

**THE INCEPTION OF CROSS-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS
IN THE CERAMICS OF THE LATE 1970S ONWARDS,
AS REFLECTED IN THE WORK OF MAGGIE MIKULA
AND HER ADHERENTS.**

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DECLARATION

Except where acknowledged to the contrary, this dissertation is the original work of the candidate. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Art in Fine Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

V. Bauer.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Kevin, my children Matt and Jess and my sister Gaye. Without your unstinting support this dissertation would not have been possible.

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation the incorporation of cross-cultural imagery and its assimilation is focused on the work of Maggie Mikula, a ceramist from KwaZulu-Natal. Producing within the 1970's and 1980's, her work is investigated within the historical context of the socio-political background of South Africa. Syncretism in the visual arts reflects problems associated with identity and authenticity and this dissertation analyses these issues. A reference is made to select artists and ceramists in South Africa who approach their work in this manner, in particular with reference to the influence that Maggie Mikula has had in their work.

Chapter One discusses the history of borrowing in South Africa citing examples of work by artists including amongst others Walter Battiss, Alexis Preller and Cecil Skotnes. This is based around the broad political and ideological relationships in the country that framed local art making. The assimilation and the breakdown of barriers in African/western art in a South African context is argued through a post-colonial reading. The chapter deals with the problems of borrowing related to appropriation and stereotyping from a postmodernist perspective.

Chapter Two introduces the history of South African ceramics examining its development and styles, focussing on changing premises within the medium. The second part of the chapter positions Mikula's work, interests, personal history and ideals.

Chapter Three deals with the development of Mikula's ceramic work, referring to her technology, processes and sourcing.

The reception of Mikula's work and the attitudes to cross-cultural assimilation in the 1980's, as well as current perceptions are addressed in Chapter Four. Her influence on this creative medium is shown with specific examples. Personal interviews attempt to contextualise her position and situate her within the ceramic world.

Acknowledging that there is a wealth of collections through out South Africa, the ceramic work predominately researched for this paper is from KwaZulu-Natal. It has been sourced both from the immediate family, and from individual collectors, as this was the site of her production. Other collections have been accessed from around South Africa including the Corobrik collection in Pretoria (of which there are two pieces – one which is broken), the large piece is documented photographically (see **Fig.22**) and referred to on Page 66. The Nelson Mandela Museum, Port Elizabeth, (accessed on-line and via photographs from the artist's records) has a notable collection, but given the nature of this research, these pieces do not demonstrate any significant features over and above those that were already sourced. This paper is not intended as a catalogue, but is meant to show a variety of Mikula's work to demonstrate her influence and style. Each piece is chosen for its specific aspects and unique features that would support this research.

Given the nature of this investigation, the author has been obliged to read widely, including writers such as Berman, Sacks, Cruise and the complete edition of APSA newsletters and magazines to give a comprehensive over view of the changes in style and influence within South African art and specifically, ceramics.

PREFACE

The following conventions have been applied in this dissertation:

References in the text follow the Harvard System.

Bibliographic references appear in the text accompanied by a date and page number where relevant. The name of the author only appears if not mentioned in the same sentence to which it refers.

Interview references are all coded alphabetically under the name of the author and appear at the end of the Bibliography referencing the interviewee.

Footnotes appear where necessary to amplify the text.

Indentations and single spacing indicate quotations of four lines and longer within the text.

‘ ’ used for quotations within the text.

[] indicate the author's insertions in quotations.

The term ‘ceramist’ is used throughout the paper for consistency, however the term ‘potter’ may be used when quoting directly from sources.

Foreign terminology is indicated in italicised font and where necessary the English translation is supplied in brackets after the foreign term.

Titles of literature in the form of books, journals, magazines and articles appearing in such publications appear in the text in italicised font.

Titles of art works are indicated in italicised font.

Illustrations of ceramic works are referred by their figure number in bold font within the text.

A Bibliography follows the dissertation and cites published and non-published dissertations, magazines, (mainly pertaining to ceramics) newspaper articles and interviews grouped thematically and presented in alphabetically order. The Bibliography contains texts that are not referred to directly but nevertheless were instructive in the writing of the text.

The images of the ceramics by Mikula are found within the text in Chapter Three. The ceramic works illustrated are measured in centimeters and the breadth/length precedes the height. This and other relevant information is found in the List of Illustrations following the Bibliography.

Most of the images have been taken digitally, however where the actual ceramic work could not be sourced the image has been scanned from photographs obtained from Maggie Mikula's photo albums and from other sources. Every attempt has been made to ensure the quality of the reproduction however; some of the scanned images may not be as clear due to the varying quality of the original image.

Transcripts of three interviews follow the List of Illustrations. This inclusion is to cite examples of the types of questions and responses noted in the primary research. The respondents chosen give a cross section of the interviewees and methods of interviewing. The first interview is with one of Maggie Mikula's family members: her husband Paul. This interview was done by a questionnaire that the respondent completed in his own time. The second interview included, is with a gallery curator: Jill Addleson from the Durban Art Gallery who responded by e-mail and the third interview is with a local black artist: Sfiso ka Mkame who was interviewed personally.

