

Transvaal Tsongu - head-rest

1987-3-100



object type: head-rest	acc no: 1987.3.100	
vernacular:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 20px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 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: 14,5 cm	diam:
date executed:	w: 13,5 cm	mounted:
artist name, sex: male	d: 5 cm	
use: for resting the head while sleeping	medium: wood	

JOHANNESBURG ART GALLERY
ARCHIVE SHEET V
LOANS / LOCATIONS REGISTER

ARTIST:

ACC. NO.:

Placed in [REDACTED] 1987

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

WUKASA

JBL ✓
NL ✓
EK
SS
TM
BN

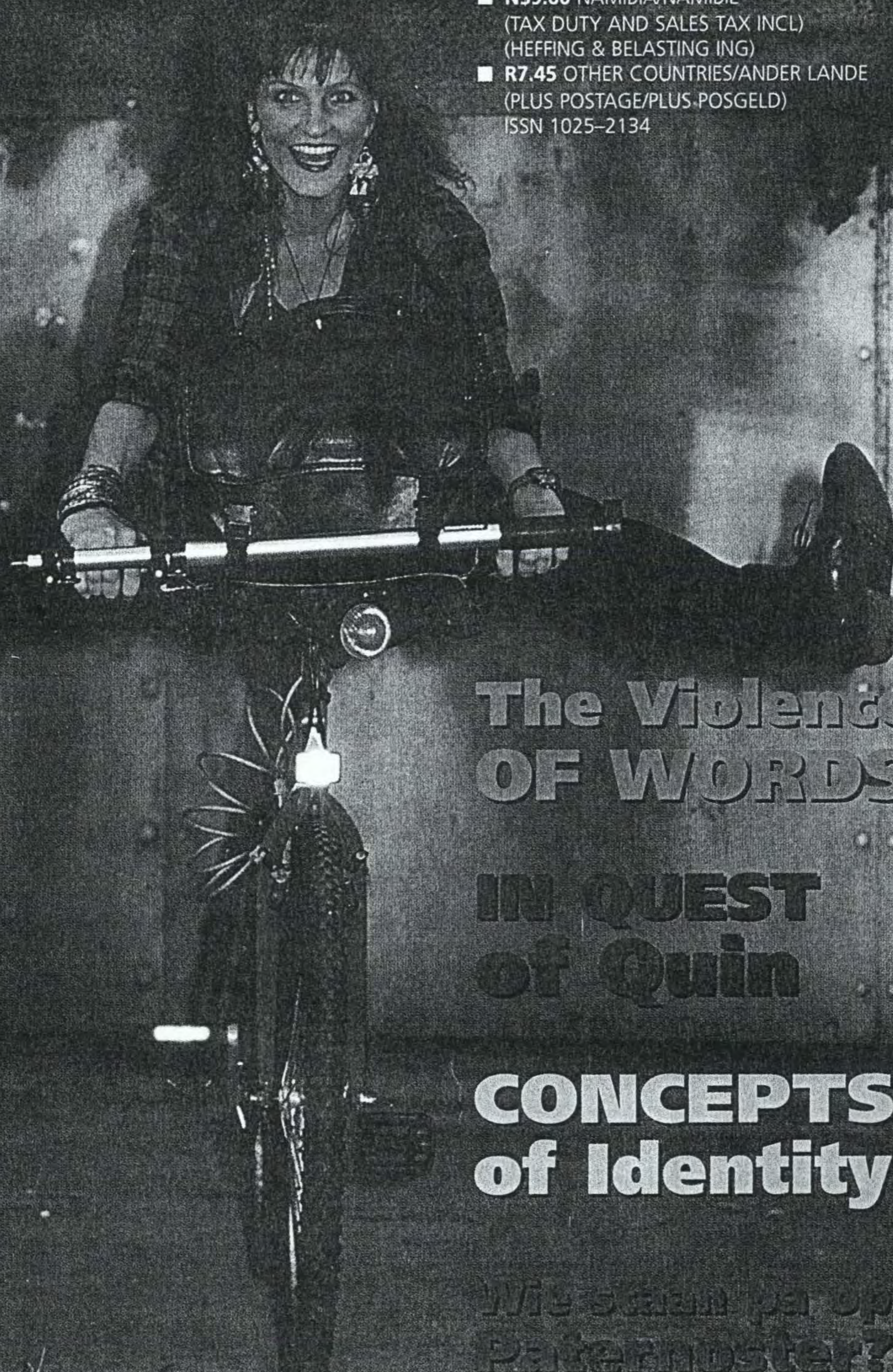
SOUL OF THE RAINBOW NATION
SIEL VAN DIE REËNBOOGNASIE

VOLUME 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 pa op
Paternoster?



