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Recent changes in wall painting amongst the Ndzundza as an indication of social changes amongst Amandebele women

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20 April 2013

Prof Anitra Nettleton
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Dear Anitra

I enclose a photocopy of my extended essay as I felt that it may be easier for the post as well as for the library to bind. I hope this is in order.

I think WAM is wonderful and think that the work that you are doing is very valuable as well as inspirational. I trust that the Gerard Sekoto show is going to bring lots of benefits to current art education practises as well.

Kind regards,



Annette Loubser

RECENT CHANGES IN WALL PAINTING AMONGST THE NDZUNDZA AS AN INDICATION OF SOCIAL CHANGES AMONGST AMANDEBELE WOMEN.

Dissertation submitted as part fulfillment of Honours in Art HIstory course, University of Witwatersrand. January 1994.

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RECENT CHANGES IN WALL PAINTING AMONGST THE NDZUNDZA AS AN INDICATION OF SOCIAL CHANGES AMONGST AMANDEBELE WOMEN.

Introduction:

Wall painting amongst the Ndzundza amaNdebele appears to have begun in the 1940s, and it has continued until today. The wall painting tradition has been, and continues to be, characterized by continuities as well as shifts in form and function. One of the strong factors which becomes apparent in determining the development of the wall paintings, is the relationship between the paintings and social changes amongst the Ndzundza amaNdebele women. It is the aim of this dissertation to explore aspects of this relationship, with particular reference to the art of Esther Mahlangu. Other painters and trends will also be discussed.

The Southern amaNdebele consist of two sub-groups, namely the Manala and the Ndzundza, both of whom have been involved in wall painting. It is the Ndzundza and the particular circumstances which have influenced their art, which is the subject of this dissertation.

The establishment of the Botshabelo cultural museum, outside Middelburg (Transvaal), was a tentative attempt to give Southern amaNdebele history some kind of historical 'authenticity'. However, this was done under the severe control of a conservative white-dominated city council. The recruitment of women as employees at the open-air cultural museum of Botshabelo has been from the contemporary 'homeland' settlement of Weltevreden, where the traditional leadership has been based for some time. Despite the kind of patronage system under which the museum functions, certain innovations and changes in the circumstances of its 'traditional' employees have occurred.

The changes in the circumstances of its past employee, Esther Mahlangu, has had a determining influence on the production of Ndzundza wall painting. This can be seen at her 'traditional' home, Weltevreden. These changes have created new systems of painting-production in which stylistic changes in Ndzundza wall painting are associated with 'workshop' traditions.

METHODOLOGY

I have been acquainted with Esther Mahlangu since 1988 and have visited her intermittently both at Botshabelo and at Weltevreden. I have also become acquainted with Francina Ndimande and her husband, but to a lesser extent. My initial motivation was based on a hunch that an indigenous painting tradition exists in South Africa. The extensive research done by Schneider(1987) has been an important source for this paper and it has been facilitated by the recent research done by Mchunu, for the 'AmaNdebele:Signals of Colour from South Africa' exhibition in Berlin in 1991. I have been fortunate in having encountered the Botshabelo authorities, the Transvaal Museums authorities, the Chief of Culture of the KwaNdebele government, Esther Mahlangu's new 'culture brokers', beadworkers who grew up at KwaMsiza, and Esther Mahlangu's friends and relatives. The contact involved fairly informal interviews and visits, and the assistance that was volunteered may be an indication of how vital wall painting

continues to be amongst the Ndzundza. The current political changes in South Africa have meant that I was able to observe only certain patterns that appear to be emerging in contemporary Ndzundza wall painting production.

The research has been dealt with in sections. These are:

1. Historical contexts of Middelburg and Weltevreden.
2. Description of KwaMsiza and Botshabelo as examples of patron art.
3. Botshabelo Historical Village seen in terms of Esther Mahlangu and her emergence into the international art market.
4. Description of the Weltevreden settlement and the role of women and the changing circumstances of women painters, in which I make the suggestion that 'workshop' traditions are in operation. This is partly due to traditional informal education practices, outside intervention, and the recent cultural initiatives taken by the KwaNdebele government into the commercial production of Ndzundza wall painters.
5. These changes are seen to have determined changes in the style of Ndzundza wall painting, education practices, as well as the role of women in Ndzundza society. Schneider's analysis of wall painting as being 'ethnic' in character is being challenged by these changes, and the wall paintings need to be examined from a broader perspective which includes the categories of tourist and traditional art.

THE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION OF THE MIDDELBURG DISTRICT WITH THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN AMANDEBELE.

Under Chief Mabhogo, the Ndzundza were settled in the area which is now called Roossenekal in 1839. Under his rule, the Ndzundza became a powerful force and also owned vast tracts of land. The royal headquarters (*Erholweni*) were built at the settlement called *KoNomtjharelo* in the Roossenekal district.

Since the 1840s, the relationship between the nearby Boers and the Ndzundza appears to have been an uneasy one. The growing tension culminated in a confrontation between the Boers under Commandant Joubert and the Ndzundza, under the popular chief, Nyabela in 1882. In this well-documented siege of the Ndzundza at *KoNomtjharelo*, Nyabela was finally defeated in 1883 and taken to Pretoria for imprisonment. (1.)

In E. A. Schneider's account of the circumstances of the Ndzundza defeat(1987), she records that the 36,000 hectares of tribal land were divided into 7-hectare farms and allotted to the burghers who had participated in this war. The area known as *'Mapoch's Gronden'* was incorporated into the fourth ward of the Middelburg district.

The defeated Ndzundza were now at the mercy of the Boers, who became the 'legal' owners of their land, as well as their employers. In a resolution passed by the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek in 1883, the Ndzundza prisoners were subjected to indenture to Boer farmers for five years and their labour was to be paid in the form of food and clothing. An annual allocation of three pounds was subject to

taxation and fines by their employers. On the expiry of their indenture, the Ndzundza prisoners faced the option of being placed in any 'location' designated by the white government. (2.)

Although they were indentured to white farmers in the Middelburg district, the idea cannot be dismissed that the Ndzundza continued to cherish the hope or reoccupying their territory in the near future. Fene, who was Nyabele's heir, made numerous attempts to regain the land for his people. But clearly the Union Government had no intention of co-operating with them.

The number of Ndzundza settled in the Middelburg region between 1911-14 appears to have been substantial. Their subjection to the discriminatory practices and hard labour by the Boers and the white government appears to have encouraged the Ndzundza to retain their traditional customs as a form of resistance and having to adapt to their new circumstances. A comment made by the sub-Native Commissioner of the Middelburg District in 1914 gives an indication of how the Ndzundza differentiated themselves from their white employers and, to a lesser degree, other Sotho-speaking groups.

> "The amaNdebele are the most conservative Natives to be found in the Transvaal .....and they still firmly adhere to their old customs, dress and mode of living' (NLCR U.G. 22,1914:413) (3.)

It is thus, apparent that the Ndzundza were determined to express their pride in their past history and, through the overt display of traditional dress and homestead architecture and decoration, they were signalling a cultural unity amongst themselves. Simultaneously, their form of differentiation was also an acknowledgment of their resistance to the white leadership.

As farm labourers, the women had more time at the homestead where they were involved in child-rearing. As schooling does not appear to have been made available to the tenant-labourers, the practice of beadwork and wall painting may have become an important form of education for young girls. While the boys had to participate in farm-work from an early age, women ensured that a cultural continuity of traditional practices by the Ndzundza was maintained. A part of their tradition was to educate the youth about the history of the Ndzundza, and this may have been incorporated into the teaching of the skills of beadwork and wall painting.(see p.20 concerning Angelina Ndimande's possible source of inspiration). Thus, the type of education that the girls received involved a strong component of learning about their identity as Ndzundzas.

Fene's initiatives to regain land culminated in the Ndzundza's buying their own land in 1923, some distance from Middelburg, in the Dennilton district. The royal headquarters (*KwaNsimuymbiwe*) were built on the farm of Weltevreden.(4.) Despite the Land Act of 1913, the British Government finally granted the Ndzundza the right to buy or lease land in 1919.(5.) The condition was that it was not to be in the traditional territory near Roossenekal. There is little documentation concerning this settlement between 1923 and 1950, but indications are that a large proportion of tenant-labourers from white-owned farms began to settle there from the mid '70s. This was at the time when the Ndzundza were negotiating with the South African Government for an independent homeland. The South African Government

had given King David Mabusa Mabhoko recognition as the paramount chief of the Southern amaNdebele in 1961 and intended to incorporate the surrounding area of Weltevreden into an independent KwaNdebele homeland. These initiatives came to an abrupt halt in 1986 when the ANC-affiliated Ndzundza resisted their pro-homeland *Imbokodo* Party and their efforts to gain independence, later that year.

Considering these historical circumstances, a distinction can be made between the Weltevreden settlement and the circumstances of the tenant-labourers in the Middelburg District.

Weltevreden developed into a settlement from the '70s when many tenant-labourers re-located there. As this was where their tribal authority was based, they set about re-forming as a cohesive group. Residents were able to participate in local decision-making processes and they were also kept informed of the negotiations for a homeland between their leadership and the South African Government.

For the scattered Ndzundza tenant-labourers in the Middelburg region, their isolation from the Weltevreden settlement since its inception, meant that their participation in the social and political activities of the Ndzundza group as a whole was restricted. Their Weltevreden counterparts were becoming a substantially homogeneous group in which traditional practices continued and were adapted to their changing circumstances.

Issues concerning broader social changes and political allegiances could be expressed in more personal ways. It appears that women were no longer wholly restricted to the maintenance of a cultural continuity within the domestic sphere. The practice of domestic and personal embellishment may have become less resistant to changes at Weltevreden and it may have held more of a popular appeal than that of Ndzundza identity.

Unfortunately, there has been no documentation of Middelburg tenant-labourer homesteads or beadwork since 1883. However, considering the different circumstances of the Ndzundza in the two regions, it may be feasible to interpret that the continuation of cultural practices amongst the tenant-labourers in the Middelburg region was far more resistant to change. In contrast, the homogeneous nature of the Weltevreden settlement may have included cultural adaptations and continuation of traditional practices which were not seen as threatening to the identity of the Ndzundza as a group.

Wall painting amongst the Ndzundza is a relatively new phenomenon. It emerged in the 1940s, and how it evolved was determined by the different circumstances in which the painting emerged. As no early documentation of wall paintings appears to have been made in the Middelburg district, it is difficult to advance more than a general assumption of what the differences between this region and Weltevreden may have been. The need for the Middelburg tenant-labourers to use wall painting as a proclamation of their identity and group affiliation may have suited their white employers as well. The white farmers may have seen this cultural distinctiveness as a convenient confirmation that the Ndzundza were too 'traditional' to

pursue modern farming practices on the land which they now occupied. The ambivalence of this interpretation may have both facilitated the continuation of the tradition of wall painting and helped to ease the tension between the Ndzundza and their employers. As outsiders, the farmers may have interpreted the paintings as a form of cultural differentiation in which they saw themselves as politically more powerful and culturally superior.

In the recent Nyabele Day celebrations at *Erholweni*, King Mayisha II claimed:

> "Because Pretoria would not recognize us, we had to look for other things to get their attention".(19/12/1993)

How Pretoria responded to this attention-seeking can also be seen in the nature of its intervention at the KwaMsiza 'tourist village' and the Botshabelo Historical village, which will be discussed presently.

Summary:
The historical defeat of the Ndzundza was marked by the use of traditional symbols to retain a sense of group unity. As the Ndzundza re-formed into a settlement, so the functions of the tradition of wall painting gave expression to these changes. Owing to the difficult circumstances of the Ndzundza, the paintings became an expression of both cultural resistance and continuity. Thus, a distinction may be made in the paintings of the new settlement of Weltevreden which has been documented since the '60s, and those of the tenant-labourer dwellings on the white-owned farms in the Middelburg region.(c. 1883 to the present).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CULTURAL MUSEUM AT BOTSHABELO.

Today, this now defunct German mission-settlement advertises itself as 'Botshabelo - Historical Village'. In the 1980s, it was called the 'Middelburg Cultural History, Open-Air and Site museum'. Its change in title is an indication of a changed relationship of the Middelburg Town Council to this project and what it represents. But the accompanying text to the brochure provided is still the same and it acknowledges that the Transvaal Provincial Museum Services have partly been responsible for Middelburg's initiating the 'South amaNdebele Open-Air Museum'. Its 'intention of preserving the black man's culture'(brochure) ignores the fact that many famous Ndzundza scholars have graduated from the mission's school and training-college.(6.) Instead, it displays a 'frozen moment in time' of Ndzundza amaNdebele 'culture', which is more of an ethnographic description than an historical interpretation of Ndzundza culture.

The Botshabelo Open-air Museum, representing a distinct form of patron art, needs to be reviewed in terms of the earlier 'tourist village' at KwaMsiza.(1953) This popular tourist village 'closed' in 1978. The Transvaal Provincial Museum Services decided to allocate certain 'themes' to local authorities to establish 'tourist villages in 1971. The South African Nationalist Government can be seen to have been indirectly involved in both these 'traditional culture' projects. Its role as patron at KwaMsiza and Botshabelo serves as an indication of how it views Ndzundza culture.

KWAMSIZA AS AN EARLY TYPE OF PATRON ART (7.)

As Levy clearly shows in her research, Meiring's view of the Hartebeesfontein Ndzundza farm-workers was a 'limited and eurocentric view of the amaNdebele'.(8.) His intervention with the state provided the Hartebeesfontein residents an opportunity to settle at Klipgat in the Odi 1 magisterial district in 1953. This is north-west of Pretoria and a considerable distance from Weltevreden. Meiring had been making photographic documentation of their wall-decorations in the '40s, and their work so impressed him that he discussed the idea with the Nationalist Government of establishing a 'tourist village'. Levy points out that Meiring's early attempts at 'preserving the black man's culture' should be seen in terms of the prevailing political ideologies of the early part of this century.(9.) Ethnography and anthropology were being viewed in terms of development studies in South Africa and this played a significant role in defining what the 'native' and 'black' were. The indigenous black was seen as a unit defined in terms of his 'tribe'. The 'tribe' was defined in terms of definitions based on language, kinship-systems and culture, and were thus structurally differentiated from each other. By justifying an

> 'intrinsic separateness of different black groups, researchers sought to document and preserve indigenous cultures" (10.)

Although this may have been the main motivation and enthusiasm to characterize Meiring's intervention in Southern amaNdebele culture, the political motives of the South African Government in 1953 appear to have been different. The latter wanted to relocate tribal authority to different groups in order to limit the growing influx of black people into the urban areas. This method would also ensure identity differentiation between the various groups in which control would be based on a regional basis.(11.) Thus, by giving each group its own cultural identity and autonomy, the South African Government would also be ensuring that cultural differences were maintained.

Allocating land to a group of displaced Ndzundza in a predominantly north-Sotho speaking area, seems to indicate that the South African Government was not consistent in its black policy. It may have also seen this initiative as inconsequential. As a 'tourist-village' KwaMsiza served the interests of its Tourism Bureau as well as Meiring's teaching programmes for architecture students from Pretoria University. The Government's contribution was an irregular supply of poles and paints to the new settlers. The Department of Tourism supplied groups of tourists to KwaMsiza on a fairly regular basis, but this relationship was only tenable as long as the residents continued to provide a 'colourful', 'contented' and 'picturesque' notion of an African traditional way of life.

The head-man was Hlangane Speelman Msiza, who appears to have seen this initiative as an opportunity to provide a settlement for his people. The settlement was known as KwaMsiza by the Ndzundza: to Sotho-speakers, it was known as *ga-Matabele*, and to the South African Department of Tourism, it was known as "Ndebele village".(12.) The nature and circumstances of the KwaMsiza settlement involved the Ndzundzas' having to develop their own economic initiatives for survival. It can be seen that the perceptions and needs of the dominant white patrons also played a role in determining the type of

settlement that was being established at KwaMsiza.

