**CITATION: DR DAVID NTHUBU KOLOANE**

Today Dr David Nthubu Koloane stands as one of South Africa’s, and Africa’s, most pre-eminent and distinguished artists and socio-cultural activists: his longstanding commitment to traversing multiple roles in the art world, and broader society, has seen him make immense contributions as a leader, intellectual, writer, critic, educator, curator, consultant and administrator. He has also been a role model and mentor to generations of South African artists. He has been called a “living pioneer” in the South African art world, and, given his extraordinary contribution to the field of arts and culture, there are few others who are more deserving of this title. Central to all his work has been a consistent and profound pursuit of a social justice agenda that has sought to promote the lives and work of Black South African artists during and post-apartheid era.

Koloane was born in Alexandra Township on 5 June 1938. He grew up in Orlando-West in Soweto and attended St. Michael’s Primary School, St. Peter’s Secondary School and Orlando High School. It was during his school years that he met artist Louis Maqhubela who had studied at Polly Street Art Centre. Maqhubela would provide inspiration and mentoring for the young, emerging artist. Towards the end of his schooling Koloane’s father fell ill and he left school to find employment to support the family. While working at an engineering firm the Polly Street group of artists provided him with an informal apprenticeship that was to inform his vision as an artist.

For Koloane, the seventies and eighties were a period of wide ranging critical interventions that figure strongly in the history of South African art of this period. In 1974 Maqhubela encouraged Koloane to join the Bill Ainslie Studio and he continued to work there until 1977. While at the Ainslie studio, Koloane met and worked with artists such as William Kentridge and Ricky Burnett. In 1977 he co-founded The Gallery in Jeppestown, and in 1979 co-founded the Federated Union of Black Artists, also known as FUBA, with the poet and novelist, Sipho Sepamla. Koloane taught at FUBA and in 1983 was appointed Head of Fine Arts. It was during this time at FUBA that he met the prominent British sculptor Anthony Caro, who was presenting guest lectures at Wits University and other tertiary institutions. Koloane explained to Caro that there was also Black artists working in South Africa and invited him to FUBA. In the early eighties he attended an art teachers’ course at Birmingham Polytechnic in the UK (1983) and also acted as the visual arts coordinator for the Art Towards Social Development component of the Culture and Resistance conference held in Botswana (1982). His role in the Triangle Artists Workshops in New York is well documented (1983-84) as are the Thupelo Workshops held in Johannesburg (1985-1991) and Cape Town. In 1985 he was awarded a Diploma in Museum Studies from the University of London and, thereafter, he was appointed curator of the FUBA Gallery in Newtown, Johannesburg. In 1995 he curated the South African exhibition forming part of the ground breaking Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa show that was part of the Africa 95 Festival of Arts in London. This exhibition later travelled to the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

During his career he received numerous awards including the British Council Scholarship in 1983, the Prince Claus Fund Award in 1998 and a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Arts and Culture Trust in 2008. In the same year Koloane was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Vaal University of Technology.

Koloane has lectured at several universities in the UK and USA and is a sought-after external examiner at tertiary institutions. In his role as educator he often demonstrates how knowledge production can be achieved in a disruptive manner that is not necessarily about displacing the more formal knowledge of the academy, but rather about bringing them to dialogue with each other. This critical, reflective and dissenting voice is also to be found in the many essays and articles he has published in journals, catalogues and books which have had an important impact both in South Africa and abroad. He is also the subject if innumerable publications, including the Taxi Art monograph in 2002. The past two years (2011-2012) has seen a major UNISA publication being brought together on his contributions across the many roles he has played in the art world.

He is a founder member of the Fordsburg Artists Studios in Johannesburg. Also known as the Bag Factory, this internationally renowned complex of artists’ studios has been home to artists of the calibre of Kagiso Pat Mautloa, Sam Nhlengethwa, Joachim Schonfeldt, Kay Hassan and, of course, Koloane himself. More recently the studios have been the location for the successive new generations of South African artists. Koloane has created powerful outreach projects within the Fordsburg precinct and beyond, engaging international and national artists in dialogues concerning urban conditions, and has allowed many young African artists to test their voices. As a trans-continental hub for emerging talents, it has created a solid network of artists from South to East to West Africa, supporting and facilitating workshops in many countries.

His work is to be found in most major collections in South Africa, including the South African National Gallery, Cape Town; the Pretoria Art Museum; the Standard Bank Collection; and the Sasol Collection. In keeping with his status as an artist of international standing, his work is also to be found in the Smithsonian Institute, USA; the Victoria and Albert Museum, UK; and the Daimler-Chrysler collection, Germany. He has exhibited widely, including galleries and museums in Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, France, Germany, Spain, Japan, Malaysia and the USA.

Given Koloane’s extensive involvements in the art world, his own practice as an artist has been extraordinary. An innovative and accomplished artist, the multivalent body of work he has produced since the 1960’s encompasses the rigorous abstraction of the Thupelo Workshop period incisive, haunting examinations of the gritty urban reality of Johannesburg. These works capture with precision the atmosphere of urban environments which echo the realities of oppression and exclusion. Many artists have taken this city and the urban socio-political condition of South Africa as their subject. Koloane’s intense relationship with this project and its contradictions and tensions, is one that has been sustained over decades with the Revival exhibition at the Goodman Gallery in 2008 showcasing the tough, yet evocative qualities found in his vast oeuvre of drawings, paintings and prints.

It has been argued that David Koloane’s longstanding project be seen as part of a modernist project that includes Wole Soyinka and Eskia Mphahlele. The ongoing “Living Pioneers” project on the life and work of Koloane will undoubtedly ensure that he is part of this canon.

It is therefore befitting that the University of the Witwatersrand confer an honorary Doctor of Arts on Dr David Nthubu Koloane, as distinguished and inspirational artist.