

# **Artists of Mozambique**

## **Looking at themselves and at their world**

**Alda Costa**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The words of Octavio Paz — ‘Today [...] East and West, yesterday and tomorrow exist as a confused jumble in each one of us. Different times and different spaces are combined in a here and now that is everywhere at once’<sup>1</sup> — seem to be a good way to begin this piece about modern and contemporary art in Mozambique and the different generations of artists who created it.

The artistic production of Mozambique has undergone different periods and results from a diversity of cultural relationships. The purpose of emphasising the working conditions and the historical and cultural context in which this production took and is taking place and its milestones is to increase awareness of the visual language that has developed up to the present, the techniques employed, as well as the styles, content, materials and trends and the new forms of art produced by artists.

What has it meant, over the years, to be a modern artist in Mozambique? Has it involved the expression of individuality, the rejection or appropriation of artistic styles or methods of production, conscious dialogue or the invention of new meanings? How was the relationship between tradition and modernity handled? How was life in the colonial or postcolonial city reflected in each artist and in the wider experience of the artists? When did this movement begin? Which artists were or are part of it? These questions relate to the changes that took place in the local wood carving tradition, but also relate, in particular, to the sculpture and painting done by artists living and working in the then capital city of Lourenco Marques, as well as other towns. As Edward Alpers<sup>2</sup> aptly notes, the battle to define the art being produced as ‘Mozambican’ lasted many years, at both individual and collective levels. This movement emerged against a historical background characterised by the development of nationalism, the first African countries attaining independence and the liberation struggles of the then Portuguese colonies and, in this case, of Mozambique. This movement included a generation of artists that evolved or began to evolve in a context of polarisation between the coloniser and the colonised people, but which also resulted from the relationships established between both sides.

Not all of those artists belonged to the small colonial or assimilated elite. There were artists from the countryside, recently arrived in the city and undergoing a profound process of cultural transformation and artists from humble social origins who had had access to some kind of education or who were trying to obtain it. Aaron Montoya<sup>3</sup> is studying this first generation of

---

1. Susan S Bean, ed, *Midnight to the Boom: Painting in India after independence*, Thames & Hudson Ltd, London, 2013.

2. Edward A Alpers, ‘Representation and Historical Consciousness in the Art of Modern Mozambique,’ *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 22:1, 1988, pp 73-94.

3. Aaron Montoya, ‘Encaixe, fricção e emaranhamento nos mundos de arte em Moçambique: Artistas, audiência e intenção em Maputo colonial, socialista e pós-socialista,’ Museu Nacional de Arte, Maputo, 30 September 2010.

modern artists (and compares them with other generations) in order to understand their role in the context of colonial Mozambique and in the creation of a Mozambican identity. This generation had a profound influence on artists and the art world after independence (1975) and affected various artists in subsequent generations. The generations that came after had the task of blazing a trail for others, suggesting fresh ideas, affirming a shared identity and diversifying the Mozambican art scene. All of them are part of this history.

***THE INITIATORS OF DIALOGUE:  
USE THE WORDS OF OTHERS, FIND ONE'S OWN VOICE***

*If you want a dialogue, you have to take somebody else's words [...] and use them to some degree in the conversation as if they were your own.*

Homi K Bhabha<sup>4</sup>

To speak of the founding generation, I shall begin with Malangatana (1936-2011). He was the artist best known outside Mozambique from the 1960s. He used his paintbrushes to fight colonialism, to depict the war suffered in the country after independence, to express, to the end of his days, his concern regarding poverty and injustice, but also to make people happy.<sup>5</sup> His desire to draw, to paint, to become an artist grew alongside his awareness of the realities of colonialism, when the doors of Núcleo de Arte da Colónia de Moçambique, established in 1936, began to open its doors to black artists. In the very limited context of access to artistic training, the frequency of courses in drawing, easel painting or sculpture provided a valuable opportunity, especially because art training was almost non-existent for the majority of the colonised population, who were confined to the activities of some religious missions,<sup>6</sup> individuals, to occasional and ad hoc initiatives or arising from chance policy objectives.

Malangatana told me that he chose to take art classes at the Núcleo de Arte where João Ayres (1921-2001), a modern artist who he admired, was teaching.<sup>7</sup> It was also a place where other people he admired were to be found. João Ayres, an innovator of the new times, was strongly affected, in the first stage of his African journey, by local themes, by themes relating to the human condition, which gained greater force in the colonial context and which influenced almost every aspiring artist in this small urban setting. Bertina Lopes (1924-2012) also left her mark on Malangatana's generation, with her strongly social and political painting. When she returned to Mozambique after studying in Portugal<sup>8</sup> she became a teacher in technical education, giving lessons in drawing and decorative painting at the headquarters of the Associação Africana. She became a member of the Núcleo de Arte, participated in collective exhibitions and also had

---

4. Bean, *op cit.*

5. *Sol*, No 188, 09 April 2010, pp 36-42.

6. For example, the Massangulo Mission in Niassa in the north of Mozambique. There the mission founder, Father Calandri, a painter, taught painting and sculpture to his students.

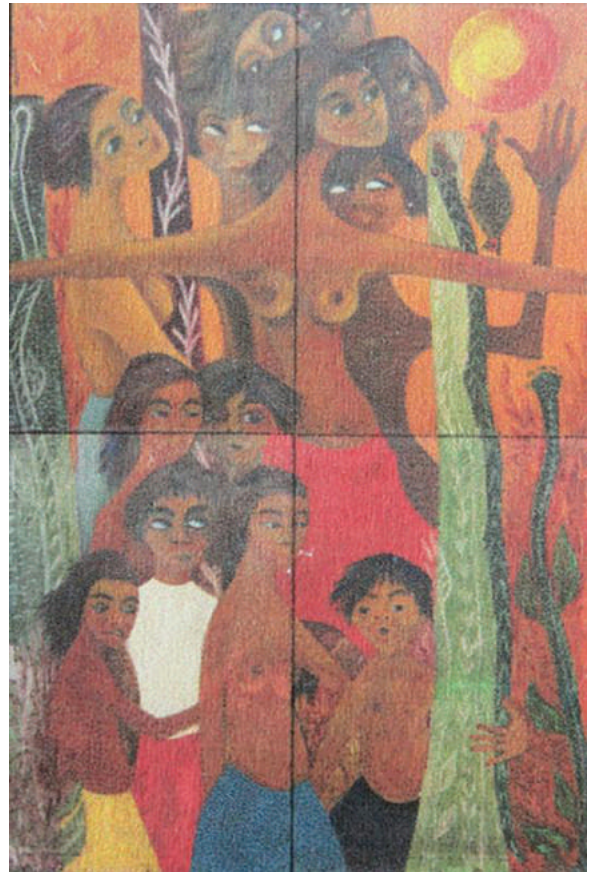
7. Personal communication.