Schneider describes the settlement in the '70s as consisting of four families which accounted for 43 households in the settlement.(13.) The distance from the urban centres for regular employment, as well as the limited supply of water, precluded any other form of economic activity other than that of 'tourism'. While the men could still participate in the migrant-labour system, the women supplemented their income through the sale of beadwork to visitors who had come to view the brightly coloured and complex designs painted on the walls of their dwellings. Considering the isolation of the settlement and the barrenness of the landscape, the only means of 'advertising' a trade in beadwork must have been stimulated by the wall paintings at KwaMsiza. Photographic publications of KwaMsiza as well as publicity material issued by the Department of Tourism increased the popularity of the 'tourist village', and local whites also visited the settlement.

The dwellings, courtyard walls and elaborate entrances were all brightly painted, and researchers have seen this as uncharacteristic in terms of the earlier, more muted work done in earth colours at Hartebeesfontein prior to 1953. Schneider describes the many KwaMsiza designs as having included representational motifs of urban architecture and elements from the alphabet.(Figs. 1,2) Using a Southern amaNdebele Style typology, she concludes that the painted decorations at KwaMsiza had a "very low incidence of colour symmetry in comparison to the form symmetry".(14.)

Her analysis of a Southern amaNdebele painting style was in terms of the types of rural homestead layouts and the way the walls were decorated. She spent nine months doing fieldwork and her most consistent work was done during the period 1976 -78. She looked for a consistency of certain forms and elements in the wall decorations, which she isolated and then specified what they constituted. By describing a 'typical' homestead, she then used a system of design-analysis tests in order to define what the Southern amaNdebele style was. This was found to be peculiar to the Ndzundza in particular.(15.) She located sub-styles according to particular types of communities within geographical areas. Tenant-labourers residing on white-owned farms and rural villages, where a headman or chief was based, were the two primary sub-styles in her analysis. She distinguished the manner of decoration in these two regions in terms of variations in size and colour of the design-units, the entire compositions, as well as the types of symmetries that were prevalent in each case.(16.)

Based on this system, Schneider found the decorations at KwaMsiza to be somewhat of a 'corrupted' version of the Southern amaNdebele style. This analysis was seen in terms of how the majority of the wall paintings functioned in the other two contexts. She saw Southern amaNdebele wall paintings primarily as

> 'an art of social identity, or ethnicity".(17.)

This distinction was made in terms of 'traditional' art in that the wall paintings were a manifestation from a

> 'multi-cultural situation in which cultural groups (were) form(ing) part of an over-arching society'.(18.)

Schneider's definition included the view that the paintings were 'on remote homesteads far from any main road and often in locations where tourists were not permitted'.(19.) The KwaMsiza paintings, in contrast, were seen as a 'superficial' interpretation of traditional Ndzundza paintings. Ndzundza wall painting, viewed as an elaborate form of group identification which had evolved from historical circumstances, meant that the KwaMsiza paintings were not seen as having functioned in the same way. This view is based partly on the wall paintings' being seen as having been influenced by commercial factors. Schneider's view of the function of the wall paintings in Ndzundza domestic traditions precludes their having any economic function as well.(20.)

A cash economy emerged from the surplus production of tradition-based beadwork at KwaMsiza. The women encountered their tourist-consumers directly and they were thus able to gauge the kinds of aesthetic responses that their work elicited. They were also able to monitor the buying patterns for their beadwork from their visitors. Innovations in types of beadwork such as beaded neckties and bracelets emerged and, similarly, the wall-decorations were seen to have become 'uncharacteristically' bright and complex, as well as more figurative.

With the wall paintings, seen as a form of 'tourist art', Jules-Rosette's definition of tourist art bears consideration. She views it as a contemporary form of art which is produced from traditional contexts and sources for consumption by outsiders.(21.) The artists 'embellish' forms 'with traditional motifs to make them appear exotic or 'ethnic', (to outsiders), while remaining useful'.(22.) The innovations in types of beadwork and painted designs should be seen in terms of how the producers have been responding to the social and economic changes in their circumstances. Western aesthetic responses, on the other hand, view these changes as being either a renewal of a tradition or a 'distortion' of an 'authentic' form. (23.) These views are based on whether traditional art is perceived as one which is changing or static in nature.

To discover the value of these emerging items within the context of a market, Jules-Rosette establishes a communication system in which the tourist art-works are ascribed a signifying function. Through the interaction between the 'traditional' artists and their consumers, a sign-value or meaning emerges in the art-work - a symbolic value emerges from this form of communication determining the use and market-value of the art-product.(24.) The assumption is that the type of interaction that occurs is of a cross-cultural nature, which either may be a direct one, or one which is intervened by middlemen and 'culture brokers'. How the 'communication gap' is closed or distorted by this intervention bears influence on how artists perceive the receptivity of their consumers to their work. They may choose to adopt another external form of imagery, or continue to use their own traditional imagery which, in this instance, is the Southern amaNdebele style of wall painting with adaptations.(25.) This particular style is seen to be 'emblematic' of the group, its traditional function within the homestead, notwithstanding.(26) Similarly, for Schneider, architectural details appeared to be somewhat elaborate at KwaMsiza, and she points out that the plan of

the homesteads was inconsistent with a Southern amaNdebele 'type'. However, these 'changes' could be seen to have excluded external intervention, that is, they could be seen as having emerged from the kind of contact and the particular circumstances in which the artists and consumers found themselves.

Whatever criticism may have been levelled at the material production at KwaMsiza by predominantly white researchers, it does not appear to have carried weight amongst the Ndzundza women at KwaMsiza or in the other areas. The 'fame' of KwaMsiza is still common knowledge amongst the Ndzundza, particularly those who participate in the various commercial markets for the trade of beadwork and, indirectly, wall paintings. Schneider, in a later article, acknowledges that the reputation of KwaMsiza may have spread amongst the Ndzundza who were working on white-owned farms as well as on settlements where chiefs were based.(27.)

But the reputation of this 'fame' appears to have been different among the Southern amaNdebele from eurocentric 'outsiders'. The latter were preoccupied with notions of ethnic identity and racial differentiation; the former viewed themselves in terms of economic enfranchisement and access to a broader market without losing sight of their traditional practices and affiliations.

The growing power of black political dissent and the necessity of the state to establish 'homelands' as soon as possible, may have been a reason why the state terminated its meagre support and tourists to KwaMsiza. Although it was a Ndzundza settlement, it was incorporated into the Tswana-speaking homeland of Bophuthatswana. Despite the South African Tourist Office's having given indications that the settlement no longer existed, this is not so. Recent indications are that the settlement is somewhat impoverished. As a 'tourist village', it was artificially, albeit tenuously, supported by a dominant white South African Government and its tourists.

As an example of tourist art in South Africa, it has served to maintain popular viewing prejudices about notions of African 'tribes' and traditions. As an ahistorical experience, KwaMsiza appears to have been a 'proof' of how successful the state's disenfranchisement of black South Africans was in preserving the traditional way-of-life of the Ndzundza. The State's intervention was transferred to a secondary level of tourism where, as an experience of notions of a 'wild' Africa to outsiders, it ignored the contemporary socio-political circumstances relating to the Ndzundza. The system of patronage at KwaMsiza was a loose arrangement in which secondary support was given only for the duration that it was required to serve the ideological needs of the state. When political changes began to undermine the state's ideology, the settlement no longer served its interests, and hence its informal 'closure'. In this instance, the patronage exercised over KwaMsiza appears to have been a functional kind. Although the state held no 'ownership' over the material production of the inhabitants - the settlement can be seen to have served its purposes in terms of an ideological 'novelty'.

A BRIEF HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE BOTSHABELO HISTORICAL VILLAGE AND OPEN-AIR CULTURAL MUSEUM.

Botshabelo, as a mission, was started in 1865 by two German missionaries, Alexander Merensky and Heinrich Grutzner. Botshabelo, means 'Place of Shelter' or 'Sanctuary'. It served as a refuge for Chief Sekhukhune of the north-Sotho people. Like all other mission projects, the South African Government stopped its foreign aid and the settlement closed in 1978.

The Middelburg Town Council has since taken control of the settlement and the Transvaal Provincial Museum Services acts as an advisory body. As state aid is also provided, this advisory capacity by the Transvaal Provincial Museum Services also needs to be considered. The site's popularity in the '80s was based on its nature trails rather than its historical significance. The idea that an 'open-air' cultural museum be opened at Botshabelo, was mooted by the Middelburg Town Council in 1971. A Southern amaNdebele domestic settlement was built and opened to the public in 1981.(interview Swiegers 8/12/1993) As a 'South-amaNdebele Open-Air Museum', it consists of three types of dwelling arrangement. These appear to be based on an earlier Nguni-type settlement consisting of predominantly grass-type dwellings(site 1), a settlement of rondawel-type dwellings with courtyard walls(site 2), and a homestead comprising of square-type dwelling with courtyard walls(site 3). Although not described as such, there is evidence that the site represents an 'evolution' or 'development' of a Southern amaNdebele culture. Its 'evolution' is seen in terms of a Nguni-type settlement culminating in dwellings which emerged on the highveld in the '40s. The Unisa academic, van Vuuren, who has also published on the Southern amaNdebele architecture, was the consultant for the project.(interview Swiegers) (Fig.3)

The museum's employees are Ndzundza women who have been recruited from Weltevreden and its surrounding settlements.(28) As representatives of their 'traditional' culture, the women also clean the buildings daily at Botshabelo. They resume their 'work', dressed in 'traditional' clothing, from 11 am each day.(29.) The Middelburg Town Council provides the women with paints, beads and canvas and, from the proceeds of their sales at the site, they are provided with a fresh supply of materials. Presently, there are four Ndzundza women in the employ of the Middelburg Town Council at the Botshabelo open-air cultural museum.(30)

Significant changes in the wall paintings at Botshabelo have not occurred since 1988. The most compellingly intricate designs and brightly-coloured work at the site were done by Esther Nostokana Mahlangu, who resigned in 1992. She returned to Weltevreden in the same year. Prior to her departure, she painted two self-portraits on the ablution blocks of the camping site which is adjacent to the open-air museum. These representations are similar to South amaNdebele beaded *'umdwana'*(dolls). Esther has signed each image, possibly, as a means of proclaiming her artistic 'fame' to Botshabelo.(Figs, 4,5)

The women are paid a meagre salary and are required to live within

the 'museum'. They return to their homes at Weltevreden monthly, on a rotational basis. What is of note though, is that there are considerable differences between their own homesteads at Weltevreden and those that they have to inhabit at Botshabelo. The women are represented almost as 'cultural artifacts' of a perceived Southern amaNdebele 'tradition', which is fixed in some idealized past bearing stark resemblances to their period as tenant-labourers on white-owned farms.

The women are 'instructed' to paint the various homestead complexes ('*umuzi*'); control is also exercised over their beadwork production (viz., sales, commissions, and supply of beads). Instructions to the public, when visiting the settlement, appear to have become stricter and the public is required to make prior arrangements with the Botshabelo management before visiting the open-air cultural museum. This tightening of control over the 'viewing' of an "amaNdebele Traditional Way of Life" may be partly out of respect for its workers, but it may also be an indication that stricter 'supervision' needs to be taken over the interaction between the visitors and the workers at the museum. The earlier request, "Do not tip black personnel, rather buy a curio from them", in the brochures has now been replaced by stricter 'museum-type' viewing supervision. Previous incidents in which foreign clients directly recruited the women for overseas work, are now precluded.

Botshabelo, as an example of controlled and censored patron art, gives an indication of how it sees itself as 'owner' of the cultural interests of indigenous groups in South Africa. This is partly a result of the historical relations between the controlling body and the Ndzundza in the region since the 19th century. This paternalism is confirmed by the state's ethnographic orientation to African culture and its need to maintain boundaries between the identities of African groups.

Attempts were made by the Botshabelo controlling body to adapt to the changes precipitated by the international success of their former employee, Esther Mahlangu. Owing to historical and traditional circumstances, Esther was subjected to a variety of forms of patronage. Her circumstances at Botshabelo may have been an important factor in her emergence as an 'artist'.

DESCRIPTION OF ESTHER MAHLANGU'S CIRCUMSTANCES AT BOTSHABELO

Biography:
Esther Mahlangu, who now describes herself as "Mahlangu Esther Nostokana -S.Ndebele - Painting Artist" on her courtesy card, is almost a legend at Botshabelo and Weltevreden.(Fig.10) She was born probably in 1939 on a farm called 'Syplaas', near Middelburg. She was taught to paint by her grandmother, who was also a resident on a farm in the Middelburg district. Her grandmother also taught her sisters Bettie and Lettie. Esther claimed that her paintings are from "*My gedagte van my ouma*".(interview 22/08/1993) This may possibly be interpreted as her having learnt to paint in the style of her grandmother. She received no formal education and she is illiterate, despite having recently learnt to write her name.

Evidence suggests that Esther was married to Msoso Mahlangu who was a farm labourer. Her two sons are Elias and Petrus and she has grandchildren. She moved to Weltevreden in the early '80s when her husband died.

Circumstances:
Esther, together with her sister, Bettie, entered the employ of Botshabelo Historical Village from its earliest inception in the early '80s. They were recruited by a Weltevreden builder to work at Botshabelo.(Lettie 19/12/1993) Together, they occupied the third and squarer shaped settlement on the site, now being occupied only by her sister. Bettie's home at Weltevreden shows a minimum of painting. The superficial repainting of the walls at site 3 appears to continue to be based on Esther's work. Although both sisters underwent the same system of painting apprenticeship with the same teacher, it seems that Esther has become the more skilled painter of the two.(Figs.11,12)

Botshabelo was frequented by predominantly local white South Africans in the '80s and little attention was focused on the open-air museum. The women traded beadwork, woven grass-mats and dolls (*'umdwana'*) to the public. The postcards on sale represent the women as Southern amaNdebele 'types' and the photographs do not identify the women by name.

Matters took a somewhat dramatic turn, in the early part of 1988, when Esther Mahlangu was recruited by André Magnin to participate in the international exhibition in Paris titled "Magiciens de la Terre". The show took place during May-July 1989, and Esther was provided with two air-tickets and accommodation in a first-class hotel in Paris.

André Magnin, a researcher for the show, chose Esther as a participant. His choice was made on the basis of her 'talent' rather than her work being representative of a 'typically Southern amaNdebele style'.(31) Sally Price questions the motives of the West: the search for a 'Universal Art' she sees as being partly philanthropic in nature:

> 'Equality accorded non-Westerners (and their art), the implication goes, is not a natural reflection of human equivalence, but rather the result of Western benevolence.' (32.)

In Magnin's case, it appears, that his use of discretion was to seek

> 'to bestow international recognition on (his) ..personal favourites from the 'anonymous' world of Third World craftmanship'.(33.)

It seems that his benevolent gesture could not have been without some sort of self-interest as well.

Dubow, who visited the exhibition, saw it as an 'exciting and stimulating' event. His interpretation of the intention of the 'Magiciens de la Terre' show was that it was an attempt to break the first-world hegemony over cultures from other parts of the world:

> 'Gone are the narrow tenets of the art hierarchy -the premium placed on the new and the original, and the primacy of conceptual work made by artists for art-gallery consumption, with its

implication that all tribal, ritual or craft-based art should be assigned to ethnographic museums. For the organizers, plurality rules'.(34.)

A contrast to Magnin's benevolent viewpoint of Esther's painting was that of the Middelburg Town Council. As patrons of her art and, by implication, of Southern amaNdebele Culture, they saw themselves as Esther's 'keeper'. They did not recognize Esther's creativity within the traditional convention of a Ndzundza style of wall painting and they regarded her as a 'prototype' of an indigenous tradition. The Middelburg authorities had difficulty accepting that their museum curator was unable to use the other air-ticket to accompany Esther as her representative from Botshabelo. Esther chose her favourite son, Elias to accompany her, instead. Dressed in traditional clothing and taking a bag of mealie-meal with them, Esther and Elias were, nevertheless, escorted to Jan Smuts Airport by the Middelburg Civic authorities. This was done despite her having 'temporarily' resigned from Botshabelo as a means of resolving the conflict of interests which had emerged between her and the Botshabelo authorities. (7/112/1993 Agent B)(35)

In Paris, Esther had the opportunity to interact with her 'foreign' patrons in their own social settings. She was also able to gauge the kinds of responses that her wall paintings elicited from other international artists. Coosje van Brugen, collaborating with Claes Oldenburg, confirmed in a video interview, at the time, that her work had a

> 'profound effect....on her fellow artists during the execution of her work'.(36.)

Their responses to her use of bright colours make it difficult to assess whether it was more than a curiosity for work produced by an artist from another social category.

