

Bowie / Johannesburg

‘The very idea of the African artist spins mind into mush. The reality is almost as kaleidoscopic as one could ever imagine...there is only one common thread: an unquenching thirst for national- and self-understanding’ (David Bowie, ‘The Cleanest Work of All’, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 8, Summer 1995, p.43).

Bowie first visited South Africa in early 1995, less than a year after the first democratic general elections that finally brought apartheid to an end. South Africa had suffered from decades of international economic and cultural boycotts, and contemporary South African artists had grown up with a sense of dislocation, cut off from developments in the art world in Europe and America, and with no wider stimulus from Africa.

Africus, the first Johannesburg Biennale, attempted to reconnect South Africa with Africa and the international art community. 300 artists from 64 countries were invited to participate through national pavilions, from North America and Europe, as well as 18 other African countries. Visitors came from around the world to witness the largest exhibition ever held in Africa, and it was within this context that Bowie made the trip south to research a piece for *Modern Painters*.

‘The politics of South Africa had precluded my finding out much about their works... The damage-zone and fear, the great knot of zeal and burgeoning hope that are the centre of the new era, this play-off of tension and release are the very fabric of a set of visions by extremely diverse talents that record the tangled machinations of an emerging force for community peace and stability... Highly accessible as it is, reverberations abound’ (David Bowie, ‘An Introduction’, *Mayibuye I Afrika*, Bernard Jacobson Gallery (exh. cat.), London, 1995).

The *Modern Painters* review starts with the central show at the Electric Workshop: ‘The more I walk around, the pricklier my skin gets; my pleasure is heightened moment to moment with the pure exhilaration of sharing in work of talent and undiluted communication. The colour and serious declaration of intent are overwhelming. This is as mind-jarringly moving as any major art-thing I’ve seen, East, West or Middle, in any year’ (Bowie, ‘The Cleanest Work of All’, *op. cit.*, p.44).

At the Angolan pavilion, Bowie stopped to talk to António Ole for hours, discussing their mutual admiration of and debt to the work of Duchamp and Basquiat. ‘The tension between the different logics of war and peace is epitomised by this masterful conceptualism of António Ole...there is a sub-text that envelopes the soul’ (*ibid.*, p.44). In Beninese artist Romuald Hazoumè he is struck by the ‘incredibly forceful Picassironic assemblages...from this most distinguished of Post Dadaists’ (*ibid.*, p.44).

Bowie immersed himself in the Johannesburg arts scene, making sure to visit the city’s galleries away from the main sites of the biennale. ‘I’m finding the electric atmosphere and sheer diversity of the art-works intoxicating. Collectively, the exhibits within the official venues, and those dissenting or uninvited artists who’ve found their own spots on the fringe, reveal a passion and quality, a generous revelation of vision that just does not have an equal in the majority of Modern Western exhibitions’ (*ibid.*, p.43).

Goodman Gallery was showing David Koloane and Willie Bester, two of South Africa’s most important resistance artists. Bowie describes Koloane as ‘the old sage of African painting...If Leon Kossoff had been born a black man in Soweto, he might have painted like this’ (*ibid.*, p.46). Bester’s also resonated, ‘A bit like Bacon... His technique is quite as powerful as his subject matter is didactic’ (*ibid.*, p.46).

The 1st Johannesburg Biennale marked the beginning of a year-long international programme of events celebrating South Africa’s new identity and its return to the international art community. As a direct result of what he had seen in Johannesburg, Bowie campaigned for his friend Bernard Jacobson to hold an exhibition of contemporary South African art to coincide with the africa95 festival of African Arts held in the UK:

‘Since [the] late 1970s, I have been mesmerised by the spontaneous and ever changing panorama of this continent’s artistic experiments. Africa95...will, hopefully, challenge our preconceptions of ‘otherness’ and establish African art as being some of the most tantalising and provocative work to be seen. It should be nurtured and presented respectfully. If we continue to categorise art that is outside our cultural experience as somehow ‘low art’, curio or merely artefact, we will be dealing these artists a serious injustice and we ourselves will be far poorer for it’ (*ibid.*, p.47).

David Bowie at Angola in *Africus*,
1st Johannesburg Biennale, 1995
Image © Ruvan Boshoff

Catherine on Bowie

I met David by accident: I happened to be at Goodman Gallery when he popped in. Obviously I'm a fan – I've got all his albums – so it was a bit of a shock. It was his first visit to the gallery and he obviously liked what he saw.

