

**JACKSON HLUNGWANI**

**A GREAT ARTIST**

**OF THE NORTH**



**MASHIFANE PHINEAS MAKUNYANE**

University of Fort Hare  
*Together in Excellence*

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## Table of contents

Section 1 - Introduction	1
Section 2 - Meeting Jackson Hlungwani	7
Section 3 - The making of artist and cultural leader	14
Section 4 - How great is thou art?	20
(Fig 1) Stone building of New Jerusalem	20
(Fig 2) God	20
(Fig 3) Christ	20
(Fig 4) God's Leg with Eggs	20
(Fig 5) Stone building of New Jerusalem	21
(Fig 6) Angel Gabriel 1	25
(Fig 7) Christ Playing Football	26
(Fig 8) Alter of God (i)	28
(Fig 9) Alter of God (ii)	29
(Fig 10) Michael Star	30
(Fig 11) Adam and the Birth Eve	31
(Fig 12) Tiger Fish	32
(Fig 13) Large Crucifix	34
(Fig 14) Crucifix	34
(Fig 15) Untitled	35
(Fig 16) Mbhesu (Groot Blaarsdoring)	36
(Fig 17) Little Daniel	36
(Fig 18) God and Christ	37
Section 5 - Jackson Hlungwani and the wider art community	39
Section 6 - Conclusion	42
Acknowledgements	44
Bibliography	46



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## **Section 1 - INTRODUCTION**

*"I have respect and honour for Hlungwani's unique way of seeing things and expressing them through his creativity. He takes elements known to everybody and attaches his mythological religious meaning that is integrated with cultural flavour"<sup>1</sup>*, indicated Ruth Sack during my video interview with her on the 27/06/2003 at New Town (Johannesburg). Ruth is a professional artist and the Director of the Imbali Literacy Art Project in Johannesburg. She visited Jackson Hlungwani at New Jerusalem in 1998 with a group of artists from Johannesburg.

During her visit she found that BMW (South Africa), in agreement with Hlungwani, had removed all the sculptures from New Jerusalem. The sculptures were sold through exhibitions. Some were bought by art museums while others were sold privately both locally and abroad. Ruth Sack, as an artist and strong supporter of Hlungwani's collection at New Jerusalem, expressed her anger, frustration and disappointment over the removal of the collection to elsewhere in the country. According to her, Hlungwani's sculptures should not have been removed from New Jerusalem, after he was discovered through BMW South Africa and Ricky Burnett. New Jerusalem should be known as the Jackson Hlungwani Art Museum and Gallery because of his passion for art creation, display and public sharing of skills and motivation.

Ruth Sack also believed that New Jerusalem existed before Jackson Hlungwani's standing exhibition. The standing exhibition was a permanent art collection of sculptures put on display to the public. The removal of the art collection undermined his original creative idea and his tradition of sharing of his artistic skills. Hlungwani had dedicated his whole life to developing and building New Jerusalem during 30 years of hard work. His intention was to present New Jerusalem as an art centre where people could view his art as it interacted with nature.

One could say that his sculptures were the embodiment of a religious message, hence the integration of the art gallery and the church at one place. Today, New Jerusalem is historically recognised as both his studio and gallery. It would be pleasing to be able to visit New Jerusalem in its original glory, as it represented Hlungwani's integrity and innovative creativity. It would have shown how he integrated art and architecture, culture

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<sup>1</sup> Video footage, interview with Ruth Sack in Johannesburg, Jackson Hlungwani and his students at Kanana (27/06/2003)

and nature at the highest levels of religion. It would have been a place where his sculptures complemented Biblical understanding as teaching visuals in real-life.

Ruth Sack indicated that it is not too late to preserve the will of the people by moving Jackson Hlungwani's collection back to New Jerusalem and forming the Jackson Hlungwani Art Museum. She even went so far as to suggest that it should be the responsibility of the Government to revive New Jerusalem.

The Government should be willing to help Hlungwani to get his collection back. They could do this through purchasing some pieces and also by encouraging people to donate them to the 'Jackson Hlungwani's Art Museum'. According to Ruth Sack, many people would agree with her. Ruth Sack is appealing to the Government to ensure that great artists, like Jackson Hlungwani are supported by the state. This is because of their achievements; they are targeted as victims and are "ripped off" (exploited) by Art dealers who leave them with nothing to show, while the sales of the artist's hard work benefit other undeserving and unscrupulous people.

In order to build Jackson Hlungwani's Art Museum at New Jerusalem, it is recommended that Provincial Department of Arts and Culture in Limpopo Province should take the lead. Department of Arts and Culture should establish a committee to be assigned with responsibilities to write submissions and draw management plan for approval of the provincial government to support the project.

In my video footage Ruth Sack said: *"Jackson is one of the unfortunate artists who is unable to make a living out of his art because people get his work for almost nothing".*<sup>2</sup>

During her visit to New Jerusalem, Ruth Sack observed - with concern - that Hlungwani struggles financially. She stated that she was disturbed because he is the poorest of the poor, to the last degree - yet he is rich artistically as a creator and as one of the greatest artists South Africa has ever produced. His sculptures are displayed throughout the country and overseas. This is evidence of his success as a traditional wood carver. Ruth Sack stated with sadness that *"These people are murderous. I don't know about their*

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<sup>2</sup> Video footage, interview with Ruth Sack in Johannesburg, Jackson Hlungwani and his students at Kanana (27/06/2003)

*conscience because Hlungwani did so much for the world and does not deserve to be treated like this*<sup>3</sup>.

She claims that Jackson Hlungwani raised concerns about the removal of his artworks from New Jerusalem and queried the lack of benefits or adequate compensation to him or his family.

At New Kanana he is known as the rainmaker because he prays for rain during periods of drought. The Rainmaker is traditionally a special individual who is known to the community and whose purity of status promotes the presence of ancestral spirituality and holiness. This is all associated with a communal cultural activity to bring on the rain.

Jackson Hlungwani has exhibited extraordinary spiritual power and is known to heal different diseases through prayer and the sprinkling of holy water. This ability to heal different diseases is the confirmation that Christ has given him to demystify suffering among people. He also uses fire to heal different diseases as he is directed and taught by Christ, just as he did with his own legs, which are full of scars. The scars on his legs and the cuts on his fingers are associated with life on different planes as part of his prophecies and belief system.

It is through interaction and communication that one realises that Jackson Hlungwani is moved by a strong spirituality, this is what guides his life and his creative world. Through personal communication with this avant-garde legend and hearing his speech that knock sense into one's head and allow his art to offer interpretations of how he integrates culture and religion as they unfold in his life.

In the leadership of his church, his wife Magdeline, who is also a priest, joins Jackson Hlungwani. She is responsible for New Kanana. New Kanana is the church for women, while New Jerusalem is the church for men, for which Hlungwani is responsible. His wife is also capable of healing disease through prayer and water. As the principal of their church, she performs the practices of prayer and healing for females while Hlungwani does the same for men. Magdeline plays an important part in the community outside of the church because she is a crafter who helps young women to develop their skills in beadwork and helps them sew traditional dresses for Tsonga women. Members of the

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

community receive skills development without having to pay tuition fees. The Hlungwani family is dedicated to enriching and enlightening the community without financial gain.

Jackson Hlungwani has dedicated his life to his artistic career as a traditional wood carver. He has exposed many professional artists to woodcarving in the Northern Province and in neighbouring villages. Most of his ex-students are full-time art practitioners with their own studios and galleries. These artists have adopted his approach to community development in the arts, with reference to traditional carving in the Northern Province and they too, teach carving techniques. As a result of his passion for traditional carving and his love of community, large numbers of tourists flock to the province. They give financial support throughout the year. They consider Northern Province as the hub of sculpting in South Africa.

It is through Hlungwani's efforts that traditional carving in Northern Province has become a source of self-employment and job creation for many people. Traditional wood carving in Northern Province is the only source of financial income for most of the artists. They produce massive collections of sculptures in their back yards and also train potential young artists. This is the legacy of Jackson Hlungwani's selfless commitment to enriching the community with skills and development.

Jackson Hlungwani is still leading by example. The Avant-garde veteran of traditional wood carving and a trainer of young artists at his home in New Kanana, he continues to integrate communal cultural beliefs and practices with Christianity (as a priest). He also goes on extra mile by sharing his belongings and property with other people while he lives in poverty as the result of oppression and the imbalances of the past.

As a teacher and facilitator, Hlungwani also focuses on making traditional carving tools from scrap metal and teaches others how to maintain them. Trainees are taken through number of different kinds of woodcarving and are guided through practical demonstrations on carving techniques and the skills needed to shape wood. Trainees are given freedom in their choice of subject matter, beside the standing principle that all of them should know how to carve fish – which are symbolic of Hlungwani's culture and religion.

Hlungwani is dedicated to religious themes and his topics revolve around the Bible. His wish is to simplify biblical scenes through his art. In this way he brings viewers into the arena of God as a symbol of hope, through an understanding of his art. His sculptures

provide deep religious perspectives and allow his viewers to participate in Biblical stories and activities. They show his interpretations of life and culture. He exercises freedom from formal conventions of size and proportion in his work; instead, the inherent forms and life force in the wood lead him as the focal points of his original creativity. Most of his sculptures are monumental in size, with particular reference to his famous sculpture entitled: *Adam and the Birth of Eve*. (404 X 142 X 87 cm) (Fig.11).

The monumental size reflects his recognition and emphasis on the greatness of his God and his ancestors. To create fascinating and appealing expressions in his sculptures, he produces intense rough textures that reflect the power of his homemade tools. The tools are made to create texture in order to highlight features and forms. Jackson Hlungwani has the tendency to leave some parts of his sculptures uncarved in order to retain the original texture, shape and colour of wood as a stimulus for strong expression. His artworks are realistic in reference to religious themes and titles and more abstract in form and structure. He harnesses his personal spiritual power to express his religious message as a confirmation of his mediation between God, ancestors and people.

#### 1.1. VIDEO FOOTAGE

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A video camera was used as a research tool to film Jackson Hlungwani's life in order to get first hand information about his lifestyle as a multi-dimensional person with different roles. In the video coverage Hlungwani talks about his history, his background from childhood to the stage when he became a professional artist. He also explains how he got married to his wife Magdeline and outlines his different roles in the community and those of his wife with confidence and tangible examples. He then talks about his sculptures in different Art Galleries and those at his home. Hlungwani also talks about his church and the ways in which he heals different diseases.

Hlungwani is proud to have produced many self-sustaining professional artists. The video depicts Hlungwani's students at New Kanana. They show their sculptures and how they are trained. It also shows Hlungwani as an international figure. He talks about how he came into contact with BMW (South Africa) through Ricky Burnett and the benefits thereof. The video coverage shows a close view of Hlungwani's home in New Kanana and his belongings that determine his financial status. It also shows Mbhokata Village at close range and New Jerusalem as it exists to date.

The video footage covered several interviews with professional artists and art academics that talk about Hlungwani and his artworks. It also shows art curators that talk about Hlungwani's artworks and how it is perceived by art lovers and students at different levels. Hlungwani's complete sculpture collection at Johannesburg Art Gallery is filmed to show details missing in books or photographs and bringing one into a more intimate relationship with Hlungwani's work. The video has served as a resource to give this extended essay information about Jackson Hlungwani as the great artist of the North.

## 1.2. WHY JACKSON HLUNGWANI AS A FOCAL POINT OF INTEREST?

I was fascinated by Hlungwani's sculptures found in different Art Galleries and Art Museums, including a private collection in South Africa. His unique approach to sculpture and carving appealed to me and I wanted to share this information with the rest of the world. The validated data research about his work and his life could serve as a resource to be used in literature for different purposes. His focus on religious themes is an indication of his approach to Christianity and his belief systems that enhance his culture, and shows his unique personality and worldview. His sculptures depict unique expressions and strong qualities of personal life style. As a person and a professional artist with norms and principles he is a remarkable challenge to all.

  
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His multi-dimensional roles in the community are the evidence that Hlungwani is an important person in the society. He needs more exposure for the world to know about his contribution and his dedication to art creation and art education through development programmes. Many people know Hlungwani by his different roles in the society as a unique person in everything he does. I took a courageous step conducting this research while he is still alive so that he can share first hand information about his art and his life. Such information will be made available as reliable and authentic resource to all those interested in the artist himself, hence the research document and the video coverage on his interview.

## **Section 2 - "MEETING JACKSON HLUNGWANI"**

Jackson Hlungwani lives in a rural area where communication and access is difficult. There are no telecommunications in his home and even into the neighbourhood. My visit to Jackson Hlungwani was made easier by the assistance of Lydia Maluleke who took me to his place.

Jackson Hlungwani has been known for many years as an artist in the (then) Northern Transvaal. It was through his apocalyptic vision and determination to achieve self-identity that he lifted himself to the heights of fame as a vibrant, dynamic artist. He was born into an ordinary Tsonga migrant labourer's family from a disadvantaged background. His lack of formal education did not impact unfavourably upon his artistic career. Hlungwani, as a multi-dimensional artist, has keen insight into life and practices that have gradually become evident to many people. His sculptures are infused with Tsonga culture, integrated with religion, and homemade articles.