Esther's exposure to the 'high' art gallery context, (where an 'élite audience are concerned with redefining the boundaries of western cultural categories) appears to have been emphatic. The extent to which money and power in the First World were able to redefine her work into the broader cultural arena and expose it to new audiences, was a new experience for her. This redefinition of material culture on a global scale should be seen in sharp contrast to the proprietorial attitude of her Botshabelo patrons. In essence, the method of appropriation by the respective powers may be seen to be similar, but the scale of power behind the international intervention was much vaster. One also suspects that the historical circumstances of the Southern amaNdebele may have added to the French exhibition some political 'punch'.

An added dimension to the dynamics involved with Esther becoming integrated into the international 'high' art arena, relates to her contemporary traditional context at Weltevreden. As a custom and a form of courtesy, all women who participate at international exhibitions are required to ask for the king's permission and blessing prior to their departure.(AgentB) This is significant in terms of the circumstances relating to the 'ownership' of Esther's art and her wall-painting work on her first overseas commission. Her paternalistic employers viewed her in terms of a somewhat archaic

ideal of an African 'traditional-type' representative, while her traditional authority saw her as a representative of their contemporary traditional society in which their ethnic identity, as manifested in the wall-painting tradition, represented resistance to white domination. On the other hand, Esther was seeing herself as a 'master' painter who had emerged from a system of specialist painters into the international arena of art connoisseurship.

In interviews over the last six years, Esther has consistently indicated that her own creativity and skill as a wall painter is a priority. She has explained her creative 'success' in terms of being experienced in the medium of painting, and she distinguishes her later work in terms of a greater use of bright colours. She describes the source for her imagery as, "*Daai ding is by my kop*".(22/8/1993) This may also allude to her apprenticeship under her grandmother from whom she 'inherited' a style of wall painting decoration, which has now developed into her own style.(Fig.13,14) As an example of a Ndzundza painting style, Esther's responses indicate that the art of wall painting is not static within its set of conventions. There is room for personal interpretation and creativity, and this depends on the level of experience of the artist. She distinguishes her work from her strong competitor, Francina Ndimande at Weltevreden, in terms of the latter's style being '*anders*'/different from that of her own. (22/08/1993) Recent indications are that a workshop-type of app'enticeship system in which young Ndzundza women are taught to paint by their family matriarchs, may have been in existence at Weltevreden since the '70s, although on a much smaller scale than what is presently being undertaken.

On Esther's return from Paris, she was re-employed at Botshabelo. The Botshabelo administration tried to compromise with her in terms of her new-found international status. They allowed her to run her own 'shop' for the sale of her beadwork and small painted canvases in an adjacent building within her '*umuzi*'(homestead complex). After 1989, Botshabelo became a popular place of visit to foreign tourists. This was partly due to her reputation as 'the darling of the French people'.(Agent A) Hence, Esther was able to set up an informal trade in small-scale traditional functional items for tourists. She began to paint on canvas in 1990, and these works she sold for a considerably higher price than her beaded items. It seemed that she had learnt to distinguish the various types of visitors who came to Botshabelo. Her painted canvases were aimed at serious collectors, while her beadwork was aimed at curious tourists: the collector was seeking something more 'authentic' in terms of a signed work by Esther, the tourist was looking for items which could be souvenirs and which would provide them with sentimental proof of their visit to Botshabelo.

On Esther's return from Angoulême in France in 1990, where she painted the exterior of a school and taught children how to paint, she encountered problems from her employers at Botshabelo. She had been awarded a medal and the Freedom of the City from the Civic Authorities of Angoulême. The Middelburg Town Council decided to keep this medal - it was a civic award, and Esther was, after all, their representative. The irony of this action can be seen in the

fact that Esther, who had grown up in the Middelburg district, had never been recognized as one of the town's citizens, let alone one of South Africa's. An incensed Esther went to Pretoria to gain legal assistance. Her employers reluctantly returned the medal to her.(37.)

Esther's international fame and improved economic circumstances were seen as both a blessing and a problem for her employers. The number of foreign tourists visiting Botshabelo increased and the overnight accommodation was improved. But Esther's reputation as an individual artist, rather than as a 'good' example of Ndzundza wall painting, was seen as problematic.

The administration saw Esther's participation in overseas commissions as being self-centred and not giving a true representation of her traditional Ndzundza group. The curator at Botshabelo viewed her painting style as being a convention-bound manifestation from a traditional African group which precluded any notions of individual creativity. Any apparent 'evolution' or 'development' in her work was seen in terms of a variation of production processes rather than one pertaining to a personal interpretation of a stylistic convention. The paintings on canvas were seen as miniature facsimiles of a 'traditional' art.(38.)

The change in the kinds of audiences and the different types of markets in which Esther M hlangu's work was being sold, did not alter her employers' ethnographic viewpoint to her work. Issues of value and quality in her work were now being determined by a variety of viewing perspectives. In the category of her work being seen as 'tribal', its authenticity was being determined by factors such as the age of her pieces and by her traditional methods of production. In terms of the popular market (according to Jules-Rosette's research), the artists also produce for the gallery trade and have 'particular patrons and consumers in mind'.(39.) The art works may be seen as 'refined' tourist pieces, but their market is aimed at one which is beyond that of the local. Apart from producing signed paintings on canvas for a gallery audience, Esther also participated in commercial ventures in which her signed designs were used on T-shirts that were sold in upmarket boutiques in Paris and Tokyo, as well as on Italian ceramic ware. For her tourist market, she produced paintings on functional items such as small bowls which were more portable. These she did not sign. Clearly she used more expensive materials for the work aimed at a popular market of 'art' consumers.

On the local market, BMW South Africa, commissioned her to be their representative for an international show in which each artist was required to paint one of their motor vehicles. Her recruitment was done under competitive circumstances which included the other women at the Botshabelo open-air cultural museum. Each woman was given a car door as well as paint to execute a design. Esther was once again chosen on the 'merit' of her work.

How her western commissioning patrons assessed her 'merit' may have been one that viewed her skill within an 'exotic' traditional African context. Their aesthetic interpretation would not have been the same

as that of Esther's. The western system of aesthetic evaluation is based on a different interpretation from that of traditional African art. Expression and skill function in different ways in the two contexts. As outsiders, her western patrons must have interpreted her work in terms of how she executed her painting within a recognizable Ndzundza style. Innovations in her paintings were more likely to have been determined and interpreted by her own traditional audience, rather than a western one. The specifications formulated by her commissioning patrons indicate that a communication gap in the interpretation of her work was occurring. The painting that she produced on a car door was seen in terms of its emblematic value as a category of traditional African art. However, its execution had become divorced from its traditional processes and function.(40.)

Traditionally, the Western view of African art has been that it is a convention-bound art which does not allow innovations or variations within its particular typology. As the forms are produced by the artists, it can be said that the interpretation of their meaning belongs to the domain of the artists themselves. When seen in terms of a category of Ndzundza wall painting, the forms become open to more generalized interpretations. Seen as reduced forms of meaning, the motifs can be used in a variety of ways by artists without their possible symbolic meaning changing. Western viewing of art sees forms as autonomous and speaking for themselves, but in terms of Southern amaNdebele paintin , form is an integral part of its society.(41.) Both the audience, the artist and the production-circumstances are integrated into the interpretation of the work as a whole.

Esther's 'painted car' became a travelling exhibit in local public and international art galleries. It was Esther's traditional 'art' which gave the industrially manufactured vehicle access into the hallowed rooms of 'high' art.(Fig.15) Her art, seen as being qualified by an African tradition, lent 'authenticity' to the reputation of a motor vehicle. Despite this blatant form of appropriation by western marketing, Esther's personality and bearing when dealing with these occasions, preempts any negative prediction being made about her future as a painter. Esther and Elias' attendance at the international show in Germany lent some intercultural credibility to the occasion, which may have been part of the company's benevolent intervention into international cultural issues as well.

Esther was also commissioned to paint the firescreen of the Johannesburg Civic Theatre in 1992. Her son, Elias helped her complete the work. The Johannesburg Civic Authorities, in their bid to appear more representative of the different population groups of the city, used Esther's work as a means of endorsing the sincerity of their new intentions. By using a form of traditional African art from a local, but relatively removed 'outside' tradition, the Civic Authorities were able to proclaim that their eurocentric ideology was indeed changing.(42.)

Esther resigned from Botshabelo in 1992 as she had become mistrustful of the curator as well as her colleagues. The curator had not volunteered her name to Japanese businessmen who wanted one of their

Tokyo factory walls painted. The curator, acting as a 'culture broker' on behalf of the women painters at the museum, wanted someone other than Esther to have an opportunity to participate in the international cultural arena.(43.) Esther procured the commission on her own initiative, and she went to visit and work in Tokyo.

According to her new agent, she was financially exploited.(Agent B 4/12/1993) The interpretation of the market-value of her work currently appears to be defined by her agent, which Esther does not seem to mind. Discussion of her Japanese trip with Esther does not elicit mistreatment by her patrons. The interpretation of the value of her work by middlemen, who do it in terms of market responses, appears to be considerably far removed from her own local-market values. The necessity for a first-world intermediary to keep her work adequately priced for her élite audience holds the risk that she might price herself out of the market. This depends on the level of her agents' own commercial interests in relation to her work, over which Esther has little control in the broader market-place. Now that her work has attracted the attention of Eastern entrepreneurs, interpretations other than Western ones are beginning to determine the value of her work as well.

ESTABLISHMENT OF MIDDLEMEN AND CULTURE BROKERS AS WELL AS TRADITIONAL CONTROL

Esther's resignation and return to Weltevreden in 1992 was facilitated by a legal agreement that was drawn up between herself, a local(Agent B) and an international agent(Agent A). The Department of Culture of the KwaNdebele Government Services supervised this transaction. Her son, Elias, who is based at KwaMhlanga, is her intermediary. As he runs a taxi business, he regularly commutes to the urban centres and is, thus, able to relay messages to Esther at Weltevreden from the urban centres. She clearly favours her international agent, though (Agent A), and she is also given privileged access to her newly constructed '*ibandla*'(ceremonial meeting place) outside her homestead on special occasions.

Esther's use of Southern amaNdebele formal structures to 'monitor' her commercial transactions is a means of ensuring that her business is conducted in an appropriate fashion associated with her own people. But how the authorities view this traditional culture is currently a complex issue. The Chief of Culture, P. Skosana, wants Ndzundza culture to be preserved, while the Chief Minister sees traditional cultural practices as possibly undermining the current democratic changes occurring in South Africa. Thus far, the KwaNdebele 'censorship' of Esther's business transactions has not been restrictive. Skosana described his government's role as being a supervisory one: outside transactions are monitored to ensure that they are acceptable to the artists themselves.(interview 9/12/1993)

This description of the circumstances relating to the commercial production of wall painting by Esther Mahlangu, implies that she has gone through a complex process. In her bid to be acknowledged as an individual artist by outsiders, where she could obtain higher prices in an élite market, she has created an elaborate system of brokers for herself. The control by her new agents or 'middlemen' is

different from that of her previous paternalistic white civic authorities. The variety of brokers and middlemen has become broader to facilitate interventions into a wider and more multicultural system of markets. Her brokers' attitudes, their social position, and their ability to speak foreign languages determine how successfully they can access these other markets. Simultaneously, she has developed a working relationship with the local Southern amaNdebele government, which does not appear to include that of the tribal authorities. As an international representative of 'Southern amaNdebele painting', she has institutionalized her ethnic identity with her painting. Her traditional clothing, the sanction of her local authorities and her Southern amaNdebele 'style' of painting has given her an opportunity to work more freely as an 'image creator' in the traditional medium of wall painting.(44.)

Her style of work continues to change and she produces a variety of functional pots and non-functional paintings. Signs of a repetition in her work occur when there is a volume of a particular type of painted item produced for sale in her 'shop'. This can currently be seen in her painted plant containers. The contexts in which her paintings are being sold, provide for wider interpretations of her paintings being made, from both local and outside audiences. But the quality of these interpretations does not provide a guarantee that her work is understood - either by her new brokers or by the different consumers in the foreign markets. However, the fact that her culture brokers live in South Africa does provide an opportunity for relatively closer interpretation and representation of her work being made.

Esther continues to wear the traditional '*linaga*' (blanket) and '*idzila*' (metal rings). These not only mark her traditional married status amongst the Ndzundza, but they are also emblematic of her ethnic origin. Personal identity and her use of symbolic clothing to identify herself in her community are not mutually exclusive and they are seen to function together. She has recently taken to signing her paintings, which serves to confirm her awareness of her status as an individual artist in the western fine-art market. Similarly, her status as an artist within her traditional context is being endorsed by her outside work. As a teacher within the female initiation tradition of her community, she is now seen as a specialist painter.

Using the paradigm of Jules-Rosette, Esther has become an 'image creator' within the context of 'tourist arts'.(45.) She has made a bid to gain acknowledgement with an international elite audience who pay higher prices than the popular consumers of the tourist markets. To confirm her participation in this sphere, the signing of her work lends 'authenticity' and value to it. As she succeeds in these foreign-based élite markets, so her prestige improves in her community. But the former market concerns itself with artistic 'authenticity', while the latter sees her art in terms of her traditional status as a specialist painter. In order to understand the changes of circumstance relating to Esther, an interpretation of her role as a woman and a wall-painter in Weltevreden has to be made.

WELTEVREDEN AND TRADITIONAL WALL PAINTING OF THE NDZUNDZA.

Esther was bestowed the "Number One" status by the KwaNdebele government in an official ceremony held at the king's residence, *'KwaSimuyembiwa'*, at Weltevreden in 1992. The certificate she was awarded has given her the official designation of being the principal painter of the Southern amaNdebele people for 1992. The certificate is on display in her home and she has also painted her title on the front façade of her home -"*Esther Mahlangu Nomber 1*".(Fig.16)

Schneider observes that there was already a competitiveness amongst the women painters in Weltevreden in the late '70s, and it still persists today. A certain protocol is maintained amongst them, involving the exchange of gifts when a painter leaves the community to undertake an overseas commission, or returns to it. Dina Mahlangu related that the women exchanged small woven grass mats, bowls('skottels') and blankets amongst themselves when Esther went on one of her many trips. This form of symbolic exchange is an expression of welcome and gratitude for her safe return. (D. Mahlangu 22/08/1993, confirmed by Agent B 4/12/1993)

What constitutes a 'Weltevreden' Painting context and its significance in relation to the work of Esther Mahlangu.(Fig.31)

Weltevreden is a fairly large rural settlement approximately 25 kilometres north of Siyabuswa and 70 kilometres south of Marble Hall in the Transvaal. The tribal authority was moved to Weltevreden in 1974 and King Mayisha II succeeded King David Mabusa Mabhoko in 1992. Renovations are currently being undertaken at the royal headquarters ('KwaNsimuymbiwe'), where the king intends to stay. His brother, Prince S.J. Mahlangu, who is the Chief Minister of the KwaNdebele legislature, also lives on the outskirts of Weltevreden. His lavish western double-storey home has no wall paintings on it.

At present, the royal family represents both the tribal and political authority of the Southern amaNdebele. Current broader democratic changes in South Africa appear to be precipitating a cultural dilemma in KwaNdebele. This was evident at the recent Nyabele Day celebrations at *Erholweni* on 19 December 1993. The king described how the significance of the traditional display of Ndzundza identity had been a successful means of attracting the Pretoria Government's attention to their plight. He described the display of ethnicity as having been a unifying strategy for the Southern amaNdebele and he announced:

'We wish for a unity until we reach our desired dream'.

