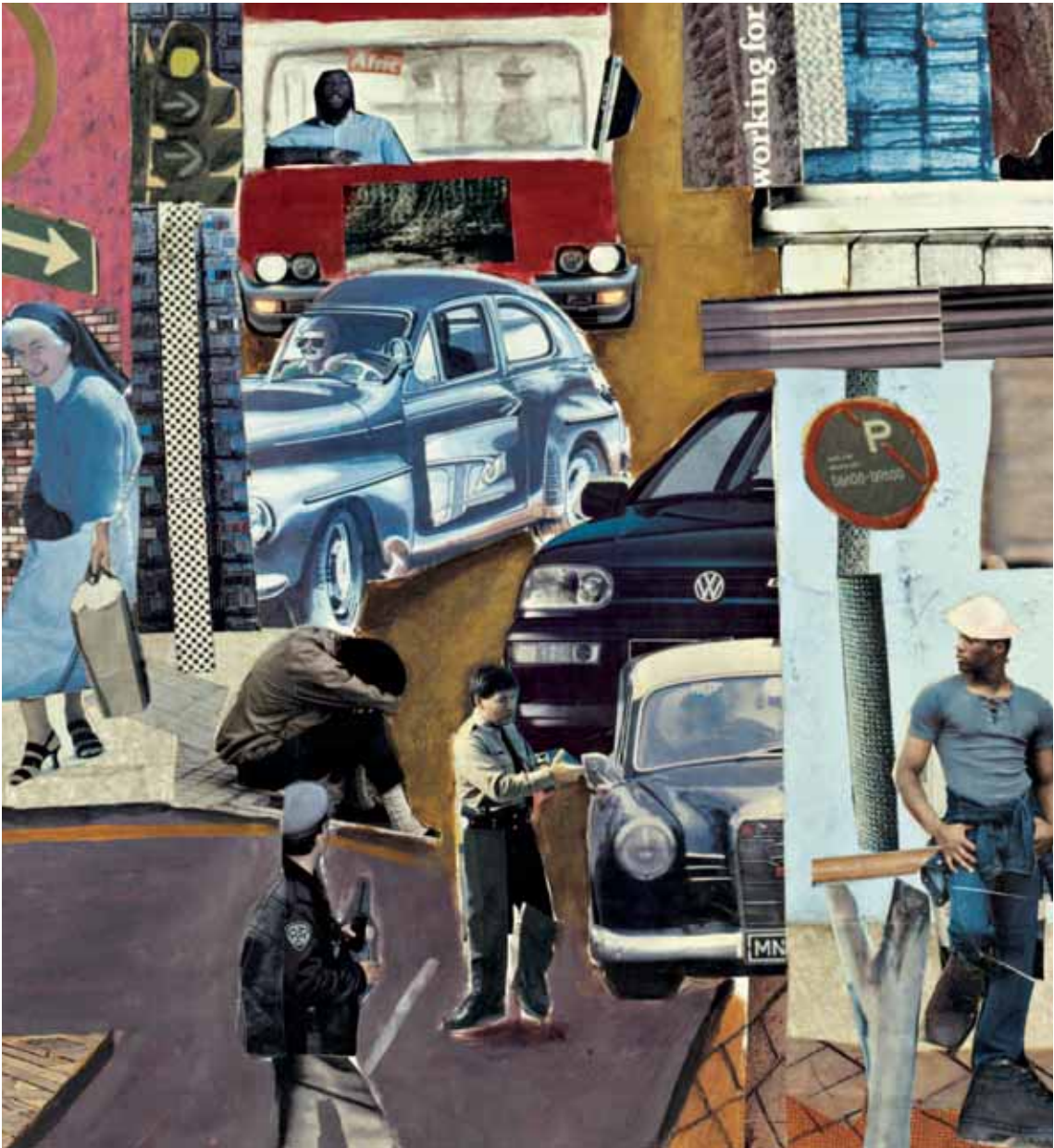
Previous page:
Miko, William (b.1961)
Gender Masses 1997
 Acrylic on canvas, 189.5 x 388.5 cm

Above:
Pierneef, Jacob Hendrik (1886-1957)
Johannesburg 1940
 Watercolour and pencil on paper, 74 x 94.5 cm

