

van Niekerk, Sacha, *Body of work for the voiceless*,
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Body of work for the voiceless

Sacha van Niekerk talks to an artist who became a living sculpture to tell the stories of women who were silenced.



Sethembile Msezane tells the untold stories of women through becoming a living sculpture

Looking at commemorative practice through statues, monuments and even public holidays, Msezane felt it necessary to use her body as a vehicle to articulate their stories in public spaces. She did this, often alongside other statues or monuments, on public holidays between 2013 to 2014. In her performances, Msezane aimed to represent black women in a positive way.

‘Too many women anchor our

societies (and) go unacknowledged. The struggle against apartheid would have never been won if it wasn’t for the work of women. I’m not necessarily only talking about your prominent Struggle heroines such as the late Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, I’m also speaking about ordinary women who wake every day and make plans happen with limited resources,’ she said.

She gave such performances

outside Parliament, at taxi ranks, at historically significant sites such as Kliptown in Soweto, and even in Zimbabwe and Senegal.

Over time Msezane began to exhibit her photography, sculptures and installations in galleries and museums. 'It has been challenging. I didn't make money from my arts practice for about three years at first, and the arts industry had very limited space for black women in important institutions or platforms, which further spoke to the issues I had identified about representation in South Africa.

Gradually, people started taking notice of Msezane's work online, particularly when she 'embodied the spirit of the soapstone 'Bird from Great Zimbabwe', at the removal of the statue of Rhodes from UCT. 'From then on there was interest from both local and international

audiences. Social media can be a tool for awareness if you use it sensitively.'

This will be the second time Msezane exhibits her work at the Cape Town Art Fair. Last year she was part of the fair's Unframed section, where she presented a sculpture made out of hair and antique irons titled *Avuleka Amazulu* (2017-2018), which was positioned at the entrance to the fair. 'The Cape Town Art Fair is another venue where I can exhibit my work locally as I am not currently represented by a gallery in South Africa... Tyburn Gallery, my UK-based gallery, will be showing some of the works I had in my recent exhibition *Speaking Through Walls*.'

The future looks exciting for Msezane, who is keeping details of her future projects under wraps. 'I have something planned locally, but you'll have to wait and see...'