He was referring to the relocation of the traditional territory that the Ndzundza lost in 1883. In contrast, his brother's earlier speech had requested that there be a loosening of traditional institutions so as to accommodate the current democratic processes taking place in South Africa. The association of tribal nationalism, with broader pan-Africanist liberation ideologies, appears to pose a threat to the authority of the king, his chiefs and headmen. What could become an ideological conflict pertaining to the cultural identity of the Southern amaNdebele, is currently being contained by a common dislike of the white South African Government. The Chief of Culture indicated that there were signs by his government of neglecting the

cultural traditions of the Southern amaNdebele and that there was a need to document what there was before dramatic changes took place.(interview 19/12/1993)

These recent differing viewpoints towards Ndzundza cultural traditions have not yet become apparent at Weltevreden. But many residents are relocating to settlements which are closer to transport routes leading to urban areas. Consequently, it is mainly the earlier farm-tenant residents approaching retirement, who continue to live at Weltevreden. The lack of electricity and telephones inhibits small business enterprises opening at Weltevreden, and the idea of returning the royal residence to KwaMhlanga is also currently being considered. These changes pose a threat to the commercial viability of Ndzundza wall paintings. To date, the wall paintings have been seen by outsiders in terms of having a symbolic value by their close proximity to the royal headquarters.('*KwaNsimuymbiwe*')

There is little documentation concerning Weltevreden after 1923. Weiss suggests that there was already a high incidence of wall decorations in the Weltevreden area in the '60s. But she does not elaborate. Schneider's research shows the wall paintings at Weltevreden were indirectly adapted from the KwaMsiza designs.(46) This may have occurred as the tenant-labourers from white farms relocated to Weltevreden in the late '70s and '80s. She notes that in the late '70's the women were painting geometric designs in which stepped patterns featured.(47) Blues and purples seemed to be the favourite colours, and these colours may be also seen on the earlier painted sections of Esther Mahlangu's '*umsamo*'(dwelling).(See Fig.11) But Schneider's analysis of this region as a sub-style included settlements which were within a 30-kilometre radius of Weltevreden.(48) But there are inconsistencies in the wall paintings at Weltevreden and in the surrounding settlements, which implies that her interpretation may have been too generalized.

Schneider's interpretation of wall paintings in the vicinity of Weltevreden.

Although the wall paintings are associated with traditional events relating to the homestead, Schneider points out that owing to the disenfranchisement of the Ndzundza, the wall paintings also functioned as markers of identity. She claims that the identity-function of the paintings was manipulated by the Southern amaNdebele political leadership in its bid to achieve an independent homeland from the South African government.(49) For her, this political intervention is exemplified by the Weltevreden paintings done on the king's residence and the *Isango leZulu* Catholic Church. She sees these as 'studied' and 'sterile'.(50)

The circumstances pertaining to the execution of paintings on these two building-complexes appear to have been initiated by two different commissioning bodies, but they were executed by the same workshop of painters. The royal princess, Francina Ndimande, her husband, Daniel Msana Ndimande, and her daughter, Angelina, were responsible for the execution of the paintings in the late '70s. What Schneider observes as an 'unexpected change in the painting style at Weltevreden', is an increase in the volume of work of a particular wall painting-

workshop.(51) The wall decorations on the Ndimande '*umuzi*' (dwelling complex) of the same period indicate that the commissioned work is only marginally more elaborate, but not dissimilar in style. Francina Ndimande confirms this in an interview with Mchunu in 1991. She says,

> 'the designs I apply for commissioned work are no different from those for a royal kraal. I do not have special royal motifs'. (52.)

Daniel Ndimande was King David Mabusa Mabhoko's praise poet and aide, and his daughter, Angelina, is possibly inspired by the present Prince S.J. Mahlangu's praise poetry.

> 'I feel this inspiration. This poetry is different from the older ones. It is witty, uses today's language and is fearless. I always hear it buzzing in my ears when I work on the murals. It is difficult to interpret this praise poetry in my work.'1991 (53)

This may indicate that the earlier commissioned designs also may have had historical associations with amaNdebele oral traditions.

Schneider describes an example of wall painting which includes figurative imagery with the traditional geometric designs at a homestead at Wolwekraal.(54) This work has representations of a feline animal, soccer players and figures framed by brightly painted geometric designs. Schneider acknowledges that this example is rare but she, nevertheless, includes it as representing a general stylistic change in Southern amaNdebele painting. Wolwekraal is on a main transport route in KwaNdebele, and the painter may well have been responding to government officials' instructions to decorate her home so as to attract the attention of senior Pretoria government officials who were visiting the region.(55) But the inclusion of figurative imagery may also have been a naive expression of worldliness. This example should thus be seen as an innovation, rather than a 'corruption' of a Southern amaNdebele style of painting. As there is not enough information available concerning the circumstances and motivation of the painter, or what type of social organization existed at Wolwekraal village at the time, the example cannot be related to the work done at Weltevreden of the same period.

Schneider's idea that a distinct 'development' can be seen in Southern amaNdebele painting between 1946-86, poses problems. Her hypothesis that changes can be seen between the simpler '*ligupho*' paintings at Hartebeesfontein of the '40s and 'the flamboyant, overripe style' of the '80s is based on a generalization that the works are representative of an ethnic category of art.(56) This has tended to exclude the particular circumstances in which the wall paintings were produced. Issues such as the individual circumstances of the painters, their locality and the socio-political changes in each locality are ignored and need to be considered. Instead of seeking consistencies in the manifestations of a Southern amaNdebele style, identifying variations within the style may indicate factors determining the continuation and changes in the wall-painting tradition. By looking at the work of particular painters and their circumstances, it may be a beginning towards a symbolic interpretation of the paintings.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL SOUTHERN AMANDEBELE SOCIETY AND CONTEMPORARY EVENTS

Schneider views the phenomenon of wall painting amongst the Southern amaNdebele from 1949-86 as an expression of domestic and political pride. But in the light of recent socio-political changes, this interpretation needs to be reviewed. Significant changes have occurred in the role of women within traditional amaNdebele society. Their recent political participation in the 1986 confrontation with the South African Government; their success in gaining voting power through legal proceedings in the Pretoria Supreme Court (1988), and their strong contribution to the formation of the new *Intando Yesizwe* Party (The Will of the Nation) in 1990, suggest that their traditional role has not been as passive as it was previously thought.

Prior to these important events, it may have been true that women, 'as keepers of the home and the guardians of tradition', may well have 'used' amaNdebele culture and ethnic identity to maintain an equilibrium within their strife-ridden homes and society.(57) But this does not necessarily imply that their cultural role was also an expression of subservience and passivity within Southern amaNdebele traditions.

Mchunu's interview with an elderly resident of Weltevreden, Benzangani Mahlangu (Ndala), expresses the si nificance of cultural traditions as one which gives identity to the group, when she says,

> "AmaNdebele customs are amaNdebele customs. They have made us what we are and they must be observed".(58)

But poverty also may have played a part in creating the women's dynamic role. When Martha Msiza of Dortfontein Farm said (1991):

> 'I want my children to be proud of their home'.(59)

she was expressing a personal relationship with her family(rather than a traditional one).

SIGNIFICANCE OF INITIATION AND FORMS OF INFORMAL EDUCATION PRACTICES

The traditional practices of male and female initiation also exist amongst the Southern amaNdebele. As an institution, it is not unique to the group, and it is an important process in which young Africans qualify for responsibility and adulthood. The male *'ukuWela'* is held approximately every three years, and young men belonging to similar age-group sets are educated by a warden elected by the parents of the initiates. Great festivities are held on their 'coming out' (*'ukuwendisa amasokana'*), and women wall-painters regard this as an important social event requiring the execution of new paintings on their homesteads.

In contrast, young women undergo their initiation (*'ukuthombisa'*) singly, and their informal education is not complete once they have emerged from the seclusion of their first menstruation. They are taught the skills of housekeeping, beadwork, and painting by their mothers or grandmothers. Some families send their daughters to 'master' wall-painters to ensure that their education is completed. (60) The completion of the young woman's initiation is marked by an *'ighude'* festivity at her parents' home. The practice of wall

painting amongst the Southern amaNdebele is more than the marking of traditional occasions within the homestead and an expression of domestic pride. It is also part of an informal educational process where the young women learn to develop and test their skills as wall painters. The period of apprenticeship varies - it may even take two years. Some women claim that, although they have learnt how to paint, they do not have the talent for it. A trainee wall-painter imitates the style of her senior teacher and, only on the latter's approval, may begin to 'experiment' with a personal style. Francina Ndimande describes her teaching of wall painting to Mchunu in the following way:

> 'You encourage those that are interested. Showing them how to hold the brush, how to keep a steady hand and to correct mistakes by painting them over. They have to be careful with the natural earth colours. They have to work them into the right thickness, not too watery and without any clods. Apprenticeship demands its own time. The young person must also learn to handle the oxides and commercial whitewash. Once you notice talent in the youngster, you have to guide her development. Leave her to work alone and correct the mistakes. You must be strict and yet encourage her to find her own patterns. You always emphasize how the colours relate and harmonize. A talented girl listens attentively and registers this in her head. You invite the trainee to do commissioned work. She has to follow your instructions, but you give her the freedom to discover her own style".(61)

While a particular convention of painting may be common amongst all Ndzundza painters, the process of apprenticeship is an indication that individual styles are part of a continuing process of adoption, adaptation and individual initiative. The name '*ukuthombisa*', which means 'to ripen' in isiNdebele, may be seen as symbolic of this process of also maturing in the skill of painting.

WOMEN AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Levy's observation that,

> 'The association of (ama)Ndebele art - both wall painting and beadwork -within a more organized commercial market dates back at least to the earlier 1950's (if not earlier)..' (62)

shows that Southern amaNdebele women have been able to exercise considerable freedom of movement and economic independence within their traditional contexts for some time. This may be partly due to the poor agricultural potential in their regions and the economic necessity to supplement an income. But a significant factor which may have given rise to this situation of Southern amaNdebele women, was the prolonged absenteeism of men participating in the migrant labour system. The commercial ventures in painted walls and beadwork by Ndzundza women have certainly become a lucrative source of income for them. Weiss notes that women painters were already painting for local white patrons in the '60s when they painted a wall dividing two shops in Pretoria.(63)

The practice of painting and beadwork was part of the Ndzundza informal education traditions where young women, as future mothers and homemakers, were taught the traditional skills and crafts associated with homemaking, by older matriarchs. Young Ndzundza

girls enter the practice of beadmaking prior to their first menstruation, and their participation in the production and sale of beadwork at commercial markets begins at an earlier age. It appears that wall painters enter the commercial market at a later stage, and, thus, become familiar with the market through their earlier beadmaking activities.

THE EMERGENCE OF 'MASTER' PAINTERS WHO PARTICIPATE IN NDZUNDZA EDUCATION PROCESSES.

Recent interviews with Esther Mahlangu show that she is one of the 'master' wall-painting teachers at Weltevreden. The traditional system of informal painting-lessons, where a young woman is taught to paint, has become a more formalized system. A group of young women is sent to a 'master' painter who has her own 'studio'. This year, Esther has taught a group in the afternoons after formal schooling hours. She requires that they wear traditional dress and, initially, they are taught the early methods of wall painting. These include the use of earth oxides and feathers for brushes.(Figs.17-20) On mastering these techniques, they are then introduced to acrylic paints. The earlier designs, done on pieces of cardboard boxes, were identified by beadmakers as '*isiroyidoni*', or the top chain-like motif, while the lower motif is the traditional '*ligupho*' black-and-white pattern. The central free geometric shape was described as '*nempewulani*'. (Emma Mahlangu 4/12/1993) Thus, it appears that Ndzundza wall painting may be derived from the earlier beadmaking tradition.

> "Their relationship is that both art forms are beautiful.....Some of the *amagama* (words, patterns) from the beadwork are transferred on to mural art. But not directly, since these are different forms demanding separate skills and finishing touches. Moreover, beadwork is older than mural art, as our elders always remind us."(64)

As the processes in wall painting are so different from those of beadmaking, it is difficult to make a stylistic interpretation based on the similarity of the two mediums. The process of beadmaking requires the use of geometric shapes which appear to be similar in the wall paintings. But they function differently in Ndzundza society. Beadwork is worn to symbolize the different social stages of Ndzundza members. The same decorative forms may have been re-interpreted in the wall paintings to include expressions of domestic pride and traditional identity.

OTHER PAINTED HOMESTEADS AT WELTEVREDEN

The homesteads of the two other Botshabelo employees, Johanna Serana and Dina Mahlangu at Weltevreden are not significantly different from the work produced by Esther Mahlangu at Botshabelo. Both have used commercial paints, and the designs on their homes are bold in terms of colour. The design motifs are intricate and complex. Although Dina Mahlangu has painted only on the cemented sections of her predominantly stone-courtyard walls, it seems that her use of simpler design motifs is a more personal interpretation of traditional motifs than those of Johanna. The latter has made an almost direct transcription of the work of Esther for her flat-roofed dwelling. This similarity of style may be related to a similarity of workshop

apprenticeship conditions, which include individual interpretation in the style of a 'master' painter. Dina Mahlangu and Johanna Serana appear to have learnt the art of painting indirectly from the Esther Mahlangu 'workshop' of wall painting.(See Figs.7,9.)

A middle-aged woman, living directly across the road from Esther Mahlangu, claims that she has only recently taken to wall painting. She is in the employment of a 'tourist village' which has recently been initiated by the KwaNdebele government at Loopspruit. The paintings on her homestead have been done fairly recently and she has signed her name on the lower coloured '*ligupho*' design.(Fig.21) Her name is Mainah Mbona, and her paintings, although still in process, appear to be derived from the work done by the Francina Ndimande 'workshop'. She has used bright colours in acrylic paint, and her use of motifs, which are commonly associated with Francina Ndimande, have been reinterpreted in a somewhat less programmatic way. What Schnieder may have earlier seen as 'sterility' and 'chalk-line' effect(65), has been reproduced in Mainah Mbona's work with an ornateness in which linear arrows and curls emerge from her abstractions of architectural motifs. Her possible 'lack of skill' is particularly apparent in her coloured '*ligupho*' designs which run down the foot of the main homestead ('*umsamo*') and the adjacent buildings.(Fig.22) While the '*ligupho*' designs done by Francina also consist of variations of line types, these are strictly delineated into speci'ic areas within what Schneider calls a 'translational symmetry'.(66) (Fig.23.) Angelina describes how her mother taught her to

> 'draw straight lines, sharp boundaries.." (67)

which may serve as an indication of Francina's method of painting. Mainah Mbona's arrangement is somewhat less symmetrical and the inclusion of writing, circles and S-curves on open fields, points to a variation of interpretation which is more organic and spontaneous in appearance. If she has been trained by Francina, then her painted work shows an individual expressiveness which is less formal than that of her teacher.(Fig.25) This appears also to have been the case with Dina Mahlangu and Johanna Serana, who have become more experienced in the Esther Mahlangu methods of wall painting.

KWANDEBELE GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION IN TRADE OF 'CULTURE'

The KwaNdebele government has recently begun to participate in the 'development' of Ndzundza wall painting. The chief of Culture, Skosana, related how his department holds annual 'competitions' for the wall painters at KwaMhlanga.(9/12/1993) Women are invited to participate and they are given a brief in which they have to execute a painting which is then judged. The women are provided with materials for the competition, and the work is judged according to categories. All the participants are given some written form of acknowledgement and the winners are awarded certificates and prizes. The government provides the artists with documents which sanction their participation in the trade of their art, as well. Both the beadworkers and wall painters hold this sanction with esteem.

RECENT CHANGES IN PAINTING OF 'MASTER' PAINTERS' HOMESTEADS

Recent renovations to Francina's *'umuzi'* have involved a complete reconstruction and new roof to the main dwelling (*'umsamo'*). This is still in progress, but the side walls and adjacent buildings have been painted in a much greater variety of designs, types of motifs and, also, a renewal of some older types of traditional wall-painting types. Where there previously had been a continuity of design motifs across a single plane in the '80s, the plane has now been divided into variations of smaller design motifs.(Fig. 23,24) Francina, her daughter, Angelina, Nomothelo, and Nondudzi Mahlangu participated in a major exhibition in Berlin, in the "*Haus der Kulteren der Welt*" in 1991. These new paintings have been executed since Francina Ndimande's return, in 1992, and they may have been inspired by her outside exposure..

