

collection of artworks that are already back in SA.

She has some leads already.

Two collections -- totalling 47 artworks -- have already been returned by two former Australian diplomats, Diane Johnstone and Bruce Haigh.

Johnstone promised her artist friends at the end of her three-year posting to Pretoria in 1976 that she would return the artworks once democracy came to SA.

Johnstone and Haigh are now helping the foundation make contact with other diplomats from that time. It will take all of Ramdhani's talents to track down works held by other people.

Since 1994 she has headed the African National Congress (ANC) archives project, which seeks to return for archiving all historical material about the ruling party that has found its way overseas.

To date, the Johannesburg-based ANC project has found material in 33 countries.

One question, though, is how much it will cost to buy back the artworks the foundation cannot convince collectors to part with for love.

Ramdhani was reluctant yesterday to say how much it could cost, other than to say they were "extremely valuable".

Others question this. The bulk of the paintings that left SA during those two turbulent decades are by artists who are known locally, but not internationally, says Monna Mokoena, a Johannesburg gallery owner.

There are South African artists whose works are known overseas and can fetch between \$80000 and \$400000, such as William Kentridge, but none of these township artists are in that category, he said.

On the other hand, artworks do often fetch higher prices in their home country, said art dealer Stephan Welz.

"Let's take Gerard Sekoto. He was an artist who went into exile in 1948, he was working in Paris all his life and his paintings have always sold for considerably more in SA than abroad.

"We're continually finding them making their way back to SA. They precipitate to where the most money is paid for them."

The difficulty, Welz said, was locating where these artworks were. That will become harder as time goes by. People who collected in the 1970s get older and die, and as they do, the South African connections of the works become obscured and tracking them down becomes impossible.

Ramdhani agreed they needed to act decisively. "One needs a hard-nosed approach," she said.

[Back to main page](#)