

Transvaal Tsonga - head-rest

1987.3.54



object type: head-rest	acc no: 1987.3.54
vernacular:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: auto;"> <p>contact prints</p> </div>
sub-type:	
community: Transvaal Tsonga	
sub-group:	
geographical location:	location: [REDACTED]
	shelf: [REDACTED]
	b/w:            c/t:            c/s:
	dimensions:
date and place collected: Elim, Transvaal, c. 1930	h: 13,5 cm            diam:
date executed:	w: 21 cm            mounted:
artist name, sex: male	d: 7 cm
use: for resting the head while sleeping	medium: wood

Trust	donation: Anglo American Johannesburg Centenary
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. 50/950	
object type translation:	
catalogues: Wanless, <u>AN&amp;N</u> 27(2):68	

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] 1987

Placed on display in [REDACTED]  
early 1989. Area closed off in early 1990

# WUKASA

JBL ✓  
NL ✓  
EK ✓  
SS ✓  
TM ✓  
EM ✓  
335

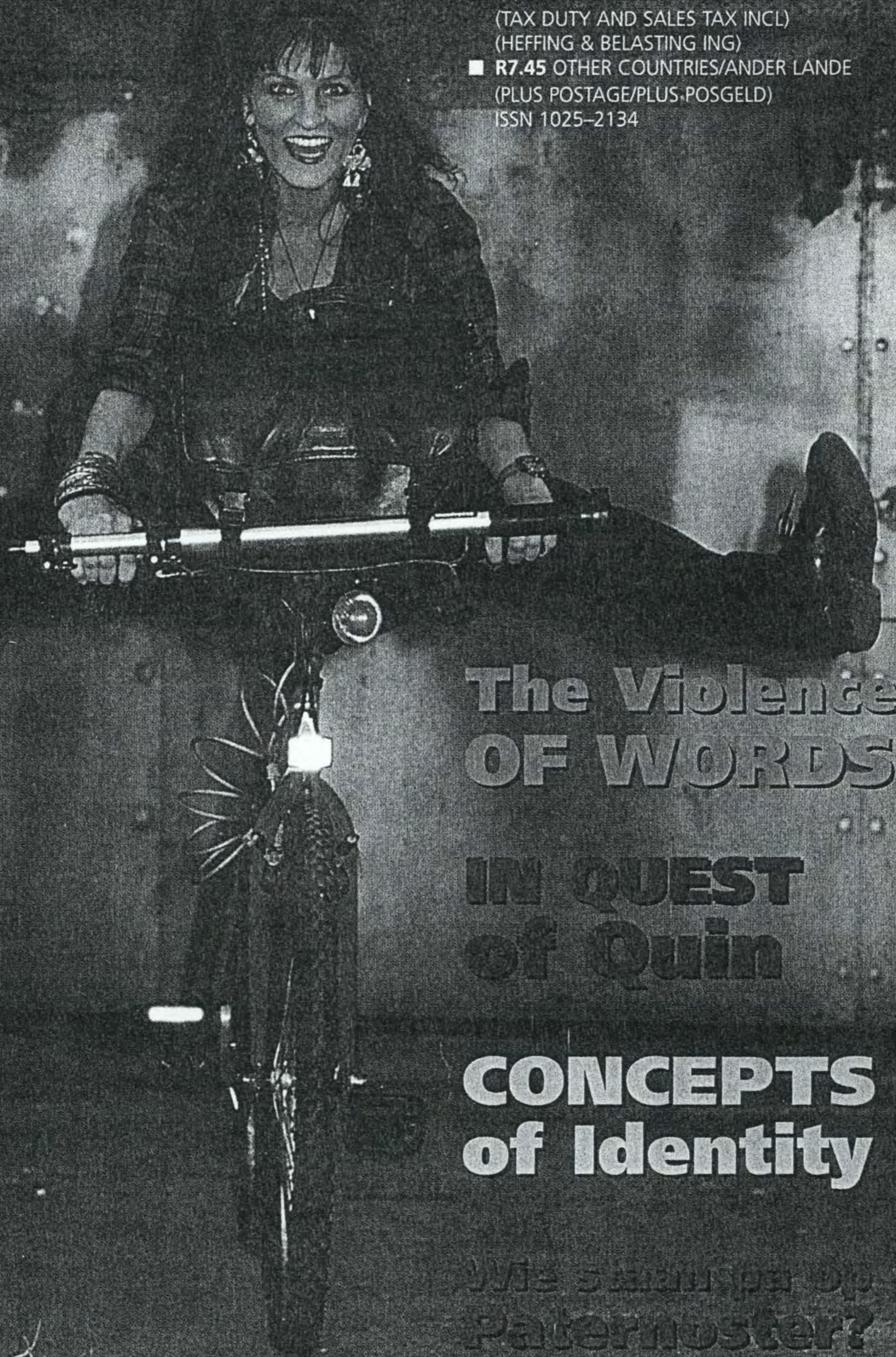
**SOUL OF THE RAINBOW NATION  
SIEL VAN DIE REËNBOOGNASIE**

