

Transvaal Bonga - head-rest

1987.3.109



object type: head-rest	acc no: 1987.3.109
vernacular:	contact prints
sub-type:	
community: Transvaal Tsonga	
sub-group:	location [REDACTED]
geographical location:	shelf [REDACTED]
	b/w: c/t: c/s: /
	dimensions:
date and place collected: Elim, Transvaal, c. 1930	h: 13 cm diam:
date executed:	w: 20 cm mounted:
artist name, sex: male	d: 6,5 cm
use: for resting the head while sleeping	medium: wood

purchase / donation / ~~bequest~~: Anglo American Johannesburg Centenary Trust

price paid: - (R168 000 incl. GST paid by Trust for Collection)

physical description:

insurance value: R346 291 (114 objects in Jaques Collection) (1990)

authority: AGC 1987-03-26
MC 1987-03-30

original collection no: Jaques Coll./
Africana Mus. 50/1013

object type translation:

catalogues: Wanless, AN&N 27(8):313

JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY
ARCHIVE SHEET II
PROVENANCE

ARTIST:

ACC. NO.:

Collected by Rev. A. A. Jaques
Lent to the Africana Museum in 1950

JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY
ARCHIVE SHEET IV
REFERENCE

ARTIST:

ACC. NO.:

Wanless, A Africana Notes and News, see acc. card
for vol. and page no.

JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY
ARCHIVE SHEET V
LOANS / LOCATIONS REGISTER

ARTIST:

ACC. NO.:

Placed in [redacted] Oct 1988, Boimery on display
in [redacted]

VUKA SA

JDL ✓
NL ✓
EK
SS
TM
BM
335

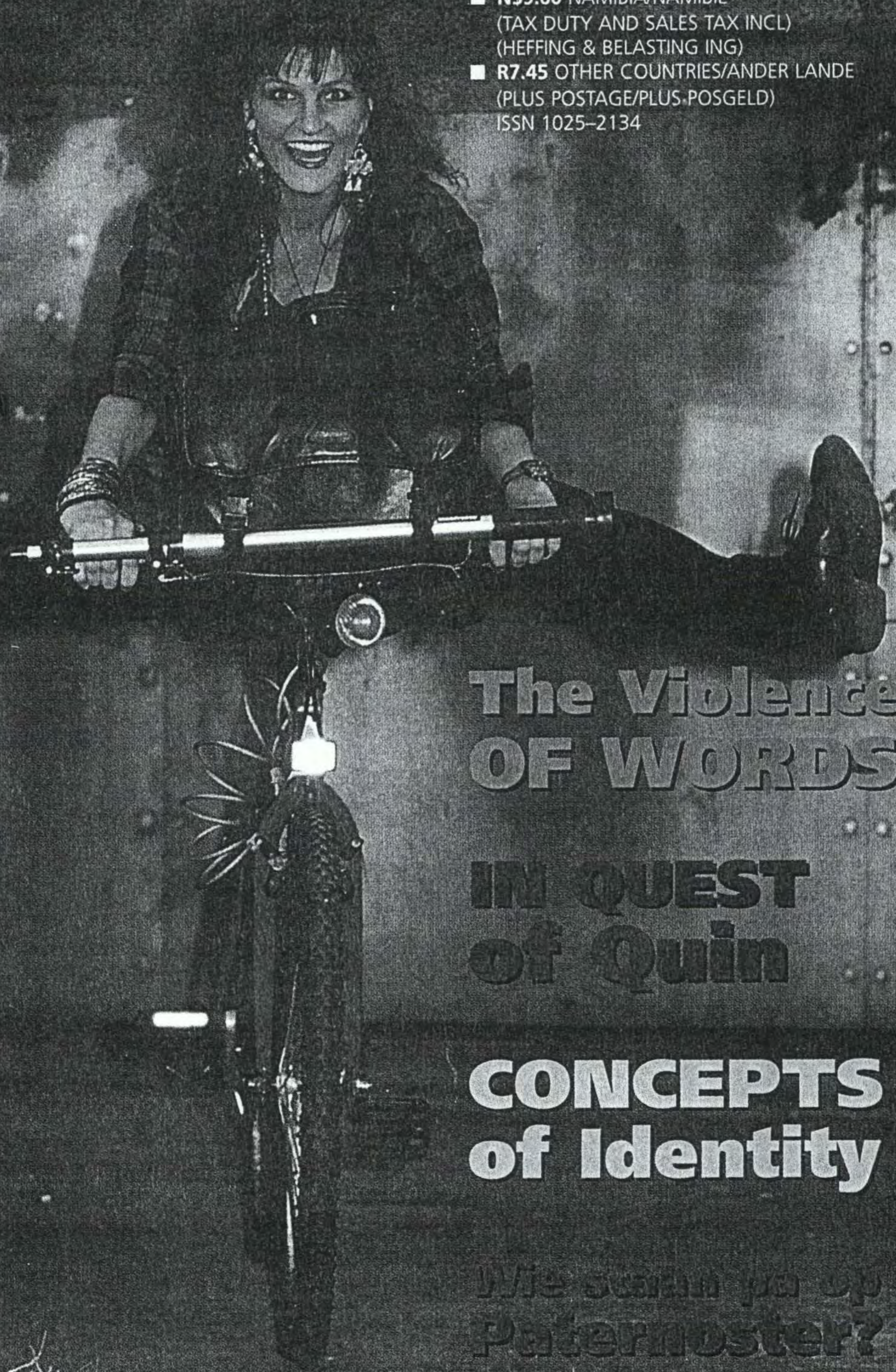
**SOUL OF THE RAINBOW NATION
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- ISSN 1025-2134