Although a qualitative social science research may not produce an absolute truth it is hoped that this research is as unbiased as is possible. I have considered the fact that my interests and experience may reflect a partial, selective and culture-bound result and have approached this paper with as analytical and objective awareness as possible. I am a white, middle-class woman, trained as a teacher and facilitator. As a Master's student at an English-speaking University, I am writing this paper in English, aware of the issues of working with people from other language and cultural backgrounds, knowing that it may affect results both from interviews and from the research information. The decision to write about cross-cultural syncretism has been influenced by my own work where I have always attempted to act with respect and understanding to produce work that celebrates rather than merely mimicking other cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa's contemporary art scene forms a part of the contradictions and complexities of our modern culture, in the sense that it is postnational and variegated. It is both a settled and a settler nation, based on immigration, economic indenture and various clashing forms of cultural performance and languages. South Africa's population is equally hybrid, European, Asian and African. As such this country forms a microcosm of that critical address defined as globalisation. (Enwezor 1997: 8)

Syncretism in the visual arts in South Africa has occurred in periods of social and cultural imbalance, and its manifestations in the arts have consequently been subject to scrutiny. This dissertation will examine aspects of assimilation of cross-cultural dimensions in the visual languages in South Africa. The study will center around this discourse in particular in its location in the work of Maggie Mikula (1941-1989), a ceramist from KwaZulu-Natal.

Considering this dissertation from a Post-modernist perspective, knowledge that was seen as neutral and objective will be questioned. This Post-modernist discourse will investigate the subjective representations by institutional hierarchies that place, and then control, hegemonic systems that will then in turn, prejudice other discourses. Specific focus will be on the relationship of cultures to each other and the position of women in contemporary South Africa, in particular within the art community. This will obviate an exploration of South Africa's socio-political history to establish the position and impact of colonialism. A Post-colonial reading shows that the aim of colonialism to consolidate boundaries had the opposite result of encouraging interaction and influence between the various cultures.

In the identification of cross-cultural dimensions in the creative arts, problems associated with the response to identity and ethnicity inevitably require exploration. If the opening quote by Enwezor is to be supported, South Africa is a microcosm of globalisation. This must be seen in response 'to the evolving nature of contemporary culture today as transmitted from a very limited enclosure of Eurocentrism' (Enwezor 1997: 7).

Eurocentrism based securely in ethnocentric principles, adhered to the belief that all that constituted value is at the center of everything, and all peripheral to this, is evaluated in reference to it. 'Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders' (Segall 1979: 222). This was the situation in Africa where most of the continent was colonised by the early 1900's. The concept of the west as more advanced than the other cultures enabled the justification of colonialism and imperialism (McEvelley 1993: 11).

The colonial encroachment into South Africa accelerating in the 17th Century resulted in exclusiveness, conflict, opposition and conquest. Under European oppression, white colonisers built a society determined by exclusive power and dominance. This ideal was established with the landing of Jan van Riebeeck in the Cape in 1652. By planting a hedge of bitter almonds around the European settlement, (after conflict between the Khoi and the settlers), he physically and metaphorically built a divide that ran through every aspect of South African life for the next few centuries (Martin 2001: 37). This culminated in the establishment of the myth of racial marginality. 'The notion of the superiority of one race over another was justified through the dispossession of land and space' (Koloane 1997:32).

European colonialism and imperialism aimed to eventually unite all cultures with the intent that they became westernised. Western cultural identity as mainstream colonialism was emphasised as a method of enhancing the power of the coloniser as the pervader of universal 'truths' against which all cultures would be judged. To validate its position the west consistently engaged with the colonised as the 'other', denying their humanity, self-respect and unique creative processes. In art the coloniser dismissed the work of any other culture as inferior and 'primitive' (McEvelley 1993:11).

A contention supported by Edward Said (1978), considered how the actual process of travel, exploration and conquest meant that people moving to places and cultures that already existed, exerted a sense of control that came not from creating something from nothing, but reducing something to nothing. The colonised culture was seen as a blank slate, having no history or civilisation of its own prior to the arrival of the coloniser. The implication of this was the development of a comparative characterisation, in linguistic terms, of a binary opposition – the west became more west, more rational, mature and

developed, the 'other' became more irrational, depraved and backward. In the colonial period the 'other' was perceived in a degraded, stereotyped image reflecting the image of the mysterious, duplicitous and primitive (Said 1978: 37-42). Objects brought back from non-western societies were claimed 'not only as booty but as evidence' of western hegemony. (McEvelley 1992: 87).

In South Africa the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 divided the land in an 87/13 percentage in the white settlers' favour. This removal of local inhabitants from their ancestral communities became further entrenched on the vision of the apartheid system directed and ushered in by the National Party when it came into power in 1948. The Group Areas Act of 1955 further controlled the movement of non-whites. The introduction of an inferior education system imposed through the Bantu Education Act of 1957, together with the implementation of the Population Registration Act of 1960, marginalised millions of inhabitants into a voiceless, second-class 'other' in their own homeland. Whites were separated from other races in an attempt to sustain a superior position of power and control. The censorship and propaganda policies implemented by the National Party kept the white population partly ignorant of the suppression of black and other communities (Carter and O'Merar 1982 (2nd ed.) 97-140).

In an aim to consolidate colonial boundaries, people of different race and culture were often juxtaposed creating new tensions and dynamics. By the early 1960's most of the colonised countries in Africa had gained independence and the post-colonial era brought into being a shift in the power and presence of the coloniser.

The 1980's were a politically volatile time in South Africa. The oppressed masses under apartheid rule began actively initiating collective resistance in the quest for basic human rights. The retaliation towards the hegemony of colonial/apartheid suppression gave rise to a complex network of community resistance that stretched across the colour line. This time of confusion and uncertainty that eventually precipitated into violence grew into worldwide pressure that eventually led to post-apartheid majority rule in 1994.

History now no longer submitted to only an elitist Western frame and could be viewed from more than one notion of authority. With colonisation came displacement and uprooting. Now with these bonds broken, a new position needed to be sought regarding the

meaning of identity, the questions surrounding origin, and the new concepts of ethnicity and home (Enwezor 1997: 7-9). Enwezor claims that colonisation constructed completely new archetypes, communities and cultures that in turn put into question the notions of hybridity, identity, place and nationality. The way people have been 'dispersed and gathered, dwelt and migrated, into various forms of social formations and reterritorialisations' have in a sense led to a new definition of society in the post-colonial context (1997: 9).

