

Lucas Seage

I met Lucas during the early 1980s when Bill Ainslie had made an appointment for him and Lucas, who was studying at the *Johannesburg Art Foundation* run by Ainslie, to consult with me. At that time I was Reader in Neuropsychology and Associate Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand. I was familiar with the work of Lucas, having attended the exhibition of his work at The Haengggi Foundation's National Art Competition and been tremendously impressed. Roger van Wyk, in his obituary of Lucas in the March 2010 issue of *Art South Africa*, captures the amazingly raw power of Seage's work exceedingly well.

It so happened that I was at a bifurcation point in my career at that stage, having become disillusioned with the ethnocentrism of psychology in general and especially in South Africa. I managed to wangle it so that third-year psychology students could get credit for open projects, which resulted in an amazing variety of creative productions from academic topics, poetry and dance to artistic productions in various mediums. Bill Ainslie paid the teaching venture a big compliment by saying that there was more creativity in my office than in the arts department at the university.

I had also closed down my brain and sleep laboratory and was developing a course on Africentric Psychology. As part of this development, a large room used for the research assistants was remodelled to serve as a consultation room for visiting *izangoma* (indigenous healers). The walls were covered with Hessian and African artefacts. Second-year students taking my course in *Transpersonal Psychology* were expected to go for consultation of a divination session involving the throwing of the bones. They then had to write a factual and experiential report of their experience as part of fulfilling the course requirement. I secretly took great pride in the fact that Wits was probably the only university in the world with a consultation facility for indigenous healers.

Since it was no longer feasible for Lucas to continue working at the *Johannesburg Art Foundation* of Bill Ainslie and given the size of the room and the way in which it was redecorated, I made it available to Lucas to use on condition that he would keep it relatively tidy for the twice weekly visits of the *izangoma*. Unfortunately, the arrangement did not endure and I had to ask Lucas to find alternative working space. In retrospect, it is interesting, though, to learn that he seems to have undergone some training within the indigenous healing tradition himself during the latter phase of his life. I wonder whether the earlier contact of working in the same space as the *izangoma* could perhaps have contributed to him seeking guidance from them in later years.

In my involvement with the indigenous healers as an aspect of the Africentric psychology course I was developing I learned that some of them had actually been artists in the first instance. Among them were several well-known artists.

Although Lucas did not see himself as a black artist he was undoubtedly influenced by the cruelty of the apartheid system. Perhaps it was this cruelty that paradoxically enabled him to produce art of such extraordinary originality and power. He was indeed an extremely complicated soul, the supreme example of the tortured artist. In terms of psychological jargon, he was egotistically self-centred, but at the same time very sensitive to his surroundings, finding among the rubbish lying about objects with which he could express the inner turmoil he experienced, as well as the duplicity and cruelty of the world around him. I think of Seage as an *imbongi*, a praise-singer, who was not just restricted to reflect about the welfare of his clan, but one to reflect about the welfare of the state of the world at large.

It is to the credit of The Haenggi Foundation that they brought the work of Seage to the attention of a larger audience. While the work of Lucas Seage is the strongest possible indictment of the apartheid regime of the Nationalist Party, it is most unfortunate that he did not receive the credit for the powerful and creative way in which he has exposed it. Perhaps that recognition will come belatedly, now that he is 'late,' for he certainly is one of the most unique artists of his generation, not just in South Africa, but in the world. The Booker Prize and even the Nobel Prize for literature seem to consider political awareness as an important factor that sets one good author apart from another. Unfortunately the same does not seem to be the case in the evaluation of art. Seage spoke to a world at large and not just to the whites in South Africa about the cruelty inflicted by discrimination. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, that world could not find it in their hearts or did not have the wisdom to facilitate his artistic expression to reach its full potential. We are all the poorer for it.

In my association with the *izangoma* and the artists among them, I got to know increasingly more African artists..... I marvelled at the plethora of creative expression in South Africa, similar to the existing musical talent. Seage portrays an overpowering awareness of and relatedness to the here and the now, a here and now that speaks of the darkness of the human soul, often lurking under the guise of politics or religion..... Seage stays grounded in the inescapable darkness of soul.

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