8. From 1945-1949, he took courses in lithographic design and in fine arts at the António Arroio School of Decorative Arts and attended a Special Painting Course at the School of Fine Arts.

several individual shows. The portraits, landscapes and still lifes of the early years gave way to new endeavours, the result of her constant spirit of quest, her desire for social intervention and change. Social topics went beyond her concerns with the aesthetic and formal nature of the work, the fields of colour and technique. Her concepts grew from topics relating to the land, the people and their customs and reached out to local realities and to her personal experiences. As José Craveirinha said at the time<sup>9</sup>, she was ‘an artist of Mozambique, completely Mozambican’ in her work.



Malangatana. *Untitled*, 2001.  
Screenprint, 61 x 44cm.  
Col. UEM



Bertina Lopes. *Untitled*, 1963.  
Oil on board, 366 x 244cm.  
Banco de Moçambique Collection

Bertina Lopes was a strong presence in the local art scene until she left the country in 1963, with a grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation that took her to Portugal and then Italy, where she settled. From then on, her subsequent career, based in Rome but always relating to Mozambique, embraced various artistic idioms. Her death in 2012 robbed us of an artist who, as I once wrote<sup>10</sup>, used art to express her subjectivity, who grasped and transformed her upbringing, her status of being half European and half African and of living in different worlds.

---

9. *Tribuna*, 11 November 1962, p 9.

10. Alda Costa, ‘Bertina ou a arte de Bertina: Mudar e permanecer,’ *Catálogo da Exposição Bertina Lopes Homenagem*, Maputo, 2012, pp 5-11.

What subjects other black African artists were then painting and had been for some time, such as the Estêvão brothers, Jacob Estêvão (1933-2008) and Elias Estêvão (1937-1960?) or Vasco Campira (b 1933), were of no interest to Malangatana. Those young men had been encouraged by the colonial government to take art classes, to learn European techniques and to become artists. They had lessons with Frederico Ayres (1887-1963), a naturalist painter who was known for his landscapes and historical pieces. They held exhibitions in Mozambique and in Portugal in order to lend visibility to the ‘civilising activity’ under way, but their work was never independently appraised. The same thing happened with Agostinho Mutemba (b 1937). Regarded as derivative and imitative, these artists were denied the chance of enjoying this experience for themselves. However, the influence that these artists had on young people was considerable. Their influence was decisive in the choices that some of them later made, although there were very few who followed their kind of painting.

Malangatana became a student at the Art School of the Núcleo de Arte. He dedicated himself to this activity with sacrifice and a great deal of commitment, given his employment obligations. He often mentioned some friendships that had been formed there with his classmates. One of them was with José Júlio (b 1925), the artist who, by his own admission, kept his distance from the European artists and moved towards the local circles, which he then frequented.

Malangatana also began to attend evening classes in decorative painting at the Industrial School. There he met another young man, Abdias Muhlanga (b 1940?), an auto painter by day and a student at the Industrial School in the evening. He had the same ambition as Malangatana. And like Malangatana, he spoke freely about his experiences and about the situation prevailing in Mozambique. A little later, at the Núcleo de Arte, Malangatana met Pancho Guedes. Pancho Guedes/ Amâncio Alpoim Guedes (1925-2015) had returned from South Africa (Johannesburg), where he studied architecture and found the time to become interested in all the arts. It was an encounter that changed his life and about which much has already been written. Malangatana stopped attending classes at the Núcleo de Arte, on the advice of the architect, to seek a path as free as possible from outside influences. Thereafter his career followed a completely different track, thanks to his own personal efforts and to historical circumstances. Malangatana had his first solo exhibition in 1961. His name became associated with a ‘purely’ African expression of modern art. He was regarded as ‘one of the foremost painters in Africa,’ ‘a natural painter, authentic, truthful and sincere,’ a painter in whose work ‘composition and harmony of colour happened as naturally as the stories and the images.’ He wanted to ‘show the things of times past, since it is possible to be civilised without discarding what used to belong to me/us.’<sup>11</sup> The artist’s intentions, present from the earliest years in which, as he put it, he ‘took up painting seriously,’ were to shock, to reclaim a distinctive identity, to paint the real situation in Mozambique.<sup>12</sup> His work, widely referred to, offers numerous possibilities for analysis and interpretation.

Other black Africans felt encouraged by the example set by Malangatana. Shikhani (1934-2010), one of his friends from childhood and adolescence, was one of the first. ‘I am largely indebted to Malangatana for the fact that today I am what I will call a sculptor, since it was

---

11. *Notícias*, 01 March 1961.

12. *Sol*, No 188, 09 April 2010, pp 36-42.



Shikhani.  
*Invisible man*, 2003.  
Screenprint, 65 x 50cm.  
Col. UEM

Malangatana who took me to the Núcleo de Arte,' Shikhani recounted.<sup>13</sup> The sculpture course that he attended at the Núcleo de Arte expanded his interest. Plaster, which had at first seemed to him like an inert substance, began to take shape in his hands.<sup>14</sup> His teacher was José Lobo Fernandes, one of the pupils of the sculptor Jorge Silva Pinto, the first artist that the Núcleo de Arte invited to visit the colony to undertake a series of works and who ended up by settling. The sculpture course always attracted fewer students than those of painting or drawing. The technique of modelling with plaster required space, materials and resources that were not always available and there were few sculptors working in this field in Mozambique. Even so, and without a strong school, there were several artists doing sculpture in wood, bronze, metal and steel. However, it was the local tradition of carving sculptures in wood that developed widely. They incorporated subjects suggested by colonial domination, expressed social and cultural concerns, represented modern concerns and translated individual proposals. Figurative and relief sculpture in plaster were the trademark of Shikhani until he also adopted painting and drawing a few years later. If Malangatana was an important influence in the early years,<sup>15</sup> the fact that Shikhani became based in Beira from 1970 led him to develop his own style, 'his own path' to which he remained faithful and developed until the time of his death in Maputo. In his own quiet way, his works commented on and referred to many events experienced by Mozambique. As he said one day, they reflected the burden of pain, of disease, of want, of humiliation and of suffering<sup>16</sup> but also the simplest of experiences. He returned to sculpture in relief. He produced large murals in various buildings in Beira, made in cement in order to last longer.

---

13. Guerra Manuel, *O Brado Africano*, 17 January 1970, p 3.

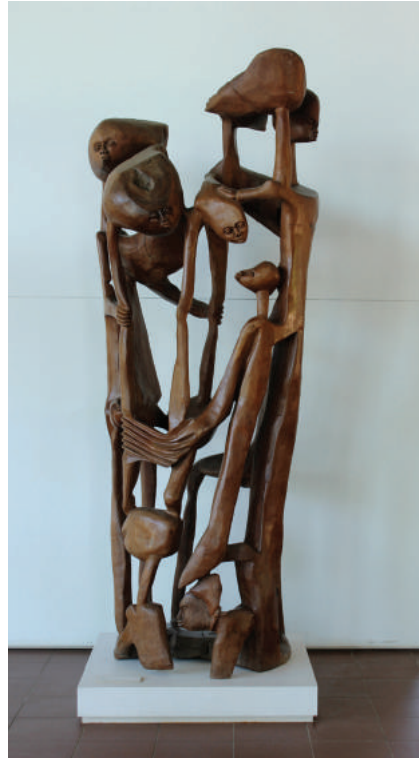
14. Ibid..

