

LESSON 22: TRADITION AS INNOVATION

Apartheid's Funeral, South Africa

Fig.4.4

Masaego Johannes Segogela (South Africa, 1936-), *Apartheid's Funeral*, 1994. Wood, paint. H: 53 cm. Fowler Museum at UCLA. Gift of Patricia B. Altman in honor of Franklin D. Murphy. X94.31-27.

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Lesson Summary and Objectives

Students explore the history of apartheid in South Africa and discover the important role of artists and the arts in the struggle for freedom and human rights for all. They will deconstruct the funeral of apartheid, as imagined by the artist, and their writing activities will focus on composing a news report of the event. Other curricular suggestions include a study of other art forms that brought attention to the injustices of apartheid, most notably South African music of resistance and anti-apartheid posters. Art and music making follow their study. Finally students have the opportunity to research world peace leaders and the impact their actions have had on global peace efforts. Students will

- Become “news reporters” and observe and discuss *Apartheid's Funeral* and the consequences of change for different people.
- Be introduced to poster art from all over the world calling attention to the struggle against apartheid. They will create posters to address issues of concern in their own lives, inspired by anti-apartheid posters they study.
- Respond to multi-media arts addressing apartheid through discussion or creative writing activities.
- Discuss the role art can play in activism and relate their work of art to current global issues.

Background Information

Artist Masaego Johannes Segogela uses the metaphor of death to make a powerful statement about social and political transformation in South Africa with the dissolution of the apartheid regime. This particular sculptural installation was carved in anticipation of the elections held in 1994 that brought about the end of white minority rule in South Africa. Segogela's work demonstrates the dynamism of the arts as artists make use of new styles and techniques—rooted in more traditional models—to reflect the ever-changing world artists encounter.

About the Artist

Masaego Johannes Segogela has been a full-time artist since the early 1980s. His previous careers included those of electrician, welder, and boilermaker. In 1980, Segogela began to create sculptures that emphasized his strong Christian values, at the same time as they dealt with the political and cultural issues that faced South Africans. First pieces were individual figures retaining the original finish of the wood with painted details; later works were combined into tableaux of figures with paint or varnish embellishing the carved wood. Born in rural Sekhukhuneland in 1936, he moved to urban Johannesburg where he first sold his art on the streets of the city's

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About the Artist (cont.)

shopping districts, and then in art galleries. His experiences growing up and becoming an adult under the oppression of South Africa's apartheid system informed his early works as current events continue to shape his work today.

Curriculum Connections **1. Art as Commentary**

Activity

Introduce this multi-figure work and inform students of the title of Segogela's piece: *Apartheid's Funeral, 1994*. What is happening in the scene? Of course to understand the work the class must have some knowledge of South Africa's history including the imposition of racial separation, the struggle of the African National Congress, and of Nelson Mandela's role in and after the struggle.

Note that there are twenty-three figures prostrate, kneeling, and standing around a box containing a coffin. Begin with any one of the figures and have students tell all they can about it. Students will notice figures in clerical robes and business suits, ANC supporters with clenched fists, mourners lamenting the death of apartheid and others praising its demise. Ask students if they are able to identify any of these figures:

- Cleric in a red robe at podium with microphones, presumably conducting the service
- One man offering flowers
- In black suit with hands over ears
- In a red clerical robe with arms outstretched giving a blessing
- In black suit, hand over eyes
- In grey suit with sunglasses
- In grey clerical suit holding up a cross
- Grey haired man holding cane
- In black clerical robe, arms outstretched holding a Bible
- Kneeling man in red clerical robe
- Large man in black suit with hands on ears
- In brown clerical robe with hand on eyes, holding a Bible
- Kneeling man in green clerical robe
- In red clerical robe with outstretched arms holding a Bible
- In black suit with clenched fist
- In red suit with outstretched arm
- Kneeling man in yellow clerical robe

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- In blue green suit with hands on ears
- In black suit with briefcase
- In black suit with hands together
- In green clerical robe, with arms outstretched holding a Bible
- Videographer in grey suit, with camera bag

Artist Johannes Segogela identifies the Founder of Apartheid as the old man with a cane; the Chairman of Apartheid as the man with his hands on top of his head; the Secretary of Apartheid with his hands over ears; ANC supporters with clenched fists; and the books and documents of apartheid being buried in the coffin. Students should also notice the presence of a photographer. This is both a commentary on the prevalence of photographers at many events, but also an acknowledgment of the apartheid regime's practice of surveillance in order to document and then arrest political protestors.