I was fortunate to meet one of his prosperous students Thomas Kubayi who knew him well. The student provided an insight into Hlungwani. Thomas Kubayi is a fulltime art practitioner and apprenticed under Jackson Hlungwani at New Kanana (Mbhokota). Thomas Kubayi described Jackson Hlungwani as the legend in traditional wood carving who encouraged and taught most of the wood carvers in the Northern Province and other neighbouring places. These young artists often heard of him while they were still young and then they later join him as trainees to acquire knowledge and skills in the wood carving they now depend on. This is what Thomas Kubayi had to say about Jackson Hlungwani when I interviewed him:

*"I knew Jackson Hlungwani Xidonkani from my childhood as a respected man in the community. I knew him as my neighbouring professional artist that motivated me in my career as professional sculptor. He is special and exceptional. He is doing so much for the community and yet the Government seems not to recognise him, for the contribution he made to the province (in terms of its reputation) because of his work as an international artist. One would expect that the Government would support him as an artist who develops the community".<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Video footage, interview with Thomas Kubayi (Lesheba Wilderness) 26/06/2003

Jackson Hlungwani is a religious person, a priest and healer. He also carves and teaches young sculptors at his place for free. Thomas Kubayi said that he is also a product of Hlungwani,

*“Jackson Hlungwani could have been rich. His home is that of the ordinary man that reflect poverty and yet he is well known internationally. He does not have valuable property at his place. I respect him and his art very few can match his career as artist”<sup>5</sup>.*

Thomas’s information about Jackson Hlungwani highlighted his historical background. He indicated that Hlungwani is multi-lingual in African languages. He emphasised that to translate Hlungwani’s language is difficult and not always accurate. The video footage as evidence of the parabolic language, expresses his statements.

Thomas went on to say: *“I am what I am because of his knowledge and skills that I have inherited like most of the artists in this part of the country. Jackson Hlungwani is one example of a victim of poverty because people obtain his artworks for up to nothing”<sup>6</sup>.*

Thomas Kubayi feels that Jackson Hlungwani should be given financial assistance. Young artists should be encouraged by his positive financial status to take on a career such as his as a way of providing a living. They should see art as a source of self-employment and job creation. Thomas became emotional when talking about Jackson Hlungwani and his artworks. His anger shows his sympathy and concern for Hlungwani, particularly when Hlungwani is badly treated by art dealers. These dealers pay very little for his artworks and sell them for a fortune. Thomas feels that people take advantage of the fact that Hlungwani is highly religious and art dealers therefore exploit him. His grand son Lybo, confirms how sculptures are taken from his grandfather,

*“There are many people that visit my grandfather with the aim of buying sculpture because he is famous world-wide. Most of these people come from all over the country including those from overseas. To cite shocking examples when I say my grandfather is been ripped off, in April 2003, unknown white man came to buy sculptures from him. He gave the old man R500.00 and filled his van with lot of*

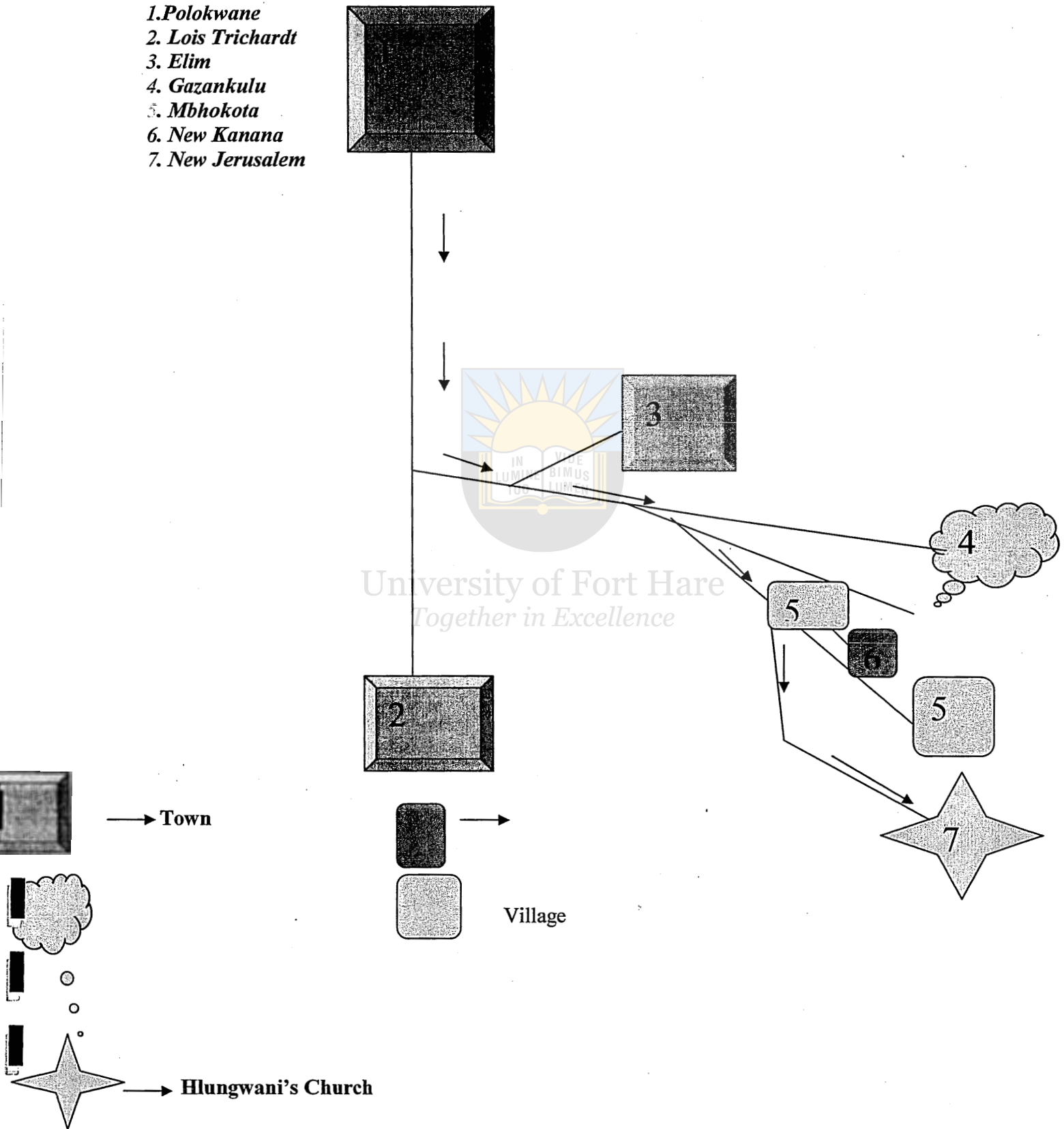
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<sup>5</sup> Video footage, interview with Thomas Kubayi (Lesheba Wilderness) 26/06/2003

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

**MAP TO JACKSON HLUNGWANI'S PLACE**

- 1. Polokwane
- 2. Lois Trichardt
- 3. Elim
- 4. Gazankulu
- 5. Mbhokota
- 6. New Kanana
- 7. New Jerusalem



*quality sculptures. The old man does not listen to us. Please talk to him as he is not aware of what he is worth as a professional artist*<sup>7</sup>.

Lybo indicated that this was the normal practice with most buyers. He appealed for intervention because Hlungwani is robbed what is due to him.

John Baloyi, a fulltime art practitioner and one of Jackson Hlungwani's ex-students was also interviewed. He said:

*"Jackson is an international figure in the world of art and he is known all over in the world. I personally respect him as a great artist, who has the community at heart. He is training young sculptors at his place and encourages them to become artists without costs. I am proud to be one of his successful products through following art as my career. I could not be where I am today without Jackson. Jackson Hlungwani produced many professional artists in this part of the country like me, and other well known artists such as: Thomas Kubayi, Johannes Maswanganyi, Meshack Raphalalani and many of those I did not mention. It is encouraging to work with an artist like Jackson. He is still working very hard. I am also following in his footsteps. I am impressed with his style of developing the community with art skills; hence young artists are developed here as you see them. Some of them are Technikon students doing Fine Arts and come for training during holidays"*<sup>8</sup>.

John Baloyi's statement is in line with what was said by Thomas Kubayi about the role of Jackson in the community. His current students also back him in this way. Information about Jackson as a facilitator and a teacher of sculpture does not appear in any of literature that I went through. I think that his development of the community is important information that should be made known to the public.

In June 2003 at New Kanana (Mbhokota Village) I met Jackson Hlungwani carving under his maroon umbrella. There were many pieces of wood lying around. His trainees were also busy carving around him. When Hlungwani was asked to move out from under his umbrella so we could get better coverage of him, he said:

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<sup>7</sup> Video footage, interview with Lybo Hlungwani and John Baloyi (Mbhokota) 27/06/2003

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

*“Nna ke nyaka go tsibja ke lefase ka segopotso sa morithi o wa ka. Morithi ‘WO’ ke wona e lego ntlo ya ka, yeo ke somelago mo go yona”* (I want be known and remembered working under my maroon umbrella as my studio where I produce quality sculpture).<sup>9</sup>

I think with this Hlungwani is sending a message to the world about his poor financial status. He may be confirming that, in order to be creative, one does not need a fancy studio. He could also mean that a lack of resources should not be an excuse for one not to become an artist. He could also be challenging and motivating those who would like to follow in his footsteps. Hlungwani is proud of his status as an artist and rather than be associated with wealth he has opted to train artists without letting them pay for his services. He is financially poor but artistically rich. He is economically poor but has gained artistic fame.

Asked about his date of birth he burst into laughter and said: *“Batho ba bantshi ga ba tsebe matsatsi a ka a matswalo. Nna ke belegwe ka 1900. Ke tseba ka ga ntwala ya Kaizer, ke ge ke setse ke le gona ke phela mo lefaseng”* (People don’t know about my date of birth. I was not born during Kaizer because I was a big boy by then)<sup>10</sup>

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The so-called Kaizer war was from 1914-1918. Most literature about Hlungwani argues that he was born during this war. Other literature suggests that he was born around 1923. There is no accurate information about his date of birth recorded in literature. Hlungwani is also aware of different suggestions for his date of birth. I think it is proper to respect that Hlungwani has said his date of birth is 1900 though it is still questionable as it puts him at 105 years to date. His physical strength supported by his daily activities of carving, teaching and walking long distances up hill from home to his church is contrary to his age.

When asked about the date of marriage to his wife Magdeline he said:

*“Nna le mosadi WA ka re hlakane mo lefaseng ra ya legodimong go hwetsa Joseph le Maria. Legodimong re be re le batho ba bane, banna ba ba bedi gammogo le basadi ba ba bedi. Re be retsena sekolo legodimong. Joseph le Maria baile ba tswelala dithutong tsa go fepa Jesu Krete. Nna le mosadi wa ka reile ra tswelala mo dithutong tsa go hlokomela batho. Ka morago ga go phetha dithuto tsa rena, nna le mosadi wa ka re tlile lefaseng ra nyalana go phetha gatsa thato ya Modimo”*  
(My wife and I met on earth and went up to heaven to join both Maria and Joseph to

<sup>9</sup> Video footage, interview with Jackson Hlungwani (New Kanana) 27/06/2003

<sup>10</sup> Video footage, interview with Jackson Hlungwani (New Kanana) 27/06/2003

be educated to look after people while Maria and Joseph received education to look after Jesus Christ. After qualifying my wife and I came back on earth and were declared married)<sup>11</sup>

The response to their date of marriage shows the power of God, which is in control of their lives. His statement emphasises that they were meant for each other before they were born, and their togetherness is according to God's will. When asked about his children Jackson Hlungwani said they had, twelve children in twelve years of their marriage. According to Hlungwani five of these children had died because of the will of God. He did not expect these children to die hence he complains to his God. God is the creator and the owner of life and that is why he took his children from him.

### 2.1. JACKSON HLUNGWANI'S WIFE MAGDELINE

Magdeline has given Hlungwani support throughout his career as an artist. Both Hlungwani and Magdeline are dedicated and committed to serving the community. Jackson Hlungwani and his wife have common goals in life. Magdeline helps the community to learn beadwork on calabashes, bottles and any other objects of interest. She also teaches them how to sew Shangaan traditional garments for both unmarried and married woman.

Magdeline is a spiritual woman. She is responsible for a section of the church (Yesu Galeliya One Aposto in Sayoni Alt and Omega) at New Kanana. Like Jackson, Magdeline is also a healer of diseases that victimise girls and women. As a healer, she prays for the sick. She also helps women to conceive. Magdeline uses water as a symbol of purity, for blessings and healing diseases. She performs these practices on women and girls only at New Kanana.

According to Jackson Hlungwani, God does not allow him to touch any woman except his wife. Magdeline does not pray for men as it is an agreed principle of the church. Yesu Galeliya One Aposto in Sayoni Alt and Omega is the one church of God that transcends the two places namely New Kanana and New Jerusalem.

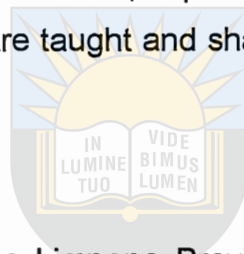
### 2.2. NEW KANANA

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

New Kanana is the home of Jackson Hlungwani and his family. It is situated at Mbhokota village and is not far from New Jerusalem. Jackson Hlungwani argues that he was instructed by his deceased father to move from New Jerusalem to New Kanana. His father's instructions were that New Kanana should be used as a dwelling place for the family. It is a holy place where a church for women was established in 1980. Both New Jerusalem and New Kanana fall under one church (Yesu Galeliya One Aposto in Sayoni Alt and Omega).