**VOL 1 NO 2 1995**

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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 op  
Paternoster?**



9 771025 213003



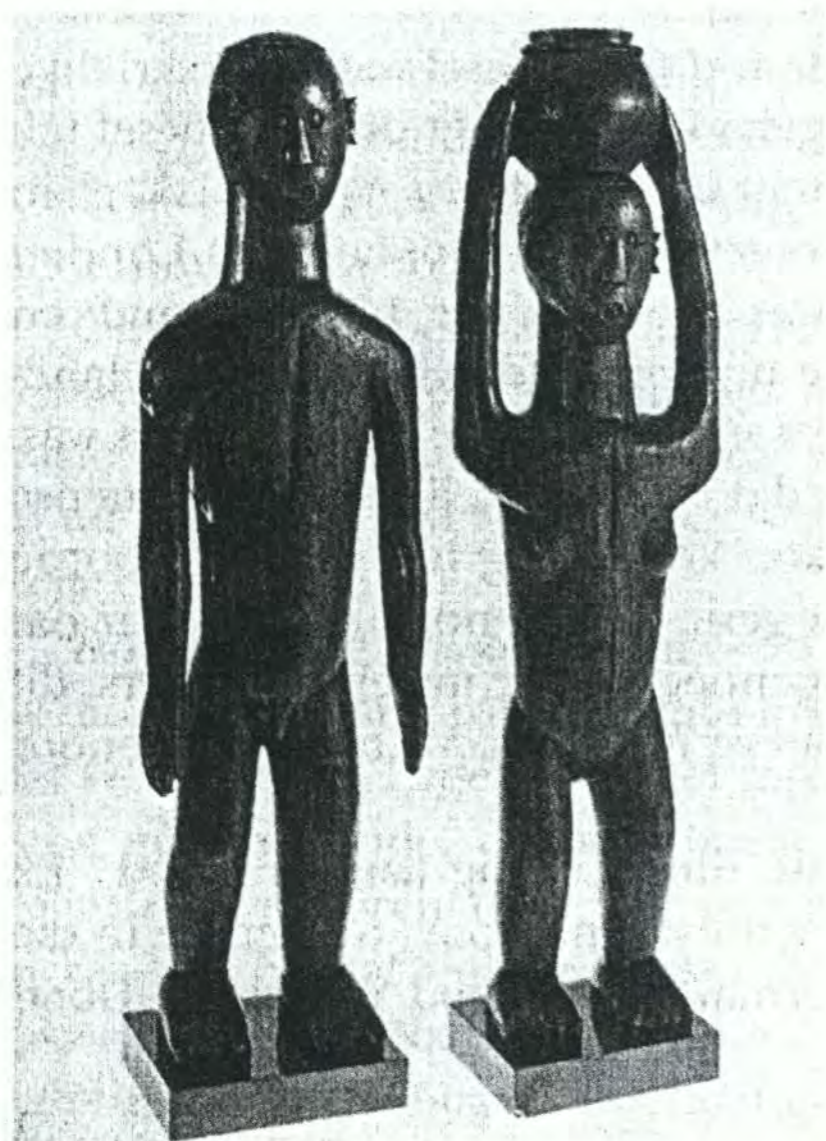