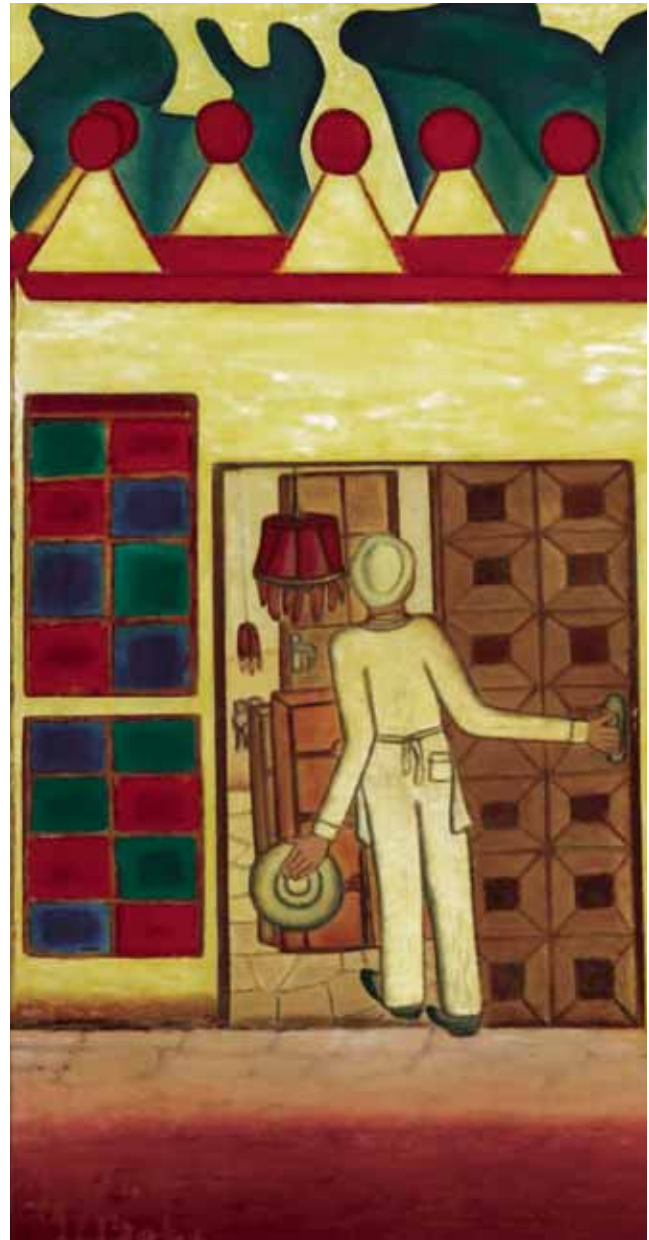
Opposite and details overleaf:
Nhlengethwa, Sam (b.1955)
Working for You 1996
 Mixed media collage on paper, 101.5 x 152 cm







Right:
Thoba, Alfred (b.1951)
Japanese Businessman's Tiger 1993
Oil on board, 53 x 73 cm





David Koloane (b.1938)

Along with Sue Williamson, David Koloane is one of a small group of artists whose multiple iterations of their artistic practice have had a dramatic impact on the shaping of contemporary South African art. Koloane's work and influence have extended outward from a diverse personal artistic expression that includes painting, drawing, printmaking and mixed media assemblages, towards landmark community engagements in art education, artists' workshops and studio collectives. Through all of this Koloane's thinking has been informed and refined by his art historical writing, art criticism and curating.

While largely a self-taught artist, Koloane was taken under the wing of Louis Maqhubela, a fellow pupil at Orlando High School in Soweto, south-west of Johannesburg, and an artist who had a formative influence on Koloane's own career. Informal mentoring and training while apprenticed to Bill Ainslie in the 1970s saw Koloane receive his first big break: An exhibition at the Nedbank Gallery in 1975, with the already established sculptor, Michael Zondi. Paintings and drawings dominate Koloane's artmaking, with the latter often making their way into editions of prints. Koloane's early work in the 1970s and 1980s, like many of his peers, focused on forms of expressive realism that directly engaged the oppressive social conditions under apartheid.