Although the main *'umsamo'* of Esther Mahlangu has remained the same since the '80s, there are considerable variations of painting formats and design motifs on the newer extensions of her *'umuzi'* (homestead complex).(Fig.26) Her 'shop' is painted in a manner similar to her Botshabelo work. It is done in bright colours, and variations of the zigzag motif are placed inside bands giving continuity to the single motif formats.(Fig.27)

Her rondawel-type *'ibandla'* and the protruding façade of one of the outside buildings contain shapes that may bear some resemblance to what Meiring referred to as *'mahoopo'* at Hartebeesfontein in the '40s. This may possibly be the *'ligupho'* style in which the delineation of the upper and lower areas of the wall is also given prominence. The upper band is called *'iketani'* or *'isiroyidoni'*. This band has smaller designs painted in it called *'maphade'*. The central design motifs, such as the *'nempewulani'*, are not enclosed in strict boundaries. These were formerly used to define the entire format of the wall-spaces of the dwelling. There is now a preponderance of broad white areas and an interplay of squares (*'lefelise'*) and triangles (*'peolani'*) which make up the design units.(Fig.28)(68) What is of interest, though, is that there seems to be a 'revival' of earlier traditional styles amongst the women painters of Weltevreden.

A process of differentiation in wall-painting practices at Weltevreden appears to have emerged in which replication is done in terms of apprenticeship to 'master' painters. At present, the 'master' painters appear to be Esther Mahlangu and Francina Ndimande and, to a lesser extent, her daughter, Angelina Ndimande.

The apparent 'revival' of earlier traditional painting forms in the work of the 'master' painters, may be due to artificial intervention entering the working patterns of the women. Local political changes, the intervention of the KwaNdebele Government in cultural matters, the extent to which outside visitors and researchers have had an influence on the working patterns of the painters, are all issues that should be taken into consideration. Angelina Ndimande's statement that her mother's 'white customers always stressed that she should teach one of her children' (69) suggests that outside

intervention has not been foreign to the determining of wall-painting styles at Weltevreden.

Esther Mahlangu's recent response to outside intervention has been to create her own commercial enterprise for her work. As previously stated, she proclaims her status as the 'First Lady of Painting' on the facade of her dwelling and she has also built a studio and 'shop' alongside it. She is currently displaying her painted and beaded work inside her '*umsamo*', as the interior of her 'shop' appears to be still under construction. Her 'stock' of painted canvases and boards is done in acrylic paints and depict details of design motifs derived from her wall paintings. A black outlined border functions as an 'informal' frame. She has also painted the top of a ball-and-claw coffee-table, ostrich-eggs and various types of bowls and jars. Her painted work is dominant in her stall and her beadwork consists of various dolls ('*umdwana*'), aprons, necklaces, bracelets and beaded borders around woven grass table-mats and brooms. An innovation is cardboard constructions of various rondawel and square-shaped dwellings which have grass thatching for the roofs. The exterior walls of these small-scale 'models' of '*umsamo*' have been painted by Esther. These 'models' are more overt forms of 'tourist souvenirs' than the other objects in her 'shop'. The scale and decorativeness of these models project a 'picturesque' notion of a Ndzundza settlement.(Fig. 29) Her nephew, Mooiboy Mahlangu, aged 21 years, also sells his wooden sculptures in her 'shop'. Thus, her workshop tradition is extending beyond her traditional teaching function to include also the production unit based on family ties.

The variation in the prices of her canvas paintings and her functional items indicates that Esther still distinguishes between her types of buyers.(Fig.30)

Her earlier memorial painting of a '*poryana*'(wildcat skin made by a father for his son after initiation) and a beaded '*irari*' (beaded blanket worn by married women) on the back wall of her '*umsamo*' has now become concealed by the addition of a studio. This uncharacteristic portrayal of Ndzundza beadwork, according to Esther, was done in memory of her late husband in the '80s.(interview 1989) The earlier display of symbolic 'privacy' has now been replaced by a blatant exhibitionism of her status and fame as a painter. She has attempted to write her name in Japanese on the façade of her house which can be seen as a bid to describe her 'worldliness' and, possibly, also to 'please' her new-found customers.

Esther is particularly popular with the Weltevreden youth - partly owing to her donation of a bus to the Weltevreden community to transport children to school at Siyabuswa and back. This she has also painted, and it is known as the "Esther Mahlangu Bus".(Agent B 4/12/1993) Such a form of local 'advertising' ensures that her reputation will endure in her local community. Her apparent support of formal school-education may indicate that she does not consider it as undermining to the older traditional forms of education.

In the above description of some of the painted '*umuzi*' (dwelling complexes) at Weltevreden, it is apparent that the art of wall painting has been in a process of continual change. Particular

conditions associated with the production of wall paintings appear to involve many variables at Weltevreden. The elaboration on traditional forms into a type of decorativeness could be said to be an outcome of a foreign-based tourist market. But the immovable nature of wall painting has to include other considerations in order to explain the apparent 'enrichment' or 'impoverishment' of the style. The availability of commercial paints and the range of brighter colours, the types of commercial ventures that the women are participating in, the rapidly changing social circumstances of the group as well as the different kinds of audiences who visit the area- these are all significant factors determining the changes in the style of Ndzundza wall painting.

CHANGES IN STYLE, EDUCATION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WALL PAINTING TRADITION TO CONTEMPORARY NDZUNDZA WOMEN.

Changes within the painting traditions of Ndzundza women at Weltevreden include individual painters who no longer wish to work within the white patronage-systems of 'tourist villages' and cultural museums. The circumstances under which Esther Mahlangu emerged as a 'master' painter have led to her creating her own local-type of commercial market-place for her various audiences. She is creating a 'traditional' homestead context at Weltevreden for her foreign visitors. This does not exclude the continuation of the painting enterprises of her community. The 'flamboyant' style that Schneider describes, appears to have become modified. It should not be seen as a degeneration of an earlier Ndzundza wall painting style. Rather, it could mean that the style speaks to a wider and more varied audience, while continuing to function within its traditional context. Circumstances have led to Esther Mahlangu's *'umuzi'* also now being viewed as a type of 'tourist village' or as a 'cultural museum'. This is dependent on the type of outside visitor she receives at Weltevreden. It is apparent that this context is not one 'frozen' in an ethnographic present. Changes from within and without serve to become part of the Ndzundza wall-painting tradition.

The earlier informal-education practices at Weltevreden have recently developed into more organized ventures in which 'master' painters teach and apprentice young women to become wall painters. The 'success' of the apprentices is seen in terms of traditional Ndzundza functions as well as an opportunity to gain access to outside commercial enterprises. The existing competitiveness amongst the wall painters at Weltevreden, which Schneider records as already apparent in the '70s, may be an additional incentive for the development of individual styles and formal variations.(70)

There are indications that outside commissioning patterns have been a determining factor in the changes of the wall paintings at Weltevreden. The expanded market for Ndzundza wall painting has also determined social changes within Weltevreden society. While some 'master' women-painters have become significantly more 'affluent', the range of variations within the Ndzundza wall-painting style has also become distinguishable. These can be isolated to individual 'master' styles and apprenticeship traditions.

This form of 'expression' in paint is endorsed by the local Southern

amaNdebele authorities. They regard it as a manifestation of cultural unity (Skosana) and an extension of Ndzundza identity. As a form of ethnic differentiation, it appears to serve no longer as an overt political or ideological need. Changes within the broader South African context and its increasing recognition by the international world, have relocated the Southern amaNdebele into a broader social setting. Issues such as access to economic resources and land tenure are no longer based on being visible to a white government.

The association of 'ethnicity' with wall painting applies in that it can be seen to 'belong' collectively to the Ndzundza by virtue of its being linked to the institution of female initiation practices. But this category does not include considerations of how the wall paintings function in terms of commercial, political, and social processes. Ndzundza beadwork can be used on occasions to signify the social status of the individual who can also safely store it. In contrast, wall painting is a public art which is not portable, though always available for viewing. As a public form of art, Ndzundza wall painting expresses the locality of the work as well as the origin of the painter. Although the style can be said to belong to a Ndzundza tradition of wall painting, it cannot be said to function in the same way in the various contexts in which it is manifested. The Wolvekraal example cited by Schneider, in which figurative imagery is included, would be regarded by Angelina Ndimande as a 'corruption' of the painting style and '..not real amaNdebele painting. It is not good. It is like imitating the European way of painting.'(71) This may indicate that the individual motives of the artists also require consideration and may also reveal the emergence of other forms of interpretation.

By looking at the Weltevreden context, in particular, one can say that the wall paintings are associated with workshops. According to Vansina, a workshop is an '..institution in which works of art are produced'.(72) This definition may also include a situation where artists work on their own. At Weltevreden, the female initiation processes are conducted by age-group matriarchs who currently include Esther Mahlangu. Young women undergo processes of apprenticeship under the guidance of a matriarch and, on their acquisition of the painting skill, they become distinguished from other women. Esther Mahlangu, as the most experienced painter, has attained the status of the 'specialist' or 'artist' of her traditional community.

The recent initiation group which Esther has supervised has included her granddaughter, Danisile Mahlangu who is 16 years old. The inclusion of blood relatives in the apprenticeship programme demonstrates how the painting tradition and style remain within the family. (Esther learnt how to paint from her grandmother, as well.) Other initiants may have been included on the strength of their artistic promise or through their family associations. The pace in which the young women learn to paint is relatively slow. At first, they learn by imitation and, under guidance, may evolve their own style of painting. The last work produced by this recent group of initiants was done in acrylic paints on the back wall of Esther Mahlangu's 'studio'. The photographic documentation of the young women posing in front of their painting indicates that they are at

different stages within the initiation process. These can be distinguished from the types of beaded 'aprons' that they are wearing. (See Fig. 19)

The process of specialization is linked to gender and group-identity processes. The acquisition of the skill of wall painting provides the young women with opportunities of becoming successful homemakers, while also developing an aesthetic sensibility. ('*vir die mooigheid*'. Lettie Mahlangu 19/12/1993) As an institution in which women participate, the practices are not sanctioned by men, but by older women. As a form of social control, Ndzundza wall painting can be said to be a specialist form of education in which women gain acceptance and status within their traditional society. But the control by the community matriarchs is tempered by their limited participation within the traditional leadership system. However, this is currently changing, as the women are becoming more actively involved in aspects of the contemporary political leadership of the group.

Within the context of present democratic changes influencing Ndzundza society, the role of women in the tradition of wall painting is also changing. Men, too, are now beginning to participate in commissioned wall paintings. This has arisen from the commercial value associated with the wall paintings. As Vansina points out:

> 'The economics of production are important in any consideration of art. The volume of output, the size of workshop, the site of the area affected by the product, the possible speed of innovation of form, the relative number of workshops, the relative frequency of skilled artists and even the relative influence of the taste of the patrons ..'(73)

However, the possibility of men's participation in wall-painting processes is dependent on their association with 'specialist' women wall painters.

In Esther Mahlangu's case, the personal production of paintings is limited to those on her '*umuzi*'(dwelling complex), while her functional painted items are intended for sale to tourists. (Her outside commissioned work is arranged by her agents.) Her workshop production is limited to that of her own production of both private and commercial work, which is interspersed with initiation apprenticeships. As a 'master painter', Esther achieved her status from her traditional group, endorsed by her reputation in foreign 'élite' markets. Her apprentices adopt and adapt her style for their own particular purposes. Similarly, Esther also adapts her style according th the nature of her commissions and her perceived taste of outsiders. She is also distinguished from the other painters at Weltevreden by the kinds of materials she uses for her production processes. These materials are not locally accessible and are relatively more expensive than traditional materials. Interpretation of her distinctive style can be seen on a number of '*umuzi*' at Weltevreden, which may be a sign that these painters have 'passed' through her workshop.

Training under a 'master' painter denotes status and specialization for the apprentices and their families. Some mothers have entered regular employment and have transferred their educational

responsibilities for their daughters to specialist wall-painting teachers. These teachers have emerged from their communities and are seen as 'custodians of Ndzundza culture'.

The intervention of the KwaNdebele government appears to be ambivalent to this wall painting practice. While the traditional leadership views it as significant, the legislative government fears that such institutions still carry notions of ethnicity. This could undermine the Ndzundza's participation in broader political issues in South Africa.

But it has become apparent that the weakening of a Ndzundza ideology in the painting institution and practices can be an incentive for outside commercial enterprises, as well. The previous 'ethnic' interpretation of the Ndzundza wall paintings does not undermine the current political initiatives of the group. Owing to the political changes in South Africa, the wall paintings no longer function overtly as a form of group differentiation within a poly-ethnic situation. The identity of the Ndzundza is no longer being threatened and it appears that the wall paintings are not challenging the current political changes either. The Ndzundza wall paintings are a continuation of a form which has evolved from earlier cultural practices and are a symbolic expression of Ndzundza history. The paintings also express the (individual) identity of the painters, their social status and locality. Indirectly, the wall paintings are an indication of how Ndzundza women have participated in the cultural traditions and enrichment of their society. As homemakers, teachers, community members and political participants, they have adapted the wall paintings to express their changing roles.

While the paintings may be said to describe the role of women, their function appears to be varied. How the wall paintings function within contemporary Ndzundza society involves a deductive process of interpretation. But, as the paintings are produced by individuals, their function cannot be seen as fixed or constant. Consequently, their function should be seen as being multivalent in nature. As there is still not enough existing information on the specific contexts where Ndzundza wall paintings appear, it is only possible to make broad generalizations as to how the wall paintings function. The Ndzundza appear to be aware of the problem and, in his speech at *Erholweni*, the Chief Minister expressed the need for Ndzundza history to be rewritten.(19/12/1993). The participation of isiNdebele speakers and residents in the region doing historical research should facilitate the making of interpretations of Ndzundza wall paintings.

Weltevreden's significance as the locality of the royal residence, appears to have become less of a determinant in the phenomenon of Ndzundza wall paintings. The tribal authority of the king (and his previous association with traditional Ndzundza pride) appears to be less resistant to the new changes occurring in South Africa. This means that the paintings may be seen as including notions of Ndzundza tradition, notions which are now in a process of assimilation and continuation.

The continued participation of Ndzundza women in the informal female education processes suggests that these institutions are not seen as

undermining the present political initiatives of their leaders. Angelina Ndimande teaches wall painting at the formal schools in the area, while the older matriarchs continue their informal teaching practices in their respective '*umuzi*'. The institution of female initiation, and its association with wall painting, appears to be one which is organized and run by women. This does not receive the sanction of men. Benzangani Mahlangu's view that 'Beauty must also be where food is prepared' shows how intimately the processes of wall painting are linked to the social role of Ndzundza women as well as how they perceive themselves.(74)

Having looked at various issues concerning contemporary Ndzundza wall painting, it is apparent that the various circumstances relating to the phenomenon preclude any definitive categorization being made of its character. Due to the historical circumstances of Ndzundza tenant-labourers on farms in the Middelburg region, the tradition of wall painting appears to have been more resistant to changes than those at settlements such as Weltevreden. The influences of a trade with tourists is seen to have been an important determinant in the changes and continuation of Ndzundza wall painting. It can be said that the 'success' and reputation that the wall painters acquire from outsiders, has been an incentive in the development of the tradition of Ndzundza wall painting into more formalized workshop systems. A system of specialization and stylistic differentiation can be seen in the wall paintings at Weltevreden. These have occurred according to the individual circumstances of the Ndzundza women who participate in the practice of wall painting.

FOOTNOTES:

1. p.200-5: Schneider, E.A:1987:Paint, Pride and Politics: Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art: unpublished Phd dissertation: University of Witwatersrand.
2. Ibid.188-205
3. Ibid.220
4. p.19 :1991:"amaNdebele :Signals of Colour from South Africa :Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.
5. p.211: Schneider, E.A :1987: Paint, Pride and Politics: Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art : unpublished Phd dissertation: University of Witwatersrand.
6. The painter Gerard Sekoto and the academic and writer, Njabulo Ndebele are two such examples.
7. I am indebted to Schneider, E.A: Paint, Pride and Politics:Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art: unpublished Phd dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand :1987 for an account of this village:p.69-73.
8. p.11-17:Levy, D: 1990: Continuities and Changes in Ndebele Beadwork :c1883 to the Present : unpublished M.A. dissertation: University of Witwatersrand.
9. Ibid. 19
10. Ibid: 19
11. Ibid. 17 : from Wright,J: 1966:102: Politics, Ideology and the invention of 'Nguni' in Lodge, T(ed.): Resistance and Ideology in Settler Societies: Ravan Press. Johannesburg
12. p.209: Schneider, E.A:1987: Paint, Pride and Politics :Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art: unpublished Phd dissertation: University of Witwatersrand.
13. Ibid. 71-73
14. Ibid. 73
15. Ibid.9 -13: Schneider distinguishes the Manala group from the Ndzundza group and uses the general term, 'Southern (ama)Ndebele' in her descriptions and discussions of the wall paintings. However, KwaMsiza, Botshabelo, Weltevreden and the majority of Middelburg tenant-labourer settlements on farms are Ndzundza. The main focus of this dissertation are the Ndzundza wall paintings. The term 'Southern (ama)Ndebele' is applied in terms of the general conditions in relation to the subject of amaNdebele wall painting, in which Ndzundza wall paintings appear to be particularly vigorous.
16. Ibid. 92
17. Ibid. 226
18. Ibid. 227
19. Ibid. 226
20. Ibid. 227
21. p.9: 1984: Jules-Rosette, Bennetta: The Messages of Tourist Art :An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective: Plenum Press. New York.
22. Ibid. 10
23. Ibid. 16
24. Ibid. 17
25. Ibid. 18
26. Ibid. 19
27. p.122: 1989: Schneider, E.A: Art and Communication: Ndzundza

Ndebele Wall Decorations in the Transvaal: (eds) Nettleton,A & Hammond-Tooke, D: African Art in South Africa\ From Tradition to Township, A.D. Donker.