Have students offer their ideas as to who might be represented. Are they all proponents of apartheid lamenting its end? Are there any people present who helped end the practice and are here looking ahead to reconciliation? Note that the artist chose to use details of dress and gesture as clues to the identity and politics of the participants. The colors of the robes may refer to specific church affiliations and/or may also refer to the colors of the African National Congress Party. Are any women present at the funeral? How successful was Segogela in portraying loss transformed into hope? What messages do students draw from the art? Note that funerals themselves were expressions of solidarity by those who fought for the end of apartheid. How was this so?

Students can take the role of a reporter covering this momentous 1994 event and write a news report. Discuss beforehand the information that should be contained in the article. Students can begin with the "five W" stand-bys: What was happening, where, who was there, when did it occur (in relation to the events leading up to this date), and why? Another approach would have them writing as an editorial writer, expressing opinions, rather than as a reporter addressing only factual information.



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2. Other Arts and Apartheid

Activity

Throughout the struggle and since, artists have used a variety of media as cultural and political weapons. Students should be introduced to the many examples of poster art that called attention to the South African struggle for freedom. By looking through printed collections (see bibliography) and viewing websites such as <http://chnm.gmu.edu/worldhistorysources/r/314/whm.html> (8/07) with over 300 examples, the class will appreciate the vibrancy and variety of the art produced. They will also become aware of international aspects of the anti-apartheid movement, with posters from Asia, Europe, other African countries, and the Americas, in addition to the majority of examples from South Africa. Students can then address political or social issues of their own time and place with posters they create. They may use paints, collage, or another medium of their choice.

Activity

In Segogela's piece one figure is documenting the occasion with camera, several have books; if it were an audio-visual installation undoubtedly there would be music. Music was both a powerful vehicle of protest and a revolutionary voice of freedom. Well-known musicians sang of their country's crises and helped spread their message throughout the world, and as in the case of the posters, music influenced world opinion to help bring about the end of apartheid. One of the most stirring and significant pieces of music is the national anthem, *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika*. This official anthem is, in reality, two anthems merged into one. It is sung in four stanzas, the first in Xhosa or Zulu, the second in Sotho, the third in Afrikaans, and the last in English. You can hear it sung and read the lyrics on <http://www.youtube.com/?v=NsWwz9UmjVk> (8/07). Students may consider these two quotes on the South African struggle as they examine the essential roles of the arts in creating social and political change:

Without this music, our struggle would have been a great deal longer, a great deal bloodier, and perhaps, not even successful. —Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *South Africa*

“When we sing our anthem, a religious invocation with our clenched fist upraised, it is...an affirmation that we sing when we struggle and struggle when we sing.” —Albie Sachs, *one of the architects of the ANC's constitutional guidelines.*

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Activity

Visual arts, music, and certainly the written word documented and influenced the struggle for and acquisition of freedom. The written word was seen and heard in plays, novels, and poetry. Don Mattera (1983) told the story of his home, Sophiatown, a pre-apartheid multi-racial, multi-ethnic community where the arts flourished until police enforced an order of forced removal. Some residents were sent to Soweto and other areas, and Sophiatown was bulldozed and rebuilt into a working class suburb for white workers. Students can respond to this powerful work in many ways: share their reactions to the account, relate to the “taking apart in a few minutes all that had been built up over the years....,” make comparable contrasts to phrases such as “the power of destroying” and “the pain of being destroyed,” and of course compose a poem in response to any of the above.

A short discography is included here featuring South African artists involved in the freedom fight:

Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

1992 *Best of Ladysmith Black Mambazo*. Shanachie 43098.
Most famous *isicathamiya* or *mbube* group. From Zululand.

