



Above left: C. Shilakoe: "Figure", 1968. Etching, 38 x 24 cm. Collection: University of Fort Hare

Above: M. Dumile: "Kwa Mashu". Crayon drawing, 1966. Composition for a sculpture

## DUMILE

Mslaba Zwelidumile Mxgasi, better known as Dumile, is one of Africa's greatest contemporary artists. He was born in 1942 at Worcester, in the Cape Province. After his mother's death in 1948 the family moved to Cape Town and later, when Dumile was 11 years old, to Johannesburg.

His exceptional talent was first noticed in 1964 while he was receiving

treatment at a hospital in Johannesburg. A year later Gallery 101 sponsored him and in 1966, he gave his first one-man exhibition in the Golden City. In 1968 he went abroad where he has lived ever since.

This artist has numerous one-man shows to his credit: at the Republic Art Festival (1966), the Transvaal Academy (1967), the Grosvenor Gallery, London (1968) and the Contemporary Africa Art Exhibition, London (1969). In



Right: M. Dumile: "Harpy". Charcoal drawing P.C.

Below: M. Dumile: "Figurative Group 1965". Chalk drawing, 80 x 65 cm. Collection: University of Fort Hare



1967 he represented South Africa at the Sao Paulo Biennale. Dumile's work has been acquired for a great many local public collections including the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, the Durban Art Gallery and the Pretoria Art Museum, as well as many private collections. Dumile is also represented in the USA, Britain, Belgium, Sweden, Israel and other overseas countries.

Dumile is both a sculptor and a graphic artist. It is his graphics especially which have won him the greatest acclaim. The content of these, mostly drawings, is strongly based on social realism dealing chiefly with the social conditions and problems affecting the Black man's identity in an urban environment.

His art, which reveals certain morbid undercurrents, is characterised by a distortion stemming from tremendous emotion. To a great extent this work belongs to the art of the fantastic. The tremendous vitality of this work, which is very contemporary, appears to be drawn from the artist's subconscious; a large number of these drawings therefore contain strong elements of the subconscious. The drawings are marked by their freedom from the limitation of reason and absence of any aesthetic preoccupation. The viewer gets the impression that they were executed spontaneously in accordance with the artist's subconscious thought and vision. Yet they are quite comprehensible and it is these very qualities which imbue the drawings with such significance.

The human figure is of prime importance in Dumile's drawings as is the successful manner in which these figures give utterance to emotions and feelings. By means of their posture, gestures, rhythm — in short, pattern of body structure — they express inner and psychic experiences. The figure is often apocalyptic in appearance and the distorted style in which they are drawn fulfils a specific function, namely, heightening the sensation of the emotions they depict. The "instinct" of Dumile's art is apparent in these sketches which communicate his emotions in intelligible language.

Dumile's art is undoubtedly a serious and meaningful commentary on the city life of the Black man. It is indicative