28. Rita Matshiye lives at Waterval, which is in the Weltevreden vicinity.
29. Interview with spokesperson of Middelburg Town Council. 7/12/1993.
30. Both Dina Mahlangu and Johanna Serana relate how they grew up on white-owned farms, and on the farmers's departure, relocated to Weltevreden. This appears to be prior to 1986.
31. He selected her in terms of her *'umsamo'* paintings which are more subdued in colour, but not significantly different to her Botshabelo work. He travelled KwaNdebele extensively before he made his selection.
32. p.25:1989: Price, S: Primitive Art in Civilized Places: University of Chicago Press, London.
33. Ibid. 69
34. p. 36:1990 (?): Dubow, Neville: 'Magicians': Leadership Magazine.
35. To protect the commercial interests of Esther Mahlangu and her agents, it is felt that ~~it~~ their names should be kept anonymous for this dissertation. Agent A is her foreign agent, while Agent B is her local agent. However, both agents are involved in international negotiations.
36. p.37:1990 (?): Dubow, Neville:'Magicians': Leadership Magazine.
37. Related by Esther Mahlangu and confirmed by her new agents. 22/08/1993 and 2/12/1993.
38. *''n Volkskuns op Doek'* -Swiegers: 8/12/1993.
39. p. 207:1984: Jules-Rosette, Bennetta: The Messages of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective: Plenum Press, New York.
40. The Botshabelo curator did an 'experiment' in which he provided each woman with canvas measuring two and a half metres by one metre in size. He requested that they make paintings on these using acrylic paints. He interpreted the apparent similarity of the works by the four women as a confirmation that the painting style was a traditional form of art. *"Dit is a sterk bewysing dat dit 'n kuns van 'n volk is wat van hulle eie volk af kom"*. 9/12/1993.
41. p. 21-3: 1969: Biebuyck, Daniel: Introduction: Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art. University of California Press.
42. The Johannesburg City Council's intervention into broader cultural issues can be seen in their support for the curated show, 'The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art (1930 -1988)' by Sack,S of 1988/9 and 'Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthust Collection of Southern African Art' of 1991. These exhibitions dealt with the history of black art in South Africa and the repossession of collections of traditional artifacts to South Africa.
43. She claimed that the latter had conspired against her and *'hulle het die telefoon weggesteek'*. 22/08/1993)
44. p.5:1984: Jules-Rosette, Bennetta: The Messages of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective: Plenum Press, New York. 1993.
45. Ibid:5
46. p.117:1989: Schneider, E.A: Art and Communication: Ndzundza Wall Ndebele Decorating in the Transvaal: (eds) Nettleton, A &

Hammond-Tooke, D: African Art in South Africa\ From Tradition to Township: A.D. Donker.

47. p.60:1987:1987: Schneider, E.A: Paint, Pride and Politics: Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal amaNdebele Wall Art: unpublished Phd. dissertation: University of Witwatersrand.
48. Ibid. 59.
49. p.120:1989:Schneider, E.A: Art and Communication: Ndzundza Ndebele Wall decorating in the Transvaal: (eds) Nettleton, A & Hammond-Tooke, D:African Art in South Africa\ From Tradition to Township: A.D.Donker.
50. p.222:1987: Schneider, E.A: Paint, Pride and Politics: Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art: unpublished Phd. dissertation: University of Witwatersrand.
51. p.120:1989:Schneider, E.A: Art and Communication: Ndzundza Ndebele Wall Decorating in the Transvaal: (eds) Nettleton, A & Hammond-Tooke, D :African Art in South Africa\ From Tradition to Township: A.D. Donker.
52. p.73:1991: Mchunu, Vusi D:'To Paint to Express Joy'-interview with Mrs Francina Ndimande (Ndala) :amaNdebele: Signals of Colour from South Africa: Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Berlin.
53. Ibid. 84
54. p.120:1989: Schneider, E.A: Art and Communication: Ndzundza Ndebele wall decorating in the Transvaal: (eds) Nettleton, A & Hammond-Tooke,D: African Art in South Africa\ From Tradition to Township: A.D.Donker.
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57. Ibid. 114
58. p.103:1991: Mchunu, Vusi D: 'Beauty must also be prepared where food is prepared' Interview with Mrs. Benzangani Mahlangu(Ndala): amaNdebele: Signals of Colour from South Africa: Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Berlin.
59. p.109: 1991:Mchunu, Vusi D:'Strange shapes bestow beauty to my poor homestead' -interview with Mrs Martha Msiza, Dorstfontein Farm: amaNdebele: Signals of Colour from South Africa: Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Berlin.
60. I do not know whether this also occurs in the beadmaking context.
61. p. 75:1991: Mchunu, Vusi D:"To paint is to express joy' -interview with Mrs Francina Ndimande (Ndala): amaNdebele: Signals of Colour from South Africa: Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Berlin.
62. p. 106:1990: Levy, D: Continuities and Changes in Ndebele Beadwork: c1883 to the present: unpublished M.A. dissertation: University of the Witwatersrand.
63. Ibid. 30 from Weiss, O:1963: Funksionele Kunsuitinge by die Amandzundza: unpublished M.A. dissertation: University of Stellenbosch.
64. p. 76:1991:'To paint is to express joy' -interview with Mrs Francina Ndimande (Ndala): Mchunu, Vusi D: amaNdebele: Signals of Colour from South Africa: Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Berlin.
65. p.120: 1989: Art and Communication: Ndzundza Ndebele Wall Decorations in the Transvaal: (eds) Nettleton, A & Hammond-Tooke, D: African Art in South Africa\ From Tradition to Township: A.D. Donker.
66. p.52:1987: Schneider, E.A: Paint, Pride and Politics: Aesthetic

and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art: unpublished Phd dissertation:University of Witwatersrand.

67. p.81:1991:Mchunu, Vusi D:'The strength of my work comes from boldness and harmony'- interview with Angelina Ndimande:amaNdebele: Signals of Colour from South Africa: Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Berlin.
68. Anna Mahlangu of Kameelrivier (14/12/1993) and Lettie Mahlangu (19/12/1993). The latter is Esther Mahlangu's younger sister who also lives at Weltevreden.
69. p.81:1991:'The strength of my work comes from boldness and harmony'- interview with Angelina Ndimande: Mchunu, Vusi D: amaNdebele: Signals of Colour from South Africa: Haus der Kulturen der Welt: Berlin.
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71. p. 82:1987: Schneider, E.A: Paint, Pride and Politics: Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art: unpublished Phd dissertation: University of Witwatersrand.
72. p. 50:1984: Vansina, J: Art History in Africa: Longman, London.
73. Ibid. 52.
74. p.100: 1991:'Beauty must also be where food is prepared' -interview with Mrs Benzangani Mahlangu (Ndala)" Mchunu, Vusi D: amaNdebele: Signals of Colour from South Africa: Haus der Kulturen Der Welt, Berlin.

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Dubow, Neville ; 'Magicians': Leadership Magazine: 1990

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Information collected from Esther Mahlangu's collection of cuttings which pertain to her foreign commissions:

1993	"La Grande Verite, Le Astres Africains", Musee des Beaux Artes de Nantes. 25 June -25 September 1993 Director -Henry-Claude Cousseau Curator - Andre Magnin and Jean-Michel Rousset
1992	BMW painted car - exhibited and in Germany. Japan -painted a factory wall and boutique -Commes des Garcons, in Minami Aoyama Street, Tokyo. Johannesburg Civic Theatre Firescreen mural.
1991	Sept -November 17. Centre Atlantico de arte Moderno, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain. December 7 - February 9 1992, Gronigen Museum, Gronigen, Netherlands. February 20 -June 1992, Centro Cultural de arte Contemporaneo Mexico. Curator: Andre Magnin and Esther's work part of the Jean Pigozzi Collection. BMW painted car exhibited nationally in South Africa.
1990	Bordeaux - caravan painting competition Angouleme - exterior of school and taught children to paint.
1989	'Magiciens de la Terre '- Paris Painted inside of Angoulême museum.

Articles:

Voici no 279 15 Au 21 March 1993: p.68-9
Catalogue: Art Now : 1991



Fig 1: Exterior Courtyard Wall : Kwa Msiza. (1985)

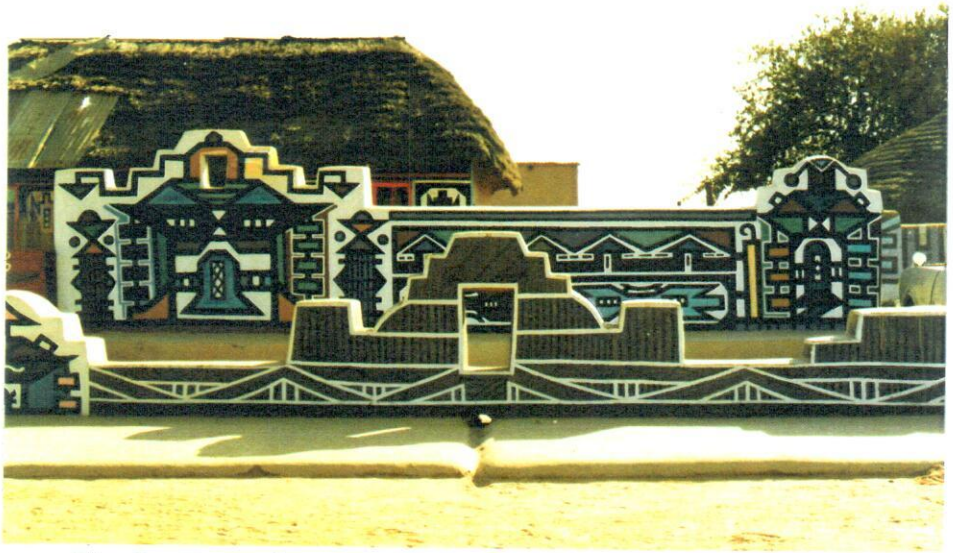


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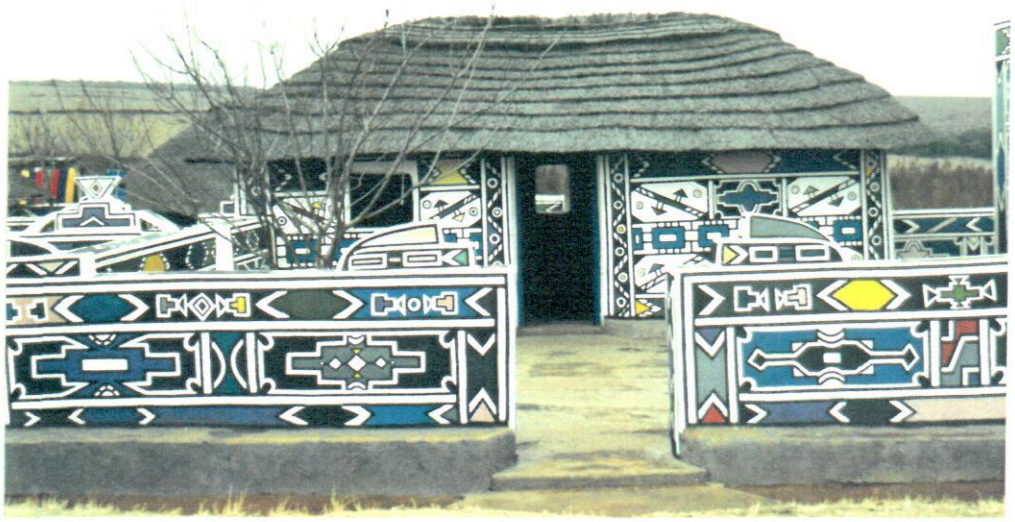




Fig 4: 'Self-Portrait' : Esther Mahlangu: Botshabelo. (1993)

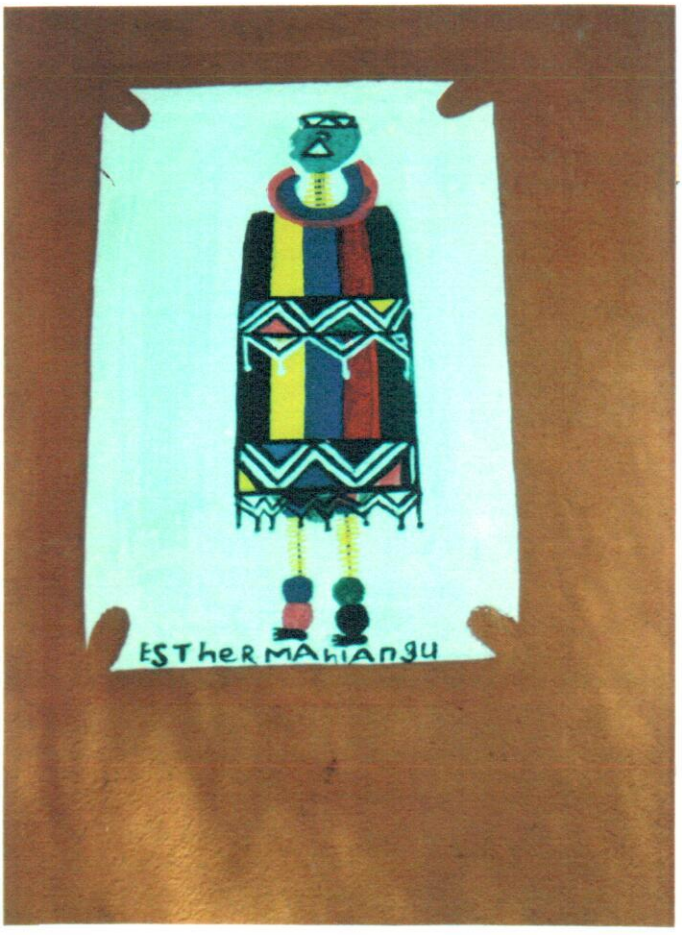


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Fig 9: Dina Mahlangu's 'umuzi': Weltevreden. (1993)

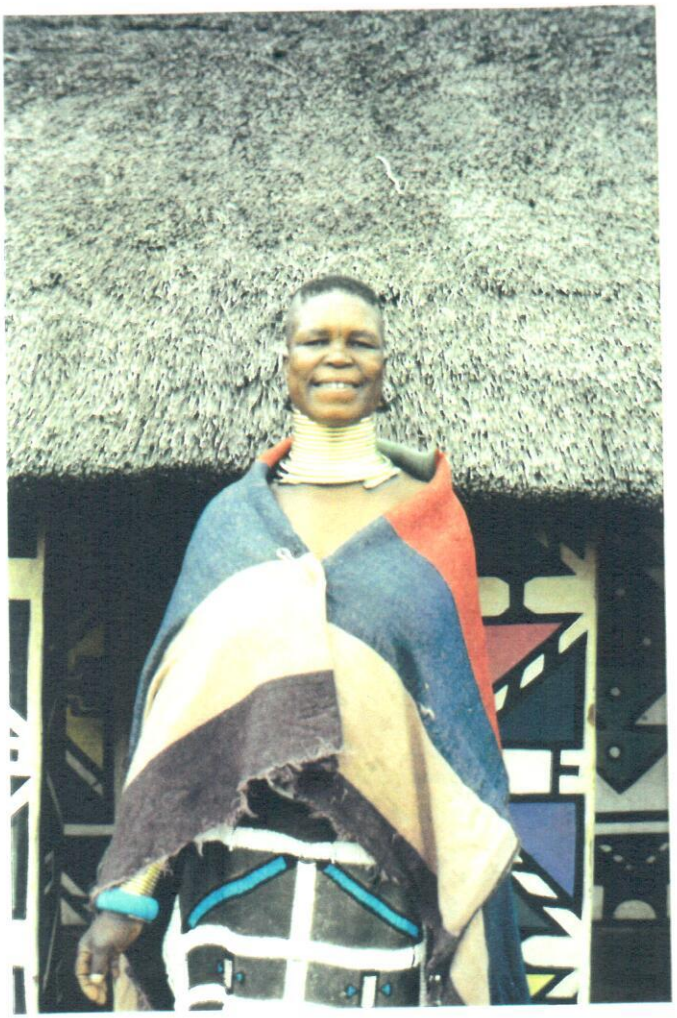


Fig 10: Esther Mahlangu: Botshabelo. (1988)