The term globalisation is fraught with questions about its final definition. In *Globalization and the Nation-State*, Holton suggests that Roland Roberts' theory of this concept that refers 'both to the compression of the world, and intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole', offers a useful working definition (Holton 1998: 15). He adds that globalisation incorporates the ways in which people understand, experience and act within the world. Although this has the implications of 'commercial persuasion, moral qualities and political objectives' (Holton 1998: 18) he qualifies this dialogue by concluding that globalisation need not be an all-encompassing and destructive, homogenising force. He suggests that it be seen as a complex *field* that sets up intersections of network processes that 'falter as much as they advance' and allows for counter-trends and movements. This leaves open the acknowledgment that social groups can be influenced by and borrow from each other without the destruction of cultural differences based on ethnicity (Holton 1998: 186-204).

Gikandi realised in *Maps of Englishness Writing identity in the Culture of Colonialism* that our postcolonial era with the legacy of 'empire' and colonialism dictated 'that we recognise the mutual imbrication of both the coloniser and the colonised in the making of modern social and cultural formations' (1996: 20). He supported Spivak when she asserted that 'empire messes with identity' (1996: 226) but goes further and claims that 'it messes with the identity of both the coloniser and the colonised' (1996: 31).

Despite the notion that people identify with and are conditioned by relatively narrow groups or cultures, Segall claims that the social fact of human existence nullifies this predisposition. He notes that people must develop empathy with others and if at all possible an identification with all mankind. (1979:222)

Edward Said, who argues that western cultural imperialism operates partially from a narrative of power, equally condemns the concepts of the reverse construct of the Occident as 'the other'. He criticises the Afrocentric and Islamocentric power bases as much as the Eurocentric one calling for a wider context that does not just reflect one 'side' or one 'culture' (Said 1993: xxiii in Holton 1998: 165).

Holton says the West and the rest of the world can not be regarded as two discrete regions as they have long been engaged in 'interchange and interaction as well as exploitation and conflict, including cultural as well as economic and political institutions and technologies' (Holton 1989: 165). He adds that cultural patterns have been exposed to change through migration, travel and continual 'syncretisation of cultural styles' (Holton 1989: 166). This break down of the association between the cultural situation and the physical setting has led to multi-layered identities and complex loyalties (Held and McGrew 2000: 17-35).

In *Cross-Cultural Psychology - Human Behaviour in Global Perspective* (1979) Segall states that human behaviour is a product of culture and as the world shrinks we develop a sense of 'self' that can be linked to an interface with numerous and varied cross-cultural processes. He emphasises that as all cultures are in flux, so are the people who invent and respond to them. As acculturation is as primary a response in human existence as socialisation (1979:183-222) he notes: 'Not only is every one of us shaped by the traditional norms and teachings that prevail in our culture; each of us is subjected to lifelong changing influences' (1979:185). Adding to this, Segall maintains that no culture exists in isolation, and social contact dispersed through missionaries, immigrants, tourists and the like, further supports acculturation. He advocates that this contact functions reciprocally with cultures simultaneously influencing each other (1979:185).

As noted, all living cultures are constantly changing - sometimes rapidly, sometimes slowly, but nevertheless continually. Institutions change, technology advances, ideologies are revalued (Segall 1979:185). According to Brydon (1991:196) this new globalism coincides with local independence and global interdependence. Seeking 'a way to cooperate without cooption, a way to define differences that do not depend on myths of cultural purity or authenticity but that thrive on an interaction that 'contaminates' without homogenising' (1991:196).

Maggie Mikula (1941-1989) lived and worked during a period when South Africa began redefining and transforming itself from a separatist to an inclusive society. Her work embraced cross-cultural dimensions and techniques that were previously associated with indigenous ceramic practices. She integrated these with western ceramic methods to produce unique works that rejected the South African ceramic styles of that time. In this manner she broke new boundaries that explored and negotiated cultural identity by white ceramists and would later manifest itself inversely in contemporary black ceramists too.

CHAPTER ONE

Art in South Africa - cross-cultural borrowing

Western art-making traditions in South Africa (specifically easel painting) were introduced by settlers from various parts of the world including the English, Dutch, Germans and the French Huguenots. The first Western painters were travelers, explorers and topographical reporters drawn to the exotic landscape and its peoples. These early artists focused on recording the scenery, flora and fauna, ethnic studies and rural and urban compositions approaching it with detached subjectivity. Their drawings and paintings were viewed as documents of authentic experience that were sent home as record of their adventures. The publication of this '*Africana*' relied on the content and not on the quality of the art (Arnold 1996: 5). Postcolonial discourse suggests this '*Africana*' provided a means by which the patriarchal west could establish its identity by positioning itself in relation to other cultures. The comparison of white/black, Christian/heathen, advanced/uncivilised was shaped through the concepts of European Enlightenment and scientific rationalism (Arnold 1996: 4).

According to Tiffin and Lawson (1994) colonialism conceptually depopulated the land by either ignoring the presence of the indigenous people or treating other cultures as less than human. This was imperative for imperial settlement. 'Only empty spaces can be settled, so the space had to be made empty by ignoring or dehumanising the inhabitants' (Tiffin and Lawson 1994: 5). This was recorded by interpreting the depiction of the landscape as pure, unsullied by human intervention, mediated by the artist's view of the 'ideal'. Also of great benefit to this principle were the ethnographic studies which depicted the differences of others. Scientific studies based on social Darwinist theory reflected in the physical disparities between races gave credence to a hierarchy of race. Thus the indigenous cultures in South Africa were presented as exotic and uncivilised and the women were explored from an erotic perspective as products of the sexual gaze (Arnold 1986: 4).

