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## Tough Task to Uncover South Africa's Hidden Art Treasures

28/07/2005

Business Day By Michael Bleby Hunting down South African artworks from the 1970s and 1980s is a difficult task.

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But with many of them missing, there is no choice but to track down this absent part of SA's cultural history.

"There is no estimate," Ifa Lethu Foundation CEO Narissa Ramdhani said. "We're not even aware of where much of this material is."

Ramdhani is leading the job of tracking down "township art" that left SA during the period spanning the Soweto uprising and the 1980s state of emergency.

Few South African galleries bought these works at the time. Much of it left the country in the hands of foreign diplomats and private collectors and its whereabouts is now unknown.

The works are a valuable part of SA's heritage, since they form another side to the turbulent two decades, for the most part characterised by sanctions, protests and uprisings.

So far, the foundation has identified 170 artworks in countries as far apart as Australia, Sweden, Canada and the US.

The foundation, which is supported by the arts and culture department and private business, wants to bring them back to show South Africans another side to their history.

"It wasn't just sanctions and protests in the streets, it was also the tenacity of the South African spirit and these artworks that represented it," the foundation's chairwoman, Mamphela Ramphele, said yesterday.

Strengthened by R4,5m from the arts and culture department and a R1m donation handed over yesterday by BHP Billiton, Ramdhani seeks to increase the small