15. '[I]n art there are always influences,' he said.

16. *Voz Africana*, 18 September 1971, p 3.



José Lobo Fernandes.  
*Untitled*, 1971.  
Bronze, 63cm.  
Col. National Museum  
of Art, Maputo



Alberto Chissano.  
*Untitled*, 1991.  
Wood, 267 x 89 x 85cm.  
Col. UEM

And also sculptures in wood, with a very personal touch, far removed from the sculpture produced by other sculptors of his generation, strongly influenced by modern sculpture, by the forms and symbolism of Alberto Chissano (1935-1994).

Unlike Shikhani, Chissano never attended any of the courses at the Núcleo de Arte but he did work there. The jobs available at that time for most of the colonised population included servant, guard or auxiliary. At the Núcleo de Arte and the taxidermy workshop of the museum, seeing people sculpting in clay and in plaster, rekindled his love of sculpture that had grown in him as a child, under the influence of a relative. Without any training other than what he acquired when, in childhood, he tried to copy what he could see other people doing, he began to carve wood and developed his own innovative style, which he gradually refined. Soon he began to show his work (i.e. the Exhibition of Modern Art in 1966).<sup>17</sup> Encouraged by other artists and by the artistic atmosphere surrounding him, Chissano worked non-stop. And soon, he was the one giving encouragement, surrounding himself with anyone who wanted to learn. He held an individual show at the Coop Gallery/Exhibition Hall, which had from its creation provided space for the promotion of new artists, in particular black Africans. His sculpture, which the critics considered to be complex, expressed what he felt, what he saw, what surrounded him and what he dreamed. *Sangrando*,<sup>18</sup> a chained mask, bleeding from the mouth and the eyes, was his preferred piece among the 44 works that were shown in that exhibition.<sup>19</sup> The ‘peasant world to which he was insolubly linked and the urban world where he lived’<sup>20</sup> were present in his work and marked his artistic trajectory.

---

17. Another artist also made his debut at that same exhibition: Jorge Nhaca (1943-1997) won the sculpture prize. Jorge (Augusto) Nhaca became better known for his works executed with pyro-engraving on wood and plywood.

18. Bleeding.

19. *Voz Africana*, 27 July 1968, pp 8-9.

20. *Tempo* No. 95, 09 July 1972, pp 46-53.

The airport neighbourhood on the city outskirts became a breeding ground for young aspiring artists who wanted to follow in the footsteps of Malangatana or Chissano. The Chissano Gallery received numerous local visitors and tourists in search of 'one of the galleries that best represented true black Mozambican art.'<sup>21</sup> In addition to showing the works of Chissano, the gallery showed works by other artists. Among the artists who were coming to be noticed in the early 1970s was Samate Mulungo Machava (1939-2012). He participated in a collective show in 1971 and exhibited jointly with Mankew Mahumana at the Coop Exhibition Hall, a venue that was interested in promoting artists, particularly Africans.<sup>22</sup> Samate felt 'isolated between the city and the township' and, in his own words, he made simple paintings; he painted what he felt, what was visible in his city.<sup>23</sup>

The Coop Gallery/Exhibition Hall continued to host exhibitions of sculptors and painters: Chissano, Adriano Mazive, Mundau Oblino (1940-2013?), Paulo Come (1946-2000?), Naftal Langa (1932-2014), Inácio Matsinhe (b.1945), Samate Mulungo Machava, Mankew Mahumana (b.1934), Fernando Machiana (b.1939), Zabela/Isabel Martins (b.1950), Noel (Noé) Langa (b.1938), among many others who, with some exceptions, are pursuing their careers.

Some of the artists who showed their work at that time had, until then, been regarded as talented artisans who deserved a chance to affirm themselves. They usually sold their work on the street. Now they were exhibiting their work with young people setting out and alongside recognised painters and sculptors, and some were being admitted to artistic circles in the colony. That exhibition space made a valuable contribution to art by organising collective exhibitions, such as the 10x3<sup>24</sup> exhibitions without any jury or prizes, or the 1971 exhibition of Black Art, and also by providing space for individual shows, encouraging and appreciating black Africans who were self-taught or worked under the guidance of a master. Public interest shown encouraged many of these painters. It also encouraged even more sculptors to continue their work. It stimulated young people. It provoked reflection on art and on black African artists, on the different artistic traditions present in Mozambique and on the relationship between these and what could become Mozambican culture.

This movement triggered a rise in the number of people who considered themselves to be artists, mainly in the capital where there were opportunities for contact between artists and some masters who were followed. The opportunities for art education remained scarce. There was no art school to develop any interest or vocations.<sup>25</sup> However, the courses at the Núcleo de Arte still ran and the Industrial School<sup>26</sup> had regular courses taught by various artists, out of which new names and ideas

---

21. *Notícias*, 18 February 1974, p 3.

22. *O Cooperador de Moçambique* No. 05, May 1973, p 4.

23. *O Cooperador de Moçambique* No. 11/12, December 1971, p 15.

24. Ten artists each with three pieces.

25. Art schools were only set up in Mozambique after independence (1975). The university courses established in 1962 did not include courses of that nature.

26. The courses in painting and decorative sculpture established at the Industrial School (Decree No 39,850 of 15 October 1954) qualified students for admission to courses in painting and sculpture at academies of fine arts and at primary teacher training colleges and were considered equivalent to high school.

were emerging.<sup>27</sup> The market for art was in its infancy,<sup>28</sup> as was art criticism, but artists had the chance to present various proposals and to pursue what appealed to them.<sup>29</sup>

### ***PARALLEL PATHWAYS TOWARDS THE INDEPENDENCE OF MOZAMBIQUE: FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COLLECTIVE VOICES***

The development of nationalist ideas and the struggle for political independence launched in 1964 affected what was happening in the towns of the colony and introduced new elements into the visual language. Ricardo Rangel's (1924-2009) photographs, as well as those of others, called attention to the situation in Mozambique. Far from the colonial towns, people sought a 'new model,' understood to be a blend of the old model with new content, pursuing a 'revolutionary aesthetic.' The skilled Makonde carvers from the north of Mozambique and the modification of the form and the content of their carvings are associated with an emerging national culture demanded by the liberation movement and later, by the project to build a new modern Mozambique. In Tanzania, to which the Makondes had been migrating for a very long time, a movement emerged that became known as the beginning of modern sculpture. Compositions of small groups were added to the lifelike forms depicting human figures and scenes of daily life and animals and they gradually grew in size and scale (*ujamaa*) and were also added to sculptures of spirits, good or bad, who adopted various forms (*shetani*). This work continues to be produced and developed today. Some artists (e.g. João Craveirinha) also adapted these ideas in drawings and paintings.<sup>30</sup> The artist included a 'drawing in



Macucule.  
*Forced labour*, 1976.  
Wood, 32 x 47.5 x 8.5cm.  
Col. National Museum of Art, Maputo

---

27. Roberto Chichorro (b 1941), Inácio Matsinhe (b 1945), Zito Craveirinha/J.J.Craveirinha Júnior/João Craveirinha (b 1947), to mention only a few.