And then Bernard Jacobson came out here and Linda [Goodman] took him around. Of course Fanagalo Store was the first work I did with all these figurines and Bernard saw it in the process of being made here in the studio and wanted it for the show.

I never met him again. He didn't know whether I was white or black or whatever so he obviously didn't remember when he met me, or perhaps that it was my work.

People can take what they want from my work.

I fed off the frenzy, gangster culture and the sordidness of daily life of New York more than I did the art. Artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat interested me with his combination of primitive and contemporary imagery. And Kenny Scharf's comic-book style encapsulated America for me.

I keep my little wooden Catherine's all over the house; they appear in nooks and crannies, corners and on shelves. They still startle and light up the moment every time I glance in their direction.

So, I got back from South Africa earlier this year raving about what I'd seen, blasting poor Bernard into a corner with my gale of enthusiasm. 'Don't do another thing!' I said, 'Bring these people to London, they're fantastic!'

One is battered by the huge array of influence and the menacing jokiness of image placement. Historical reference from Dubuffet through Pablo makes it clear that this work is meant to be disruptive. Some colour clusters pick up the same desultory, steamified, Warholism of Japan's 60s radical graphics monster Yokoo Tadanori, or the ironic slaps of Robert Colescott. The block-prints owe not a little to Schmidt-Rotloff (himself besotted by the African carving tradition) and George Gross both.

There again, the street passion of American graffiti-signer Kenny Scharf blisters the eye. The cluttered and seemingly naive use of space reminds me of Middendorf and company, the German law breakers of the late 70s. I'd bet my bottom dollar that the 'Zeitgeist' show of 1980 hit home with our Norman. Maybe not.

He almost occupies the same space in South African art that Eduardo Paolozzi shoulders in British art. Rebellious and just 'outside'. So, of course, I love him.

Bowie on Catherine

278

Norman Catherine (b.1949) Cat Man

signed
oil, wood and mixed media
height (including integral base): 105cm.; 41½in.

Provenance

Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London, in association with Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

Exhibited

London, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, *Mayibuye i Afrika*, 28th September - 28th October 1995.

W £ 2,000-3,000

€ 2,350-3,550 US\$ 2,650-4,000



279

Norman Catherine (b.1949)

Fanagalo Store

signed
oil, wood and mixed media
230 by 170 by 9cm.; 90½ by 67 by 3½in.

Provenance
Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London, in association with Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

Exhibited
London, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, *Mayibuye i Afrika*, 28th September - 28th October 1995;
San Francisco, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, *Eight From South Africa*, 18th January - 8th March 1996.

Literature
Ivor Powell, *On the Road: Works by 10 Southern African Artists*, London, 1995, illustrated p.19;
Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal, *Art in South Africa: The Future Present*, Cape Town, 1996, pp.26, 30;
Hazel Friedman, *Norman Catherine*, Johannesburg, 2000, p.124, illustrated p.6;
Ashraf Jamal, 'Norman Catherine and the Art of Terror', University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 2001.

W £ 10,000-15,000
€ 11,800-17,700 US\$ 13,300-19,900



280

Peter Bongani Shange (b.1951)
Mayibuye Head C

stamped *SHANGE* and numbered *1/5*
bronze
16.5 by 16.5 by 10cm.; 6½ by 6½ by 4in.

Provenance
Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

£ 1,000-1,500
€ 1,200-1,800 US\$ 1,350-2,000



281

Peter Bongani Shange (b.1951)
Mayibuye Head F

stamped *B P SHANGE* and numbered *1/5*
bronze
16.5 by 15 by 16.5cm.; 6½ by 6 by 6½in.

Provenance
Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

£ 1,000-1,500
€ 1,200-1,800 US\$ 1,350-2,000





282

António Ole (b. 1951) North/South VII

signed
mixed media on paper
30.5 by 25.5cm.; 12 by 10in.

Provenance

The Artist, from whom acquired directly
by David Bowie, Johannesburg, 1995

Exhibited

Luanda, *Margem da Zona Limite*, Centro Cultural Elinga, 1994;
Johannesburg, *Between War and Peace: Angola in Africus*, 1st Johannesburg Biennale, 28th February - 30th April 1995.