Artists from a dominant culture assimilating iconography from 'a vilified inferior counterculture', construct substantial aesthetic problems (Koloane 1997: 33). The ruling

white minority in South Africa used a subjective evaluation of socially and politically accepted norms to determine its position of power. To place itself, it had to create an opposition, marking itself different from the silent 'other'. Colonial artists explored the African landscape through the eyes of the conqueror, suggested by Koloane as representing 'the central emblem in the politics of space' (1997: 32).

Until the late 1940's South African art adapted only circumspectly to express a local idiom. A group of artists including Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser and Wolf Kibel assimilated early Modernism, more specifically German Expressionism endeavouring to create an African visual language. Koloane suggests, that ironically, this European influence based on the study of primitive non-western imagery, was sourced in German museums. He asks, could the South African followers not have found the obvious non-western aspect in their own surroundings? But, he argues that the 'umbilical ties of some South African artists are so potent that whatever positive elements they might assimilate locally have to be accomplished through a European source' (Koloane 1997:32).

This argument is further strengthened by Skotnes'¹ paper at the 1979 conference *The State of Art in South Africa*. This white artist claimed that 'as important as the long arm of Expressionism proved to be for us here, it was always only a stylistic influence' (Skotnes 1979:21). Art in South Africa, even into the late 1970's, was generally based on the influence of European and American conventions (Skotnes 1979:21).

However, not all artists looked elsewhere to develop a language of re-presentation. Gikandi, argues that after colonisation and the demise of imperialism both the coloniser and the colonised had to reinvent themselves. He suggested that this invention would not preclude old loyalties, but could offer additional legitimate, albeit, synthesised, narratives of discourse (Gikandi 1996:31-33).

Two of the first white South African artists to assimilate local indigenous material were Walter Battiss and Alexis Preller. Both borrowed images from black African sources, reinterpreting various stylistic languages to construct a unique reality. Berman (1983: 13),

¹ As a leading member of the artists in South Africa who sought a professional approach to their work, Cecil Skotnes worked tirelessly to develop an authentic non-derivative form of expression in his discipline. He was also continuously engaged in developing black art through his teaching (Berman 1983: 18-21).

believed these artists, who were born and lived in Africa, experienced an intangible entity she termed the '*African Mystique*'. This she claimed provided a deeper psychological response and affinity to symbols of the past – the ruins, the art, the rituals and the local legends, than had their European counterparts experienced in the earlier in the 20th Century. She felt 'the Cubists and Expressionists adopted elements of African art, welding them into their sophisticated vision and experience. But they took over only the outer forms; they did not probe the mystery' (Berman 1983: 13). Berman asserted that South African artists possessed a plethora of historic visual symbols, not she claimed, seen as just primitive symbols, but as a context of experience. This, she felt, allowed them access to the spirit of the continent. She notes that this awakened a new language that began to separate local art psychologically from its European antecedents and, ironically, helped South African art to shift nearer to the contemporary international style (Berman 1983: 13).

Battiss (1906-1982) was intuitively and psychologically attached to Africa. (Berman 1983: 13). He was the first major South African artist to base his sourcing almost entirely on indigenous African imagery (Fransen 1982: 313). Skawran (1985:15-16) notes his awareness that he was no longer a Western artist and could not return to his European ancestral roots. She said he felt that he had to forge a new localised, indigenous identity, one derived from his 'primitive core which helps him to capture the primordial echoes of his African environment', reconciling them and balancing them with his contemporary Western aesthetics (Skawran 1985: 15). An obsession with Bushman rock art led to his dedicated recording of their work. This consequently brought to bear a personal identification with the rock paintings (Berman 1970: 39). His fascination with this art linked to food gathering, folklore and spiritual awareness led him to reduce his imagery to simple schematic symbols. Sourced from the symbols and signs derived from San culture, he reduced the images until he could express just the essence of the forms through his hieroglyphic figures. He claimed the 'artists of the rocks' were his counsel directing him to his personal insights (Berman 1983: 13).

Nearly forty years on however, in a Post-modern reading, criticism of the conscious romanticised creation of Battiss's 'African identity' through his art and writings, raises questions about his identification with the Modernist artist/hero and the patronising attitudes associated with white male artists' search for identity (Lutrin 1998:73). Deborah

Lutrin, a Postgraduate student from the University of the Witwatersrand, presented a paper at the South African 14th Art Historians' Conference entitled *Walter Battiss' "African Identity": A Primitivist Invention?* In it she claims that the Modernist idealisation of Africa as the 'primordial site of the origin of humankind', (in which Battiss worked), was linked with European colonialism and the assertion of masculine power (Lutrin 1998:73-76). Based on the Enlightenment ideal of valorising 'primitive' societies, Western ethnologists as early as 1930's, seeking a counter to the growing mechanism and technology of their culture, saw this as a romantic escape from contemporary society. Later, too, Levi-Strauss, using similar Rousseauian idealism, argued that primitive cultures were more 'authentic' than western, civilised ones (Hountondji 1983: 157).

In reviewing the existing literature on Battiss, Lutrin deconstructed the myth of this man as the 'great African artist-genius' that was perpetuated by historians, and supported deliberately by the artist himself. She argues that Battiss only arrived at this image of himself after he went to Europe and was exposed to Modernism through the works of Picasso (whom he met in Paris in 1949), Matisse and other modernists and thus consequently acquired an 'African' voice.