28. The Texto Art Gallery, attached to the bookshop of the same name, opened in 1972 as a first pilot of a commercial art gallery.

29. João Ayres, Pancho Miranda Guedes, Garizo do Carmo, João Paulo, António Bronze, José Júlio, Álvaro Passos, Dana Michaelles, Augusto Cabral, Maria Alice, António Quadros (who arrived in the colony in 1964), Jorge Mealha, Zeca Mealha, Teresa Roza de Oliveira, Eugénio de Lemos, José Pádua, were also artists, teachers and art promoters in the colony.

30. Eduardo Mondlane, *The Struggle for Mozambique*, Penguin Books. Edição portuguesa: *Lutar por Moçambique*, Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, Lisboa, 1975.



the Makonde style' in his book published some years ago and presented to Samora Machel.<sup>31</sup> Interest in collecting or even in trying out the forms or including elements of Makonde culture was and is visible in the work of other artists. The dissemination of this modern sculpture and the presence of a large number of sculptors until recently rarely seen in collective exhibitions was striking in the years of self-affirmation and search for a national Mozambican style of art.

The independence of Mozambique on 25 June 1975 heralded a new era for art and artists. Almost all 'interrupted' their work for a time in order to reflect on what it meant to be an artist in a revolutionary process. They questioned their role in a new country in need of the basic rights that everyone was entitled to after the end of colonialism. As Elizabeth (Betty) Schneider<sup>32</sup> said, in the case of Malangatana, the artist and the revolution (for her, the period from 25 April 1974 to 25 June 1975) needed each other. The painting and drawing of Malangatana had for a long time depicted the suffering, the humiliation and even the imprisonment endured during colonialism and up to the time of independence and that was useful to the revolution. In turn, the revolution helped Malangatana to strengthen his ideas and convictions and his self-awareness, not just as an individual artist, but more importantly as a citizen with social responsibilities. In that process the artist came into contact with a great number of people and with very different people that he would never have met otherwise. In that author's view, the revolution needed Malangatana more as a worker and comrade rather than a member of the elite or an internationally renowned painter. It was a stage when everyone needed to be seen as equal. In fact, during that period, the artist became involved in countless cultural projects, such as the creation of an art museum, which ended up being shelved for a number of years, and painting murals, one of his passions. He also went through a life-changing experience, as an ex-political prisoner. His activities in



Jerónimo Ndinywashwa.  
*Stangueda*, 1970s.  
Wood (ebony), 40 x 75 x 12cm.  
Col. National Museum of Art, Maputo

---

31. João Craveirinha, *Moçambique: Feitiços, cobras e lagartos!* Moçambique Editora, Maputo, 2001.

32. Elizabeth Ann Schneider, 'Malangatana: Artist of the revolution.' *African Arts* 21:3, 1988, pp 58-63.

the early post-independence years included participation in exclusively collective exhibitions, involvement in painting murals (of which the 1979 mural at Heroes Plaza is a prime example); and it was a time when he did much drawing and took on new tasks. In that period, collective voices kept individual voices in check.

In the collective exhibitions, which had broad participation, the immediate political message was the form of expression most commonly used. Young and aspiring artists used painting and sculpture to speak of the colonial past, which should never be forgotten, and of the current revolutionary watchwords. Despite the focus on collective expression, individual voices were not silenced, as the work of some artists shows (e.g. Estêvão Mucavele (b 1941); some young artists were interested in finding ‘their own artistic identity.’

### ***FROM MALANGATANA AND CHISSANO TO A NEW GENERATION SEEKING ARTISTIC IDENTITY***

After the first flush of euphoria at the birth of a country having freed itself from colonialism and having overcome some doubts and tensions, the time arrived to reflect upon the culture policy. Luís Bernardo Honwana, a writer and at that time Secretary of State for Culture, asked what was Mozambican culture? What did it mean to be a Mozambican artist? What was the artist’s role? The presence and co-existence of different artistic practices were acknowledged, including those resulting from the two-way relationship between African artistic practices and modern Western art. He drew attention to the risk of falling into the trap of cultural nationalism and of imposing the values inherited from tradition as the boundaries of creativity. He spoke clearly of the multiplicity of the forms and expressions of Mozambican culture and their interaction with the culture of other peoples. The ‘painting of a Malangatana, of a Mankew are now and always Mozambican painting in their own right,’ Honwana said.<sup>33</sup> Many of the measures to encourage the arts are due to his leadership.

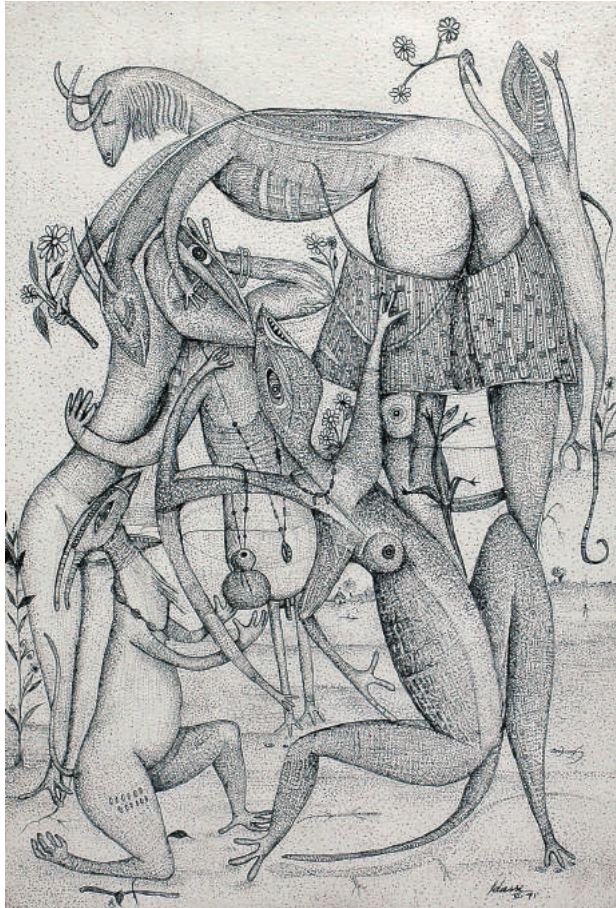
Who were the artists of those years? As well as the generation of artists already mentioned, there were artists from various countries in the world, from Chile to Sweden, Portugal to Switzerland, from Cuba to various Soviet Socialist Republics, who had come to work in Mozambique, along with several young people who wanted to be artists. A large number were teaching, at first in the Centre for Cultural Studies and later in the School of Visual Arts (ENAV) created in 1983. There were shortages of materials to face, so it was a case of using the available resources and making what was in short supply.<sup>34</sup> It was a period of sharing and creative fervour, against a background of different ideas and practices in relation to art and policy and, as Montoya remarked, it gave rise to a period of significant cultural production.<sup>35</sup> It was a time during which Malangatana and Chissano enjoyed individual and national recognition. In 1985, the President of the Republic Samora Machel paid an official visit to the home and gallery of the sculptor Chissano. While in

---

33. Luís Bernardo Honwana, ‘A nossa cultura é só a sua metade.’ *Semanário Domingo*, 18 November 1984, p 5.

34. *Tempo*, 26 August 1984, pp 4-5.