Fig 11: 'Umsamo' and external courtyard walls: Esther Mahlangu Weltevreden.(1993)



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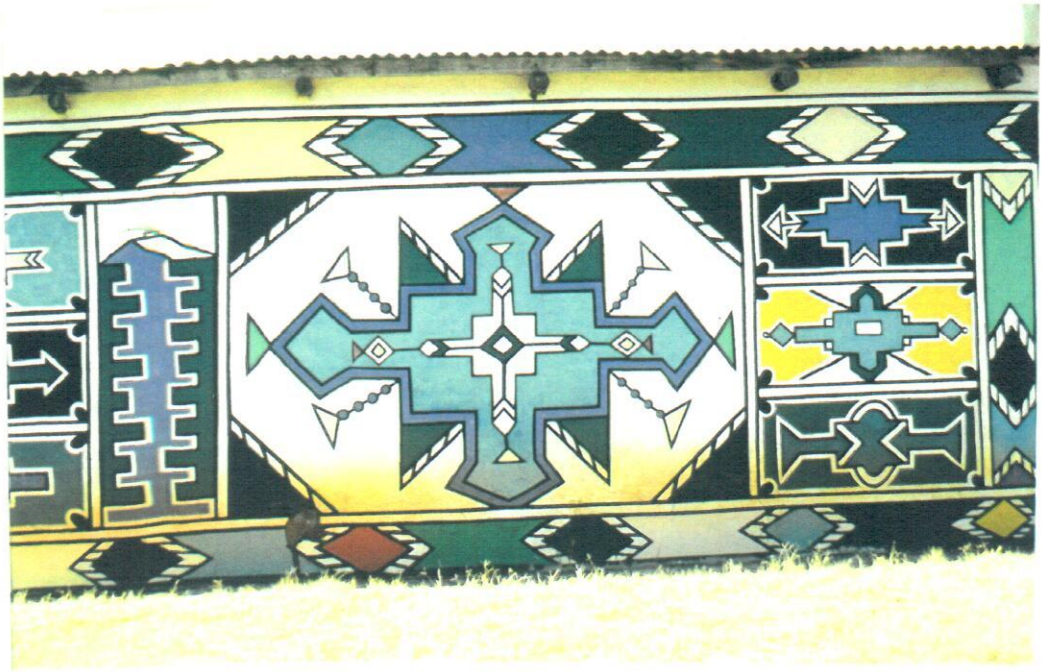
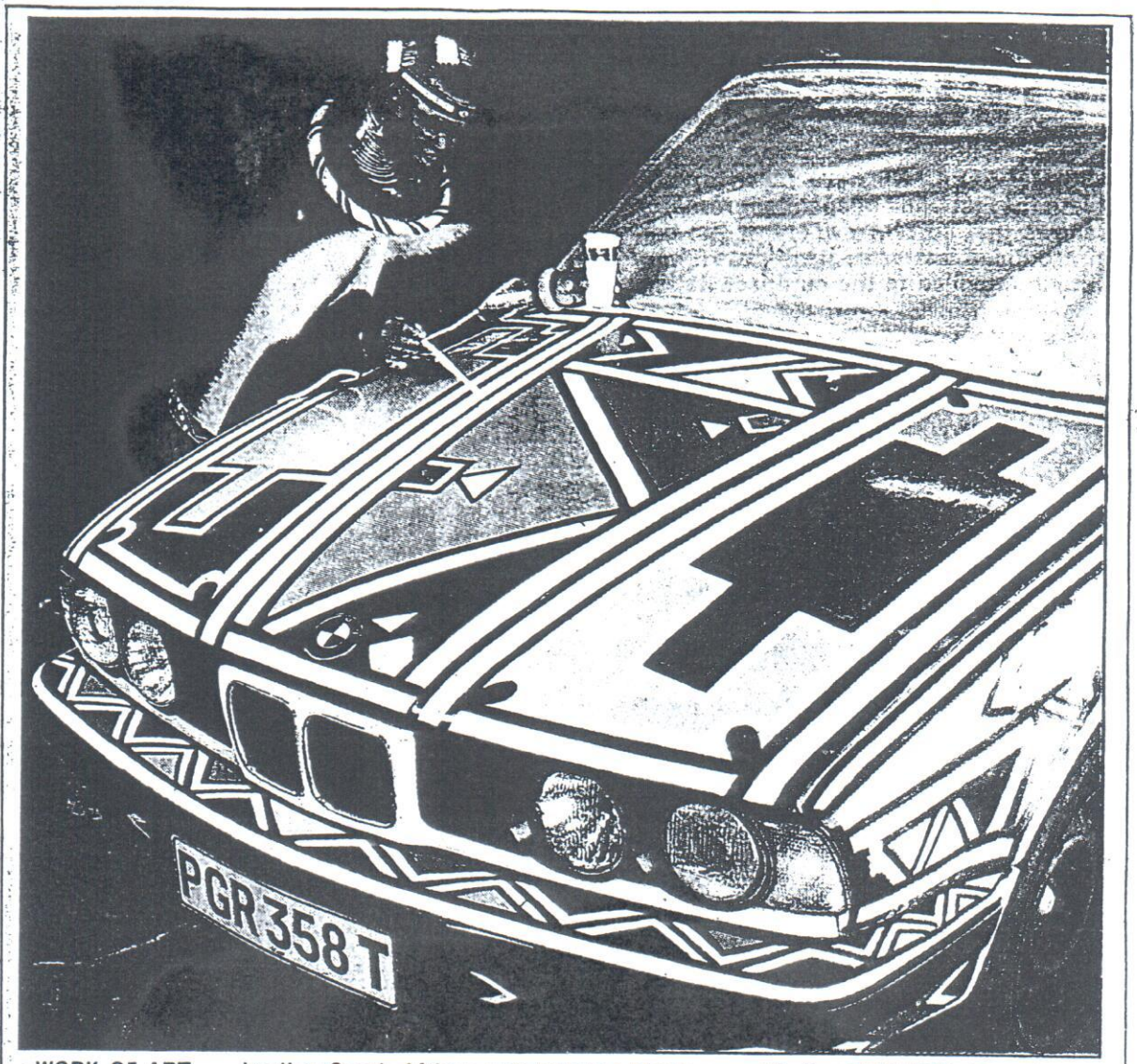


Fig 13: Exterior Courtyard Wall: Botshabelo: Esther Mahlangu.(1988)



Fig 14: Interior Wall : Botshabelo : Esther Mahlangu. (1988)



WORK OF ART . . . leading South African artist Esther Mahlangu with the BMW 525i she painted

ART WORKS ON WHEELS

FOUR highly distinctive and invaluable BMW cars are being sent to South Africa as part of an art exhibition with a difference. And a fifth South African BMW will make its art debut at the same time.

The cars are part of BMW's unique Art Car collection, which consists of 12 BMW's which have been turned into art works on wheels by leading modern artists.

Four of these cars will be shown during the exhibition of the cars in major centres. And a fifth — the latest addition to the collection — will make its first public appearance. This car, a BMW 525i, has been painted by top South African artist Esther Mahlangu and sports a distinctive Ndebele ethnic design.

Ms Mahlangu is the first woman artist to be invited to contribute to the international BMW Art Car collection. She spent two weeks painting the locally-produced BMW in a studio at BMW's Midrand head office.

The four other cars to be seen at the exhibition will be BMW's painted by the Austrian Ernst Fuchs, American Robert Rauschenberg, Australian Ken Done and Spanish artist Cesar Manrique.

The Art Car exhibition will be shown at the Johannesburg Art Gallery from October 3 to 20 before moving to Durban's Exhibition Centre from October 30 to November 17.

Finally, the five-car collection will be seen at Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred waterfront development from November 29 to December 15.

Fig 15: Newspaper Cutting, Sunday Times Motoring. 25/08/1991



Fig: 16 Painted 'title' on facade of Esther Mahlangu's 'umuzi' , Weltevreden.'(1993)



Fig : 17 Motifs done in traditional materials on cardboard, produced by initiants from Esther Mahlangu's recent classes: Weltevreden. (1993)



Fig 18: Traditional chicken feather brushes used by recent painting apprentices at Esther Mahlangu's 'umuzi'.Weltevreden. (1993)

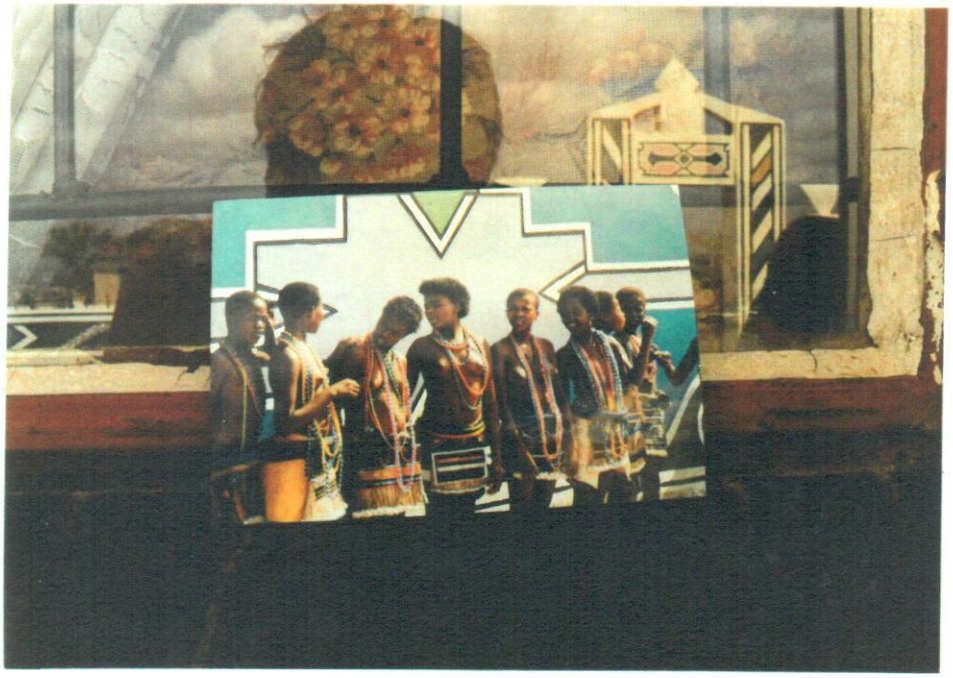


Fig 19: 'Graduates' including Danisile Mahlangu (centre) from recent painting apprenticeship held at Esther's 'umuzi' : Weltevreden :1993

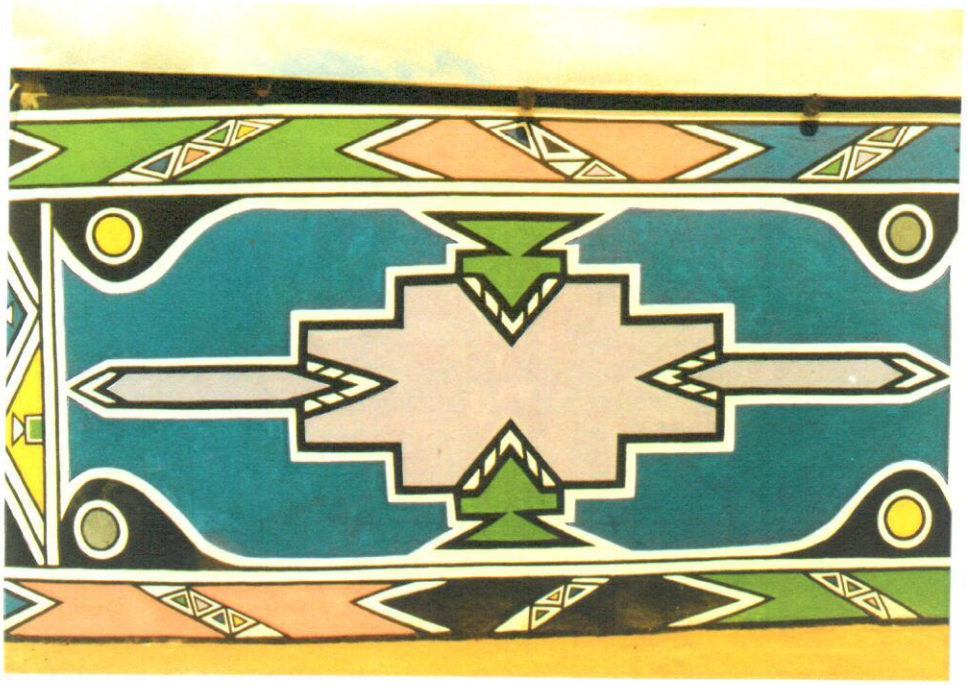


Fig 20 : Painting produced in acrylic paints by painting apprentices from Esther Mahlangu's 'workshop'. (1993)

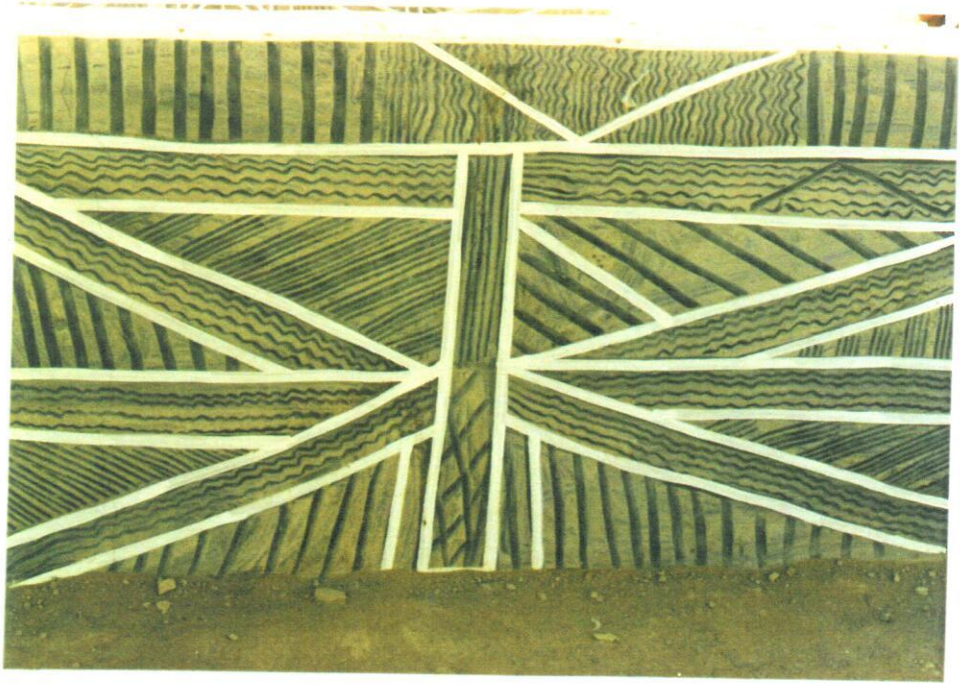


Fig 21: 'Ligupho' design on interior courtyard wall: KwaMsiza.(1985)



Fig 22: Exterior wall painting:
Mainah Mbona: Weltevreden (1993)