**An earful -
ISIQHAZA**

**Vier ons
werklik
KERSFEES**



**The Violence
OF WORDS**

**IN QUEST
of Quin ...**

**CONCEPTS
of Identity**

**Wie staan pa op
Paternoster?**



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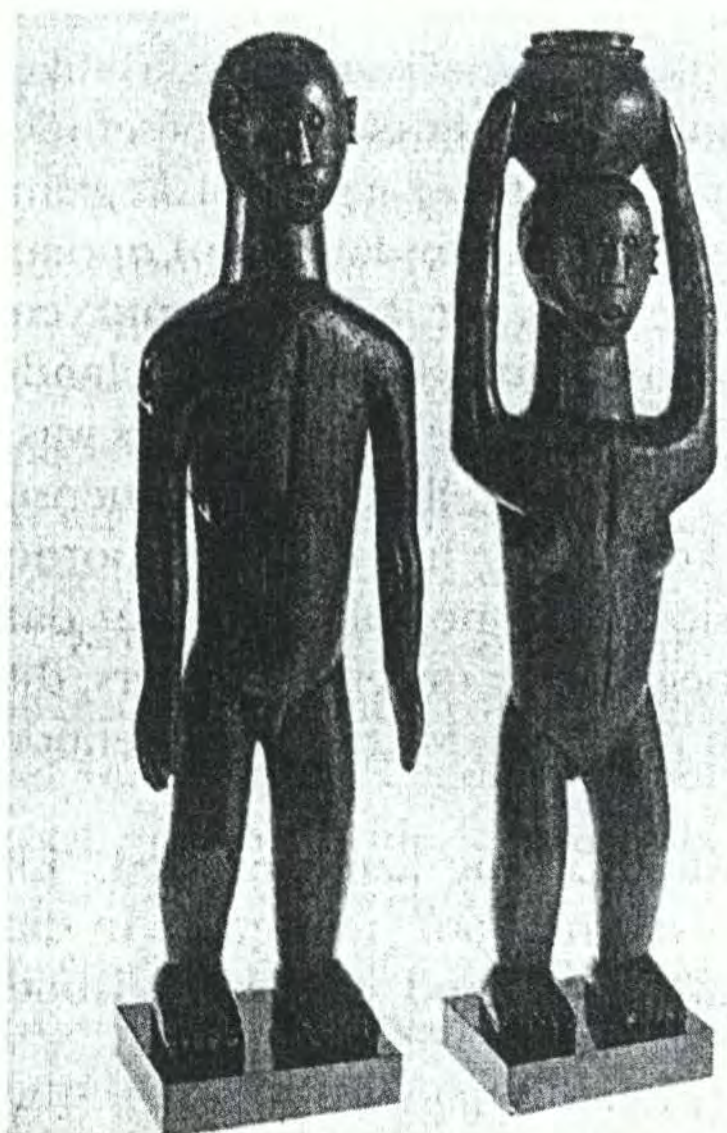
COLLECTIONS