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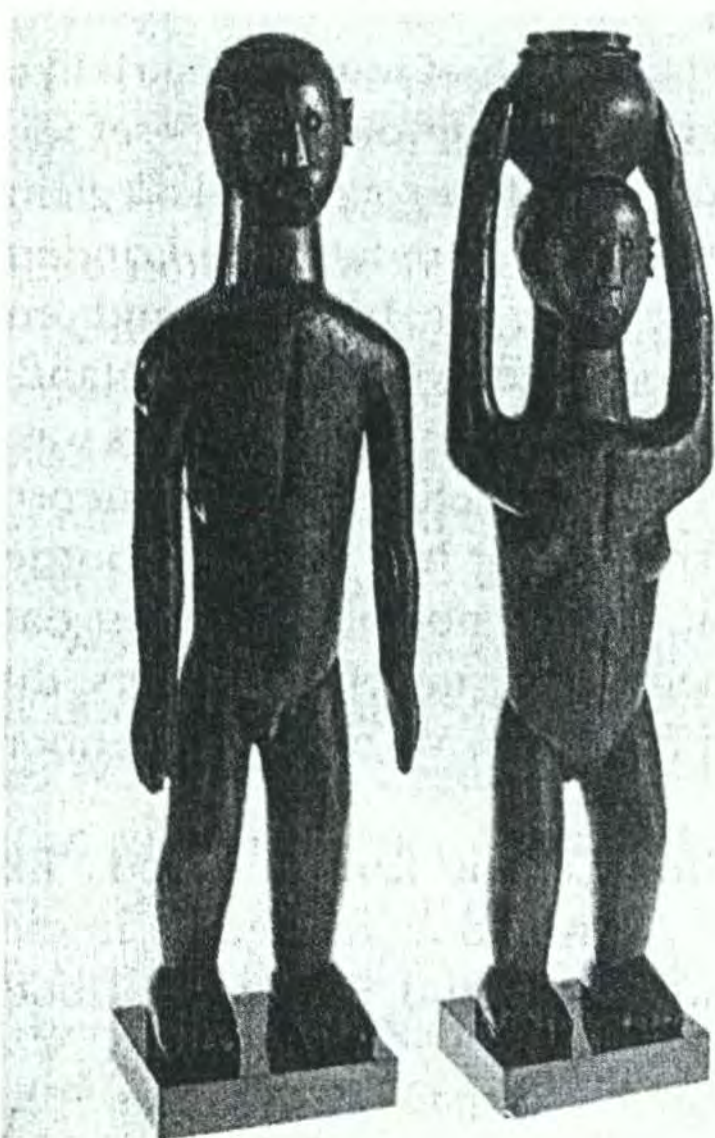
COLLECTIONS