## COLLECTIONS

# IN TOUCH WITH THE ANCESTORS

*Nessa Leibhammer*

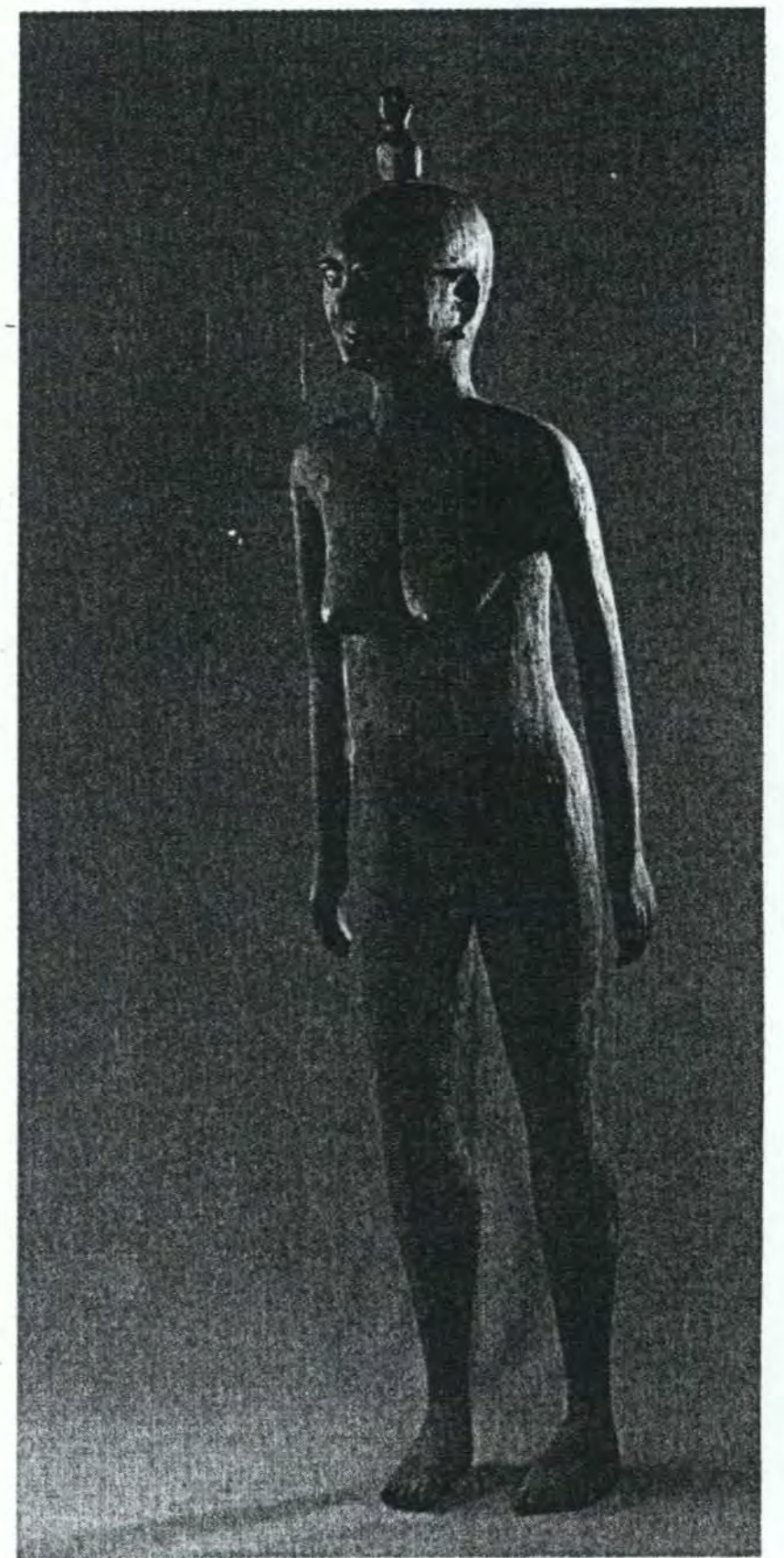
The exhibition of traditional Southern African art presents beautiful objects which are steeped in historic, symbolic, social and spiritual significance.