£ 400-600
€ 500-750 US\$ 550-800



283

António Ole (b. 1951) North/South XV

signed
mixed media on paper
30.5 by 25.5cm.; 12 by 10in.

Provenance

The Artist, from whom acquired directly
by David Bowie, Johannesburg, 1995

Exhibited

Luanda, *Na Margem da Zona Limite*, Centro Cultural Elinga, 1994;
Johannesburg, *Between War and Peace: Angola in Africus*, 1st Johannesburg Biennale, 28th February - 30th April 1995.

£ 400-600
€ 500-750 US\$ 550-800

284

António Ole (b. 1951) Untitled (Mask)

scrap metal construction with wax
height: 66cm.; 26in.

Provenance

The Artist, from whom acquired directly by David Bowie,
Johannesburg, 1995

Exhibited

Johannesburg, *Between War and Peace: Angola in Africus*, 1st Johannesburg Biennale, 28th February - 30th April 1995.

£ 500-700
€ 600-850 US\$ 700-950



Bowie / Hazoumè

by Romuald Hazoumè

‘First assault from Benin: incredibly forceful Picassironic assemblages of scrap metal, plastic petrol containers, and engine parts shaped by Romuald Hazoumè. We meet in the middle of an empty space and in a resonant tenor he sings the first verse of a song I recorded with Tina Turner. ‘Everything will be alright Tonight’, he bellows. How prophetic he is. I buy three masks from this most distinguished of Post Dadaists.... Romuald is a big and jolly chap who reminds me much of early footage of Muhammed Ali at his most poetic. He clings substantially to that old Benin proverb, ‘He who digs in filth is doing pigs’ work, the cleanest work of all’. He is in his element sorting through the contents of garbage cans throughout Africa (yes, I mean it), transforming his finds into pure icons of humour and spirituality.’ (David Bowie, ‘The Cleanest Work of All’, *Modern Painters*, vol. 8, no.2, Summer 1995, p.43)

I first met David Bowie in Johannesburg in 1995. Following South Africa’s long-awaited, multiracial, democratic elections of the previous year, Johannesburg’s Africus Biennale marked that country’s re-entry to the international cultural arena after many decades of isolation. One evening, dining in a local restaurant, I’d noticed Bowie and his wife Iman eating cosily together. Having always loved his music, I recognised him instantly, but, never having met him, I didn’t dare interrupt. Seeing them both there underscored how historic it was – following the apartheid years – that major figures from the international arts and music community were gathering to support that first Johannesburg Biennale.

The following day, I did an interview with a South African journalist and had almost finished when Joseph, a friend, burst in excitedly, shouting, ‘Romuald, I’ve been looking everywhere for you! David Bowie’s been waiting for you for nearly an hour in the upstairs office!’ I thought he must be joking, as I knew for a fact we hadn’t arranged any meeting! Joseph looked hurt, and insisted that Bowie had come ‘especially to meet Romuald Hazoumè,’ adding emphatically, ‘since he’s still waiting, you’d better follow me – right now!’

I went upstairs and to my surprise, when we entered, David Bowie was indeed sitting at the far end of the room chatting to Iman and someone else. This unknown man introduced himself as ‘David’s art agent,’ adding

that David knew my work well and was very interested in purchasing several pieces currently showing in the Biennale. Since the ‘Electric Workshop’ (a cavernous exhibition space where my works were installed) was quite close by, I suggested that we reconvene there to talk things over in front of the sculptures, in about twenty minutes time.

I’d felt somewhat uneasy about the asymmetric nature of the exchange that had just taken place. It seemed obvious to me that if David Bowie had ‘his agent’ representing him in his art purchases then, I, as artist, needed an intermediary to represent me in my sales. So I spent the next fifteen minutes, as we walked, convincing Joseph that he should act as ‘my agent’ for the coming discussions. All he had to do was report what Bowie’s agent offered and transmit my answers in return. Since the masks were all valued at the same price, no difficult maths was involved, and I insisted that under no circumstances should he agree to any other price.

After surveying the masks together, David made a selection of three and the two of us then chatted familiarly, as though picking up again on an earlier, half-finished conversation. He questioned me closely about the masks and about my work, wanting to understand the context in which they were produced, why I used recycled materials and my attitudes towards them. We talked about which masks he liked most, and why. David was very knowledgeable about art and our wide-ranging conversation moved between painting, sculpture, film and his opinion about only collecting powerful pieces that spoke directly to him. He said it was our mutual friend, the collector Jean Pigozzi, who’d introduced him to my work and had told him he trusted my artistic instincts entirely.