IN TOUCH WITH THE ANCESTORS

Nessa Leibhammer

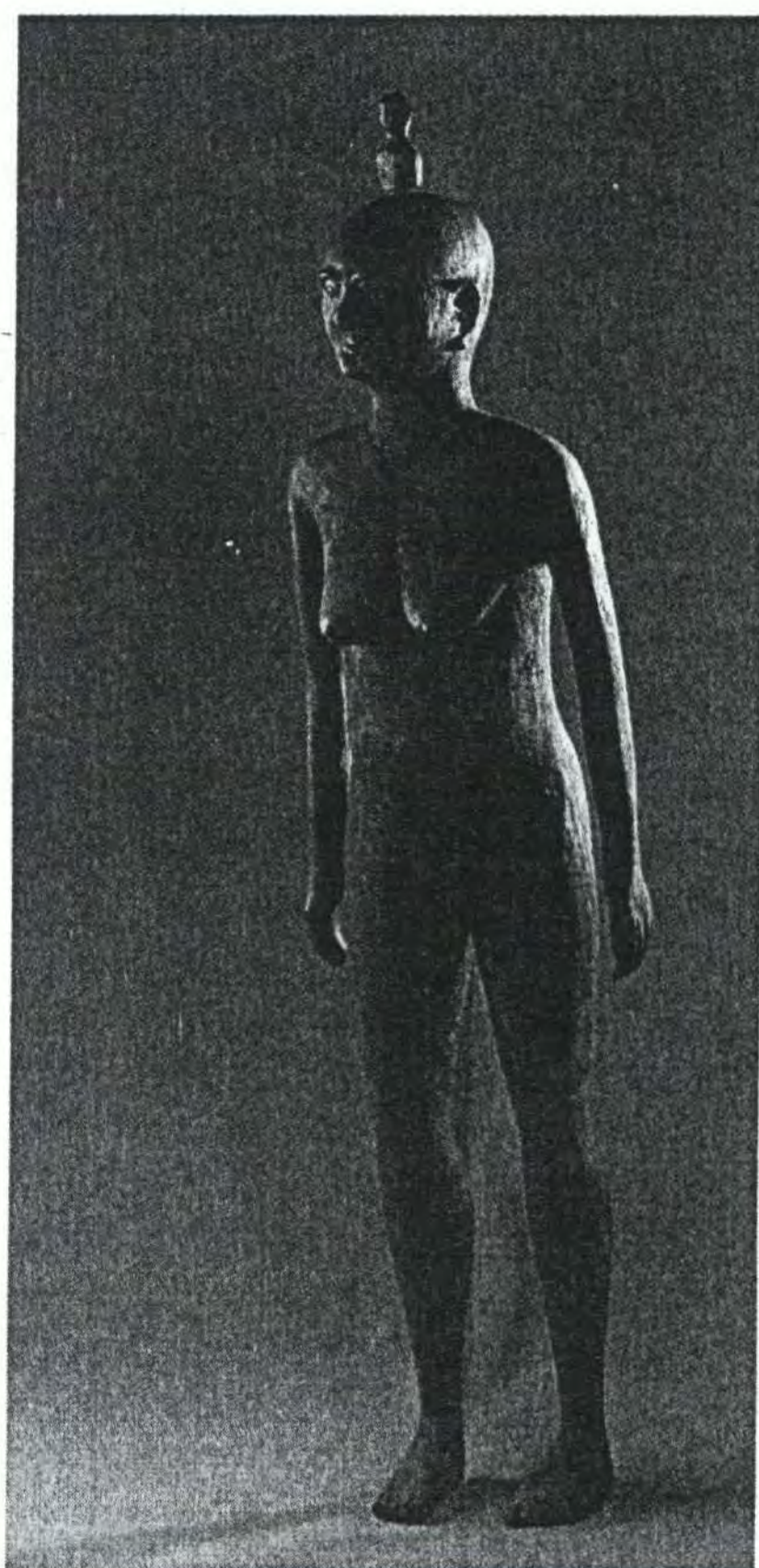
The exhibition of traditional Southern African art presents beautiful objects which are steeped in historic, symbolic, social and spiritual significance.