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



**T**he 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.

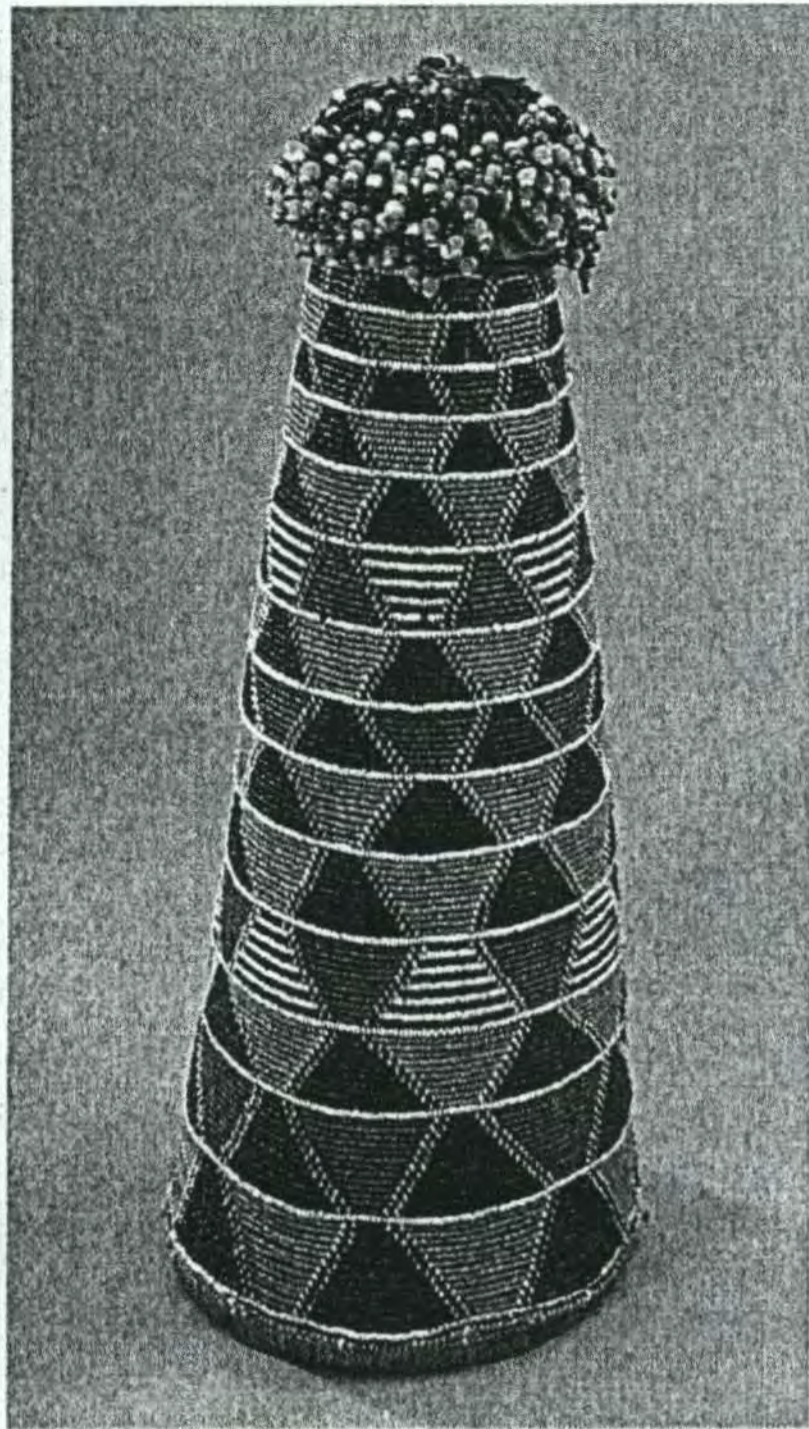
Women as creators constitute an important component of the display. Featuring many of the exquisite objects which women make, the first room of the exhibition includes *mincheka* (decorated shoulder wraps)



*Ingwabani/gona*/female spirit figure, Nda, 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.