IN TOUCH WITH THE ANCESTORS

Nessa Leibhammer

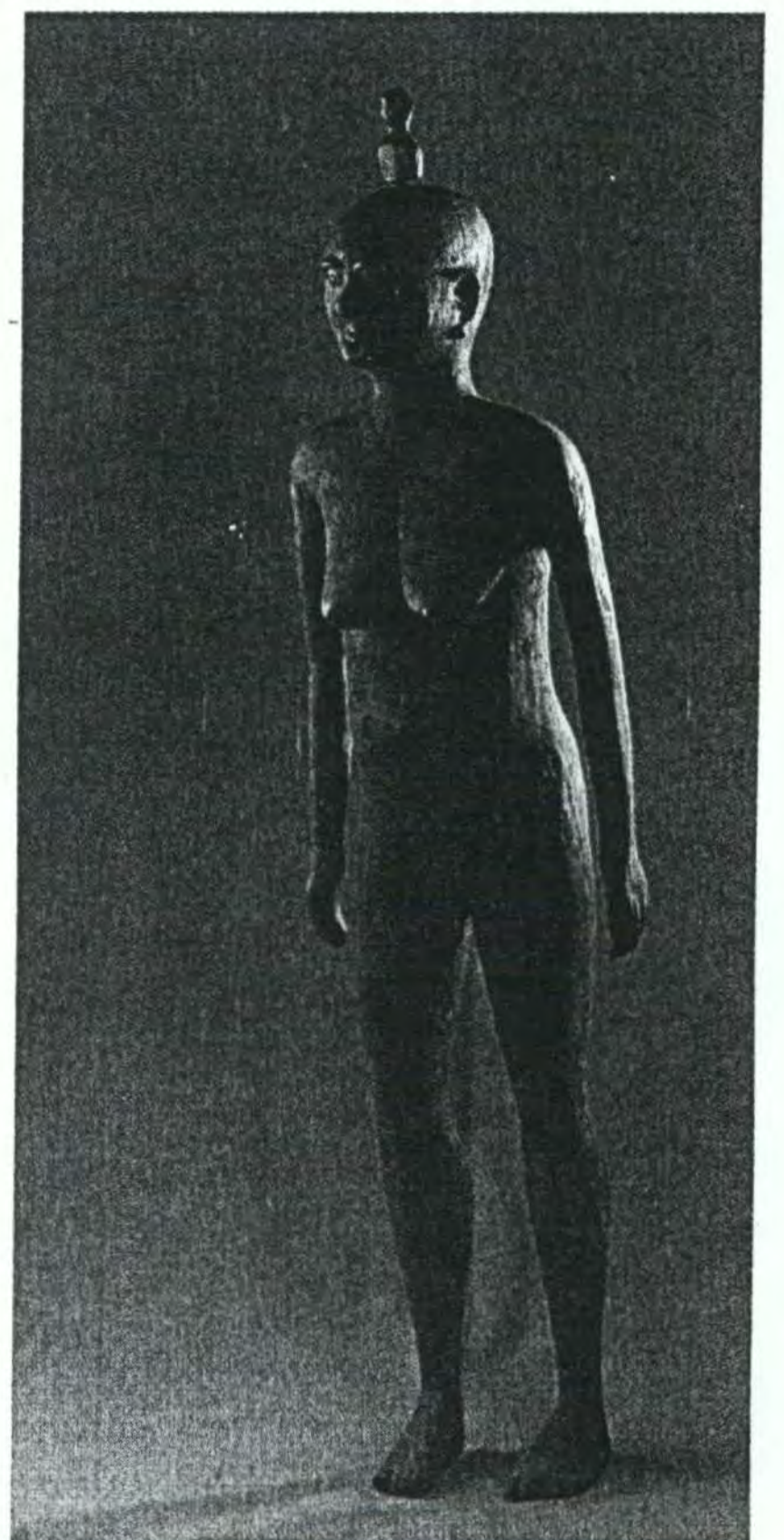
The exhibition of traditional Southern African art presents beautiful objects which are steeped in historic, symbolic, social and spiritual significance.

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

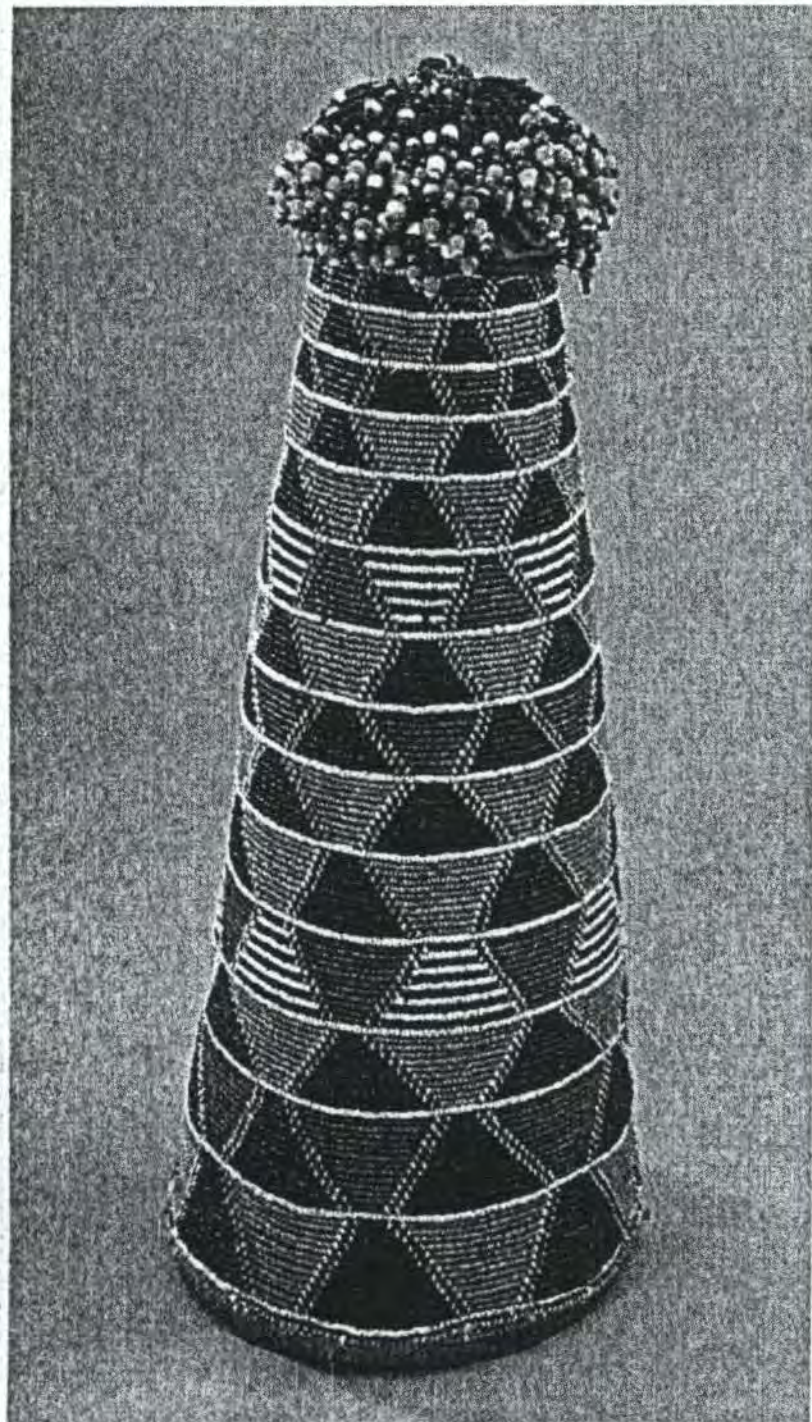
Women as creators constitute an important component of the display. Featuring many of the exquisite objects which women 'make', the first room of the exhibition includes *mincheka* (decorated shoulder wraps)