Xifaniso xo vatliwa/male and female figures, Tsonga, Northern Province. Wood. 70 x 20,1 x 10,1 and 71,5 x 19,6 x 11,8



The Johannesburg Art Gallery has dedicated two exhibition rooms to the display of 'traditional' Southern African art. Challenging the notion that Southern Africa has no traditional artistic heritage of note, the Gallery has mounted a number of objects of the finest quality from this area. Similar to other great art productions of the world, these objects are beautiful to look at and at the same time are steeped in historic, symbolic, social and spiritual significance.

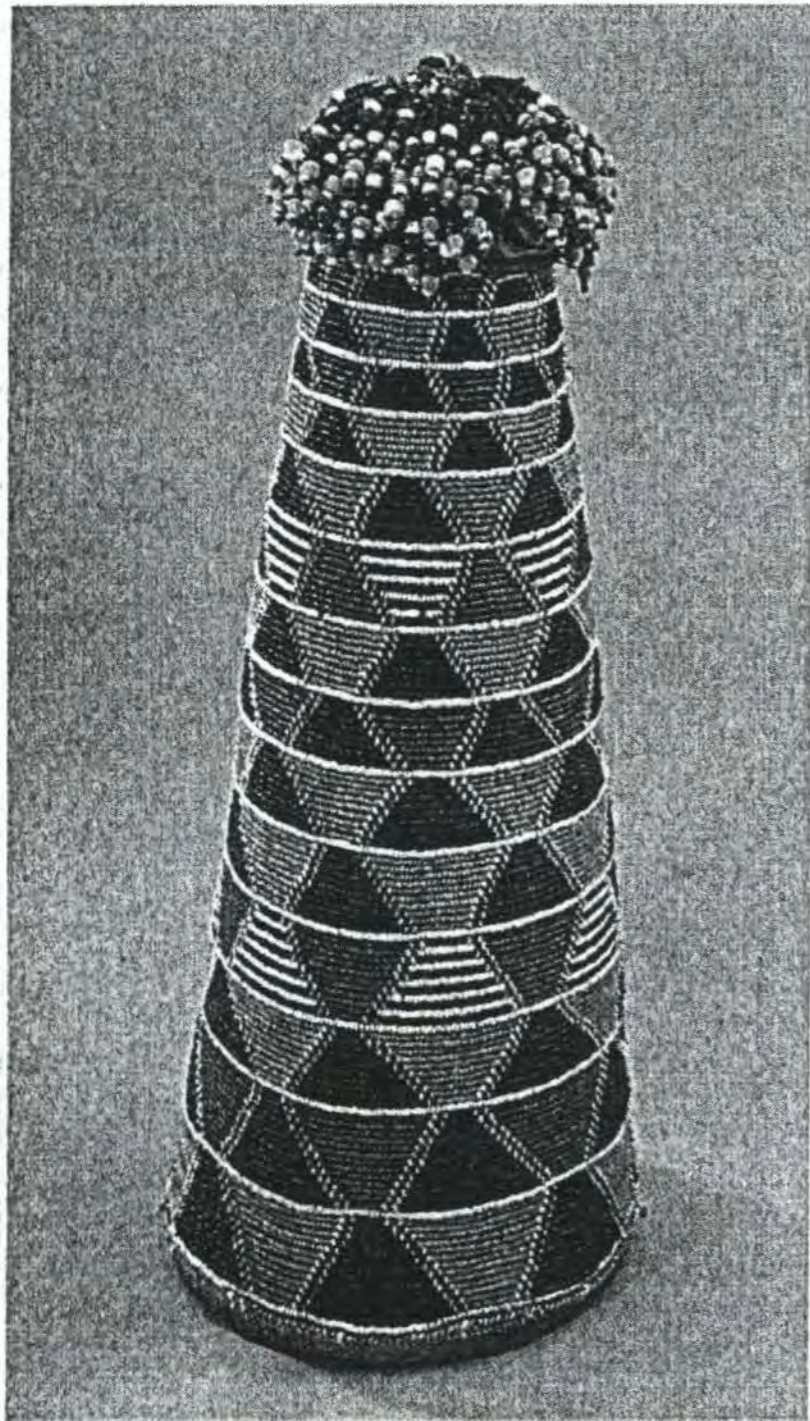
Women as creators constitute an important component of the display. Featuring many of the exquisite objects which women 'make', the first room of the exhibition includes *mincheka* (decorated shoulder wraps)