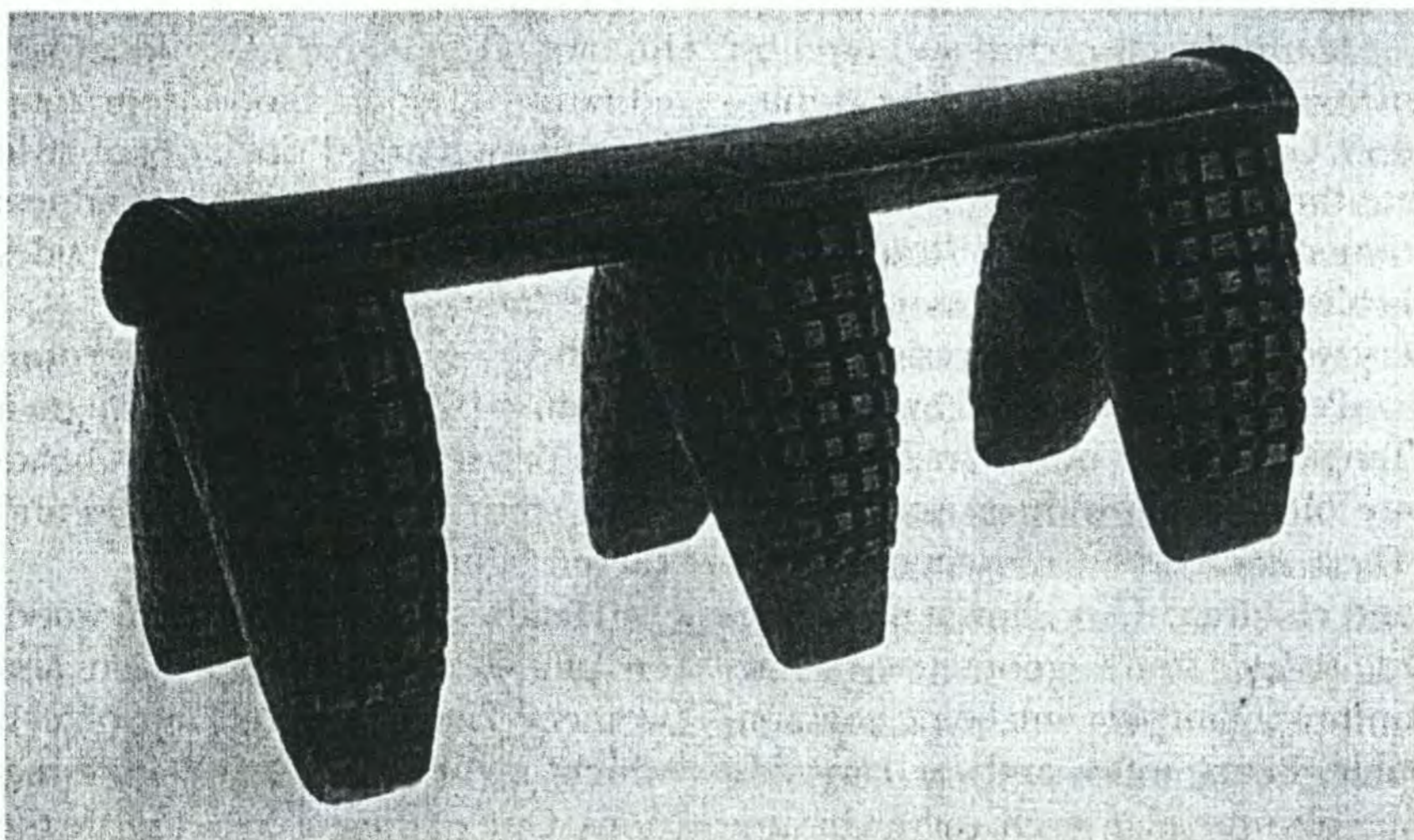
The collection of *gona* which the Johannesburg Art Gallery holds, is extraordinary in that four of these are two-thirds life sized and are carved as human figures. These figures are unusual as they are carved in a 'naturalistic' style and are much larger than any other figures from Southern Africa.