New Kanana replicates the activities of New Jerusalem, as it is a multi-purpose centre. It is a dwelling place for Jackson's family, a place for carving and a training centre for his art students. Hlungwani refers to New Kanana as a place for women. Here his wife Magdeline is the leader; a pastor for women, a priest and a healer like her husband at New Jerusalem. Students from far are taught and share the house with Hlungwani's own children.



### 2.3. MBHOKOTA.

Mbhokota is a small village found in Limpopo Province. This village is approximately 15km from Elim on the route from Louis Trichardt (Makhado) to Giyane and Gazankulu in Northern Province. Mbhokota village appears in many art books and magazines associated with Jackson Hlungwani and woodcarving. It is where Hlungwani and his family stay. He has made Mbhokota a tourist destination.

### 2.4. NEW JERUSALEM

New Jerusalem is Jackson Hlungwani's home; it is situated at Mbhokota village. It is well known because of the different activities performed by Hlungwani, for example, woodcarving, healing, training of artists and so on. At first it was Jackson Hlungwani's home. Later it was used as a dwelling place, an open studio and workplace for his carving.

It took Jackson Hlungwani thirty years to build New Jerusalem where it stands on the mountain. It serves as a multi-purpose centre for such diverse activities as worshipping and healing, as well as being an open gallery for his sculptures. These sculptures served as religious teaching aids for his congregation. His church building suggests his physical power. The partitioning and the naming of sections illustrate his constructive thinking and his ability to innovate in architecture. His stone building of New Jerusalem (Fig 5) reflects

the remarkably aesthetic Tsonga cultural architecture. Stone architecture symbolises communal leadership in Tsonga culture, associated with the King as the symbol of power.

Jackson Hlungwani depicts originality, creativity and constructiveness in all his practices as a teacher, priest, pastor, prophet, healer and artist. Hlungwani did not study art, where he might have been possibly influenced his artistic individualism. He sees life differently and his parabolic language is reflective of his unique private interpretations. He uses symbols and parables that are absolutely distinctive. He expresses his feelings to reflect dynamic religion, culture and how they complement each other in an integrated manner. He uses religious praises and sculptures as vehicles of communication and expression. In order for others to be able understand his preachings; he attaches religious meaning to his sculptures. By so doing, he helps people to understand his parabolic religious idiomatic expressions.

Jackson Hlungwani's own personal history, taken from boyhood to present day, makes frequent reference to his lifestyle as a dedicated artist and community builder. This documentation of Jackson Hlungwani's historical background is elaborated in the video footage I have with him in his home at Mbhokota village. Jackson Hlungwani was born into an ordinary Tsonga family in Nkanyani village 'Gazankulu' in the Northern Province. His father, Mundunwazi, was a migrant worker. He (Jackson) is the only child of Mr Hlungwani Mundunwazi Xidonkani and his wife Gabaza.

When I asked him how many were they in his family? he said:

*" Ke nna Gomora le Omeka, ke nna wa mathomo le mafelelo ka lapeng leshu. Ga gona yoo a tlogo ka pele ga ka go ba yeo a ntlhatlamago. Ke nna ngwana a nnoshi wa batswadi ba ka. Ge o bone nna, ke pheto, gobane ga go bo hlokwa go bona bangwe pele ka ge ke le poo" (I am the first and the last in my family as the only child of my parents. The power that I am given warrants representing everybody).<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Video footage, interview with Jackson Hlungwani (New Kanana) 27/06/2003

### **Section 3 - THE MAKING OF AN ARTIST AND CULTURAL LEADER**

It is believed that the appearance of Jackson Hlungwani's dead grandfather from the dead to Jackson appeared during his childhood and was noticed through particular behaviour and other traces discernible only to elderly people. These cultural symbols were observed and interpreted by the elderly in the village. Hlungwani's first reaction as a baby [reportedly] was to refuse to breast-feed. Refusal to breast-feed, on the part of a child, was generally interpreted as a sign that the child's mother had committed adultery.

When they visited the medicine man, he explained Jackson Hlungwani's situation as the reappearance of his Grandfather in the young child (Jackson). It was revealed after the medicine man has consulted his bones (floor X-RAY). This symbolic reappearance meant that the child (Jackson) would be a prophet, healer and diviner. The child could also be involved in performing rituals. He could act as the mediator between the community and ancestral spirits. Jackson was therefore chosen by the ancestors to perform a unique role in the society. He grew up, however, like any other boy. He was a herd boy, exposed to different kinds of animals, fish, birds, etc. These, he later explored in his artistic endeavours. "As a child, while herding cattle with his brothers, he looked carefully at the animals, birds fish and the world around him".<sup>13</sup> Excellence

Jackson Hlungwani explores his past experiences and then uses this to inform his artistic intentions. This shows that Jackson Hlungwani is a researcher in his own way.

Hlungwani is an amazing character; he is able to share information about his painful life experiences with humour. He does it as if he is talking about somebody other than himself. He bears the marks of agony and pain. His limp suggests pain in his right leg. As a young man, like most of his counterparts, he went to look for a better life in Johannesburg (Gauteng). He was employed in different capacities, although he cannot remember the dates of employment. "Hlungwani began working for a tea and coffee merchant in Johannesburg in 1941. When he lost his finger in an industrial accident, he was retrenched and returned to Gazankulu"<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Cohen, L. 1993: 1 S Looking at Contemporary South African Sculpture [Jackson Hlungwani Resource Book]: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, L. 1993: 1 S Looking at Contemporary South African Sculpture [Jackson Hlungwani Resource Book]: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

He display his (cut) finger with pride and refers to it as the symbol of Satan. He does not mention or discuss the pain that he experienced during the accident. It is believed that Hlungwani started working as a fulltime artist after his finger was cut and he was subsequently retrenched. Contrary to the information regarding his fulltime work as an art practitioner, Jackson Hlungwani in his video footage says,

*“Nna ga ke gopole mengwaga yeo ke thomilego go ba mmetli, fela ke ka morago ga le bakanyana gore ke nyalane le mosadi waka Magdeline”* (I cannot remember dates that I became artist but it was shortly after marriage with my wife Magdeline)<sup>15</sup>. In my discussions with Hlungwani, it is believed that they were married in the 1950's.

Hlungwani appreciates that a number of authors have written about him. They appreciate his contribution, as an international artist, and his contribution to the development of Art in Southern Africa. The publication of books about him and his Art has brought recognition and made him well known and respected. His artwork can be traced regionally and beyond, he is a self-taught sculptor of religious, symbolic works.

Hlungwani is known as the legendary artist and traditional wood-carver of Mbhokota, a man who dedicated many years to woodcarving. His contribution to skills acquisition to many artists reflects his commitment to the development and training of those who were inspired and influenced by his sculptures being displayed all over the country. People who were healed in his church through his prayers address him as the healer. To those who listened to his preaching and his prophetic statements he is known as the prophet. His prophetic message is often depicted in his sculptures (e.g. Fig. 13 and Fig. 14).

Hlungwani will serve his Lord as Jesus Christ, the Son of God did. He explains that he is the colt of Jesus Christ. The community recognises him as a charismatic leader, exemplar and healer and the messenger of God. In reference to his finger (cut) as the symbol of the devil or Satan, he claims that Satan did not want him to serve God. He does not associate his finger with pain, or accident. His finger is a symbol of having defeated the devil. It is the mark of sharing information with other Christians.

After showing his finger, he then quickly pulls his trousers up to show his legs, covered with horrific scars. The scars on his legs are, according to him, further religious symbols. See God's Leg with Eggs (Fig. 4). He does not recall the year in which the devil tried to

destroy his life by shooting both legs with sharp thorns that pierced them and remained in the flesh. This is believed to have happened in 1978. Hlungwani was able to remove the thorn from his left leg while the one in the right leg remained. His right leg has a big scar and is deformed and may be painful. He limps as he walks. According to Hlungwani, his right leg is a symbol of the devil indicating that dry land is not suitable for cultivation. His left leg is full of scars. He describes his left leg as symbolic of barren and fertile land to show God's presence.

He pointed to the scars while talking and said:

*“ Maoto a ka ke sesupo sa gore matsatsi a puso ya magosi a fitile. Modimo ke yena a nnosi yeo a busago, ka baruti gammogo le ba porofeta. Basadi ba filwe bo eta pele gobane mmuso wa banna o fihlile mafelelong go ya ka molaetsa wa Modimo”* (My legs are symbols to show days to be ruled by kings are over. God is the only one that rules the world through priests and prophets. Women are given leadership because days for the leadership are over according to God's message)<sup>16</sup>

In New Jerusalem and New Kanana people are healed through prayer at the church “Yesu Galeliya, One Aposto in Sayoni Alt and Omega”. This building in New Kanana is an indication that Hlungwani believes in the existence of the ancestral spirit, which is the cultural norm for Africans. The healing rooms erected at New Jerusalem are evidence of Jackson Hlungwani as a healer of different diseases. “The semi-circular stone walls of the healing rooms enclose and create a generous arrival forecourt”<sup>17</sup>.

He also believes and practices communal sharing. Hlungwani is a generous man though he has limited resources. It is due to his generosity that people have come to consider him as a charismatic leader of the community. He is also respected for his spiritual gifts. He unites people as the messenger in religion and prayer at his church. In his interview he says that he has been sent as a messenger to communicate the message of God to people and to help them through prayer and water to heal different diseases. People come with all kinds of complicated diseases. He prays for them and by laying hands and sprinkling of water, they are healed.

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<sup>15</sup> Video footage, interview with Jackson Hlungwani (New Kanana) 27/06/2006

<sup>16</sup> Video footage, interview with Jackson Hlungwani (New Kanana) 27/06/2007

<sup>17</sup> Burnett.R 1989: 28 Puer Papers, Jackson Hlungwani exhibition Catalogue: Communication Department, BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg.

Literature claims that Hlungwani named himself Xidonkani. Xidonkani means little donkey (colt) like that, which was used by Jesus Christ when he visited different places to preach the word of God. With reference to this name, Hlungwani explained that it is the colt that Joseph used to carry Mary, the mother of Christ when she was going to give birth to Jesus at Bethlehem.

### 3.1. HLUNGWANI'S INFLUENCE ON HIS STUDENTS

Hlungwani's home at Mbhokota is an historical place for most students that have graduated under him. His training is focused on empowerment and skills development of the community through traditional carving. His students are not given notes or any art materials for reference. Instead he exposes them to different traditional carving tools. They are then encouraged to make their own tools. He teaches through demonstration. Carving becomes a career for most of his students, who came from different villages in the Northern Province.

He does not have a strategy to attract students. Adults and youth alike come to his home for training. He is their role model. They regard him as a successful sculptor. He also attracts tourists. His contribution to art aesthetics and philosophy serves as motivation for the community. The younger artists also benefit from the visitors who sometimes buy their works. His training is not duration bound nor does he issue certificates of attendance. The only accreditation for students is skills development in traditional woodcarving. Creative sculpture production and being able to sell to tourists is evidence of becoming an art practitioner.

His students also participate in different exhibitions so that they are exposed and recognised as artists. When I visited Hlungwani in June 2003, he was training 25 students. He indicated that his students came from all over Limpopo Province. Those from far were offered accommodation and food at New Kanana. He introduces students to many different kinds of wood for carving. He also teaches them about different types of woodcarving techniques. He encourages them to be creative and to produce quality sculptures. His students decide on themes and subject matter. They are also given the chance to explore different types of wood.

Students are encouraged to learn from one another and get guidance during the process. According to Hlungwani they should all be able to carve fish. Hlungwani sees fish as symbols of purity and peace. He interprets fish as associated with women in leadership

because of their swiftness. The fish paves the way for artists to be creative, dedicated and committed. Thomas Kubayi also believes in Hlungwani's philosophy about the carving of fish because of its swiftness and movement.

Hlungwani monitors his students throughout the carving process. They are also taught how to handle tools and how to fashion different shapes of fish. They are encouraged to observe features in his fish. He supervises his students at all times. They are also exposed to many tourists. Though they are still learning, some claim to make a living out of the sculptures they have sold to tourists. All the students attached to Hlungwani's developmental programme want to become professional sculptors. Some of them attend fulltime while others attend part time.

Carving in the Northern Province is considered the first career option for self-employment and job creation. Artists such John Baloyi, Thomas Kubayi, Mishack Raphalalani, Johannes Maswanganyi, Owen Ndou, David Murathi, Noria Mabasa and many others have individual studios and small art galleries attached to their homes. This is the result of Jackson Hlungwani's profoundly important contribution. The following professionals including Noria Mabasa, Thomas Kubayi, Owen Ndou and David Murathi train school children at Leshaba Wilderness project.

It is through Jackson Hlungwani and the communal sharing of art skills that the Northern Province is a focal point for artistic creation and development. Hlungwani has successfully raised the awareness of art as a career, self-employment and job creation. His traditional woodcarving is a vehicle to address poverty in his area. This great artist has taught his students and the community at large that wood is a medium of communication, and can be used effectively to convey messages. It can be used as a source of income.

Hlungwani indicated that his father was a traditional wood carver and is the person who taught him the basic principles of carving. He was exposed to carving techniques at an early age and then began to develop interest. His father carved cultural bowls, wooden porridge stirrers, wooden spoons, trolleys and wagons. Hlungwani's father was gifted and would carve anything.

