

Ifa Lethu Launch – Nov 2005

Speeches by Dr Ramphele, Narissa Ramdhani

Dr Mamphela Ramphele Ifa Lethu Foundation



Two and a half years ago I had breakfast in Cape Town with journalist Tom Nevin and over croissant and coffee he outlined to me a project that literally knocked my socks off.

He explained how an untold number of valuable artworks, crafted during the 1970s and 80s, the darkest days of apartheid, now rested in the studies and living rooms of diplomats the world over. He asked me if I would chair a trust to drive the recovery of the art. That was two and a half years ago.

I won't pretend that the last 30 months of the project's first steps were easy, beset as they were with the myriad problems that come with putting together an initiative as complex as Ifa Lethu. But that all seems long ago now, and looking around this exhibition, I can see how worthwhile it was.

How the art came to be scattered over the globe and what triggered the drive for its retrieval is eloquently described elsewhere in this publication.

For me, this collection, as embryonic as it is right now, symbolises the work that lies ahead in assembling a portfolio of 'lost' art works created

throughout the struggle for freedom, the number of which can only be guessed at. It is also testimony that Ifa Lethu is succeeding in its task of recovering, safeguarding and making available to all South Africans this valuable work as a reminder of what went before, and as a lasting tribute to the artists who lived through it, and who recorded those times for generations to come.

And how can I possibly thank such donors of their collections as Diane Johnstone, Bruce Haigh and David Gillett? Whatever I say will never be enough. Thanks are also due to BHP Billiton and the Ministry of Arts and Culture for their generous financial assistance. Good things like Ifa Lethu do not happen without such thoughtful institutions. Thanks also to Tom Nevin who inspired this venture.

I am honoured to chair such a worthy endeavour, and extend my gratitude to my fellow trustees for their support and work in making Ifa Lethu the success that it is.

Narissa Ramdhani, CEO, Ifa Lethu Foundation



Being involved in the launch and work of the Ifa Lethu Foundation is clearly an emotional one for me. For it seemed that only yesterday, we fought tirelessly for our freedom and for the right to enjoy and appreciate, amongst others, what belonged to our cultural heritage. While the victory of 1994 has granted us that much-cherished ideal of freedom, we still find ourselves traversing a difficult road in regards to the latter.

Having lived outside of South Africa for much of the turbulent 80s, I was fortunate, like many others in the exile community, to find myself exposed to much of our cultural heritage that was strewn across the globe during that time. It was a dream that we should one day return such national treasures to where they really belonged - in a free South Africa. It is a dream that is now being realised. Hence my association with a foundation that devotes its energies to the repatriation of South Africa's heritage from abroad, and to the contribution of national healing is a poignant one.

Culture was employed as a weapon by all sides during the apartheid years - as a weapon of oppression by the apartheid state and as a weapon of resistance by the liberation movements. The Ifa Lethu Foundation has seized the initiative to employ it as a weapon yet again, but this time to inform, to empower all South Africans, to break down those cultural barriers that have caused so much pain and finally to teach South Africans how to transcend adversity and heal the nation.

What we see here today, much of which has been made possible through the generous donations of our Australian friends, is a modest effort to capture and appreciate our cultural heritage, thus enabling us to develop pride in our successes while at the same time ensuring that our failures fill us with a firm determination to improve. The exhibition reflects the victory of all South Africans against tyranny and is symbolic of the momentous changes that continue to sweep across our country.

As citizens of South Africa we have dreams - about our country and about our continent. Through the works of the artists represented here today, we will be able to communicate these dreams to our youth. For the vision of a free South Africa is one in which our youth should be charged with the task of acting as agents of change and development. After all, young South Africans need take ownership of the challenges the country faces as a first step in redressing past imbalances and in building a nation.

My appreciation goes to our board of trustees for their commitment to such a worthy initiative.