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



Lugs: None.

Column: A rough, flat, front-facing circle, flattened at top and bottom, with three rectangular openings cut into the centre. It is decorated on all sides with two rows of incised diamonds following the edges of the pillars.

Base: Rectangular, slightly convex, and decorated with double rows of incised triangles.

85 50/948

Place: Elim, Transvaal.

Tribe: Shangaan.

Date: c.1930.

Source: Jaques Collection.

Size: Height 135 mm

Length 210 mm

Width 80 mm

Length of base 170 mm

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

Lugs: Open arches facing front.

Column: Two rectangular pillars decorated at front and back with a narrow vertical row of parallelograms carved in relief, and at the outer sides with open arches facing front.

Base: Two flat, roughly spade-shaped pieces with the broad ends linked at the centre.

86 50/949

Place: Elim, Transvaal.

Tribe: Shangaan.

Date: c.1930.

Source: Jaques Collection.

Size: Height 155 mm

Length 245 mm

Width 75 mm

Length of base 175 mm

Description: Crossbar: Rectangular with a pronounced curve and no decoration.

Lugs: None.

Column: Two rectangular fluted pillars.

Base: Two flat circles joined by a short bar.

87 50/950

Place: Elim, Transvaal.

Tribe: Shangaan.

Date: c.1930.

Source: Jaques Collection.

Size: Height

Length

Width

Length of base

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

Lugs: Two flat semi-ovoid pieces with the broad ends linked at the centre.

Column: Four rectangular pillars decorated at front and back with a narrow vertical row of parallelograms carved in relief, and at the outer sides with open arches facing front.

Base: Ovoid with flaring sides.

88 50/951

Place: Elim, Transvaal.

Tribe: Shangaan.

Date: c.1930.

Source: Jaques Collection.

Size: Height

Length

Width

Length of base

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

Lugs: Rectangular blocks.

Column: Two rectangular pillars decorated at front and back with a narrow vertical row of parallelograms carved in relief, and at the outer sides with open arches facing front.

Base: Flat ovoid with two flaring sides.

89 50/952

Place: Elim, Transvaal.

Tribe: Shangaan.

Date: c.1930.

Source: Jaques Collection.

Size: Height

Length

Width

Length of base

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

Lugs: One broken, the other with a hole pierced through it.

Column: Two rectangular pillars decorated at front and back with a narrow vertical row of parallelograms carved in relief, and at the outer sides with open arches facing front.

Base: Flat ovoid with two flaring sides.

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*Date:* c.1930.  
*Source:* Jaques Collection.  
*Size:* Height 135 mm  
Length 210 mm  
Width 70 mm  
Length of base 130 mm

*Description: Crossbar:* Rectangular, curved and undecorated.

*Lugs:* Two flat semi-ovals, facing front.

*Column:* Four rectangular pillars, two at front and two at back, sloping slightly inward toward base.

*Base:* Ovoid with flaring and fluted edges.

✓ 88 50/951

*Place:* Elim, Transvaal.  
*Tribe:* Shangaan.  
*Date:* c.1930.  
*Source:* Jaques Collection.  
*Size:* Height 130 mm  
Length 215 mm  
Width 60 mm  
Length of base 120 mm

*Description: Crossbar:* Rectangular, curved, and decorated near the narrow ends with a row of parallel incised lines.

*Lugs:* Rectangular blocks.

*Column:* Two rectangular pillars, decorated front and back with horizontal rounded pleats on the left pillar and a panel of vertical grooves on the right.

*Base:* Flat ovoid with two small triangles carved out of centre back and front.

✓ 89 50/952

*Place:* Elim, Transvaal.  
*Tribe:* Shangaan.  
*Date:* c.1930.  
*Source:* Jaques Collection.  
*Size:* Height 105 mm  
Length 180 mm  
Width 60 mm  
Length of base 140 mm

*Description: Crossbar:* Rectangular, curved, and decorated near the flattened narrow ends with a series of incised parallel lines.

*Lugs:* One broken, the other a flat semi-circle facing front with a small hole pierced through it.



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