“As a child, while herding cattle with his brothers, he looked carefully at the animals, birds and fish around him. He did not go to school, but his father, Mundunwazi, taught him to carve households objects, to sharpen tools and to work with iron”<sup>18</sup>

His father carved domestic wooden tools used in cultural activities known to the community. The experience gained was used to make homemade carving tools. Like his father, he was motivated to carve Shangaan traditional icons symbolic of their culture. It is interesting to notice that Hlungwani is still using homemade tools and so are his students. They are cheap to make, they are made of old iron and collected metals. Hlungwani does not agree that he is a self-taught artist, because his father taught him to make tools and maintain them. Later God taught him to carve religious sculptures.



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<sup>18</sup> Cohen, L. 1993: 1 Looking at Contemporary South African Sculpture [Jackson Hlungwani Resource Book]: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

## Section 4 - HOW GREAT IS THOU ART?

Hlungwani's works show amazing power and physical strength that is hard to associate with his age and tiny frame. He is an amazing man who does not attach monetary value to his art.

### STONE BUILDING OF NEW JERUSALEM (Fig. 1)

The architectural stone building of New Jerusalem is Hlungwani's art museum of sculptures. The sculptures were exhibited in the open, to convey religious messages. He named different rooms for various utilities, i.e. reception room, prayer room, healing room, etc.

### GOD (Fig. 2) and JESUS CHRIST (Fig. 3)

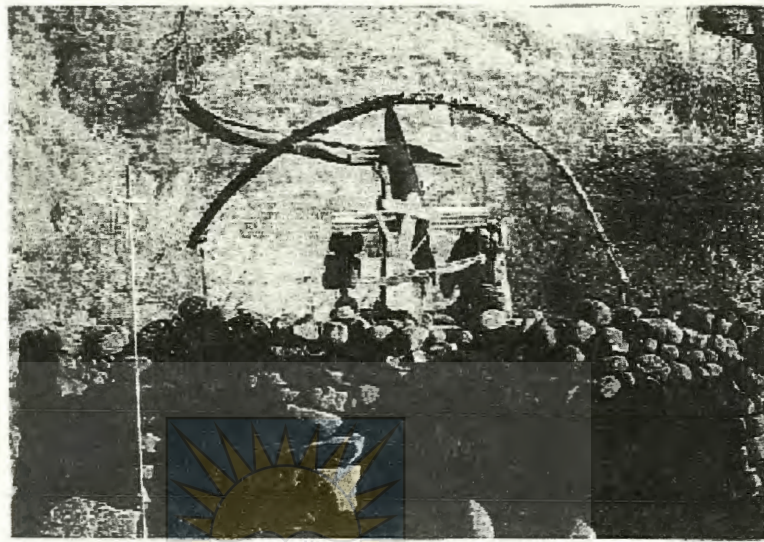
Jackson Hlungwani's interpretation of life and the expressions that he uses when he talks is a confirmation that he serves as a mediator between God and people. His sculptures revolve around the word of God. His two incomplete monumental sculptures, (Fig. 2) and (Fig. 3) that are lying in his yard at New Kanana, entitled *God* and *Jesus Christ* respectively, are good examples. The massive statue of God (Fig. 2) shows God, as Hlungwani perceives him to be. It is so colossal that one must climb onto it to view. These two sculptures are incomplete. When he was asked about their incompleteness, he said:

*"Modimo ke yena a tlogo bea nako ya gore difele"* (God is the one that knows when the sculpture of God and Christ will be completed)<sup>19</sup>. This statement is an indication that Jackson Hlungwani does not put himself first in what ever he does, God comes first and he serves as the messenger.

### GOD' S LEG WITH EGGS (Fig. 4)

This artwork is evidence of how God introduced himself to Hlungwani without exposing his entire body. Hlungwani said that although he saw God through the eyes of Jesus Christ, he could only see God's legs. He went on to say: *"Mae ke sesupo sa go ba gona ga batho ka ntle kgethologanya. Mae ke se supo sa gore batho ba swanetswe ke go fiwa thlompho yeo e feletsego gobane baswana le galase ba a thubega"* (Eggs are symbols of respecting other people that should be given equal treatment. People should be treated with care

<sup>19</sup> Video footage, interview with Jackson Hlungwani (New Kanana) 27/06/2003



*The Alter of Christ*



*The Arrival Forecourt.*

*A circular structure containing a shallow pit often used in healing rites*

*(Fig 1) Architectural Stone Building of New Jerusalem: Catalogue by curator Ricky Burnet: The Communication Department BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg 1989 page 13, 28*



*(Fig 3) Christ, Wood, New Kanana (South Africa)*



*(Fig 2) God, New Kanana (South Africa)*



*(Fig 4) God's Leg with Eggs, Wood: Catalogue by curator Ricky Burnet: The Communication Department BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg 1989 page 16*

because they are fragile). Hlungwani is encouraging people to love and respect one another in the community and church to sustain the will of God. "The marked foot is also a laming, a limiting hindrance, a frustration and a wound. The complex through which we gain our profoundest insight is also our greatest hindrance. One aspect is the native sensitivity through which we receive the Gods; another respect, however, continually hurts and may kill us."<sup>20</sup>

Jackson Hlungwani's sculpture see (Fig. 4) reflects an understanding of pain and frustration; having experienced being paralysed when the devil struck his legs with thorns. Hlungwani still bears the scars of terrible wounds on both legs, with the right one having a small wound in the middle of the scar. Through observation, his leg is still painful although he does not complain. He limps as he walks. Hlungwani exaggerated the form and the size of both the leg and the eggs without defining details or trying to be realistic. The leg is simplified and the toes are left out. The leg and eggs are rough in texture to sustain strong aesthetic qualities of form.

"The relationship between this sculpture and Hlungwani's own 'wound' leg is unavoidable. I knew God through Christ as his son. I saw both God and Christ with my own eyes not through Visions. Christ exposed God though I could not see his whole body but legs only"<sup>21</sup>.

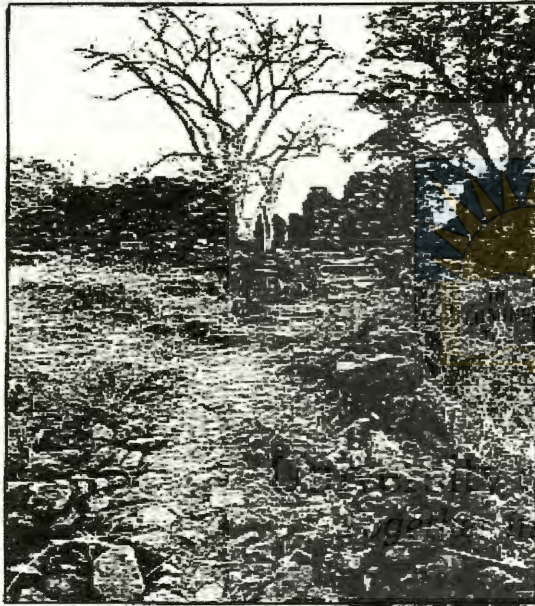
#### STONE BUILDING OF NEW JERUSALEM (FIG. 5)

Hlungwani made a collection of sculptures that were exhibited in New Jerusalem. New Jerusalem became known as Jackson Hlungwani's Art Museum. Apart from being utilised as a dwelling place and Museum it was also used as a place in which to train artists. Hlungwani established his own church (Yesu Galeliya One Aposto in Sayoni Alt and Omega in 1958) at New Jerusalem.

In order to transform New Jerusalem and accommodate his needs, he built stone-walls around the yard. He divided the place into different purposes. The sequential chapels and aisles are evidence of his architectural creativity: Reception rooms, prayer rooms, healing rooms, rooms for the sick and many more. New Jerusalem became known as the place

<sup>20</sup> Burnett.R 1989: 24 Puer Papers, Jackson Hlungwani exhibition Catalogue: Communication Department, BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg.

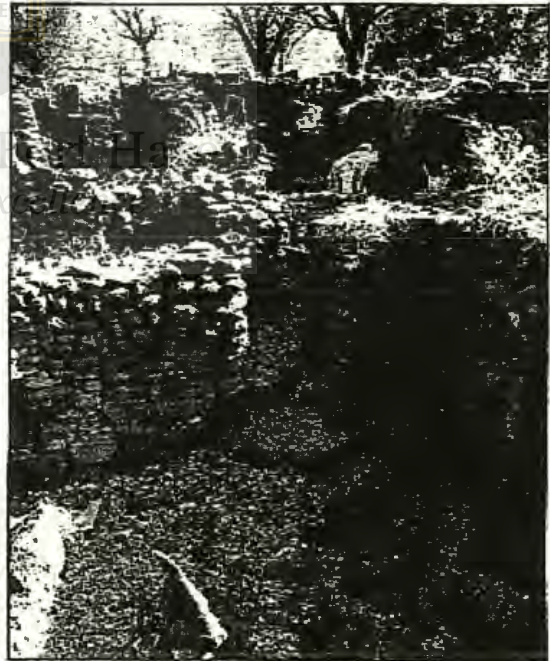
<sup>21</sup> Burnett.R 1989: 25 Puer Papers, Jackson Hlungwani exhibition Catalogue: Communication Department, BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg.



*The ascent.*



*Dwelling and reception area.*



*A view over Christ's office towards the chapel area.*

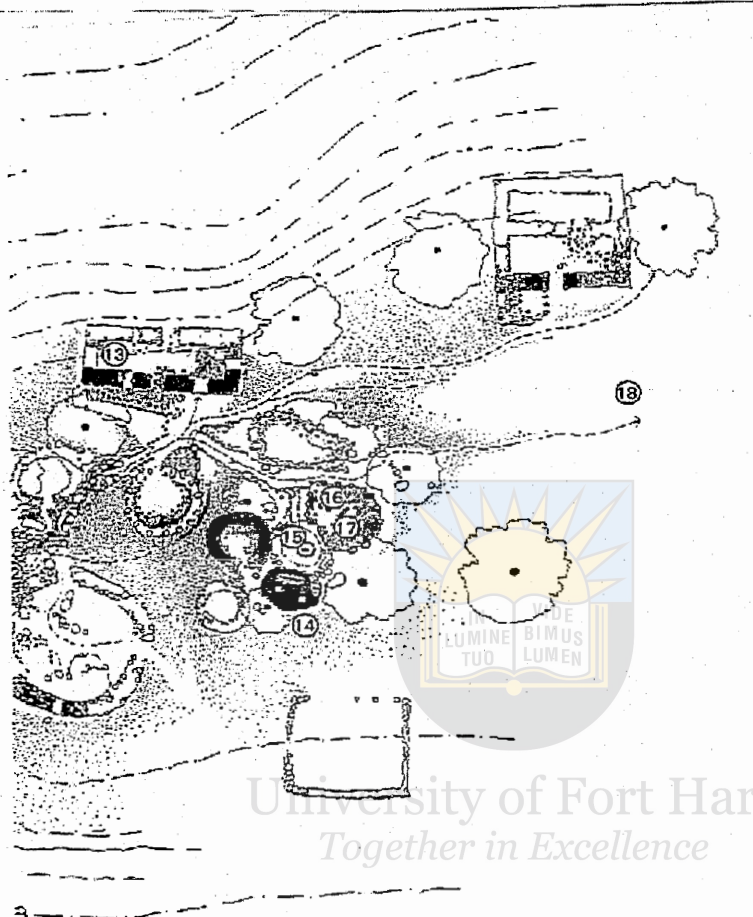


*Inside Christ's office.*

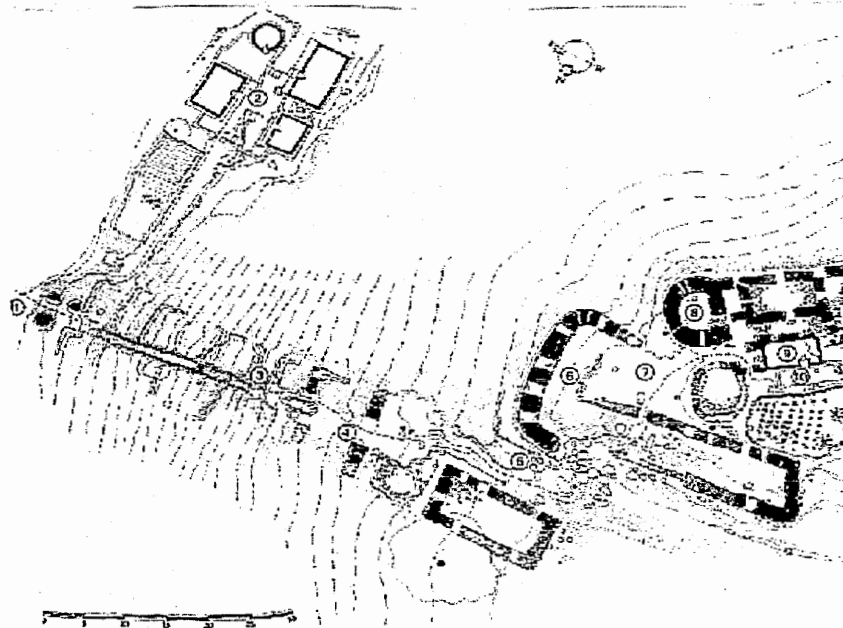
*(Fig 5) Architectural Stone Building of New Jerusalem: Catalogue by curator Ricky Burnet: The Communication Department BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg 1989 page 28,29*

# The New Jerusalem

1. Entrance pylons.
2. Typical neighbourhood  
Tsonga homestead.
3. Stone ramp.
4. Multiple entrance pylons.
5. Ante chamber.
6. The Healing Rooms.
7. Acropolis arrival forecourt.
8. Christ's Office.
9. The Labyrinth
10. Storage room.
11. Bedroom.
12. The Dual Route—the sunken passage.
13. Workshop.
14. The Altar of Christ.
15. The Chapel.
16. The Altar of God.
17. The Aerial of God.
18. Route of the Temple of Jupiter and  
Golgotha.