Ingwabani/gona/female spirit figure, Ndau, Mozambique. Wood. 135 x 34 x 19,5

made by the Tsonga-speaking women of the Northern Province, a beaded Ndebele *linaga* (ceremonial cape) and *irari* (blanket), a Southern Nguni *ingubo* (ceremonial wrap), other body ornamentations and carved and beaded sticks.

Beaded and embroidered images ranging from flowers, animals and fish to portraits of political leaders and contemporary events are used to decorate the *mincheka*. These are worn in a number of ways and are subject to frequent fashion changes.



They are also useful for carrying babies and other small loads. The highly decorated *mincheke* are worn only on special occasions and boldly declare the name of the maker and her date of birth.

Previously worn everyday and now only for ceremonies and special occasions, beaded Ndebele garments represent some of the most visually spectacular art forms in South Africa. For the Ndebele who were fragmented as a group in the late 19th century, these striking costumes were a way to declare their identity and assert their presence. Changes in colour and style are evident in the work. The earliest Ndebele beadwork used mostly white beads and the designs were small, restrained and geometric. Later work shows more colour usage and bolder designs with figurative elements.

Spiritual significance and colour are sometimes linked: the ochre-coloured earth with which the Southern Nguni (Xhosa) colour their blankets, is believed to be loved by the ancestors. Someone wearing this colour is understood to be in a normal, everyday state. The wearing of white, either as beadwork, clothing or applied to the body, indicates that the wearer is in a 'special' state and may denote a closeness to the ancestors.



Above left: *Ngoana*/beaded figure, South Sotho, Lesotho. Wood, seed-beads, mixed media. 36,4 x 14,2

Umdwana/beaded figure, Ndebele, Mpumalanga/Northern Province. Grass, textile, seed-beads, mixed media. 20,8 x 11,7

Many objects carved and used by men are also included in the exhibition. Carved sticks or staffs can indicate the status of a chief, identify the owner as a *nyanga*, or 'traditional' healer or may be an accessory for finery worn on a festive occasion.

Personal stools carved by specialist Tonga carvers of northern Zimbabwe are often taken with on social visits. These stools are used by men, women and children. They show a multitude of styles, some geometric, some anthropomorphic and some zoomorphic. Boats, trains and car caryatids are also popular, each carver having

his own recognisable style and favoured range of motifs. Stools from Zambia show a marked similarity of style and format and point to a relatedness in the people living on opposite sides of the Zambezi.

The second exhibition room contains objects which function on a more private level. It contains headrests, spirit vessels, and beaded and carved figures.

Headrests are small carved wooden pillows used by both men and women. They are significant objects which serve many symbolic functions. One of these is to delineate the

relations between a husband and his wife (or wives). For example the Shona headrests which men use evoke the female form and therefore indicate a connection to fertility. One of these headrests may be given as a marriage gift from a wife to her husband. When a husband sleeps on this headrest, his head (the seat of his ancestral line) brings together the fertility of his wife with his patrilineal ancestral line.

The headrest also maintains connections between individuals and their ancestors. For example, as the first sacrifice to his deceased father (now an ancestor) a Tsonga man will rub tobacco onto his headrest as an offering. Furthermore, dreaming while using a headrest is analogous with visiting your ancestors. Many of these small carved objects are masterpieces of three-dimensional form.

Spirit vessels, *nhunguvani* or *gona* figures are containers used in healing practises and to protect their owners against misfortune. Used by people living along the eastern side of the Africa continent, they are found in Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and north eastern South Africa. These are sometimes carved as figures but most often are vessels made from calabashes with carved stoppers assuming anthropomorphic or zoomorphic form. The spirit of deceased ancestors is thought to be contained in a special substance placed inside the vessel. Using the vessel as a sort of 'cell phone' to the



Mutsago/headrest, Shona, Zimbabwe. Wood, 13,2 x 17,8 x 6,5

ancestors, appeals are made for protection, health and fertility.