He paid me that same week, even though he wouldn’t get the pieces until eight months later. Another time, I asked him why he’d trusted me. He said, ‘Because I know you, and I know there will be no problem.’

That first animated discussion in Johannesburg, in 1995, began a free-form conversation that still reverberates today. Even though David’s gone, such creative conversations never end: the music echoes on - the masks survive.



Romuald Hazoumè, *Bidon Armé*, 2004.
C-type digital print, 120 x 80cm.
Image © Romuald Hazoumè, Courtesy October Gallery, London



285

Romuald Hazoumè (b.1962) Alexandria

found objects
height: 32cm.; 12³/₄in.

Provenance
The Artist, from whom acquired directly by David Bowie,
Johannesburg, 1995

Exhibited
Johannesburg, Electric Workshop, *Je sais d'où je vien (I know where I come from)*, *Africus*, 1st Johannesburg Biennale, 28th February - 30th April 1995.

Literature
David Bowie, 'The Cleanest Work of All', *Modern Painters*, Vol. 8, Summer 1995, illustrated p.46.

£ 5,000-7,000
€ 5,900-8,300 US\$ 6,700-9,300

286

Romuald Hazoumè (b.1962) Le Saxaphoniste (The Saxophonist)

signed
found objects
47 by 29 by 25cm.; 18½ by 11½ by 10in.

Executed in 1992.

Provenance
The Artist, from whom acquired directly by Jean Pigozzi
His sale, Sotheby's London, 24th June 1999, lot 6, where
acquired by David Bowie

Exhibited
Bamako, Centre Culturel Francais;
Dakar, Centre Culturel Francais;
Werl, Museum der Franziskaner;
Bonn, Kunstmuseum;
Abidjan, Centre Culturel Francais, *Romuald Hazoumè*, 1991;
Nantes, Musée des Beaux-Arts, *La Grande Vérité, Les Astres Africains*, 1993.

£ 5,000-7,000
€ 5,900-8,300 US\$ 6,700-9,300





287

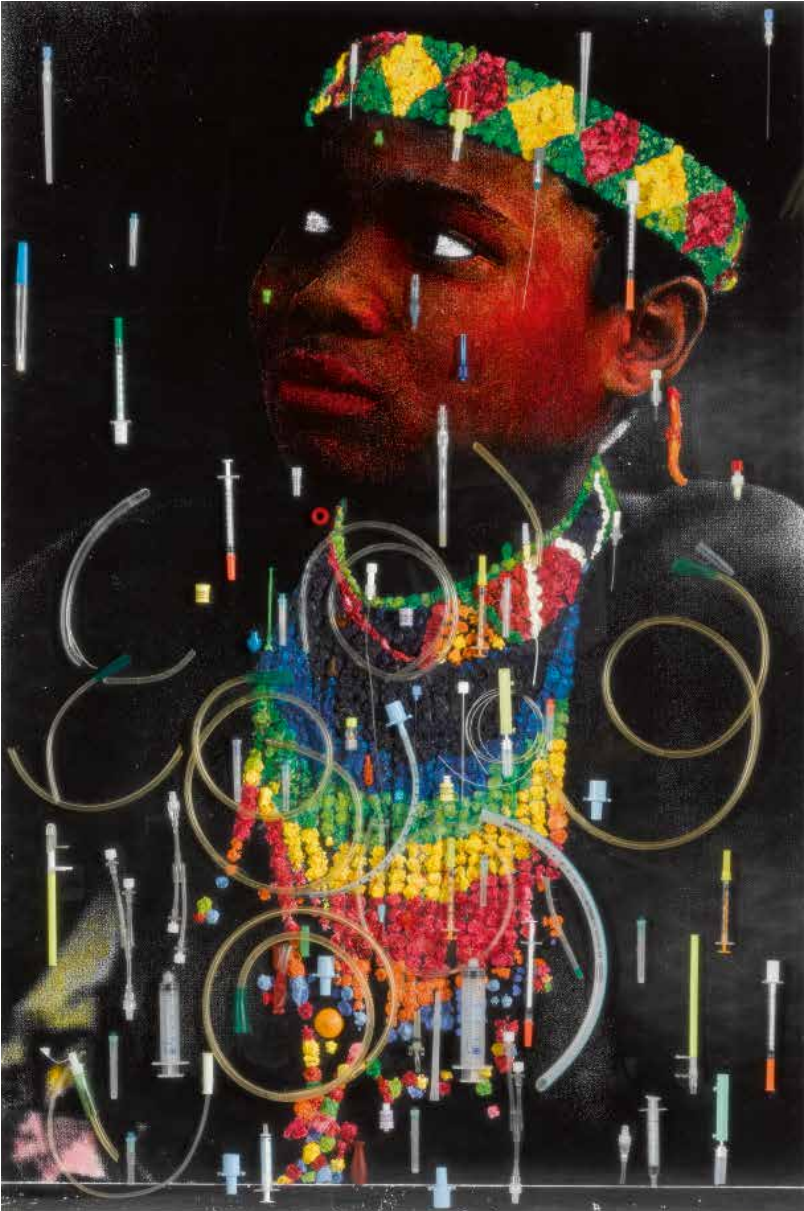
Willie Bester (b. 1956)