Author and artist Marilyn Martin criticises this theory. She concludes that although few white South African artists 'were aware of their continent's aesthetic traditions and had usually seen African objects as only of ethnological interest' (2001: 39), Battiss, however, actually engaged first hand with Bushman rock paintings. Murray Schoonraad supports this stating that Battiss's first encounter with Rock art petroglyphs was as early as 1917-1920 when his family lived in Koffiefontein. He saw his first rock painting in 1933 (Schoonraad 1986: 40). He then traveled to Europe in 1938, where he merged his new found African idiom with the emergence of European modernism that owed a debt to non-western cultures – through the 'primitivism' emulated by Picasso, Braque and Gauguin. (Lutrin 1998: 74).

An African philosopher, Paulin Hountondji, acknowledged that western anthropology was now recognising the existence of other cultures. Secondly, this acknowledgment was being seen as the potential deliverance of western society 'from an excess of technology and standardisation and [would allow] yearning for what Bergson called a 'heightening of the soul'' (Hountondji 1983: 157-158).

This cultural pluralism, based on the fact that other cultures coexist with each other, and that there is recognition of this fact, also demands that either the cultures remain separate or engage in a mutually beneficial coexistence (Hountondji 1983:156).

Battiss conceded that he was a foreigner who did not know the African soil as well as the local inhabitants did (Skawran 1985:16). He openly admitted that he did not understand black people although he admired them greatly. Despite this, Battiss, recognising that South African art had to grow in a new direction. He stated in a SABC radio interview with Elaine Davis (1981), 'I have a terrible feeling that South Africa has to start its art all over again and not imitate what's happening in Europe, or from art books on the art scene over in America, and that South Africa has to start right from the beginning, and go through the whole primitive thing, finding its roots here...' (Loubser 1989: 71). As a colonist, his identity was unfixed. Living in Africa, divorced from European society, how does a white artist come to terms with expressing a valid identity? Determined to engage with a mediated experience of his locality and his own biographic narrative, Battiss presumed a self-identity forged from these syntheses.

'A territory, as it were, is carved out and colonised. Yet such colonisation by its very nature cannot be complete' (Giddens 1991: 4). Allowance must be made for not only the coloniser's gaze on this territory, but the colonised equally has just as long a gaze on the coloniser (Gikandi 1996: 20). This process of acculturation, Herskovits says, reflects the ways that some conditions are absorbed by a culture and adjusted and styled to fit to it. This, he also emphasises, infers equality between the two cultures involved and is fundamentally a reciprocal relationship (Herskovits 1938: 6-7).

In 1937, Battiss, Preller and other young artists, formed the 'New Group' (representing artists in 1930's who 'veered away from naturalistic portrayal of the landscape')(Berman 1983: 13). Although not connected by a common aesthetic, they shared and expressed open contempt for the lack of professionalism in South African art. They organised exhibitions and lectures to educate the 'deeply conservative public' and included work by other racial groups (Martin 2001:39). Berman (1983:13) claimed this movement helped to romanticise the drama and exoticism surrounding other cultures and a new direction and energy was put into the stagnant Western painting tradition emulated by the majority of white South African artists. The language of Modernism and the visual medium of

Primitivism gave them a vocabulary in which to explore colour, line and texture and to assimilate and develop the linear qualities of indigenous art.

Alexis Preller (1911-1975) also incorporated imagery from indigenous sources, developing an intensely unique style that borrowed from Italian, Etruscan, Egyptian and African mythology and belief systems. This early practise of assimilation related to the Enlightenment, primordial 'ideal' with the essence of Rousseauian origins, interlinked ancient cultures which were seen as more authentic, unexplored, unexplained, pure and closer to the true 'ideal'. Berman (1970:241) advocates that Preller's artistic vocabulary identified with his immediate experience of Africa and not from the borrowed 'primitivist' Modernism from Europe.² To a white audience they appealed to the romanticised ideal of Africa.³

Preller was intrigued by the suppressed, inaccessible iconography of the mythical cultures he explored. His fictional reconstruction of totemic figures, reduced and modified, produced a new imagery that reflected an idealistic reading of the 'roots' and 'spirit' of Africa seen through a white man's gaze. Influenced earlier by the subjective rendering of colour by the Modernists, Gauguin and Van Gogh (Berman 1983: 351) his work was intuitively stimulated by his direct experience of Africa rather than by the superficial primitivist conventions from Europe. As with Battiss, Preller did not distinguish between fact and fantasy and created a unique and complex mythology of a prototypical culture infused with primeval legends such as the *Little King* series and *Hieratic Figures* (1955-1957). He was concerned with a new intention (noted earlier) that Berman describes as the '*African Mystique*' (Berman 1970: 12). This discovery of Africa's unwritten past allowed Preller and others to access a primordial archetype. Berman said they were intuitively stimulated by symbols of the past 'the magical connotations, the vital energy, the violent rhythms and the primitive forms of African cult-objects [that] seemed to drawn from the very well-springs of man's creative inspiration' (1970: 12).

²Examples of his work such as the Mapogga series of paintings probed the geometric patterning of the Ndebele and played on a corruption of the name Mabhoko a 19th century Ndebele chief (Berman 1970:242).

³ In the 1930's the conservative, white, audience saw Africa through the eyes of a romanticised colonial perspective. They identified with the notion that Africa teemed with 'the endless millions of indigenous black peoples whose minds and ways of life still contain unsolved riddles for us, of Bushmen paintings which incorporate Egyptian story, of the Zimbabwe Ruins of witch craft and spells. What do we know of these things? I think this is what Preller says and makes us feel' (Jeppe 1961: 133-134).