Ingwabani/gona/female spirit figure, Ndau, Mozambique. Wood. 135 × 34 × 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 *mincheka* 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.

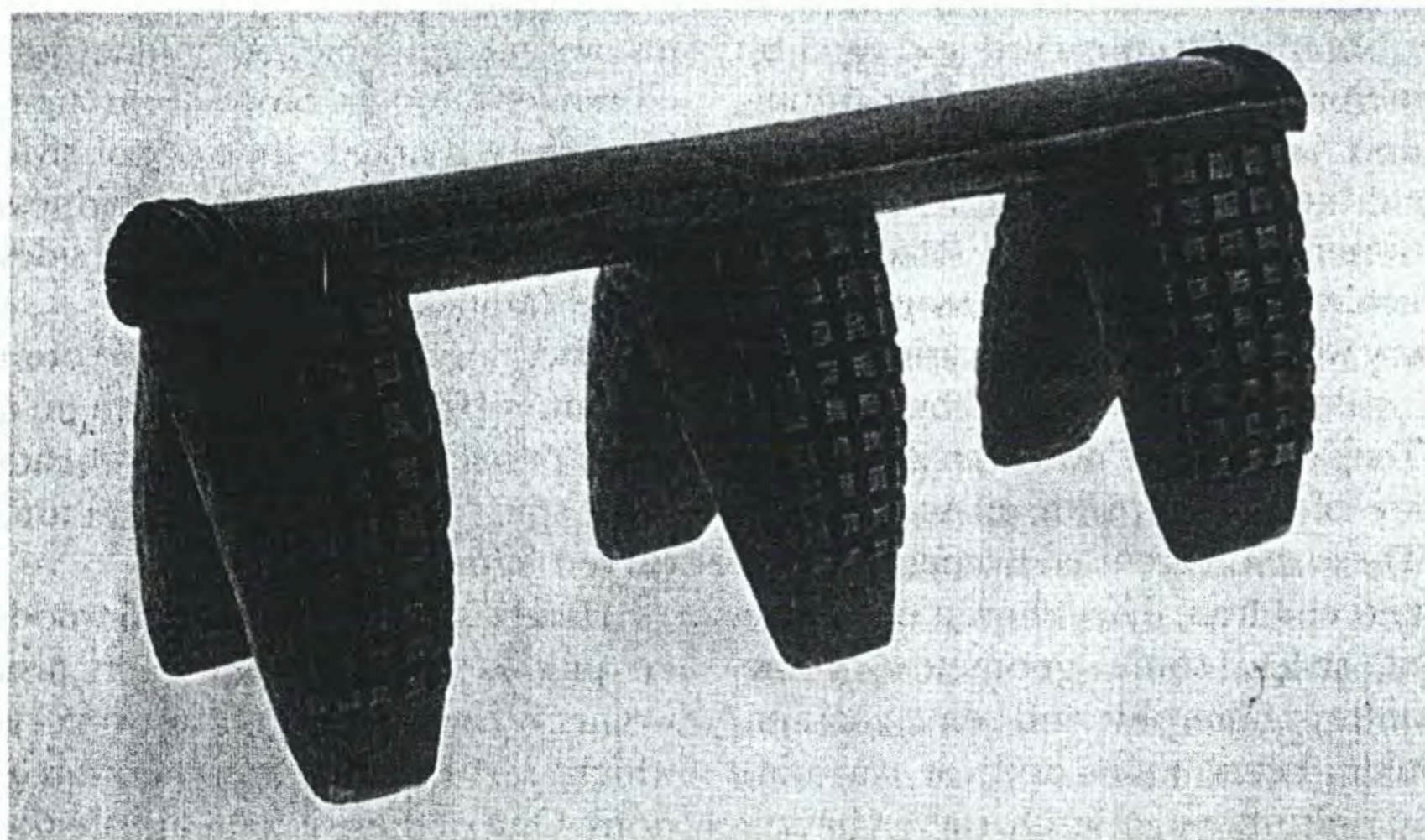
The collection of *gona* which the Johannesburg Art Gallery holds, is extraordinary in that four of these are two-thirds life sized and are carved as human figures. These figures are unusual as they are carved in a 'naturalistic' style and are much larger than any other figures from Southern Africa.