35. A. Montoya, *op. cit.*



Ídasse.  
*Savata's lobola*, 1995.  
Ink on paper, 83 x 63cm.  
Col. Telecomunicações de Moçambique/TDM

1986, Malangatana was honoured on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday in recognition of his artistic contribution with a retrospective exhibition in the National Museum of Art (being established). As Bertina Lopes said on one of her visits to the country, they were ‘the reflection of the arts.’<sup>36</sup> She continued to live in Italy, while always remaining in contact with Mozambique, personifying one of the best known cases of art in the diaspora, in a little-understood era. Another artist, Roberto Chichorro, followed a similar path. He received a grant to study in Spain and Portugal, and it is in the latter country, where he has lived since 1986, that he has devoted himself exclusively to painting.<sup>37</sup>

Among the artists of the new generation that became established in the early post-independence years were some who had experience in a range of media and conditions in the colonial context and received training in courses at the Industrial School or as pupils of established artists. This was the case, for example, of Ídasse Tembe (b 1955). Following his training at the Industrial School, he was mentored by Inácio Matsinhe. In 1977, for the first time, he participated in a collective exhibition and from then on, in many more.<sup>38</sup> At first, painting was his primary interest, but he soon discovered that he enjoyed experimenting: illustration, etching, drawing, painting and later, sculpture. In 1986, he had his first individual show at the headquarters of

---

36. *Notícias*, 23 November 1993.

37. His last exhibition in Maputo was held in 2009.

38. *Tempo*, 11 July 1982, pp 55-7.



Victor Sousa.  
*Damsel*, 2011.  
Ceramics and found objects, 53 x 23 x 23cm.  
Col. UEM

AEMO.<sup>39</sup> Drawing was the focus of his work. Ídasse said he felt at ease with the medium and drew with the same intensity with which he painted. He considered himself part of a generation that knew what it wanted, a different generation, ‘because of the fact that they were free.’<sup>40</sup> The artist believed that he belonged to a generation that was aware and that he must use the fruits of his labours to show that ‘the grandchildren of slaves were free men.’ Ídasse wanted to continue studying and therefore, accepted the lessons and the stimulus provided by other artists. However, he did not want to be influenced; he was in no hurry, preferring to meet more African artists and to broaden his knowledge of foreign artists, in order ‘to discover himself in art and gradually mature through experience.’<sup>41</sup> This has been the case. Ídasse is a recognised artist in drawing and painting, but he is also interested in sculpture. He works in bronze, iron, marble and wood, and he is always ready to embrace new projects.

Like Ídasse, in order to nourish their individual artistic practices, artists of this generation were interested in seeking out African references but also references from international art.<sup>42</sup> According to one of his contemporaries, Victor Sousa (1952-2017) ‘spoke in a different way from others,’ he experimented with forms and techniques, almost completely forgot the rules he had learned and showed ‘a painting that had nothing to do with what we were used to seeing.’<sup>43</sup> Experimenting with form and materials has been his trademark from early in his career. The

---

39. Mozambican Writers Association.

40. *Domingo*, 01 June 1986, p 3.

41. *Tempo*, No. 809, 13 April 1986, pp 50-53.

42. In addition to the artists mentioned in the text, we should mention Chiboleca, Dias Mahlate, Fernando Rosa, João Tinga, Neto, Néné, and Nurdino Ubisse.

43. Nurdino Ubisse, introducing the first solo exhibition of Victor Sousa, in 1982, at the Núcleo de Arte.

1990s were a period of intense artistic activity, which still continues. He feels at ease with painting, etching, sculpture and ceramics, but he has no hesitation in breaking new ground

Naguib (b 1955) regards himself as a citizen of the world.<sup>44</sup> At that point in his career, the expressionists were a strong reference for him to paint what he saw and experienced in his country. In 1986 he had his first solo exhibition, *Grito de Paz*,<sup>45</sup> through the good offices of the specialised service, Horizonte Arte Difusão (HAD).<sup>46</sup> The exhibition featured a ‘very different Naguib from the one seen hitherto in various group shows.’<sup>47</sup> A new professional standard for art exhibitions was also introduced.<sup>48</sup> At that time, peace was the subject of much of Naguib’s painting and he dreamed, as he thought artists should, that peace would one day be possible. But his subjects and concerns did not end there. It was the affirmation of a new generation of artists. He continued to work and dream, always on a large scale, as he still does today. In the opinion of Carlos Jorge Silia, Naguib retreated from the ‘traditional mode of artistic creation common to our artists [...] and introduced modernism into Mozambican art.’<sup>49</sup> Perhaps he tried a different kind of modernity. Naguib always displayed his urban origins, which were reflected in his work. He conceived, tested and painted huge pieces, researched forms and techniques, used new media, because it was necessary ‘to keep looking ahead.’ Restless, as he was deemed to be, he continued to look to the future. Public art now holds a special place in his plans.<sup>50</sup> For Maputo and Tete, he has designed and implemented enormous murals in mosaic.<sup>51</sup>



Matias Ntundu.  
*One day a hunter*, 2010.  
Woodcut, 15.5 x 26cm.  
Col. UEM

---

44. *Tempo*, 17 June 1984, pp 45-7.

45. Cry for Peace.

46. Service set up in relation to the state company Artesanato Loja-Galeria, managed by José Bragança, who promoted and publicised artists from 1986 to 1991.

47. *Domingo*, 11 May 1986.

48. The exhibition had a proper catalogue, a good exhibition space, an opening with cultural presentations, marketing, and press coverage.

49. *Domingo*, 28 May 1989.

50. *Border Post*, 12 March 2010, p 10.