Makeba, Miriam

1994 *The Click Song*. Sonodisc 5564. Famous singer and political figure in South Africa, this disc features a song popular in the U.S. in the 1950s.

Mbuli, Mzwakhe.

2001 *KwaZulu Natal*. 2001. EMI.

Various artists

1998 *The Rough Guide to the Music of South Africa*.
World Music Network 1020.

Various artists

1999 *The Kings and Queens of Township Jive*. Sterns Earthworks 20.
Includes such early stars as Mbazos, Mahotella Queens, Thomas Phale, and West Nkosi from South Africa.

Various artists

1999 *South African Gospel According to Earthworks*.
1999. Sterns Earthworks STEW39CD.

Various artists

1999 *Radio Freedom: Voice of the African National Congress and The People's Army Umkhonto We Sizwe*. Rounder Records CD 4019.
Music from the liberation struggle in South Africa.

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3. Strategies for Change—Artful and Other

As art played a role in the fight against apartheid, so has it been a vehicle for people all over the world in struggles against injustices and inequality. Consider some of these battles against racial discrimination such as the fight for civil rights in the United States, land right struggles of Australian Aborigines, the American Indian movement and others.

Activity

In addition to addressing the role that art may play in such situations, let students offer other strategies people might use to let governments know of their discontent. These may include letter writing; the circulation of petitions; composing or performing protest music; picketing; sponsoring email or regular mail campaigns; and participating in boycotts, strikes or sit-ins. They may add less acceptable ideas as rioting, bombing, hostage taking, etc., leading to a discussion as to whether such tactics are ever warranted. Particularly non-violent approaches could be stressed, certainly in regard to South Africa's Nelson Mandela, but also Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi, Betty Williams, Mairead Corrigan from Northern Ireland, and others. Let students depict a scene appropriate to any of the above struggles, either in the style of Segogela with many figures, or in another medium.

Activity

As an alternative, rather than a work based on one of the civil or political injustices cited above, students may want to relate their work to other problems facing people today such as global warming or the AIDS epidemic. A good reference is the Keiskamma Art Project, also taking place in South Africa, where women in the village of Hamburg are using embroidery techniques to depict the tragedy of HIV and AIDS. Art, again, is serving as a catalyst for action and a vehicle of hope and transformation.



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Useful Readings

Mattera, Don

1983 *Azanian Love Song*.
Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.

2003 *Sophiatown*.
Boston: Beacon Press.

The Posterbook Collective

1991 *Images of Defiance: South African Resistance Posters of the 1980s*.
Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Ross, Doran H.

1995 "Masaego Johannes Segogela (Portfolio)."
African Arts 28 (1): 74–79.

1995 "New Acquisitions." *African Arts* 28 (1): 80.

Williamson, Sue

1989 *Resistance Art of South Africa*.
New York: St. Martin's Press

Note to Teachers:

This lesson is part of the curricular materials developed to accompany the exhibition ***Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives***. Although this and companion lessons are self-contained, each will be enhanced when used in conjunction with others in this resource. Addressing several lessons within each unit will facilitate the incorporation of the study of world arts and cultures into your curriculum.

The lesson is based on works in the last section of the exhibition called *Art and Transformation*. In this gallery works are introduced that served to make things happen. See "Unit Four—Art and Transformation" for an introductory statement on the unit, along with some provocative "Questions for Thought," and suggestions that will inspire the students to relate the unit to their own lives.

Images of objects to be shown to students may be printed as handouts (from within each lesson), viewed online at the ***Intersections*** web link <http://collections.fowler.ucla.edu>, or downloaded from the curriculum page on our website.

In this unit the topics and lessons are

Lesson 19: Memorials and Transcendence: *El Arbol de la Muerte*, Mexico

Lesson 20: Arts for Spiritual Intervention: To Seek Divine Assistance: *Emas*, Japan

Lesson 21: Arts for Spiritual Intervention: Honoring Patron Saints with *Retablos*, Mexico

Lesson 22: Tradition as Innovation: *Apartheid's Funeral*, South Africa

Lesson 23: Tradition as Innovation: *La Calavera don Quijote*, Mexico