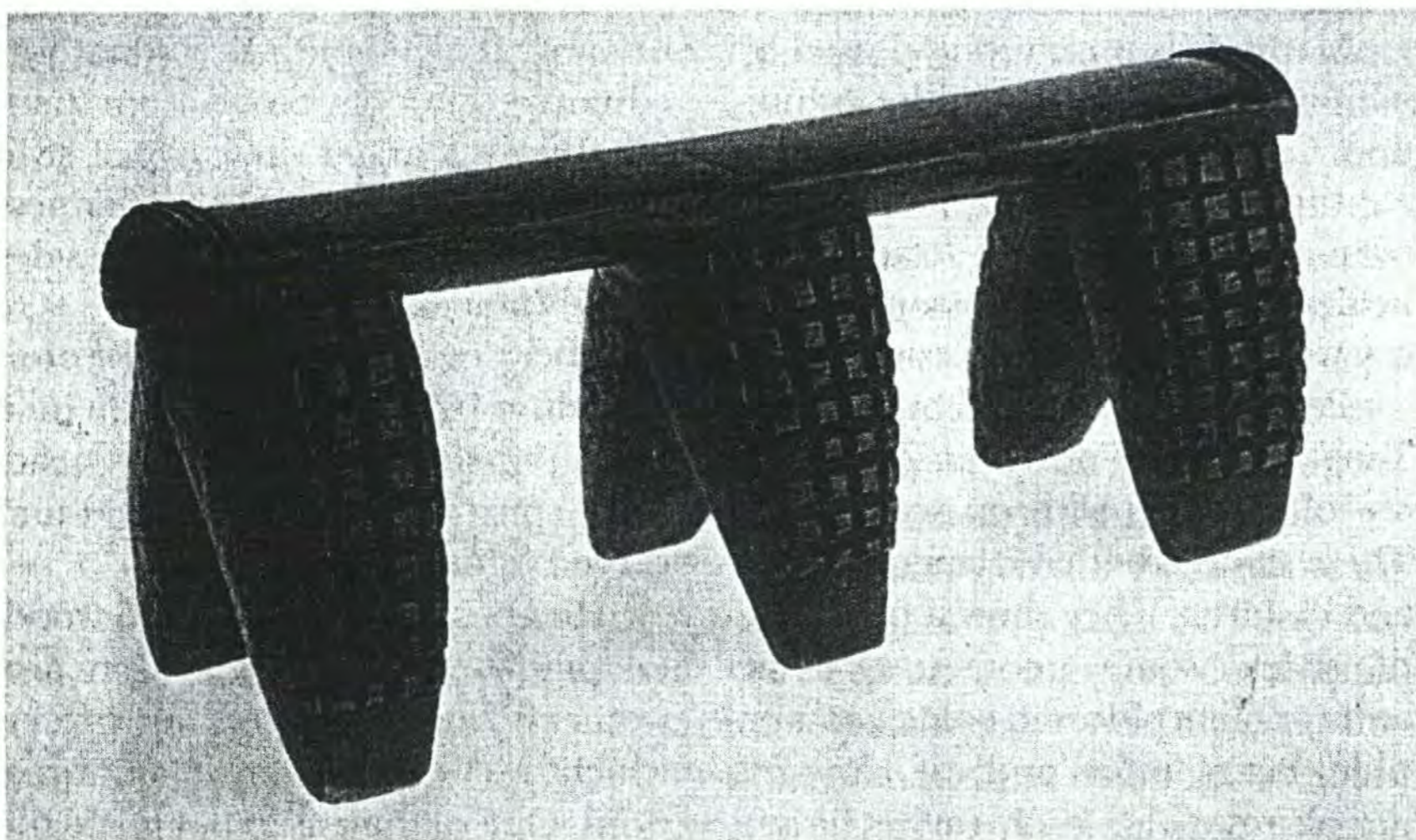
The collection of *gona* which the Johannesburg Art Gallery holds, is extraordinary in that four of these are two-thirds life sized and are carved as human figures. These figures are unusual as they are carved in a 'naturalistic' style and are much larger than any other figures from Southern Africa.