Nel (2000) contends that Preller, even in the late 1930's, had a compelling desire to be 'one' with Africa at a time when the need for artists to 'understand their Africanness' was questioned. Although born of an Afrikaans family, he was of German origin and was also homosexual, a fact that would alienate him from the mainstream white South African society at that time. This hybridity could have predisposed his need to search through different cultures to claim roots that did not exist in the Eurocentric dialect. Most white artists in South Africa at this time lent towards their European heritage or an emergent nationalist Afrikaner tradition and those who appropriated African imagery into their work could be seen as heretical (Nel 2000: 116). Nel asks 'How could artists of this era, who had European training and orientation, become African?' (2000:116). He says, it is in hindsight, too simplistic to condemn Preller for the 'fact that he was engaged in an active and unpopular search for identity in a context of enormous cultural complexity and compartmentalisation' (2000:166). Using eclectic imagery sourced from Paris, the Seychelles, Egypt and the Ndebele culture he was discovering his vision of Africa and his experiences in a broader cultural matrix. Nel states that access to Ndebele wall painting was also relatively new and Preller reflects a similitude in attempting to seek an 'authentic language in which to reflect and construct an identity' (2000:116).

Berman claims this engagement with the specific ethos of Africa was the start of the psychological separation of South African art from its traditional European roots. It opened with it a new difficulty – one of choice. Artists could remain with eclectic internationalism or discover a 'self-conscious Africanism' (Berman 1983: 14). This she said would only become an issue in the sixties.

Self-identity was a reflex reaction to new forms of mediated experiences offered by modernity. The sense of 'self' 'which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems' (Giddens 1991:5). As tradition loosens its grip the more an individual is forced to become eclectic (Giddens 1991:1-14).

In the 1960's several young artists felt they had never really examined the character of their specific identity as South Africans. New attention was being placed on South Africa from abroad and was instilling a deep 'reflection on the meaning which South Africans held for each other' (Berman 1980: 19). With the independence and liberation of

seventeen African countries in 1960, came the rejection of European cultural superiority and the campaign for an African ethical and cultural ideology (Enwezor 2001: 10-12). Negritude was a product of these challenges and was an expression of 'dissatisfaction with colonialism, its emasculation of [their] culture, and its deferment of [their] freedom' (Okeke 2001: 30).

Arising at the same period as these political 'winds of change' in Africa, an exhibition of traditional African art, coupled with Cubist and Expressionist works, was held in Salisbury (now Harare) in 1962. Several artists felt that by utilising European and African styles they were in a unique position to assimilate and transform these combined concepts into a new language. The focus now, according to Berman, was their intention 'to strip Africa of its mystique and to come to grips with the unromanticised reality' (1983:19). This coincided with the return to inherited traditional imagery by West African artists, who had until then, had only been exposed to formal training in European styles (McEvelley 1993: 12).

The 'Amadlozi' group consisting of, amongst others, artists Cecily Sash, Cecil Skotnes, Sydney Kumalo and Edoardo Villa formed in the early 1960's.⁴ Important here is that this group identified themselves with the spirit and ethos of Africa especially at a time when domination and political suppression was accelerating in South Africa. They sought to construct a local and original identity to their work that 'could not be fabricated from derivative conventions – African or European' (Berman 1983:20). Technically and stylistically the work from which was derived was European, iconographically it was African. Cecil Skotnes was at that time coordinating the Polly Street Art Centre that became one of the centers of black expression in art during the 1950's.⁵

⁴ 'Amadlozi' means ancestors in Zulu.

⁵ One of the most significant of the early South African art schools was the Polly Street Art Centre that was established in 1948 as an art and recreational center for the black townships. The Art Director, Cecil Skotnes, developed the center into a thriving community that nourished and encouraged some of the most accomplished black artists such as Sydney Kumalo, Ben Macala, Durant Sihlali, Lucas Sithole and Helen Sebidi. As the ideology of apartheid gained momentum, black people were being removed from city centers. Polly Street Art Centre, as a consequence, shut down (1960) and alternate venues were sought out of the main centers (Martin 2001: 40).

Skotnes' work changed from the mid 1950's when he moved from painting to graphics and wood- cuts. Using indigenous woods he embraced printmaking as a medium to develop his own 'essentially African idiom' (Harmsen 1996: 11-63). He read widely and collected indigenous artifacts that were significant influence on his style. He drew cross-culturally from ancient Babylon, Egypt, Greek and Assyria. He combined primeval aspects of these cultures, with styles from Africa, as well as from his European heritage, claiming as seminal to his work the knowledge of Cubism, in particular that of Picasso. His home was filled with an eclectic mix of artifacts, from African sculpture, Persian carpets, Japanese prints and Greek pottery (Skotnes 1996: 83).⁶

Skotnes' empathy with Africa informed his evocative images and his decorative use of colour and line expressed these concepts. In the early 1960's when Battiss asked him how he created his work he said:

... The colours of Africa, but as a European, I see the sensitive bleached colours and the pale ochres rather than the strident saturated primaries. I do large work because of the massiveness of the landscape. My creation runs parallel with that of contemporary, disturbed African art because the African and I are nicely caught in the same mesh of circumstances. I do not take from the African directly, nor does he take from me. What actually happens is that the black artist and myself, a white artist in Africa, are driven by the same artist compulsions in parallel lines. (Harmsen 1996: 19)

As white South African artists, these and others, adapted aspects from their ancestral roots, fusing them with their African 'roots' in an attempt to nourish a unique iconography through which they could express their individual spirits. However as they were progressing towards an authentic acculturated language, derived in part from eclectic

⁶ Skotnes encouraged his students at the Polly Street Centre to investigate their African material culture about which they knew very little (Martin 2001: 41). He encouraged them to synthesis it with modern European art in an attempt to 'assert an 'Africanness' - in a time when being African in South Africa was an existential burden' (Okeke 2001: 34).

borrowing, the political system which supported a fragmented and alienated society could not hope to nurture anything other than a 'false consciousness constituted in traditional white-based culture' (Gordimer 1979: 11).