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



Description: Crossbar: Rectangular, curved, and undecorated.
Column: Two short, rectangular pillars, flanked by two, flat, roughly "C" shaped pillars, all resting on a horizontal rectangular bar.
Base: Two legs each at front and back descend from the horizontal bar, and are joined near the base by a parallel bar.

138 50/1002

Source: Jaques Collection. (Now in the possession of the Jaques family.)

Size: Height 150 mm
 Length 225 mm
 Width 75 mm
 Length of base 145 mm

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

Lugs: Open arches facing front.

Column: Four rectangular blocks joined around an open square in the centre form a cross linked to crossbar and base at top and bottom. Each block is decorated at front and back with an incised rectangle inside which are rows of studs. The "arms" are joined to the crossbar and the base by short round pillars. At the ends of the arms are small filled arches facing front.

Base: Badly broken, roughly rectangular. There is a small triangle at the centre of the back.

✓ 136 50/1000

Size: Height 145 mm
 Length 250 mm
 Width 85 mm
 Length of base 165 mm

Description: Crossbar: Rectangular, slightly curved, and decorated near the narrow ends with a row of incised triangles.

Lugs: Half cylinders running from front to back, with a small ridge around the centre.

Column: Four rectangular blocks, joined around an open rectangle form a cross. This is linked to the crossbar at the top and the base at the bottom.

The "arms" are joined to the crossbar and the base by short pillars.

Base: Four, linked ovoids.

Comments: The whole piece has been stained a reddish brown.

✓ 139 50/1003

Size: Height 145 mm
 Length 135 mm
 Width 50 mm
 Length of base 115 mm

Description: Crossbar: Rectangular, curved, and undecorated.

Lugs: Crossbar "folds" over at right-angles to form rectangular, side-facing lugs which are decorated with a series of concentric rectangles and a row of zig-zags all carved in relief.

Column: "X" shaped, with a horizontal rectangle in centre. Incised diamonds cover the front and back, except for the horizontal bar.

Base: Two, linked, truncated, concave cones with downward-pointing triangles at centre front and back.

✓ 137 50/1001 a and b

		a	b
<i>Size:</i>	Height	130 mm	130 mm
	Length	215 mm	215 mm
	Width	70 mm	70 mm
	Length of base	145 mm	136 mm

Description: Double head-rest. These two head-rests formed one piece until a link of the chain was broken. The two sides are almost identical.

Crossbars: Roughly rectangular but flaring slightly at ends; curved and decorated near the narrow ends with a short row of tiny diamonds carved in relief.

Lugs: Filled arches facing sides.

Columns: Four rectangular pillars, two at front and two at back, curving slightly toward the centre. At one side an open arch extends horizontally to hold two links of a chain for "a" and four links for "b".

Base: Two flat linked circles, blackened at edges.

✓ 140 50/1004

Size: Height 150 mm
 Length 110 mm
 Width 50 mm
 Length of base 140 mm