Beaded figures, or 'dolls' from all over Southern Africa are on display. These have many roles and

there is little clarity on many aspects of their use. Early texts tend to refer to them as 'fertility dolls' but their uses and functions are much more diverse than this. Many are toys, others represent 'children' and are used by boys and girls when they enact adult roles as part of a learning process. Some are made by barren women who wish to have children. These figures are created with great care and skill and are infinitely varied.

Objects created in a non-western aesthetic paradigm have often been housed in ethnographic or natural history museums. The technique of displaying multiples of objects in glass cases is reminiscent of specimen exhibits. The exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery breaks with these display techniques which have created inequalities in the way cultural objects from Africa are viewed. Exhibiting each object as an example of individual creative talent and having as many objects as possible free of cabinets, counteracts the ethnographic effect of many previous displays. In addition, locating the exhibition in two adjacent but different spaces, enhances the conceptual depth of the exhibition. ▽

Isiquiki/headrest, Northern Nguni (Zulu), KwaZulu/Natal. Wood, 14,7 x 39,4 x 11,9



✓ 145 50/1009

Size: Height 110 mm
Length 175 mm
Width 50 mm
Length of base 110 mm

Description: Crossbar: Rectangular, curved and decorated with a differently arranged row of incised triangles at each flattened narrow end.

Lugs: Small, rectangular blocks.

Column: Two rectangular pillars form a "V" which rests on a rectangular block.

Base: Two flat linked circles with a tiny triangle at centre front and back.

✓ 146 50/1010

Size: Height 145 mm
Length 175 mm
Width 55 mm
Length of base 135 mm

Description: Crossbar: Rectangular, curved and decorated at one narrow end with a row of incised triangles. The other end is worn.

Lugs: One lug is broken off, the other is a side-facing rectangle decorated with two brass studs.

Column: Six short pillars radiate out from a central sphere, three to the crossbar and three to the base. The four outer pillars are decorated with incised triangles, and the sphere is decorated with two brass studs at the front.

Base: Roughly rectangular, narrowing slightly at centre to form two small, triangular niches.

Comments: The brass studs used to decorate this piece are eyelet hooks of the type used on boots from the end of the nineteenth century.

✓ 147 50/1011

Size: Height 155 mm
Length 195 mm
Width 70 mm
Length of base 155 mm

Description: Crossbar: Rectangular, curved and decorated at the narrow ends with a row of zig-zags carved in relief.

Lugs: Side-facing open rectangles. The one on the left has a large piece broken off it, the right has two protruding filled arches.

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Column: Four rectangular pillars, two at front and two at back forming a double "X" shape.

Base: Two flat circles joined by a rectangular bar.

✓ 148 50/1012

Size: Height 165 mm
Length 190 mm
Width 65 mm
Length of base 175 mm

Description: Crossbar: Rectangular, curved and decorated on either side of centre with two triangles made up of six incised triangles, and on the flattened narrow ends with a series of short incised lines.

Lugs: None.

Column: Three pillars in a row each made up of a front-facing narrow "X" intersected by a circle. Decorated with parallel grooves on the "X" and on the circles with incised concentric circles with varying numbers of rough diamond shapes.

Base: Two flat linked circles with a small semi-circle at centre front and back. A large piece is broken off one side, and the sloping edges are broken in many places.

Comments: This head-rest has several features which show Shona influence. (See number 140).

✓ 149 50/1013

Size: Height 130 mm
Length 200 mm
Width 65 mm
Length of base 150 mm

Description: Crossbar: Rectangular, curved and decorated near the narrow ends with two rows of small zig-zags carved in relief.

Lugs: Filled arches facing front.

Column: Two rectangular pillars curving inward slightly, and decorated with a row of narrow, horizontal, rounded pleats running down centre front and back, as well as three open arches inside and one outside.

Base: Two truncated cones linked at centre by an inverted truncated cone at the base of which is cut an unusual ovoid at front and back.

Comments: In her article "Artindigène et appuis-tête",¹ L. Jaques remarks that the inspiration for some designs seem to have come from the grill of an Arab window.

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