Attempts to reconcile cultural divisions caused by Apartheid were met in part by exhibitions such as the biennial *Art South Africa Today* (Organised every two years by the Durban Art Gallery (DAG), the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) and the African Art Centre in Durban. It was held from 1963 to 1975). The inclusion of some black artists and jurors, as well as the acceptance of works of a socio-political nature, made this exhibition unusual and at that time relatively 'liberal'. White artists joined their black counterparts to protest, through satire and criticism, the white South African government. These included new lecturers at the Natal Technical College, Clifford Bestall, Paul Stopforth and Gavin Younge (Clark 1992: 68). They subsequently all moved from Natal by the 80's having 'undergone crises of confidence about the political efficacy of their work' and 'disillusioned with the politics in the early 80's' (Clark 1992: 210-211). Despite this support many black artists refused to be affiliated with white-organised exhibitions (Clark 1992: 198) thus giving a partial and unbalanced representation of what South African art represented.

By 1979 a conference in Cape Town, titled *The State of Art in South Africa* brought together concerned art historians and artists who questioned the crisis in South African art. In his paper, *The Problem of Ethnicity*, Skotnes blamed the divided social and political position in the country for the lack of growth in art. 'We live in a fragmented society which is partly the result of the racial structure of our society, but mainly due to our political system' (Skotnes 1979:21). He stated that 'white art was detached from the real issues confronting the country and until this was addressed white contribution, which is the major force in South Africa, remains without roots' (Skotnes 1979: 22). He was nevertheless speaking prior to the dawning of the era of 'resistance art' of the early 1980's when many artists used their art as a vehicle of social indictment (Okeke 2001: 34).

With black artists boycotting the event, this conference reinforced divisions apparent in the country. According to Gavin Younge, black artists refused to participate as they felt no real solutions would come from it, and they saw the venue – the University of Cape Town – as representing educational privilege (Clark 1992: 201).

This was supported by Nadine Gordimer in her contribution *Relevance and Commitment* (1979: 6-7) as she felt the white artist must engage in a double rejection of himself, firstly as the dominant culture and secondly as a mediator between the oppressed and the oppressor. She said that it could be achieved by changing his attitudes and concepts that would be 'seen as relevant by and become committed to commonly understood, commonly created cultural entities corresponding to a common reality, an indigenous culture' (Gordimer 1979: 7).

Andrew Verster, a Natal artist and critic, also dealt with this in his paper *Is there a South African Art or is it still to come?* Focusing on the voluntary isolation in which white colonists placed themselves when they created an insular, inclusive laager system, that rejected anyone that was not the same. Verster felt that 'art is the expression of a deep personal commitment to one's own private vision, of a total sense of identification with the actual experience of one's own life' (1979: 34). He argued that although the white artist was physically part of Africa, he was an exile in his own land due to the politics of the time saying 'there is no room in art today for a narrow vision. Regionalism has no place. Culture transcends time and place, history and people. Like art it is international and universal. If we hope to find ourselves we must first find our common identity and this can only happen when we integrate into a common society. Until then we will have no art, no culture, no hope and no future' (1979: 35).

Although the purpose of this conference was to encourage all artists to strive for change towards a post-apartheid ethos it only reinforced the beleaguered position of the white art community.

Ironically, even two years later artists were still supporting national whites-only exhibitions and newly published art history books such as Berman's *Art and Artists of South Africa* (1983) still reflected only a partial and main-stream view of South African art (Clark 1992).

Both Gordimer and Verster reiterated that the solution to the divided society in South Africa and its art was to develop an indigenous culture embracing all groups. In *The Postcolonial Aura* historian Arif Dirlik reasons 'culture is not a way of seeing the world,

but also a way of making and changing it' (Dirlik 1997:24). He added it is 'a way of organising the world, its time and space' and 'having organised the world in terms of culture, it seems easier to think of people as the creation of culture, rather than the reverse' (Dirlik 1997:24). He argued, however, that culture is not an autonomous principle but a relationship inter-linked with social relations. In *Contemporary African Art in South Africa* (written as far back as the early 1970's) De Jager writes that when acculturation occurs the over-riding consequence of such a development is the change that results in both groups, neither escaping from a mutual influence (De Jager 1973: 17).

The 1980's heralded organised resistance to segregationist rule, fired in part by the historic *Culture and Resistance* Symposium held in 1982 in Gaborone. It was held to highlight and challenge apartheid, and 'creative expression was perceived as an integral aspect of the struggle for liberation' (Koloane 1997:33). Clark maintains that the 80's ushered in persecution and repression of artists who invited dissidence through their work (1992:64). Producing work often termed 'resistance art', many artists such as Willie Bester, Gavin Younge, Sfiso ka Mkame, William Kentridge and Penny Siopis commented on the sociopolitical climate of the 70's and 80's in South Africa (Martin 2001: 41).