51. Such as the mural on the Av. Marginal in Maputo.

This generation of artists, who are now figures of reference, lived through a very special period in history: the construction of a new country, the flare up of another war, strong state intervention, difficulties and many challenges at all levels. But this was also a time when activities in the area of culture became more professional. These included creating incentives for the establishment and staffing of institutions essential to the promotion of the arts. During this time, the first scholarship students returned home and a number of young people went on to higher education in various parts of the world (i.e. Soviet Union, East Germany, Cuba and later on, Brazil and South Africa). After all, higher education in the visual arts was started inside the country only recently.<sup>52</sup>

The Loja-Galeria company and its various services have played an important role in training and promoting artists and artisans. The Cabo Delgado project also should be mentioned. In the early 1980s, in a village on the Mueda Plateau, Makonde carvers had the opportunity to exchange experiences with the Swiss artist Maya Zurcher and learn woodcut techniques. Matias Ntundu (b.1948) was one of those carvers. He was concerned 'not to imitate Maya's work,' but rather to learn the technique and work on the basis of his own ideas. This new means of expression gave him different possibilities in carving 'to express actual experiences.' Years later, Matias Ntundu has not given up; he is still producing woodcuts in his village, as he showed in his last exhibitions held in Maputo. Maya Zurcher also met Reinata Sadimba (b 1945) in Cabo Delgado. She began to stand out because of her skills in pottery, a 'traditionally' female occupation that she displayed in the decoration of the walls of her house. Then she ventured into her first sculptures. She added decoration and sculpted forms to traditional objects such as pots. In Maputo, where she came to settle some years later, she has pursued a remarkable career in ceramic sculpture. Her life and work have been amply documented in a book published recently that includes reports from people who have followed her career, collected her work over the years and crucially, studied it and opened up new avenues of research.<sup>53</sup>

Another institution, the National Museum of Art, opened to the public in 1989. The idea of the museum was hatched soon after independence and the driving force was Malangatana. Lourenço Marques (present-day Maputo) never achieved its much-wanted Gallery of Art, but had only a collection and some space in the Town Hall. The exhibition with which the museum opened to the public generated much discussion about the art and artists that should be included.<sup>54</sup> This discussion, still on-going, reflects the different perceptions on modernity, modern African (Mozambican) art and African (Mozambican) artists. In addition to the museum, various cultural centres were established<sup>55</sup> while some companies<sup>56</sup> and banks became involved in promoting art, which continues to the present day. Regular exhibitions and competitions are now held, such as Annual of the National Museum of Art (since 1991), the Biennale of TDM (also since 1991) and the Discoveries (since 1995) sponsored by the Alto-Maé Casa de Cultura.

---

52. The Higher Institute of Arts and Culture (*Instituto Superior de Artes e Cultura*) was established in 2008.

53. Gianfranco Gandolfo, *Reinata Sadimba: 'Não estamos iguais, estamos diferentes'*, Kapicua, Maputo, 2012.

54. Abdias, Agostinho Mutemba, Bertina Lopes, Celestino Tomás, Chichorro, Chissano, Freire, Estevão Mucavele, Govane, Ídasse, Isabel Martins, Jacob Estevão, Macamo, Mankew, Malangatana, Moisés Simbine, Miguel Valingue, Naftal Langa, Naguib, Ndlozi, Oblino, Reinata, Samate, Shikhani, Victor Sousa are some of the artists represented in the permanent exhibition.

55. The first was the Brazilian Studies Centre (CCBrazil-Mozambique) in 1989.

56. The Mozambique Telecommunications Company (TDM), for example, began acquiring works of art in the 1980s. It still sponsors a biennale.

***ARTISTS TAKE THE INITIATIVE:  
OTHER VARIETIES OF MODERNITY, NEW DIRECTIONS***

Domestic changes and others resulting from global conditions since the 1990s have gradually influenced the conditions of production and the discourse on art in Mozambique. A new constitution was approved in 1990, the General Peace Agreement was signed in 1992 and the first multi-party general election was held in 1994. Mozambique was at peace after long years of war. Art was not immune to these new conditions created in the country, the region and the world.

Some important changes in this scenario were brought about on the initiative of artists. The first international art workshops held in Mozambique were one example.<sup>57</sup> They exposed the participating artists to new materials and techniques, encouraged the exploration of differences and similarities and provided a basis for reflection and innovation. They made it possible to break national isolation and open up to other artistic experiences, mainly in the southern African region, going through profound political changes to become familiar with new aesthetic trends, but also to avoid the ‘trap of assessing African art as exotic.’<sup>58</sup>

Despite the changes under way, Mozambique’s participation in the First Johannesburg Biennale in 1995 corresponded to the country’s transition<sup>59</sup>: the four artists selected were (Alberto) Chissano (who died the previous year), Malangatana (Ngwenya), Reinata Sadimba and Titos Mabota (1963-2017). Reinata Sadimba was a recent discovery and Titos Mabota was being noticed because of his adoption of new forms of artistic expression and the use of new or alternative materials.

Younger artists, schooled or unschooled, maintained less restricted personal pathways, remaining aloof from the masters in sculpture and in painting, from traditions that they had not experienced and they also stressed their individuality.

A force for change was Arte Feliz, a new association that involved several young artists, including Bento Mukeswane (1965-1999) and Gemuce (b 1963). Established in the 1995/1996 period, between the ‘old masters’ and the ‘novices,’<sup>60</sup> the association defended freedom of artistic expression and difference and proposed to stimulate the development of art in the country and its projection on the international stage. Its activities involved and marked its students at the Escola de Artes Visuais, where they were teaching, and other youngsters who aspired to become artists. For Gemuce, this was the affirmation of a generation of artists and of new artistic expressions in a context they regarded as closed and hostile to change.<sup>61</sup> The result was a period of great vitality, openness and experimentation, of maturation of proposals and artistic careers, such as that of Gemuce.

---

57. The first workshop was held in Maputo in 1991, on the initiative of Fátima Fernandes. The first Ujamaa workshop was held in Pemba the same year. These workshops were based on the model of the Triangle Art Workshop.

58. ‘‘Workshop’ de Arte, Maputo, Março/Abril 1991’. Brochure, Maputo, 1991.

59. The Mozambican curators of this biennale were Gilberto Cossa and Cidália Chissano.

60. *Catalogue of the Second Annual Exhibition of Arte Feliz*, 03 November 1997. Franco Mozambique Cultural Centre: Maputo.

61. Personal communication.



Gemuce.  
*Untitled*, 1998.  
Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 66cm.  
Col. UEM



Celestino Mondlane/Mudaulane.  
*Broken minds*, 2002.  
Ceramics, 134 x 58 x 43cm.  
Col. TDM



Dito.  
*Untitled*, 2014.  
Pen and ink on paper, 29.5 x 21cm.  
Col. UEM



Walter Zand.  
*Hero*, 2014.  
Mixed Media (charcoal on paper, book, clipboard), 91 x 24 x 2cm.  
Col. UEM



The use of stone, marble, metal and clay and the combination of different materials enlivened even sculpture in wood, which had become repetitive and seemed to be worn out. Celestino Mondlane/Mudaulane (b 1972) and even younger young people, such as Tsenane (b 1979) or Titos Pelembe (b 1988) are using clay creatively and opening up new possibilities. Drawing is gaining visibility and new practitioners. Malangatana, Shikhani, Ídasse and Miguel César (b 1957) have been joined by many young artists enthusiastic about the medium. Prominent among these is Famós (b 1978), who has been taking an approach to drawing that is quite different from what is usual here in Mozambique. Freedom of drawing is likewise characteristic of Lourenço Pinto (b 1980), with his narratives in which everything seems to be happening at once. Celestino Mondlane/Mudaulane has married the sculpture that he has been doing for some time now to large scale designs. And Walter Zand (b 1978), an artist with multiple interests, is growing ever more at ease with drawing.

