

DUMILE FENI



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Dumile Feni was born in South Africa in 1939. Dumile learned sculpture from his artistic family at an early age. They took him to see the cave paintings of his ancestors in nearby caves and he still uses the same ochres and earthy colors first seen in these rock drawings.

In the 1950's, he learned about casting through an apprenticeship at the Sculpture, Pottery and Plastics Art Foundary of Bloke and Leo Wald in Jeppe, Transvaal.

Dumile has always drawn inspiration from the Community of black artists in South Africa—well-known writers such as Bloke Modisane, Willie Kgositsile, Dennis Brutus and Wally Serote. And they have been greatly influenced by Dumile.

In the 1960's, Dumile was becoming very well-known in Johannesburg and had two exhibitions running concurrently. His works also began to be shown overseas—in Brazil, at the Sao Paulo Biennale, in Belgium at the Museum of Art and in England through the Grosvenor Gallery.

At the end of the decade, Dumile came under increasing harassment by the South African Government. The authorities disliked the attention he gave to such figures as Nobel Prize winner Chief Albert Luthuli. They also resented the attacks against apartheid which emerged in the titles he gave to his sculptures and drawings. Dumile was also an active sympathizer of the ban-

ned African National Congress. After being in and out of prison and often in hiding, Dumile was forced to go into exile.

Despite the great hardships of exile, Dumile has struggled to develop and expand his wide artistic interests. He has made posters, murals and calendars for the cause of liberation; in 1978 he was a visiting lecturer at UCLA, and recently he has been attending the New York Film School.

After years of struggling to find his feet in foreign lands, Dumile is now about to become widely known in New York and North America.

His work continues to express, with dazzling force, the cruelties and deprivations of life for black people caused by a system of apartheid. But Dumile never loses sight of the universal dimension of the struggle against oppression, nor of the seeds of hope and compassion, hidden in the darkest night.

Dumile's friend, Bill Ainslie, has summed up the artist's achievements thus, "Dumile took the raw material of his life in Soweto, and it was a life of real ordeal and translated it into work in a manner which revealed a capacity to face unflinchingly the most frightening extremities of human desperation and cruelty without spilling over into sentimentality or overblown expressionism. His originality led to a new style of drawing in South Africa, but I have not found anybody equal the ferocity and compassion of his work."

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