What Happened in the Western Cape?

mixed media assemblage on board
32.5 by 63.5cm.; 12 by 24in.

Provenance
Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

£ 2,000-3,000
€ 2,350-3,550 US\$ 2,650-4,000



288

Penelope Siopis (b. 1953)

South African Postcard II

oil and medical objects on laminated photocopy on board
114 by 76cm.; 45 by 30in.

Provenance
Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London, in association with Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 5th October 1995

Exhibited
London, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, *Mayibuye i Afrika*, 28th September - 28th October 1995, illustrated front cover.

Literature
Ivor Powell, *On the Road: Works by 10 Southern African Artists*, London, 1995, illustrated p.37;
Okwui Enwezor, 'Reframing the Black Subject. Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation', *Third Text: Third World perspectives on contemporary art & culture* no. 40, Autumn 1997, illustrated p.34.

£ 3,000-5,000
€ 3,550-5,900 US\$ 4,000-6,700



289

Romuald Hazoumè (b.1962)

Miss Pretoria

signed and dated 95
found objects
height: 26.5cm.; 10½in.

Provenance

The Artist, from whom acquired directly by David Bowie,
Johannesburg, 1995

Exhibited

Johannesburg, Electric Workshop, *Je sais d'où je vien (I know where I come from)*, *Africus*, 1st Johannesburg Biennale, 28th February - 30th April 1995.

£ 5,000-7,000

€ 5,900-8,300 US\$ 6,700-9,300



290

Romuald Hazoumè (b.1962)

Miss Johannesburg

found objects
height: 25.5cm.; 10in.

Provenance

The Artist, from whom acquired directly by David Bowie,
Johannesburg, 1995

Exhibited

Johannesburg, Electric Workshop, *Je sais d'où je vien (I know where I come from)*, *Africus*, 1st Johannesburg Biennale, 28th February - 30th April 1995.

£ 5,000-7,000

€ 5,900-8,300 US\$ 6,700-9,300



291

David Koloane (b.1938)

Made in South Africa (Purple)

signed and indistinctly dated
oil stick on paper
29.5 by 42cm.; 11½ by 16½in.

Executed in 1994.

Provenance

Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

£ 2,000-3,000

€ 2,350-3,550 US\$ 2,650-4,000



292

David Koloane (b.1938)

Made in South Africa (Pink)

oil stick on paper
29.5 by 42cm.; 11½ by 16½in.

Executed in 1994.

Provenance

Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

£ 2,000-3,000

€ 2,350-3,550 US\$ 2,650-4,000

293

Percy Konqobe (b.1939)
Prophet's Head

bronze
14 by 11.5 by 9.5cm.; 5½ by 4½ by 3¾in.

Conceived in 1993, the present work is number 1 from the edition of 5.

Provenance
Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

£ 1,000-1,500
€ 1,200-1,800 US\$ 1,350-2,000



294

Norman Catherine (b.1949)
Back Chat II

signed and dated 95
oil, wood and mixed media
height (including integral base): 109cm.; 43in.

Provenance
Bernard Jacobson Gallery, London, in association with Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, where acquired by David Bowie, 1995

Exhibited
London, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, *Mayibuye i Afrika*, 28th September - 28th October 1995.

W £ 2,000-3,000
€ 2,350-3,550 US\$ 2,650-4,000