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for healing and worship. Later, Jackson Hlungwani's family moved to New Kanana in 1980 not far from New Jerusalem. After Ricky Burnett discovered him, his sculptures were sold and left New Jerusalem. New Jerusalem as it stands today is purely the church for men where Hlungwani is the pastor, priest and healer.

#### 4.1. JACKSON HLUNGWANI'S CHOICE OF THEME AND SUBJECT MATTER

Jackson Hlungwani's spirituality overarches his entire life. It is impossible to talk about him as an individual and exclude his spirituality. It is through his spirituality that he is unique and different from other people. When he is spirituality influenced, it is difficult to understand him.

"The sculptures are inspired by religion and by experience - the monumental fish, the angels and crucifixes which are incorporated into the acropolis, and which will never sell. One cannot sell Christ, Hlungwani says, but his intimacy with religious personages is such that he can depict Christ as a soccer player"<sup>22</sup>.

This statement is supported when one sees his famous sculpture entitled, *Christ Playing Football* (Fig. 7) The choice of subject matter is an indication of the freedom with which he attaches meaning to a Biblical context. *Christ Playing Football* does not appear anywhere in the Bible. This subject is his personal interpretation of life. Hlungwani attaches meaning to his sculptures to show his commitment and association with his art works. (Refer to the video footage about God and Jesus Christ).

#### 4.2. JACKSON HLUNGWANI'S CREATION OF FORM/SHAPE, SIZE AND SPACE

The shape of a piece of wood guides his form. He studies the shape of wood before he starts carving. He associates a block of wood with what he is going to create. He reveals the form as the wood guides him and end ups with interesting sculptures. He does not over work his sculptures. His artworks show freedom, self-esteem and satisfaction. His approach is unique in terms of technique, choice of subject matter and how he ends up with the final presentation of the product.

*Angel Gabriel* (Fig. 6) is an example of how he enjoys using the form of the wood. For this he studied the shape of the wood. This sculpture is standing on its feet, leaving space

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<sup>22</sup> Cohen, L. 1993: 17,18,27,30 Looking at Contemporary South African Sculpture [Jackson Hlungwani Resource Book]: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

between the legs. He took advantage of the wood itself to shape the legs. He is creative and knew what to do hence his final product presentation.

Hlungwani created space and movement. *Adam and the Birth of Eve* (Fig. 11) lie on the ground at New Jerusalem. One can see how original branches of the wood were carved creatively into gigantic legs. The gigantic legs are carved to suit the body. The upper branches were carved into arms. You can see that: "His forms are monumental symbols of a highly personal kind"<sup>23</sup>.

Hlungwani's sculptures range from small to monumental. His collection in Johannesburg Art Gallery and the incomplete sculptures at his home in New Kanana serve as good examples of how he is not restricted by size. He preserves the form of the wood and allows the natural grains to be touched by the viewers.

The sculpture *Adam and the Birth of Eve* (Fig. 11) is one example of where Jackson Hlungwani has created a strong effect of quality and strength. The monumental size of this sculpture is connected to God and his ancestral spirits. It also indicates the greatness of both God and ancestors. The monumental size suggests the extraordinary power of the mind, spirituality and courage in reaching the highest level in communicating with God and the ancestors through art. The monumental size recognises and glorifies the presence and greatness of God and ancestors. The monumental size also indicates the fulfilment of the spirituality guided through creativity. It is evident that: "Jackson Hlungwani and Noria Mabasa are crafts people who have pushed back the boundaries of their creativity and made large wooden sculptural images"<sup>24</sup>.

His monumental sculptures should be exhibited outdoors. They should be kept at the open venue in New Jerusalem where they were meant to remain. They were created for spiritual purposes and to communicate with the ancestral spirit. The sculptures at New Jerusalem are enriched by the architectural stonewalls. Charlotte Schaer, (director of the Curriculum Development Project (CDP)), suggests that the removal of Hlungwani's work from New Jerusalem, the place where they were created and meant to stay, is deeply regretted by Hlungwani. She says "certainly their placement within the confines of gallery spaces decontextualises and crowds them. Even those who have not been as privileged to witness them under an open sky of New Jerusalem, feel isolated."

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<sup>23</sup> Hunter O. 1992: 24 Art in Outline: Oxford University Press.

Charlotte Schaer expressed concern about the agreement, which may have been entered into to allow the removal of the works from New Jerusalem. She went on to say “This view is potentially disrespectful to Hlungwani’s integrity, visionary power and clarity of intention, as this view risks reducing his status as artist and spiritual leader to one of victimhood and disempowerment.”

Ruth Sack and Silas Malapane, the Art subject head at the East Rand School of the Arts, also indicate that Jackson Hlungwani’s works in Art Galleries like Johannesburg, Wits, etc. have lost meaning to Hlungwani himself and to the public at large because they were created to remain at the New Jerusalem and thereby serve their own profound spiritual purposes.

Silas Malapane said: “It is of no use to remove Hlungwani’s sculptures from New Jerusalem and put them in the buildings so that they lose value because they have lost their spiritual reflection. It is of no use to part Hlungwani from his sculptures because he remains with his spirituality that guided him to create them at New Jerusalem”.

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According to them, Hlungwani’s sculptures lost value and meaning once they had left New Jerusalem. The sculptures miss the accurate interpretations and spiritual reflection they once had at New Jerusalem, as their place of origin, with ancestors and the enriching stonewall building.

### 4.3. JACKSON HLUNGWANI’S QUALITY OF SCULPTURES AND UNDERSTANDING OF PROPORTION AND APPROACH

“His work is the fruit of inborn artistic sensitivity, revealed to him through the divine vision in 1978.”<sup>25</sup>

The originality and creativity of his work does not come from him but from God, the Holy Spirit and Messiah, the greatest teacher. Looking at Jackson Hlungwani’s work and how he approach individual sculptures, how he does not struggle to create images. He does not claim to be special in terms of his lifestyle as a spiritual being and artist, he is

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<sup>24</sup> Cohen, L. 1993: 17,18,27,30 S Looking at Contemporary South African Sculpture [Jackson Hlungwani Resource Book]: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

<sup>25</sup> Burnett.R 1989: 35 Puer Papers. Jackson Hlungwani Exhibition Catalogue: Communication Department, BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg.

communicating the message of God through his artwork. He is used like an angel to put a message across.

Hlungwani explored this theme in *Angel Gabriel* (Fig. 6) extensively by carving several sculptures to emphasise the importance of the messenger. Hlungwani seeks to communicate the important role of the messenger in the religious context. It is through messengers that God is able to respond to the different prayers and requests of his people. Jackson Hlungwani's angels are messengers accepting of the good news. His angels show his personality and creativity.

#### ANGEL GABRIEL 1 (Fig. 6)

*Angel Gabriel* (1) is reduced to a young man, characterised by a suppressed strength and vigour, yet he is a messenger. The sculpture is symmetrical. It shows rigidity and stiffness that limit movement. The artist does not consider proportion. There is no neck. It appears to be out of proportion. The torso is exaggerated with elongation. It is firm and stiff in posture.

The choice of the title is biblical as are most of his sculptures. The angel looks different to the one in the Bible. The first characteristics of an Angel are its wings, which Hlungwani did not consider. His angel is liberated from Biblical description of forms. *Angel Gabriel* is shown standing, youthful with simple stylistic depiction of features that do not resemble naturalistic or real features. The hat is in three steps from top to bottom to suggest the style or fashion that increases at the base in order to cover the round head. The hat protrudes strongly to suggest a helmet protecting the head. The forehead is frowned to suggest fear. The ears are simple and out of proportion.

"The angular bi-planar nose and the low-slung waist with a consequently long torso are features of much of his figurative work and are echoes of a figurative carving style indigenous to the region in which he lives. Traditional, figurative is ascribed to the Tsonga or Thonga and Nguni groups, many of which, are, housed in Europe museums, are unfortunately, infrequently seen in South Africa and rarely featured in publications"<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Burnett.R 1989: 36 Puer Papers, Jackson Hlungwani Exhibition Catalogue: Communication Department, BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg.



*(Fig 6) Angel Gabriel 1, Wood: Catalogue by curator Ricky Burnet: The Communication Department BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg 1989 page 34*

The angular nose protrudes sufficiently to suggest well-balanced composition of the eyes. The closed lips show quietness. There is a strong line that embraces these features placed at the lower level of the cheeks and chin to suggest a facemask (to change identity). The Angel is clothed. He is wearing a garment that looks like a jacket, decorated with draperies. The edge of the jacket is decorated with knobs or beads, illustrating the stylistic beauty of the cultural clothing of Tsonga people. In the right hand the Angel is holding a long knife facing downwards to guard against any threat from viewers.

Holding any object is a cultural indication of manhood in African tribes. This figure is wearing a decorative tie. One might misinterpret the Angel for a soldier in heavy armed protection. On his back the Angel carries luggage to suggest that he was travelling for a while. The heavy shoes protrude from a pair of trousers. The trousers are divided into two.

#### CHRIST PLAYING FOOTBALL (Fig. 7)

Hlungwani shows that religion is not only for the elderly; even a young soccer star could be invited to play with Christ. Hlungwani brought Christ to the level of human beings by allowing him play soccer (football), soccer is the biggest sport in the world. He used sculpture to help the young stars to understand soccer.

Christ is shown as an adult playing football. This symbolises leadership, and power. The artist is realistic in terms of posture and composition. The sculpture shows proper observation of a professional football player. The player is full of movement, concentration and has control of the ball between his feet. The eyes of the player are on the ball to exercise ownership, without the intention of passing it over to someone.

The carving of facial features and sports gear shows that Jackson Hlungwani has good command of his tools. Christ is out of proportion with an exaggerated elongated torso to emphasise movement. His legs are thick and distorted. The figure is clothed in sports gear attire, which is relevant and appropriate for the game. Although the figure shows plenty of movement, the attire remains stiff. There are no draperies and folds to suggest flexibility.

Consequently the artist was able to define the size of the gear appropriately, to show his control of wood and carving tools. Jackson attempt to overlap the jersey on the pair of



*(Fig 7) Christ Playing Football, Wood: Catalogue by curator Ricky Burnet: The Communication Department BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg 1989 page 37*

trousers is limited by his media. The right arm balancing a pair of trousers while the left arm swings to suggest movement.

Facial features are stylised. They emphasise the simplicity and shapes. The composition is proportionate in terms of space and balance. The face has an exaggerated elongated jaw, a long chin, a protruding mouth with closed lips, which suggest quietness, a big long nose, medium open eyes and a baldhead for an old Christ. The bow-legged sculpture creates space and reveals the form. The feet are not detailed. The toes are simplified. These legs are tightly holding the ball, shielding it from opponents to indicate the dribbling artistry. But this is an ordinary person who can be identified by the features of the Nguni nationality because of the head being tilted as a sign of respect.

Hlungwani might have been influenced by religious pictures of Christ known to him, in particular a copy of the Last Supper by Leonard Da Vinci hanging on his bedroom wall. However, the facial features of *Christ Playing Football* are different from the Christ in the Last Supper (by Leonard Da Vinci) dressed in full garments dominating centre stage of the table as if he alone gives instructions. *Christ playing Football* is a reflection of enigmatic and poignant imagery duly interpreted in the artist's statement. The shape of the head is reflective of the Byzantine period. The body reflects Cubism, while the world of football is Jackson Hlungwani's playful comment on and interpretation of religion to suit the present life style as observed.

Jackson Hlungwani imposes no limitations upon exposing his life style and sufferings to his viewers and visitors. This is not for people to sympathise but for them have knowledge of where he comes from as a religious or spiritual person. This self-introduction helps people to change their mind-set and to consider him as an individual with his own experience and practices of life.

It is through his physical exposure that one is able to relate some of his sculptures, which illustrates suffering, pain, poverty, oppression and endurance, to his real life. In *Little Daniel* (Fig. 17) and *God and Christ* (Fig. 18) one is also able to detect how he integrates religion with his Tsonga culture without compromise.

Hlungwani uses different ways to depict dramatic sculptural composition by putting many pieces together to create specific scenes, which conform to his uncompromising original thinking. The *Altar of God* (Fig. 8) at the University of Witwatersrand is one of his most

remarkable sculptural compositions that steers the mind of the viewer and also challenges religious text and knowledge.

“The *Altar of God* is unconventional in its treatment of a Christian scene. Not all the characters have a biblical or ecumenical origin, and their combination does not fulfil any established programme.”<sup>27</sup>

The characters depicted by Jackson Hlungwani play different roles in the biblical dramatic context. Jackson Hlungwani used this composition in the church to explain a biblical message to his followers.

Hlungwani differentiated between his characters by means of forms associated with specific characters in the bible as associated with specific names; e.g Cain, Abel and Gabriel.

The composition is dominated by the figure of Christ with a disc-plow halo and hollow eyes. This piece is dressed in a long garment with draperies. Christ is a humble figure, quiet and focused to reflect his dignity, strength and command of power. His facial features are simplified, stylised and convey a sense of proportional balance.

