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Campaign to Recover Lost Artwork

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BuaNews (Tshwane)

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Themba Gadebe

A global hunt to recover South Africa artworks
that played a pivotal role in the fight against apartheid regime is underway.

This drive has been initiated by the Ifa Lethu (our heritage) Foundation that
Arts and Culture Minister Pallo Jordan launched yesterday.

The foundation seeks to recover, safeguard and make available the
"township artwork" crafted during the 70s and the 80s - the time described
as the darkest days during apartheid.

It will be working with embassies in the country in an effort to locate many
of the artworks.

According to the foundation, many of these could be recognised by the
embassies and visitors to the country but eventually disappeared from the
country's shores.

Foundation chairperson, Mamphela Ramphele said the collection that had
been found so far symbolised the work that lied ahead in assembling a
portfolio of "lost" art works created throughout the struggle of the freedom.

It is not known how many have been lost but some have been found, with
the belief that there is still more lying out there.

Yesterday at the launch, guests were greeted by some of these finest and
well-crafted paintings and sculptures: African artworks made out of wood,
oil, clay and metal.

Some of the works in display include that of Matsemela Mkoana whose
work has exhibited in Germany, Sweden, United States and Canada.

Clad in a maroon African regalia, his head covered with long dreadlocks,
Mr Mkoana tells BuaNews he started art at the tender age of 14 in 1962.

The Soshanguve-based father of three has been making a living from his
uncle-inherited-talent his entire life.

He says the highlight of his career was in the 70s when people in the
township "started understanding how artwork plays a role in the fight
against racism" and when former President Nelson Mandela received his
woodwork during his 80th birthday.

Mr Mkoana welcomed the initiative by the Ifa Lethu Foundation.

Speaking at the launch, Mr Jordan said the event was a celebration of
South Africa's talent in visual arts.

He said racism should not silence artists.

"Artists grabbed opportunities to give a voice and played a role in the
realisation of democracy. Through arts, they could express ideas,
aspirations and values, and became an integral element of democracy

"They communicated anger, sadness, and even joy that an end of
apartheid era would surely come. The Ifa Lethu collection is our only
glimpse of the life in the townships in those hard years," the minister said.

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"We owe it to the men and women whose
work is displayed and some of them are no
longer with us to see their work," he said.

More importantly, Minister Jordan said
government was committed to advance art by
mobilising public funds and give continuous

support to the arts.



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