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BONGIWE (BONGI) DHLOMO-MAUTLOA



COMMENDATIO

Bongiwe (Bongi) Dhlomo-Mautloa

Doctor of Art and Design (Honoris Causa)
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Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa, a prominent South African artist, arts administrator, curator and activist, has been instrumental in shaping the landscape of art in South Africa. Her multifaceted contributions have not only enriched the artistic community but have also fostered a deeper appreciation for the role of art in societal transformation.

Dhlomo-Mautloa studied Fine Art at the famous Rorkes Drift Art and Craft Centre, graduating with a two-year diploma in 1979. As a curator and art writer, she has been actively involved in various local, national and international art exhibitions, publications and conferences.

Her work is featured in numerous public and private collections both in South Africa and internationally, and her career is distinguished by several notable highlights and accolades. She has also lectured widely on South African art in South Africa, Sweden, Germany, USA, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin Republic, Australia, Austria, Switzerland, Namibia, Botswana and Malaysia, among others.

In April 2023, Dhlomo-Mautloa was awarded the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver (OIS) by the South African Government in recognition of her contributions to the arts. The National Orders are the highest awards that South Africa, through the President, bestows on citizens and well-known foreign nationals who have contributed towards the advancement of democracy and who have significantly impacted the lives of South Africans.

In 2017, she collaborated closely with the Javett Foundation to collect art produced by Black artists during the 20th

century. The Bongi Dhlomo Collection, exhibited at the Javett Art Centre at the University of Pretoria, demonstrates that, despite the Apartheid government's educational system not recognising Black students as deserving of art tuition, many significant Black artists and creatives emerged through sheer willpower. Musicians, theatre producers and visual artists were determined to be an integral part of South Africa's creative tapestry and history.

Moreover, her work has culminated in a unique book titled *Mihloti Ya Ntsako: Journeys with the Bongi Dhlomo Collection*, authored by Pfunzo Sidogi, Head of the Department of Fine and Studio Arts at the Faculty of Arts and Design, Tshwane University of Technology.

This book not only contributes to a broader understanding of African art and culture but is also significant for several other reasons.

Firstly, it celebrates the career of Dhlomo-Mautloa, who has worked in the visual arts industry for over four decades. Although the book is not a comprehensive biography of Dhlomo-Mautloa as an artist and curator, it was nevertheless used as a primary citation when she was awarded the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver by President Cyril Ramaphosa for her "contributions to the arts through curating creative projects that preserve important periods in South African history."

Secondly, and perhaps the most fascinating narrative that the book highlights, is that Dhlomo-Mautloa was probably the first Black professional curator in South Africa in the early 1980s.

Sadly, her contributions to the development of curatorship in South Africa during the 1980s and 1990s were not fully appreciated, as she was often perceived as merely an 'administrator,' 'secretary,' or 'assistant.' The book seeks to rewrite this history and fully acknowledges her remarkable role in advancing and democratising curatorial practices in South Africa over the past four decades.

Dhlomo-Mautloa is also acclaimed for her roles in the administration and direction of the first and second Johannesburg Biennales, as an art consultant for the Constitutional Court of South Africa's Architectural Artworks Programme from 2001 to 2004, as Project Manager for Content Development at the Steve Biko Centre from 2009 to 2012, and as co-curator of a major photographic exhibition commemorating the centenary of the 1913 Land Act with renowned photographers David Goldblatt and Paul Weinberg, among others. She has also served as a judge for the major art competitions in South Africa and was a member of the Art Gallery Committee at the Johannesburg Art Gallery for many years.

Another heartfelt project she has curated since 2015 is an art initiative at the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital. This project aims to create a friendly and welcoming environment for young patients.

The project of creating art for the hospital was not a 'top-down' initiative led by established artists deciding what kind of art young patients, aged birth to 12 and 16, should see. Instead, Dhlomo-Mautloa engaged directly with children

in that age group, sharing various stories, many of which touched on President Nelson Mandela's contributions to the country and young people.

As a result of this process, some of South Africa's leading artists, most of whom are mothers or grandmothers of children the same age as the hospital's patients, have been invited to collaborate on artworks that are a testament to the power of children's imagination.

The Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital Art Collection is currently undergoing valuation, with plans to develop a template for future hospital art collections. This will be achieved through a book that outlines the processes involved in creating this art collection.

The Tshwane University of Technology is immensely proud to confer the prestigious degree of Doctor of Art and Design (Honoris Causa) in the Faculty of Arts and Design upon Bongiwe (Bongi) Dhlomo-Mautloa. This recognition underscores the pivotal role she has played – and continues to play – in enriching the artistic community and cultivating a profound appreciation for the transformative power of art in society.

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