#### ALTAR OF GOD (Fig. 8)

Hlungwani has placed the tall figure of Cain with a shield next to Christ. Tied to the silver and red element on the God structure is a small figure of Abel, which can be interpreted as the messenger. The facial features, enormous geometric forms, differentiate it from others. The sculpture of Gabriel stands in front as the warrior with outstretched right arm carrying a shield, of self-defence on his left arm. Behind Gabriel is a figure of Seth with two tablets in his hands.

The artist included smaller figures of Shangaan warriors to show the importance of his cultural reflection in his art and also as an indication of recognition and the retention of traditional activities. On the left, Hlungwani shows Jonah's fish as a symbol of peace and stability. It is of fundamental importance to view this dramatic religious composition as a holistic collection in order to understand the intentions of the artist rather than concentrate on the individual images.



*(Fig 8) Alter of God, Mix media: Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)  
Contemporary Art of Africa by Andre Magnin and Jacques Soulillou, 1995: Thames and  
Hudson page 39*

Hlungwani shares his religious understanding and freedom of expression, through his passion and dedication to serve God. He is challenging biblical scholars and professionals with his dramatic scene (Fig. 8) that has no reference to religious statements. However one should consider the fact that though Jackson Hlungwani focuses on religious dramatic elements and scenes, his work remains simple art creation.

“His work is a reflection of sublimating poverty and oppression; it also depicts a continuous coming and going between Judeo-Christian and African traditions.”<sup>28</sup>

This dramatic composition is remarkable evidence of the diversity of Jackson Hlungwani’s approach to art and religion. It is disturbing and challenging to accept this sculptural composition, considering it is misplaced, as one should not view the Altar of God in Johannesburg at the Wits Art Gallery but rather at New Jerusalem (Mbhokota) where it was created to serve the purpose of its spirituality and its connection to Hlungwani, as a spiritual being. This sculpture is in the forefront of his communication with God and his ancestors. To put it under a roof, in contrast with New Jerusalem, its place of origin, is to undermine both its artistic and spiritual purposes.

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Jackson Hlungwani's artworks in both Johannesburg and Wits Art Gallery are placed on glittering tile floors enclosed and embraced by painted walls, under artificial lighting. The environment gives his works a different perspective altogether and actually they lose their purpose. However, one understands that through business and ownership Jackson Hlungwani’s artwork has gained exposure.

Jackson Hlungwani's sculptures are however created for spiritual purposes only. As seen in the video footage where Charlotte Schaer and Silas Malapane raised concerns about the removal of Hlungwani’s sculptures from New Jerusalem and the relocation of them to the modern buildings such as the Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Wits Art Gallery in Johannesburg.

#### ALTAR OF GOD (Fig. 9)

This piece of wood is not touched at all; it is still in its natural form in order to resemble nature and to suit the surrounding stonewalls construction. The artist fastened semi-circular wood with strings of different colour as a symbol of Christianity belonging to his

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<sup>27</sup> Magnin. 1995: 99 A Contemporary Art of Africa: Thames and Hudson, Soulillou. J

<sup>28</sup> Magnin. 1995: 99 A Contemporary Art of Africa: Thames and Hudson, Soulillou. J



*(Fig 9) Alter of God (ii), Mix media: Contemporary Art of Africa by Magnin A and Soulillou J. Thames and Hudson 1995 page 99*

church. Apostolic Christians believe strings are tied to suggest bonding to Christianity. Members of Hlungwani's church tie the strings around their waist, arms and legs. Hlungwani as the pastor use them as a reflection of Christianity and so to do his followers.

At the bottom of stonewall, the artist put a fish as a symbol of peace. The artist took advantage of the shape of wood to carve a tiger fish. Fish are an important element to Jackson Hlungwani's art because he has carved them repeatedly. The artist placed a number of small sculptures on the right, next to the burned wood, which at this stage is the focal point of this composition. These sculptures are placed in such a way as to create a sense of balance.

Though Hlungwani carved from a monolithic piece of wood, he successfully depicted different creatures to create harmony and expression. Two birds are carved side by side to create balance. They are stylised and simplified, with little detail. One might suggest that it is the Holy Spirit coming in the form of doves. Below the birds is a cross, set (in the middle) to emphasise Christianity and to identify Christ as in Renaissance robes suggesting priest dress.

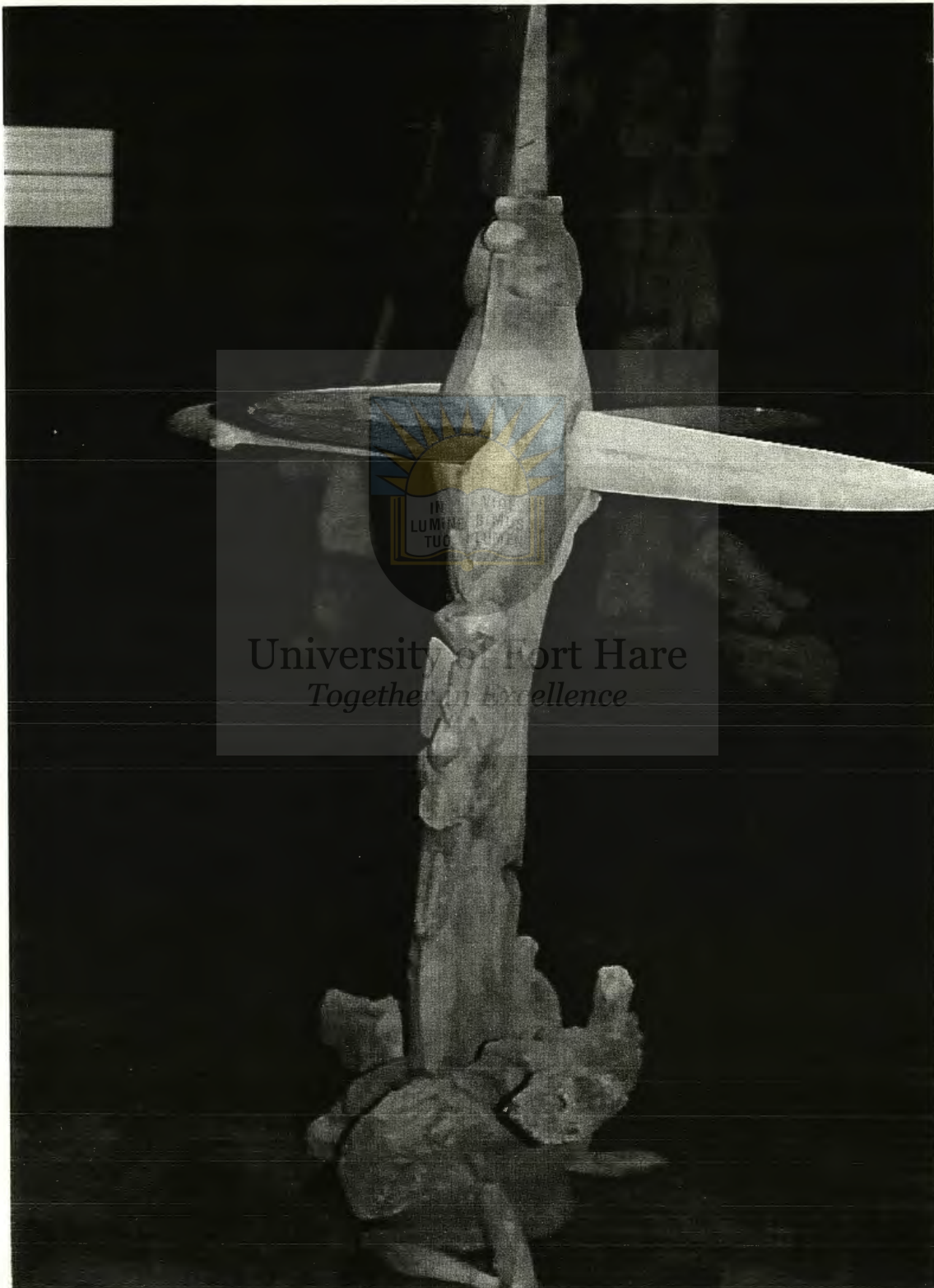
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The base of (Fig. 9) is decorated with an iconic ornamental structure that grows in steps from top to bottom. The base is over worked with a smooth texture to contrast with the sculpture. The artist placed another piece of sculpture in the semi-circular arch with a bold (human) head as the focal point. The head is deeply carved on the side to suggest hair. The facial features are stylised and deeply carved to give the impression of the developmental process as the reflection of existence without details.

At the bottom is the cross, carved in high relief with other elements. The artist combines high relief technique around the sculpture. Hlungwani constructed a cross with shining metal plates in the semi-circular arch, by nailing it onto the old timber. The sides of the cross are attached to sharp metals (on the base). These sharp elements are made from the same metal plate as the cross. The composition suggests the Altar of God is the Holy place of worship.

### MICHAEL STAR (Fig. 10)

Jackson Hlungwani has the freedom to express himself without limiting his sculptures to size. He does not anticipate his artworks being for sale, e.g *God and Christ* (Fig18). Some of the buyers could have problems in accommodating some of his sculptures.



(Fig 10) Michael Star, Wood, 178 X 115,5 X 116 cm, Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)

*Michael Star* is 404 x 142 x 120 cm in size. As seen in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, it would seem as if it determined the size of the room because of its perfect harmony and balance with the other sculptures. This is a well thought out space to accommodate this sculpture. The artwork should not be seen in isolation, it also forms part of the Gallery's collection.

The sculpture *Michael Star* (Fig. 10) serves, as an indication of Jackson Hlungwani shift from carving single monolithic pieces to abstract work. The accurate definition and presentation of the sculpture reflects the artist's structure of fine details and the size of the star.

*Michael Star* (Fig. 10) wears a smooth texture to express mood and appreciation of the final presentation. The Star displays the artist's ability to carve single pieces of wood and later join them to create a holistic piece of sculpture.

The star has needle sharp arms stretched in different directions. The body is screwed with four long protruding sharp edge elements jutting into space to suggest propulsion of movement into space. The bottom part is long and irregular because of the high relief symbols that complement the quality and form of the Star. This is the Star that directed the three wise men from the East to the place in Bethlehem to acknowledge the birth of Jesus Christ. The light reflection on the sculpture is an indication of the holiness and blessings of the Christians in the world. The star is a symbol of peace and stability and assurance to Christianity.

"With Jackson Hlungwani's artwork we finally confront the most enigmatic and poignant image in his exhibition"<sup>29</sup>

The sculpture, *Adam and the birth of Eve* (Fig. 12) are a good example of how a sculpture can reflect sadness rather than happiness. This piece of work is monumental in scale. It is not confined to an internal exhibition. To him, nature has no limitation, hence the open-air sculpture exhibition at New Jerusalem (before it was dismantled).

#### ADAM AND THE BIRTH OF EVE (Fig. 11)

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<sup>29</sup> Burnett.R. 1989: 18 Puer Papers. Jackson Hlungwani exhibition Catalogue: Communication Department, BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg 1989.



(Fig 11) Adam and the Birth of Eve, Wood, 404 X 142 X 87 cm, Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)

According to the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, God created the universe, the earth and the living things in six days. On the sixth day, God created the first human beings, Adam and Eve. Biblical text goes further to indicate that God created Adam first, and while Adam was asleep; he created Eve out of his rib.

Hlungwani carved *Adam and the birth of Eve* (Fig 11). This is the symbol of God's love to mankind and the unity among South African peoples. The sculpture carries eggs in both hands as a symbol of fragility, which refers to kind treatment of others. The artist is also bringing Ubuntu, the principle of sharing and cultural awareness, as associated with Africans. The sculpture is without finer details. It is abstract and does not attempt to reflect the human figure. Facial features are incised with simplicity to suggest an awareness of observation. Ears are circular in shape, while the hair is carved in a few straight lines.

The sculpture is distorted, the arms are small and hang above the waist. The form of the original wood influenced Jackson Hlungwani. He differentiated parts of the body by mere carving of form with reference to the torso, waist and the lower limbs. Adam is in a short pair of trousers. Eve's head is seen to be coming out of Adam's head with hollow eyes gazing downward as if she is going to fall. The sculpture is not over-worked and displays the colour of the wood.

The flowing grains add to the quality and form of the sculpture itself. This piece is unique as it displays the confidence, strength and power of the artist's creation. The sculpture shows the natural form of the wood even though some areas are transformed by means of carving. There is no indication of movement. *Adam and the birth of Eve* is rigid and stiff. The legs are suggested by medium cuts that do not change their position at all. Feet are exaggerated in size to balance it. The size of the sculpture does not allow it to stand on its own. Consequently the Gallery supports it with a chain on the head mounted it to the wall to keep it from falling.

The monumental feet are fitted with sandals and straps. Jackson Hlungwani interprets the creation of Adam as different from Eve. She is seen to be coming from the legs rather than the rib as indicated in the Bible text. At the bottom of both legs is the reflection of feet that appear to be under developed, stylised, and incomplete. The artist created contrasting tones by leaving some chisel/adze and axe marks while other parts are rasped to create different tones adding to the quality of this piece of artwork (Refer to the video footage for details of this sculpture.)



(Fig 12) *Tiger Fish* (1987 – 1989), Wood, 94 X 470 X 26 cm, Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)

## TIGER FISH (Fig. 12)

Jackson Hlungwani's fish is simple in style. He carves form nature and deals with the finer details of the eyes, scales, tail, fins and lateral fins. The artist also carves naturalistic abstract fish using the advantage of the shape of wood. The *Tiger Fish* (Fig 12) displayed in the Johannesburg Art Gallery, was left with some parts not carved.