Koloane has played a leading role in community arts initiatives that have ambitiously brought together artists from different cultural and academic backgrounds. These include the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA), the Thupelo Workshop and the Fordsburg Artists' Studios. In 1977 Koloane co-founded and became the curator of the FUBA Gallery, one of the few gallery spaces that afforded real opportunities for black artists in Johannesburg at the time. Koloane was the visual arts co-ordinator for the Culture and Resistance Festival in Gaborone in 1982, an event that marked the consolidation of creative resistance to apartheid. When British sculptor Anthony Caro came to South Africa in 1982, he visited FUBA and persuaded Koloane to apply to participate in the Triangle Artists' Workshop in New York, which brought together mid-career artists from Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States to foster dialogue and artistic exchange. Koloane returned for the third Triangle Artists' Workshop in 1984, and Bill Ainslie participated in its fourth gathering. The two artists agreed that a similar workshop in South Africa would be of great benefit to local artists and by the time Koloane had returned to South Africa from London in 1985 – where he completed a Diploma in Museum Studies at the University of London – Ainslie had secured the funding for a local workshop. Organised by Ainslie, Koloane, Pat Mautloa and Sam Nhlengethwa, the first Thupelo Workshop was held in Rustenburg in 1985, with the purpose of encouraging artists to experiment with new mediums and techniques. It was the Thupelo Workshop that made obvious the need for proper artists' studios, and became the impetus for the formation of the Fordsburg Artists' Studios in downtown Johannesburg.

Always reacting against the stereotypes of 'township' art, Koloane's output found its sharpest expression after he began working at the Fordsburg Artists' Studios. His hard, linear use of graphite, and his soft, tonal application of oils and pastels give his drawings and paintings a quality of movement and energy that has become synonymous with the post-apartheid city that has preoccupied his work since moving into the Studios. Koloane's renditions of urban life, often captured in the twilight and at night, have been dominated by two themes: 'Wild' domestic dogs that live in urban spaces, and Hillbrow in Johannesburg. *Three Sisters* (1999) is a good example of Koloane's use of loose line work and mingled hues to capture the energy and exuberance of nightlife on the streets of Hillbrow.

In addition to his visual oeuvre David Koloane has made a hugely important contribution to critical thinking about South African art. As an art critic, curator and writer, Koloane's reviews, essays and exhibitions have defined many of the critical debates in post-apartheid visual art. *Art from South Africa* opened at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford in 1990, and was one of the first surveys of South African art after the end of the cultural boycott and set the stage for the reintroduction of South Africa into the global art world. Similarly, *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, which Koloane co-curated for London's Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1995, clearly placed South African art and its sociopolitical context within a history of African modernity.

It is this unique combination of art practice, critical writing, curating, community arts and studio collectives that makes David Koloane unique among contemporary South African artists. It gives him, his work and his ideas a special energy that captures a cultural *Zeitgeist* of the past 25 years of artistic production in South Africa. **Rory Bester**

Opposite:
Koloane, David (b.1938)
Three Sisters 1999
Lithograph on paper 7/30, 37.6 x 51.5 cm



Three Women 2006/07



Above:
Nhlengethwa, Sam (b.1955)
Kippies, Johannesburg 1994
 Tapestry in wool (ed. 111), 147.5 x 209 cm

Opposite:
Mautloa, Kagiso Pat (b.1952)
Letters from Home 1999
 Mixed media (paper and oil on canvas), 170 x 231 cm

Fordsburg Artists' Studios

In 1985 Bill Ainslie, David Koloane, Pat Mautloa and Sam Nhlengethwa were the drivers behind the organisation of the first Thupelo Workshop, the purpose of which was to encourage artists to experiment with new mediums and techniques. After the first Workshop, the organisers realised that when many of the participants returned home they lacked proper access to studio space. Koloane and Ainslie floated the idea of transforming an old Johannesburg bag factory into studio space, and when United Kingdom philanthropist Robert Loder visited South Africa in 1991, that idea became a reality. "We told Robert Loder about our need for studio space," says Koloane.¹ "Ricky Burnett identified the Speedy Bag Factory in Fordsburg. Loder then bought the building and leased it to us for ten years." The Fordsburg Artists' Studios, more commonly known as the Bag Factory, began operating from its downtown Johannesburg home in 1991. The Bag Factory initially struggled to gain momentum. But on the eve of the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995, Koloane, Nhlengethwa and Mautloa exhibited at Ricky Burnett's Newtown Galleries.