The project to collect and transform guns into art that involved many young artists in the Núcleo de Arte has produced interesting developments and outcomes. Some of the pieces produced, both individually and in collaborative efforts, have been widely publicised. Kester (b.1966), Fiel (b.1972) and Hilário Nhatugueja (1964-2016) are among the names to remember in relation to this work. I would also highlight Gonçalo Mabunda (b 1975) who, since then, has followed a different artistic path, producing large-scale works reminiscent of Andries Botha<sup>62</sup> and also experimenting in other directions. His search for materials to be incorporated in and to produce his sculptures has long since ceased to involve just guns. But he cannot resist an AK 47, 'it's the one that kills most and so is the priority for destruction.'<sup>63</sup> He says he never dreamed of becoming a sculptor, but today sculpture is his greatest achievement.<sup>64</sup> He has regular exhibitions in Maputo and receives invitations from all over the world. He has shown his work at many different venues and has been part of travelling exhibitions, such as *Africa Remix*.<sup>65</sup>

The project proposed by Marcos Bonifácio Muthewuye (b 1972) was also ground breaking in its day when the then scholarship student in Cuba came home on holiday to Mozambique. He performed in 1998 at the Franco-Mozambique Cultural Centre and caught public attention with a show inspired by the Makonde Mapiko.<sup>66</sup> He wanted to establish a dialogue between the traditional and the contemporary, a theme still present in his more recent work, combining his personal experience with his training and reflecting on his involvement in the Havana Biennale. The training in Cuba 'lent me wings to grow as an artist,' he said recently.<sup>67</sup> Several years on, performance remains the best means of expression for this artist and teacher. He regrets that it is scarce in the Mozambican art scene, as are video, installations and other contemporary art forms.

---

62. His teacher.

63. *O Sol*, 18 November 2011, pp 66-9.

64. *O País*, 23 September 2010, pp 8-10.

65. *África Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* was shown at the Museum Kunstpalast, Dusseldorf, from 24 June-07 July 2004 and travelled thereafter.

66. The mask that was made (with beer cans) and used in 1998 is part of the permanent display of the National Museum of Art.

67. *Lua*, a magazine published with the newspaper *Sol*, No. 95, 04 October 2013.

**‘DIVE INTO THE WORLD TO EXPLORE NEW CREATIVE SPACES’<sup>68</sup>**

Over the last decade, a growing number of young people have joined the older generations of artists in a space composed of individual choices, of opportunities that they pursue quietly, at times almost on the sidelines, but also of competition and a desire to open cracks. This was the background to the emergence of the Contemporary Art Movement of Mozambique (MUVART). The movement was founded by eleven artists. Its members include Gemuce, Jorge Dias (b 1972), Anésia Manjate (b 1976), Marcos B. Muthewuye, Ivan Serra (b 1978), Xavier Mbeve (b 1974), Vânia Lemos (b 1962) and Carmen Muianga (b 1974). It has been active since the 1990s. Some former members of the now defunct Arte Feliz, decided to pool their experience, training and varied skills to encourage the production of contemporary art, exploring new fields of creativity, renewing existing forms of artistic expression and extending the diversity of art in Mozambique.<sup>69</sup> The first exhibition by the artists in the movement was held in 2003. It aroused the curiosity and interest of the public who visited the exhibition, mainly young people or just interested parties, but it passed off almost unnoticed.<sup>70</sup> Given that there was practically no regular art criticism and few critics, researchers and commentators, this silence was really no surprise. This is how MUVART started out, but it soon became clear that this group of artists could make a difference because of their intellectual and organisational capacity. Rejecting the concept of ‘authenticity’ that many (still) seek in African art, they paved the way for other perceptions of African identity and pushed the boundaries of art, questioning the local dominant concept of art. A year later, in 2004, pursuing their interest in emphasising the multiplicity of resources that artists have at their disposal for creative experimentation and



Jorge Dias.  
*Spiritual platform*, 2005.  
Installation (sieves, wire and wood  
objects, ceramics),  
dimensions variable.  
Private collection

---

68. Phrase used by the artist, Jorge Dias, and by Alda Costa in the text written for his exhibition *Transparency: Creative processes and musings*, Maputo, 01-18 September 2010.

69. The Movement of Contemporary Art issued its Manifesto in 2003. Also, see *Notícias* (Cultura), 05 May 2004.

70. Francisco Manjate referred to the exhibition some time later, *Notícias*, 20 September 2003.



Carmen.  
*Untitled*, 1998.  
Acrylic on canvas, 82 x 121cm.  
Col. UEM

for the production of contemporary art, they organised the first Expo Arte Contemporânea Moçambique, a courageous and provocative challenge involving various local artists and artists from abroad. The conceptual freedom of contemporary art allowed barriers to be broken down and relations to be established that had never before been considered. Artisan objects, flowers, lace and embroidery and printed cloth, among other things, are all used in the work of Jorge Dias. He is not bound by one technique or only one material. He is a versatile artist. He works with an idea and returns to previous work, in an open process of creation. Video, at that time practically unknown in Mozambique, was taken up by Gemuce, until then a painter. Installations became part of the local language of art. They multiplied the possibilities for art, almost always using simple or recycled materials, despite the voices that described them as ‘alien to our art.’<sup>71</sup>

International contemporary art exhibitions continue to be held in Maputo (2006, 2008, 2010, 2012), demanding artistic practices open to the world. But how are the relations of the artists of Mozambique with the world of art? Until then, artists from Mozambique had not been present at the main exhibitions of contemporary art, where African artists made their presence felt. Malangatana was the exception in documentary exhibitions that included his earliest works.<sup>72</sup> More recently Titos Mabota and Gonçalo Mabunda have been included. Something has changed since MUVART became active, but even so, it has been no less complex. A small number of artists received invitations, showed their work, became part of networks, became better known or were represented in international galleries. Participation in contemporary art fairs (Arte Lisboa 04, ARCO2006 or even the possibilities opened up by the Joburg Art Fair since 2008), the interest that certain international collectors have shown in the work of Mozambican artists, whether or not they are part of this movement, are signs of change, but only very small steps.

---

71. *Zambeze*, 21 January 2010, p 31.

72. This refers in particular to the exhibition *The Short Century. Independence and liberation movements in Africa 1945-1994*, which was opened in 2001 in Germany and the USA.



