



Diamonds in the Dust

• Leonard Shapiro

Papier mache crafter, artist and sculptor Themba Masala lives and works in Raaswater, 16 kilometres outside of Upington in the Northern Cape Province. His shelved studio is laden with his brightly painted creatures. Visitors will not find much room to move about inside his studio, so whilst waiting outside Masala will reveal his unique crafts and arrange them in the sun on the dusty ground like animals in a surreal menagerie.



Themba Masala with one of his sculptures

Masala started making sculptures two years ago after attending an art course in Luderitz and his creations have grown from strength to strength since. He started making representational and conventionally decorated objects like guinea fowl and porcupines, but has since found his own style and sculpts a unique brand of mythical creatures, drawing on a sophisticated array of patterns with which to emblazon their hides.

The heads of these creatures are often reptilian and bear colourful patterns akin to the myriad variety of lizards that inhabit this part of the world, while their bodies resemble the dinosaurs of millennia gone by. Masala also creates wildly colourful fish in a refreshing response to this sun baked desert region, just as the Orange River brings its own welcome oasis of relief.

Like diamonds that lie undiscovered in what is the biggest province in South Africa, it is the vision of the Northern Cape Arts and Culture Council (NCACC) to nurture the talent of craftspeople like Masala. NCACC is a statutory body of the Northern Cape Department of Sports, Arts and Culture.

The NCACC has recently appointed four Crafts Development Specialists to assist crafters with the development of craft products in the Northern Cape for sale to both national and international markets.

Craft centres are being established in various parts of the province as focal points for crafters to display and sell their creations as well as draw inspiration from each others work. The efforts of the NCACC is aimed at enabling people to harness and direct their creativity towards the small and large scale production of craft products.

Whilst Themba Masala's creations intersect the boundaries of fine art and craft, there are

many people in the province who possess similar creative and technical skills which can be directed towards the production of quality crafted products.

This office has secured an order for 4,400 Christmas balls for Masala. In addition, a Cape Town art gallery owner flew to Upington and purchased 30 of his creations. A craft production facility in Raaswater is now under consideration, to ensure that more creative individuals can join forces in what could become a self-sustainable income generating business.

The office wants to adopt the same strategy that has worked for so many other countries. Hand crafted products have been successfully developed for global markets from countries like India (wooden combs and silverware), Ecuador (the

famous Panama Hat), Kenya (stone bowls), Nepal (silver buttons and paper) and Rwanda (embroidered cloth) to name a few.

Over decades these countries have developed and adapted their products to suit world markets. Although all of these products are entirely hand made, they are produced in sufficient quantity to meet global demands.

Given the enormous creative talent in South Africa, there is every reason to believe that with the application of sound business and production principles, it is inevitable that we will see an increasing number of products being supplied to both national and global markets.

■ Leonard Shapiro is from the Northern Cape Arts and Culture Council.



Products from Themba Masala on display in Raaswater outside Upington in the Siyanda region



Peter Visser from the Peter Visser Gallery in Cape Town with Themba Masala from Raaswater.

Hope for crafters of the Province

• Patrick Williams

The Northern Cape Arts and Culture Council (NCACC), funded by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) has appointed four Crafts Development Specialists (CDS) in the Province.

Being skilled in the field of product development, they are tasked with assisting crafters in the development of craft products for sale to both national and international markets.

The NCACC Head Office is in Kimberley and is headed by Andrew Hall as the director of this programme while Vuyisile Mshudulu serves as the marketing manager. The four CDS appointed are Jane Mokwena for the Kimberley region, Leonard Shapiro in Upington, Antoinette Du Plessis in Victoria West and William Alves serves from Calvinia.

The Craft Development Specialists are currently identifying creative talent and taking steps to develop self-sustainable craft businesses. Their work is integral to Government's Poverty Relief Projects. The CDS offer assistance to crafters with developing their craft product to suit specific markets. In

addition, training is offered in business and packaging skills.

'The NCACC Office in Upington has formed supportive links with both provincial and local government,' says Shapiro.

He says that a team spirit is forming between enthusiastic individuals who want to make a real difference to the craft development of this province. 'I have always found that by working together as a team, real delivery can be achieved. I keep meetings to a minimum and delivery to a maximum. After all, at the end of the day, it is delivery that counts,' says Shapiro.

Similar links are being formed by the CDS in the 3 other regions. If you are a Crafter or have information about Crafters, please contact the appropriate Craft Development Specialist for your region.

■ Jane Mokwena (Kimberley) Francis Baard Region
Tel: 053 831 1761 or 082 5844176

■ Leonard Shapiro (Upington) Siyanda & Kgalagadi Region
Tel: 054 332 7895 or 082 553 0824

■ Antoinette du Plessis (Victoria West) Karoo Region
Tel: 053 621 1185 or 083 246 1463

■ William Alves (Calvinia) Nama Khoi Region
Tel: 027 341-1183, 072 2777953