This is an indication of Jackson Hlungwani's creative skills. The texture of the wood is left in its original form, not disturbed by an axe or adze to enhance the vibrant strong quality of tones or to explore the naturalistic wood grains and colour. Hlungwani is able to work in different sizes. *Tiger Fish* carved between 1987-1989 is 94 x 470 cm. The large swimming fish carved between 1989-1990 is 11 x 256 x 35,5 cm. These are good examples of his monumental sculpture. "His sculptural literacy is further evidenced by the ease with which he shifts focus from piece to piece, from the horizontal axis in the fish to the vertical axis in the figures and thrones, from the monumental in *Adam and the birth of Eve*".<sup>30</sup>

*God and Christ* (Fig. 2 and 3) are still under creation at his home in New Kanana (Mbhokota), Northern Province. He also carves symbolic iconic items with irregular shapes to show his dynamic complexity in his quest to express his creativity.

Jackson Hlungwani concentrated on Christ during his trial and death, as depicted through his crucifixion. Christ's death is the fulfilment of God's will. He wished his blood to be spilt in order for the nation to be saved, so that people can have everlasting life if only they believe. Hlungwani viewed this topic in differing contexts and perspectives and that is why he carved many crucifixions, with differing expression of pain.

The *Large Crucifix* (Fig. 13) in the Johannesburg Art Gallery is one example of how he tackled this topic. The artist brings forth a simplified Christ without naturalistic details of his features. "Hlungwani seldom emphasises the sufferings on the cross. The bearer and the cross are inseparable. In *Large Crucifix* the horizontal bar of the cross is flexed with the upward sweep of the arms. This movement, which is sustained by the upper part of the body, circumscribes an opening roughly simulating the shape of a heart".<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Burnett .R 1989: 48 Art Calendar 7: Communication Department, BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg.

<sup>31</sup> Burnett .R. 1989: 49 Art Calendar 7: Communication Department, BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg.

Christ is depicted in an abstract bulky form, rigid and without life and movement. Features of the face are stylised, and exaggerated size with no expression of pain and death. The eyes are bold, wide open with sparkling stars to show power and identity. The star hanging on the left arm supports this. The figure of Christ is frontal and symmetrical in pose. His body parts are distorted, to emphasise the expression and sympathy. On the forehead is the cross, the symbol of Christianity an identification of Christ.

The legs are even and bulky in size. They are also rigid and straight showing no life or movement. Both feet are nailed to the cross to symbolise the pain and death. To suggest different parts of the body the artist used deep carving around to the torso, waist and joints of the legs.

### LARGE CRUCIFIX (Fig. 13)

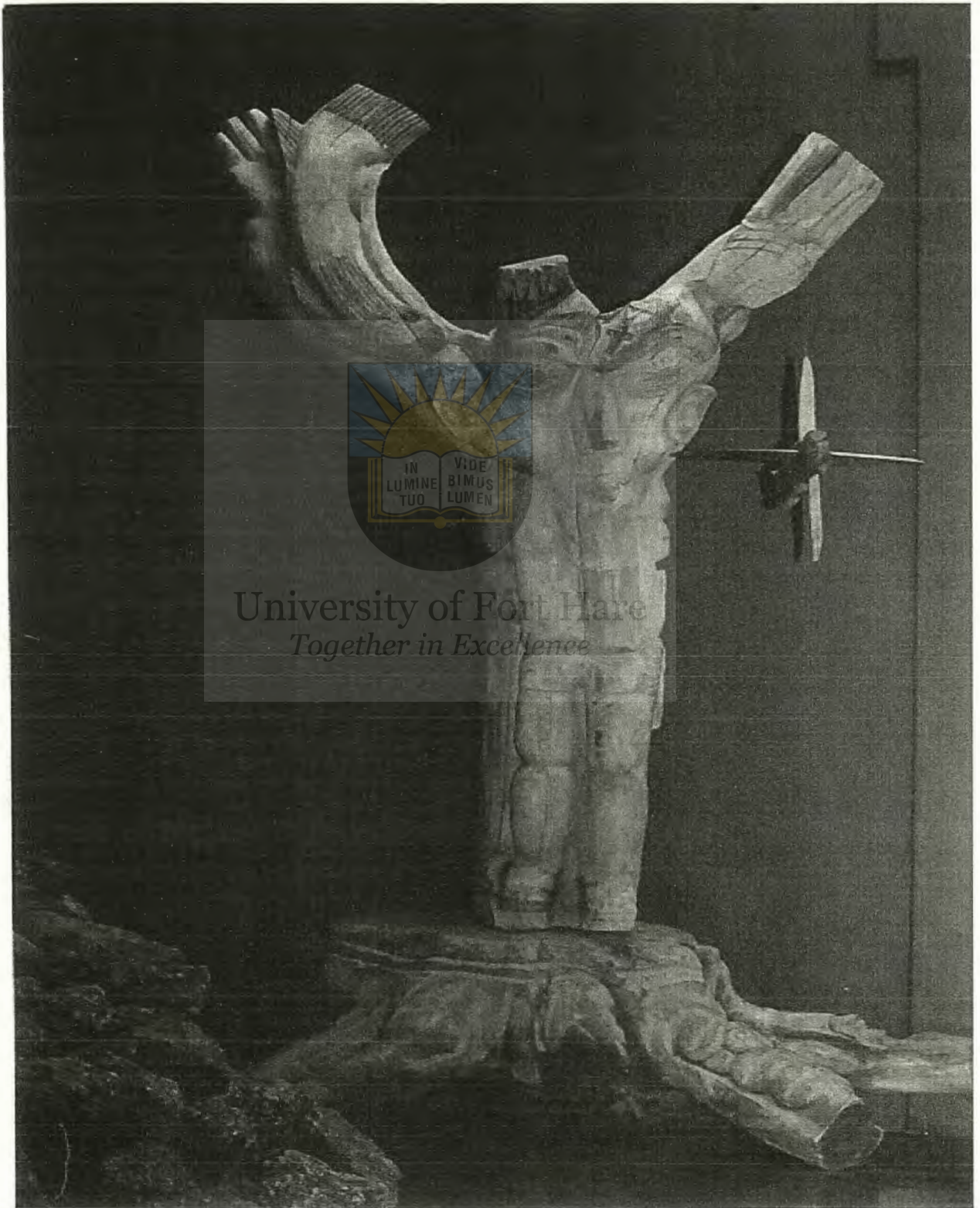
Hlungwani carved two crucifixes with two criminals. These pieces are not finished. They are both stylised and abstract. The one on the left appears to be complete according to Hlungwani. While the other criminal, is still at an early stage of defining shape. It is bulky in form and there is little definition between different parts of the body.

He has carved many iconic cultural symbols around the base. These are Tsonga traditional artefacts. The artist left parts of his sculpture uncarved to retain the natural texture of the grains and colour of the wood.

### CRUCIFIX (Fig. 14)

Unlike most of Jackson Hlungwani's sculptures, in *Crucifix* (Fig. 14) the artist emphasised proportion. He has defined different parts of the body. *Crucifix's* head (Fig. 14) is tilted to the left to symbolise tiredness. This may also be an indication of Christ dying as his body is stiff. The artist has captured facial expressions and a sense of endurance of severe pain. The eyes are tightly stylised and tightly closed as a confirmation that Christ is dead and that the body is not living.

*Crucifix's* head is wearing a crown, an indication that Christ is the Son of God. The deflated limbs are evidence of the starvation, torment and struggle that resulted in death. The knees are bent to suggest the body is alive. Both legs are well attached in terms of form, size and positioning. The feet are overlapped and joined by a nail as depicted in the Bible. The artist combined both synthetic and analytical techniques of carving. He carved



*(Fig 13) Large Crucifix (c1990) Wood, 23 X 12 cm, Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)*



*(Fig 14) Crucifix, Wood, Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)*

the outstretched arms separately and later joined them with nails to form part of the body. The other parts are carved of a solid block of wood.

The anguished, bared Christ, is represented naked except for the loincloth tied around his waist, his feet crossed and pinned with a single nail. These parallels are useful in that the subject is easily recognisable, but they also help to mark other aspects and inclusions as creative additions. In Hlungwani's crucifixion scene neither the cross nor the nail are represented and the starkly isolated form alone carries as the main subject. These are not simple abbreviations but rather concentrations of significant forms. The arms are bent at the elbow in a gesture more akin to that of blessing than crucifixion.

Strings are fastened around the arms and cross the torso. The string's knots should not be seen as reinforcing of bondage that is holding the body of Christ. Above the head of the Crucifix the artist carved a bird in the form of a dove with great accuracy. The dove symbolises the presence of the Holy Spirit, as depicted in the Bible. The Holy Spirit in the form of a dove is the confirmation of Christ as the Son of God.

The colour of the Crucifix has been affected by unfriendly weather at New Jerusalem. The *Crucifix* is greyish in colour with deep grains that seem to be steadily disappearing. This crucifixion expresses horror, pain, oppression, struggle, starvation, hunger and frustration.

#### UNTITLED (Fig. 15)

Apart from Hlungwani being influenced by his spirituality, his creativity has quite possibly been guided by external sources such as references, art books and magazines. If we refer to the untitled iconic symbolic sculpture, which appears on the out cover of the booklet "Vita Art Now" published by the Johannesburg Art Gallery, it can be seen that there is the possibility that the Egyptian Sphinxes influenced the artist because of his approach to its composition.

The sculpture resembles Egyptian Sphinxes. Combining two different forms: a lion's body with a human head. This icon also has a frontal symmetrical view. It reflects rigidity and inflexibility of movement. The lion carries a geometric symbolical element of power that is balanced by both the head and the long tail. The left front leg of the creature is extended towards the chest in order to symbolise balance and suggest a sense of unified composition.



*(Fig 15) Untitled, Wood: Vita Art Now, Cover page: Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)*

The features of the face are stylised and emphasise simplicity of shapes. The eyes are bold and wide open to form coherent balance and proportion with the nose. The artist did not make any attempt to carve these features to depict reality or nature. The artist carved wrinkles long stylised beard. The head is covered with a decorative hat that looks like a tower to kingship, power and greatness.

Jackson Hlungwani is not sure when the sculpture was made. The sculpture is unique with reference to the choice of religious themes. It also uses an abstract approach to texture that reveals the kinds of tools used and the quality of wood. Cultural elements in his sculptures and the retention of his monumental size emphasise the greatness of both God and the ancestors-as indicated by Silas Malapane. One is compelled to think about Pablo Picasso's unique style that was influenced by African sculptures. Their geometric features leading Picasso to create abstract art.

#### 4.4. CULTURE AND RELIGION

It is important to note that this artist does not date nor sign his sculptures.

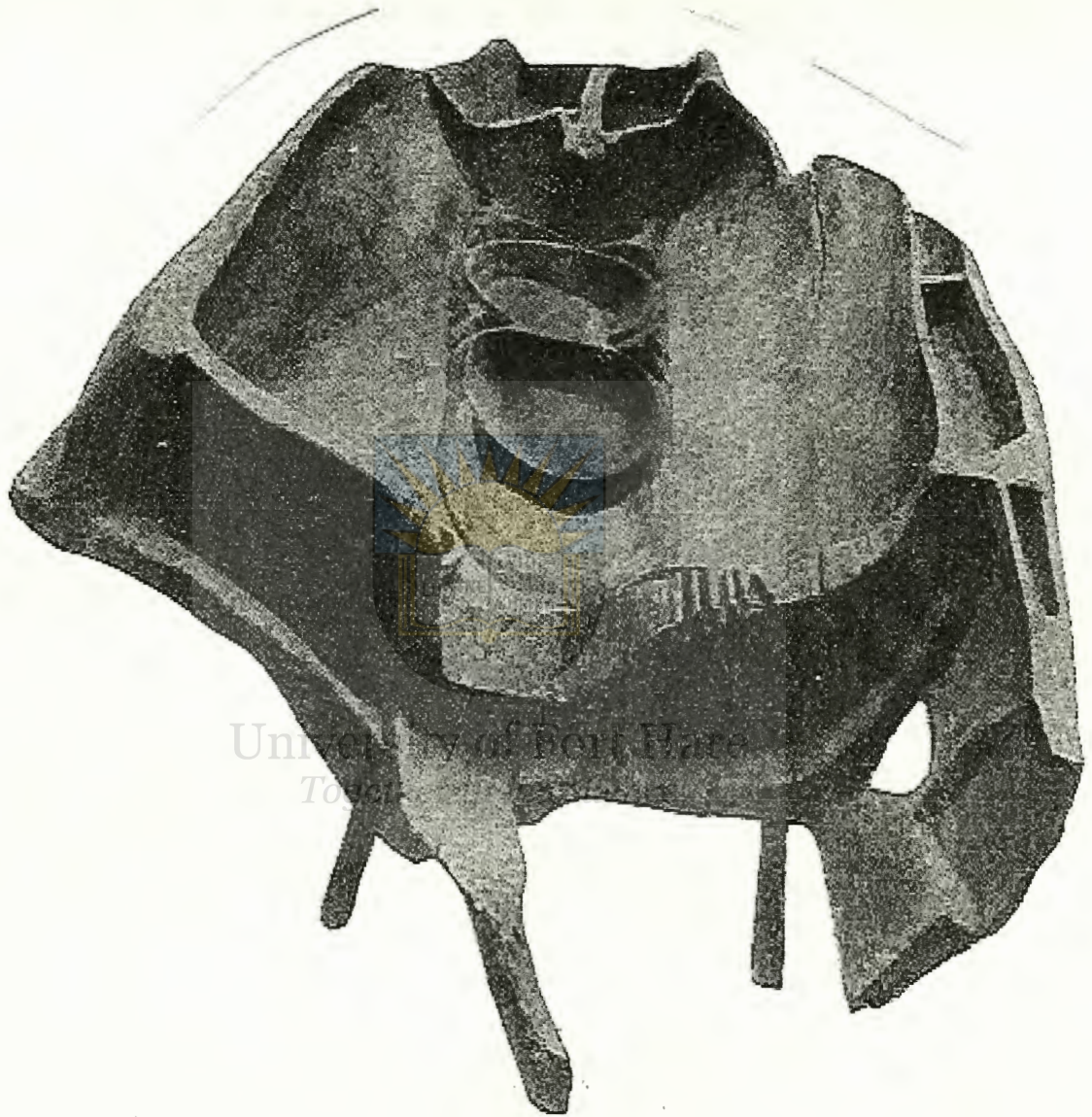
#### MBHESU (GROOT BLAARSDORING) (Fig. 16)

Hlungwani is committed to his background as an African, he is proud of his Tsonga culture. He exposes his culture through his art so that viewers can acknowledge his cultural background. The artwork titled *Mbhesu* is a symbol of cultural and communal identity and togetherness that show the ability to share. It is a reflection of the communal kraal where people sit and share love and humour. It shows an appreciation of the community in order to ensure tolerance and to appreciate culture.