Gemuce and Félix Mula.  
*Rush Hour 1*, 2013.  
Installation (plastic and metal cars), dimensions variable.  
Artists' collection

The same is happening in relation to photography. In a country that has produced well-known names in photojournalism some photographers have combined documentary work with art. Even so, it may be said that questioning photography as a medium and pushing the boundaries of photography and its potential is a recent development. José Cabral (b 1952) is an exception here. Sérgio Santimano (b 1956) and Rui Assubuji (b 1964) have participated in various exhibitions. A new generation has gradually emerged, including Luís Basto (b 1969), Mauro Pinto (b 1974), Mário Macilau (b 1984) and Filipe Branquinho (b 1977). From 2002, international meetings on photography in Maputo opened up opportunities that some of the younger photographers have pursued. They have taken part in international exhibitions, joined local group projects and have competed for various prizes with individual work (and won).<sup>73</sup>

After a period of more activity, the artists of MUVART seem to have felt the need to turn inwards, to pursue their personal quest and to consolidate their own projects. They held individual shows, Gemuce in 2009 and Jorge Dias in 2010. They participate in group exhibitions and special projects, such as the *Temporary Occupations*, in projects with other artists, such as Gemuce and Ulisses (b 1952) in 2011 or Gemuce and Félix Mula (b 1979) in 2013. Some artists seem to have taken time to pursue their own careers quietly, as with Vânia Lemos. Jorge Dias divides his time among many tasks. Mentoring artists and curating exhibitions are among the things that he loves doing, along with writing. His voice is missed in a situation where there is practically no criticism and where there is a kind of void resulting from the changes that have taken place. And also because, as he says, 'the artist should be the first to offer theoretical and conceptual input about his work.'<sup>74</sup>

Given the fragile conditions for formal art education and the absence of the mediators essential to a system of arts and of a structural system of support, it is still too early to evaluate the impact

---

73. For example, the BES Photo Prize, created in 2004, an initiative involving Portugal and Brazil. Mauro Pinto won a prize in 2012 and Filipe Branquinho was a finalist in 2013.

74. 'Entrevista: Jorge Dias', *Artcapital*, 2009, <http://www.artcapital.net/entrevista-25-jorge-dias>

of the contemporary art movement on the Mozambican art world. We could ask ourselves about the propositions of the last biennales, but these activities have undoubtedly enlarged the scope of local artists. They have paved the way for other projects, at least in the early days, as was the case with the ‘Occupations.’

The *Temporary Occupations* project 2010 – was started by Elisa Santos, an independent curator. In its first edition, it involved six artists: Gonçalo Mabunda, Gemuce, Maimuna Adam, Mauro Pinto, L. Pinto and Celestino Mudaulane. The aim was the temporary occupation with works of art of public spaces belonging to the city that had never previously been used in that way. The occupations rapidly established themselves as important art events. In 2011, the theme chosen was precariousness and the work of the participating artists (including the musician Azagaia) challenged new spaces and established different relationships with their inhabitants/the public. The 2012 theme, *Foreigners*, brought together five Mozambican artists Eugénia Mussa (b 1978), João Petit Graça (b 1979), Rui Tenreiro (b 1979), Sandra Muendane (b 1978) and Tiago Correia-Paulo (b 1977), and one Angolan artist Paulo Kapela (b 1947). Those selected were familiar with the theme as they had lived, trained or worked abroad. And given its interest in promoting the circulation of artists in international markets, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation supported the project. Commentators and others interested in art supported this project. It involves new players in the art scene in Maputo, makes them known and diversifies the world of art, where new projects such as this are needed.

### ***BY WAY OF CONCLUSION***

The artists of the founding generation of modern Mozambican art, a generation whose symbols are Malangatana and Chissano (and also Bertina Lopes, Shikhani and other artists) have only disappeared physically. Their influence is ever present and their work remains. But a phase has ended, perhaps an era or an age. And a new era dawns. And while it is unpredictable, it is nevertheless possible to identify some trends. Artists will continue, in a more open and better prepared space, to search for new answers to questions about the definition of contemporary African art, what it means to be an African/Mozambican artist, African identity and the identity of individual artists and their work. There seems to be infinite possibilities and artists with no desire to remain passive. Using the media with which they feel most comfortable, artists of all generations, will give shape to this time ahead. The ‘traditional’ sculpture in wood is being challenged by young sculptors who demand the right to express their individuality and modernity, such as Pekiwa (b 1977). Video, a medium of expression rarely used by Mozambican artists, is making strides in the hands of Maimuna Adam (b 1984) as has been shown in recent exhibitions inside Mozambique and abroad. This young artist favours photography in her artistic research, but she also loves drawing, objects, sculpture, installations and painting. Her first solo exhibition, *Bon Voyage*,<sup>75</sup> reflects her interests and her desire for self-knowledge, to be many things at once. Painting, which is strongly present today and interests many young people, has a long way to go. It is the responsibility of each artist to decide on what possibilities it offers. Installation is taking new

---

75. Kulungwana, 19 September-02 November 2013.



Jorge Dias.  
*Signs*, 2011.  
Pyrography on plywood, dimensions variable.  
Artist's collection (on loan to UEM)



Félix Mula.  
*Means, ends and enslaving situations*, 2013.  
Series of 10 photographs, each measuring 80 x 53cm.  
Artist's collection

twists. *Mafalala Blues* by Camila de Sousa (b 1985), shown in 2010, represents an advance. It is a conceptually strong work, blending historical and anthropological research of the township with photography, video, music and poetry. The installation *3x4* is the outcome of a project for anthropological research conducted in Maputo's jails. It was exhibited at the Medical Faculty in the 2011 Occupation. While it is less media-rich, it gives grounds for expecting new and ever more ambitious projects in the future. There is more space for other forms of art.

The conditions for support of artistic production are far from ideal for this new era that is dawning. There is an urgent need to strengthen the system of education in existing cultural institutions and to modify the policy models in place. State support has been drastically reduced and other resources are sporadic and ineffective. Existing collections lack professional management and an adequate policy of acquisition. The only things that seem appropriate with regard to current artistic production are the exhibition spaces. Kulungwana, an association for cultural development, has joined the cultural centres (i.e. National Museum of Art, Núcleo de

Arte). The activities of Kulungwana are wide and varied, providing gallery space with a regular calendar of exhibitions and other activities that explore synergies and disseminate techniques and artistic processes. It has created public interest in promoting its calendar of events. And it was the first Mozambican gallery to be included at the Joburg Art Fair 2013, representing three Mozambican artists: Filipe Branquinho, Mauro Pinto and Mário Macilau. The curator was Berry Bickle (b 1959), a Zimbabwean artist who has had a special bond with Mozambique since the 1990s and for that reason is part of this story. One challenge for the future seems to be that of reconciling the informal conditions in which the local creative process is undertaken with the need for structures to provide professional support to the arts and artists. Another, no less important, will be the vital dialogue between the local and global creative processes.