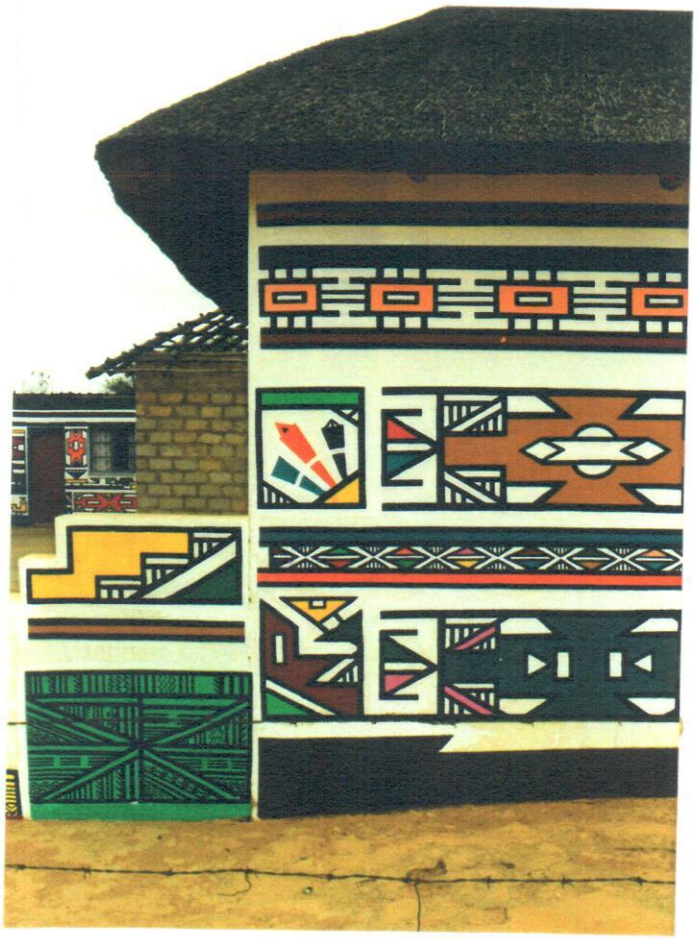


Fig 23: Exterior wall painting: Francina Ndimande,
Weltevreden. (1993)

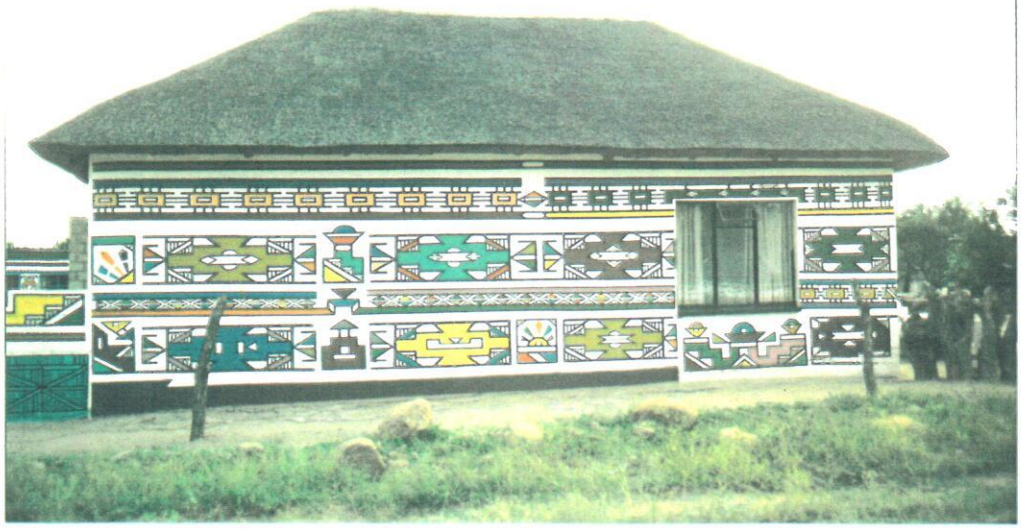


Fig 24: Exterior wall painting: Francina Ndimande's 'umuzi'.Weltevrden. (1993)

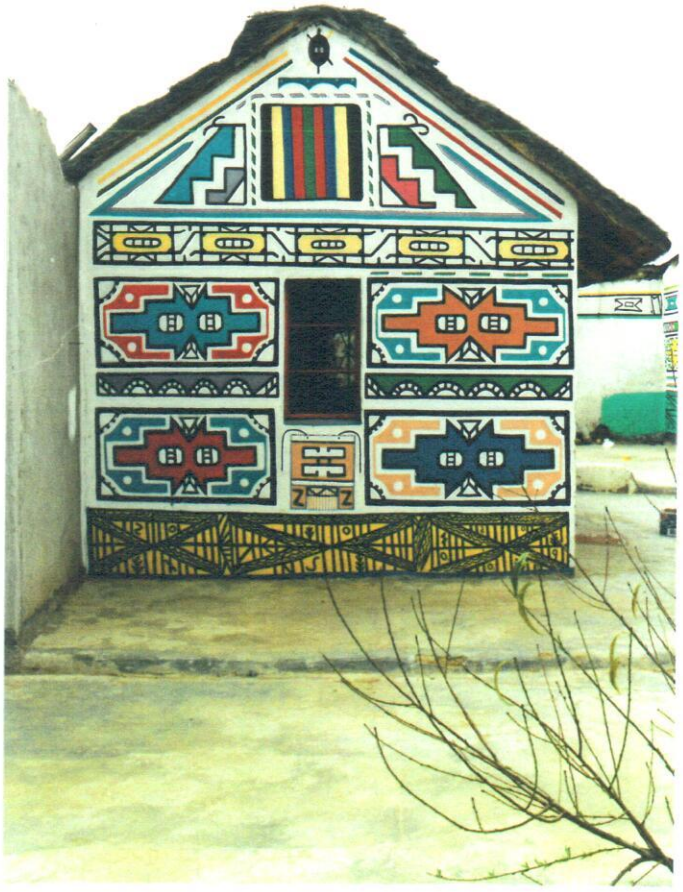


Fig 25: Exterior wall painting: Mainah Mbona, Weltevreden. (1993)



Fig 26: Exterior wall: Esther Mahlangu's 'umuzi':Weltevreden. Decorations include 'ligupho', 'iketani', with 'maphade' designs. The central free-flaoting motif is known as 'nepmpewulani'. (1993)



Fig 27: New 'shop' at Esther Mahlangu's Weltevreden 'umuzi'.(1993)

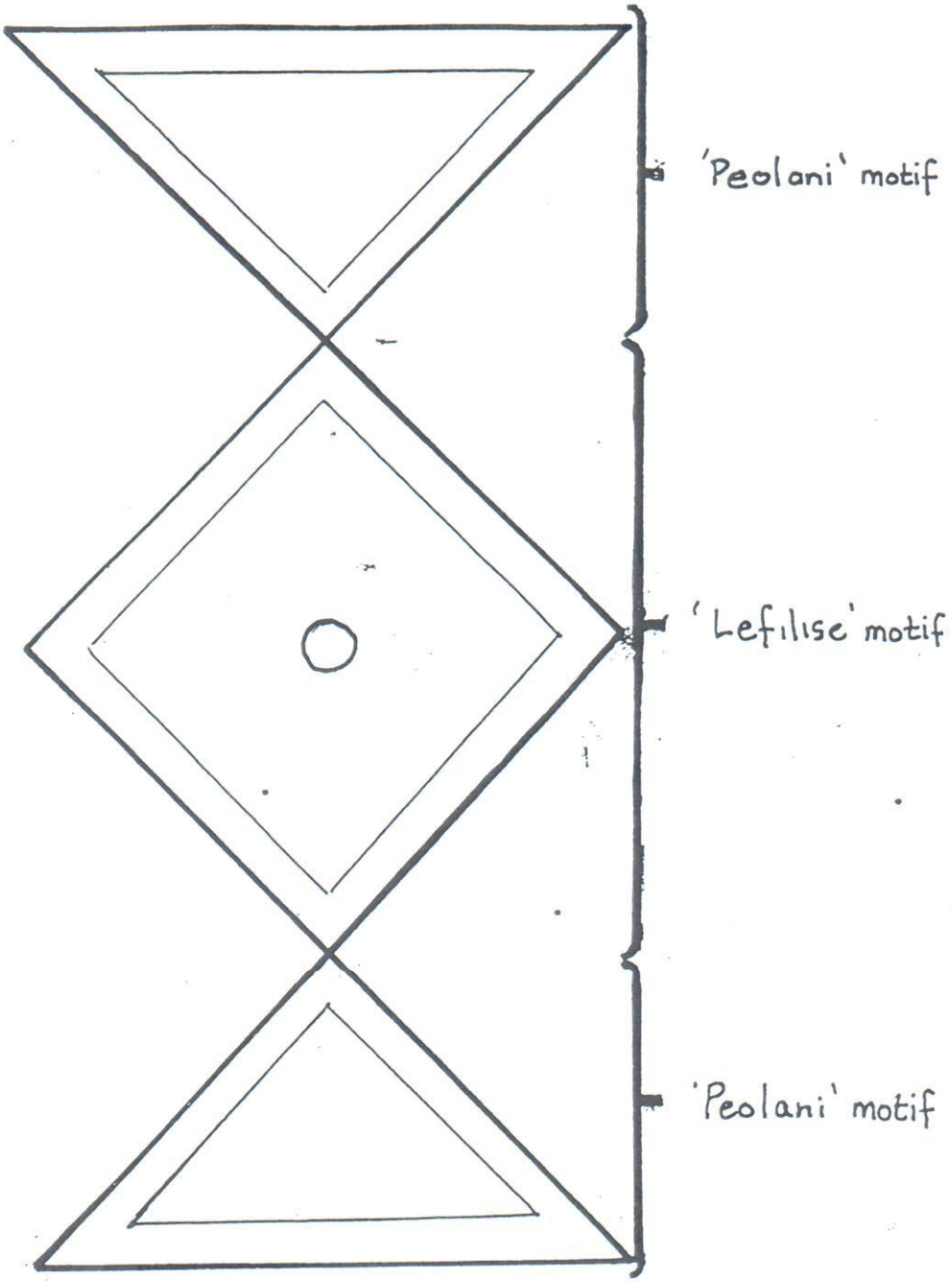


Fig 28: Diagram of basic shapes used by Esther Mahlnagu in her recent wall paintings. Names identified by Anna Mahlangu (14/12/93) of Kameelrivier and Lettie Mahlangu (19/12/93).



Fig 29: Current painted forms for tourist trade from Esther Mahlangu's 'workshop', Weltevreden. (1993)

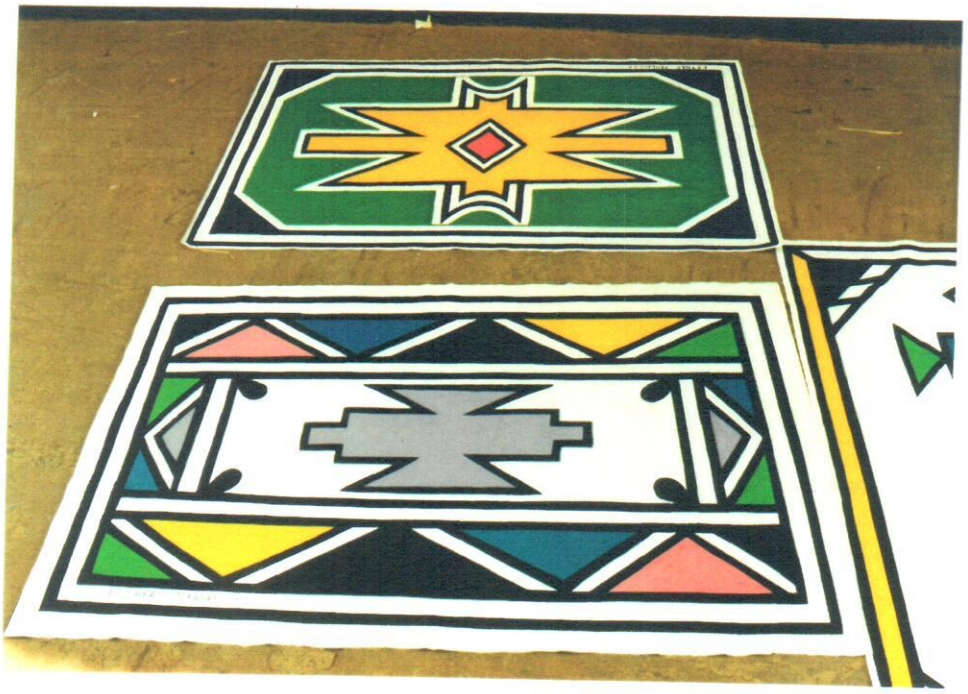


Fig 30: Painted canvass by Esther Mahlangu: Weltevreden. (1993)

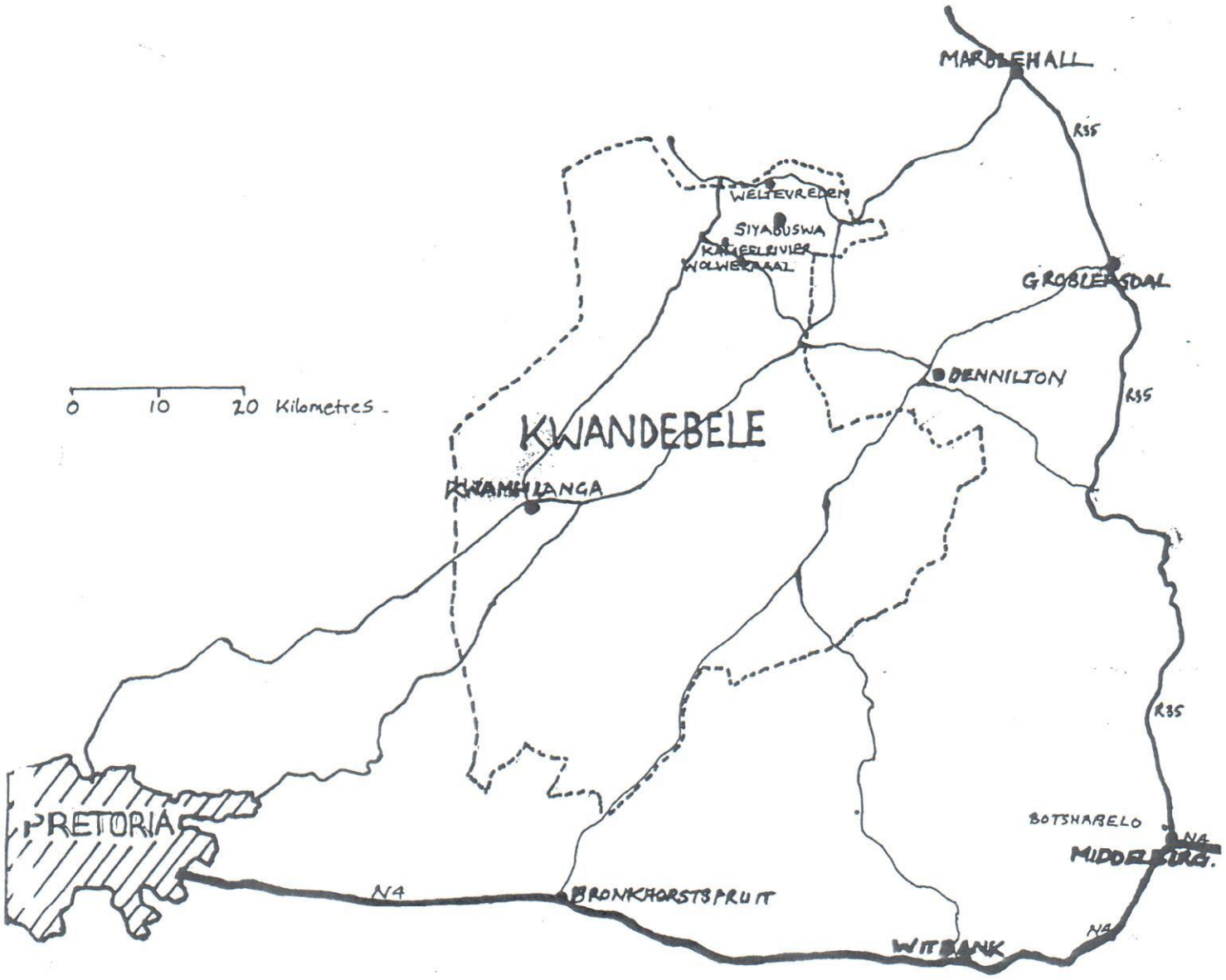


Fig 31: Map of KwaNdebele.