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# Sofaya in paint: representations of human dignity in the work of Sekoto, Xaba and Mthethwa

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**Abstract**

The core of the study for this MA examines expressions and understandings of human dignity/*seriti,* in the work of Gerard Sekoto (1913-1993), Nhlanhla Xaba (1960-2003), Zwelethu Mthethwa (b.1960) and in my own paintings. As such, the study probes, analyses and questions the intentions, writings on and readings of these artists' work, as well as appropriate and build on their visual and representational languages. Underlying the research is the idea of black consciousness, and quest for an ideology of a more human and equal South Africa. The subject of my paintings evolves around *seriti* in Sofaya, an informal settlement in the northeast of Johannesburg, which is not located on official maps of the city. I set out this study with the argument, that all human beings retain *seriti* as a quality that bestows respectability and equality to them.

The practical component is comprised of paintings in oil. The work tries to capture a personal and spiritual quality that I call *seriti* through explorations of colour, paint mark, and texture. I am curious about the concept of *seriti* as seen through everyday experiences. I am moved by the imaginative ability of both Sekoto and Xaba's images that weave communal and socio-political narratives to portray, positively, people's capacity to outlive harsh and conflicting living conditions. As a result of these influences, I employ dynamic brushwork, poetic colours, and expressive forms in an attempt to portray the realities, agency, and the place of Sofaya.