The sculpture is on three legs, to resemble a three-legged pot used to cook African meal. Different partitions suggest that different meals were served. The artefact looks like a musical instrument that can be folded. It has two bowls in the middle. The shape of this piece reveals the artist's carving skill through his obvious control of materials and his carving tools. His carving is characterised by irregular geometric shapes. The sculpture reflects poverty and oppression, a place where people share from one source or dish.

#### LITTLE DANIEL (Fig. 17)

*Little Daniel* was donated to the Johannesburg Art Gallery, with instruction that the sculpture be allowed to be touched. It is the only artwork that people are allowed to touch in this gallery. Hlungwani is interacting with the public through his art. To him this piece



*(Fig 16) Mbhesu (Groot Blaarsdoring) Wood, 50 X 200 X 100 cm, Catalogue by curator Ricky Burnet: The Communication Department BMW (South Africa) Johannesburg 1989 page 51*



*(Fig 17) Little Daniel, Wood, Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)*

belongs to the people for appreciation. The sculpture has qualities of the Stone Age, with its stylised features. There is no attempt create realism. The eyes and eyebrows are simply incised with thin lines. The nose protrudes and does not seem to be part of the tilted flat face. The eyes, mouth and cheeks are on the same level. The tilted face seems to be staring at poverty in shock, frustration and depression.

The short arms are lifted to the head. They are an image of struggle and starvation. The torso and waist are of the same size with thick legs, which are out of proportion. The waist is covered with a garment associated with hunting or herd boys looking after livestock.

The skin covers the front only while the posterior are not covered. On the side Daniel is carrying a knobkerrie suspended from the waist by a belt. Around his neck is a geometric shape. His legs are bulky and rigid without movement. Both feet are without details. The sculpture is roughly finished.



#### GOD AND CHRIST (Fig. 18)

Jackson Hlungwani's dedication and discipline has given him strong spiritual motivation beyond his lifetime. Hlungwani claims to have seen God through Christ. He saw only his legs. This was neither a vision nor a dream because he was awake. God's head is tilted toward the left, while Christ's head is tilted towards the right.

The facial features were idealistic and exaggerated, to emphasise the power and strength of both God and Christ. The artist used geometric elements to describe their facial features. God's nose is elongated and broad while Christ's is small and sharp to match facial features. The two arms are way lifted half showing the inside of the palm as a symbol of blessings and welcome. The right hand is closed a sign of power and political unity.

The hands cover the mouth on each face. Carved birds form a relief on the head. They are confirmation of the presence of the Holy Spirit. According to Jackson, birds are an indication of the Holy Spirit. The chest is burned to highlight the grains. This is a traditional technique for changing the natural colour of wood. The legs are firm on the ground showing no movement and are symmetrical to the body to maintain balance.

In the foreground where the sculpture stands are stones taken from New Jerusalem. They are used in an attempt to connect the sculpture with Jackson Hlungwani's ancestral spirit



*(Fig 18) God and Christ, Wood, Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)*



*(Fig 18) God and Christ, Wood, Collection, Johannesburg Art Gallery (South Africa)*

in Limpopo. The stones have little impact. They do not transform the interior of the gallery to become New Jerusalem. Smooth tiles, walls and artificial lighting are contrary to nature, part of God's creation disturbed by human influences.



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## **Section 5 - JACKSON HLUNGWANI AND THE WIDER ART COMMUNITY**

Hlungwani confirms that it was between approximately 1952 and 1984 that he worked as a fulltime artist and produced a massive collection of sculptures at New Jerusalem. His sculptures were exhibited at New Jerusalem to fulfil the word of God. Jackson Hlungwani, as a believer stated that he knew in advance that his sculptures were to tour the world. His sculptures were meant to reach as many people as possible and spread the word of God. He stated that it was according God's plans that BMW South Africa came up with a special art project that exposed him to the entire world through Ricky Burnett who was then the advisor.

According to Hlungwani, meeting with Ricky was according to God's plan. Ricky Burnett was commissioned by BMW South Africa to look for artists with great potential to participate in an exhibition to be held in Johannesburg. It was through this process that Hlungwani came under the spotlight as the greatest traditional sculptor of the North. Hlungwani has kept on producing sculptures at New Jerusalem.

There is a picture of his sculpture entitled: Christ Playing Football (Fig. 8) in his bedroom on the wall. Of equal importance is that a BMW symbol is also depicted. Jackson Hlungwani said:

*"Ke ka lebaka la BMW gammogo le Ricky Burnett gore mosomo wa ka wa tsa bokgabo o sepele le lefase. Mosomo wa ka o bewa pepeneneng ka tlhompho ya bo kgwari ka ge ke le ngwana wa Modimo"* (It is because of BMW [South Africa] and Ricky Burnett that my artwork is known worldwide, because I am a Christian)<sup>32</sup>

It is through Ricky Burnett and BMW that Hlungwani had his first solo exhibition in December 1989. The exhibition was held at 140 Bree Street, Johannesburg, under the patronage of BMW South Africa. Hlungwani was given the chance to open his own exhibition this meant more to him and was highly appreciated. Despite the fact that BMW exposed Jackson Hlungwani to the entire world, the permanent removal of his sculptures from New Jerusalem is still questionable and a matter of concern.

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<sup>32</sup> Video footage, interview with Jackson Hlungwani (New Kanana) 27/06/2003

Whatever agreement might have led BMW South Africa and Jackson Hlungwani into the dismantling of his permanent exhibition at New Jerusalem is still questioned by most art academics, artists, students and art lovers. I think BMW and Jackson were interested in people conducting research with the resources available without travelling to New Jerusalem to view his exhibition. In my opinion, the dismantling of Jackson Hlungwani's sculptures should be regarded as disrespectful of the artist, his spirituality and his ancestors. The removal of the sculptures from New Jerusalem was not in the interests of the community and the welfare of other artists. (Refer to video footage to this effect - interview with Art professionals). Irrespective of the contractual agreement between Hlungwani and whomever, this radical action has disadvantaged him, as he no longer has his own museum at New Jerusalem.

Several people who were interviewed indicated that Jackson's sculptures serve the purpose of spirituality for the public if situated at New Jerusalem. They would like to see them back at New Jerusalem, not elsewhere. It is doubtful whether Hlungwani is in possession of any contract as proof of agreement concerning the removal of his sculptures. If such a contract existed it is doubtful that Hlungwani understood the contents and its implications. New Jerusalem has been dis-empowered as it was previously known and visited because of his sculptural exhibition. I think people have taken advantage of Hlungwani because he never went to school.

Hlungwani's family live in poverty at New Kanana. They are without a decent house; his two rooms serve as a storeroom for completed sculptures, and the other room is his bedroom. They don't have beds to sleep on or a wardrobe to put away their clothes. They don't have a stove, although his sculptures stand in different Art Galleries all over the country. His collection at Johannesburg Art Gallery alone is worth over a million rand. Hlungwani and his wife Magdeline depend on a combined family old age pension grant of R 1600.00.

Hlungwani is potentially rich but financially poor. As Ruth Sack indicated he gained fame due to his artistic contribution. He is an international figure because of the unique quality of his sculptures, which attracted many authors that document his artworks.

Before his solo exhibition, Hlungwani participated in a group exhibition with the late Nelson Makhuba from Venda. This group exhibition took place in 1985 in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Hlungwani was given public commissions in 1988 to decorate the

foyer of the African Studies Building at the University of Cape Town. This was a sign of recognition and respect for his remarkable abilities as a sculptor.

Jackson Hlungwani is represented in many places, both public and private including: St. Peters church in Soweto, the Irma Stern Museum, the University of Cape Town, the South Africa National Gallery in the Cape, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the University of Witwatersrand and many more.



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## **Section 6 - CONCLUSION**

Jackson Hlungwani has attracted the attention of many people from different backgrounds because of his outstanding sculptural abilities. Many academics, scholars and artists have visited him for different reasons. Some were interested in his life and art. Others were interested in his religious practices, while others were still interested in viewing the architectural stone building in New Jerusalem. Ruth Sack also visited Jackson Hlungwani at New Jerusalem in 1998. She took along a group of artists from Johannesburg. She was fascinated by Hlungwani's interpretation of his own world and how he attached meanings of his works.

When interviewed, Ruth indicated her respect and honour for his unique way of seeing things and expressing them through his creativity. Hlungwani takes elements known to everybody and attaches his mystical religious meaning that is integrated with cultural flavour.

Years later many artists who visit New Jerusalem in the hope of viewing Hlungwani's sculptures were disappointed at their removal. Hlungwani's sculptures had a strong following at New Jerusalem and were linked to their spiritual role. At the moment these sculptures are found in different Art galleries and Museums. They have lost both ancestral and spiritual purpose. Their removal has caused dissatisfaction, as many people who feel they should have been left at New Jerusalem. Most of those interviewed felt that New Jerusalem should have been Jackson Hlungwani's Art Museum.

Hlungwani is, born into the family of a migrant labourer who was poor and oppressed. His father was a self-taught traditional wood carver who influenced his choice of career. Hlungwani is multi-lingual and that makes it easy to interview him. He has much information.

Mbhokota is a small village in Louis Trichard (Makhado). It is the village where New Jerusalem and New Kanana are situated. New Jerusalem is where Hlungwani carved and exhibited many sculptures. He stayed with his family for many years and established his own church. Today what is left at New Jerusalem is the church. He has now settled in New Kanana with his wife where they both create and teach art.

Hlungwani has taught many individuals who have later become professional artists. Many students have also gone on to train others. Some adopted his philosophy. Hlungwani has dedicated his entire life to carving and to the development of his community. His theme is religious. He integrates religion and cultural beliefs in his art. Hlungwani produce small and monumental sculptures. Hlungwani at times disregards proportion.

Although he has carved and produced many sculptures at New Jerusalem, his art was not recognised until he met Ricky Burnett. It was through Ricky Burnett that his artworks were exhibited in and around the country. The exhibitions gave him fame, as unique and free from the artistic conventions that rule academics.

#### 6.1 WAY FORWARD

Through empowerment and development programmes for young artists, Hlungwani is in-line with the Arts and Culture White Paper, which encourages and emphasises the development of artists through special programmes funded by the government. Hlungwani and his wife Magdeline are running similar programmes at (New Kanana). Hlungwani should be allocated funds in order to empower artists and community programmes. In this way he will reach out to more communities.

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I think it is proper for the government to honour Hlungwani for his contribution in the arts. Hlungwani is able to create job opportunities and address poverty as outlined in the constitution of the country.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This essay was possible due to different people, individuals and institutions who have played fundamental roles in the compilation of information and that has culminated in this research.

I would like to thank the following people for their different roles and responsibilities in my studies:

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My wife Nape Sherdina Makunyane together with my daughters, Mahlako, Phuti and Mainele for their support, motivation, the creation of a healthy study environment at home and peace of mind that helped me focus and face challenging work with energy and strength.

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Jackson Hlungwani and his wife Magdeline for accepted my visit to their home at New Kanana (Mbhokota) on the 27 June 2003. This research could not be possible without their contribution as they are the focal point of this research component. The information given by Hlungwani and his family members is reliable and genuine and is not recorded in books hence this document serves as a new resource to complement all previous information about Hlungwani as a person, a healer and a great professional spiritual artist.

My sincere gratitude also goes to different professional artists and art academics that agreed to be interviewed and to discuss critical issues attached to Jackson Hlungwani as a traditional sculptor. These people raised critical issues from different viewpoints and dimensions about Jackson Hlungwani's life and his ongoing dedication to art as his old age advances. For some of these critical issues, these professionals also gave suggestions on how they can be resolved so that Hlungwani should be given the kind of respect he deserves whilst still alive. Critical information and concerns raised are complemented by the video footage that should not be divorced from this document as a primary source that underpins the focus of this research.

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