This challenge and resistance to racism was not exclusive. The 1980's also witnessed the rise of feminist consciousness in South Africa (Arnold 1996: 15). Modernism posited the subject of representation as masculine, centered and dominant. Craig Owens, a Post-modernist writer and critic, claims that although critics respected feminism it was regarded as one among many voices, placing it in the same category as black and ethnic cultures, homosexual issues, and 'naïve' or marginalised folk art. In the attempt to neutralise feminism as a unique entity in its own right, women were described as incomplete and used as a 'token for all markers of difference' (Owens 1992: 172). In the post-colonial context women were seen as the mediators between the indigenous cultures and the western hegemonic, male power structure. Their reduced position of power was identified with similar readings of the marginalised 'other', and thus their art in certain genres was assumed different, and so to by western aesthetics, assigned a lower priority. Examples of this art made by women, included flower painting, and objects argued as 'craft' due to their functionality, the choice of material and also often their decorative motifs. Many of these pieces were produced by black and white women (Arnold 1996: 15).

By the mid 1980's, women in South Africa were building a network amongst themselves, organising exhibitions and festivals to represent their art that would challenge and question the notion of a single theoretical discourse, that of a western, white male narrative.

In 1980 the United Nations instituted a cultural boycott against South Africa as part of a strategy to isolate the South African regime. The boycott lasted ten years, and artists, starving culturally and denied access to overseas opportunities, were forced to reassess their work. They challenged the work being done around them and confronted their role of expression and social accountability (Martin 2001:37). Conferences such as *Art Towards Social Change and Development in South Africa* (held in Gaborone, Botswana in 1982) served as support mechanisms for cultural change and resistance (Williamson 1989: 1- 4).

According to white perceptions, black art had two clear origins from two clear localities – the rural crafts and the urban centers (Sack 1988: 9). The black, urban artist, encouraged by white patrons drew from his traditional heritage, and although influenced by western ideas, was allowed no formal tuition, the excuse given that he ‘ had a natural ability that should not be tainted by outside influence’ (Martin 2001: 38). Most of the painting and drawing done in the 1950's and 1960's were based on the iconography sourced from daily life and the people in the townships. Aptly named ‘Township Art’, this form of expression developed using an acculturated style and medium, and the picturesque versions reflected self-censorship as it catered to a white audience (Sack 1988: 9-14).

In 1948 the Johannesburg Local Committee for Non-European Adult Education was created by a multi-racial group uneasy about the lack of education for blacks. The Polly Street Art Centre, established in 1949, encouraged the promotion of an indigenous African artistic idiom under the tutelage of white artists such as Cecil Skotnes and Larry Scully. Similar centers opened over the next few decades, run and supported by churches or private patronage. Formal government funded black art education was not to be realised until the end of the twentieth century.

In her article *What is African in South African Art?*, written six years prior to independence, Natalie Knight declared that artists in this country were in a special

situation. They could access European art traditions and at the same time possess an intimate relationship with African iconography. The writer said artists had responded individually to their 'dual heritage over the past century...South African art has proved to be a fascinating seedbed for acculturation – the meeting of two cultures' (Knight 1989: 38). Reference was made to Phatuma Seoka, a Venda artist, whose woodcarvings included images of prominent local white figures, are westernised with the use of paint, and Edwine Simon whose drawing *Witchdoctor* was described as possessing a sensitive awareness of two intensely differing cultures (1989: 39).

The post-apartheid era of the early 1990's put an end to more than five hundred years of colonial rule in South Africa. With colonised and colonisers skeptical and hopeful at the same time, moving towards a free and fair democracy (Oliphant 2000:59), the process has not been without its problems socially and culturally. After the 1994 elections that lead to majority rule in South Africa, artists felt encouraged to consider new themes and images other than political inquiry. However, now in the 21st century, identity, memory and history are again being addressed (Martin 2001: 1).

Post-modernism has brought amongst its many characteristics, such as skepticism, irony and paradox, the use of appropriation. It rejects the supposition of modernity and contemporaneity as exclusively European or American, and the notion that Africans have no legitimate voice because they are read as the marginalised 'other'. Martin exhorts South African artists to honour and celebrate their origins and experiences to direct their narrative towards discovering their own identity (Martin 2001: 44). This, she suggests, can be achieved by the 'gradual assertion of assimilation', in which 'the center learns of its own peripheral status through the gradual shock of a more equitable system of universal recognition' (Martin 2001: 43).

This gradual assimilation has brought about a degree of concern over the integration of cross-cultural dimensions in art. A Post-modern discourse redefines the boundaries between high art and craft and the position of women in the art community. It is within this context that the ceramic work of Maggie Mikula will be explored in the following chapter, examining its relevance in the evolution of art in South Africa in its broader sense and in particular within ceramics.

CHAPTER TWO

Ceramics in South Africa

2.1

Post-modernism in the visual arts has produced a host of theories that address the ways in which boundaries between the arts, cultures, traditions and practices have been erased or blurred (Bertens 1995: 3-11). This paper centers on the Post-modern appropriation of imagery both historically and cross-culturally particularly centering on the work of a Natal woman ceramist, Maggie Mikula. The free and open structure posited by Post-modernism reconnected artists with the past. Ceramists looked to history for inspiration in an eclectic borrowing that they transformed into original work with its own character (Cooper 1997:206). In direct rebellion against Modernism's puritanism, Post-modernism argued that work inevitably contained narratives, symbols and meanings. The theory of Semiotics, claimed as comprising of a new system of language, developed in the 1960's. It examined the meaning of signs, that, when read symbolically, enabled 'an object to become what semiologists term 'a bearer of meaning' (Del Vecchio 2001: 11). This aspect of Post-modernism, that questioned Western hegemony, and issues of identity and representation, was to have important implications in a South African context

South African ceramics in the 1970's clung to the conservative Anglo-Oriental style influenced by historical links with Britain. Unlike South Africa, America, had developed a potent individualism in the-mid 1950's, that had 'manifested when the oriental ideas of Bernard Leach were reinterpreted and merged with other influences to form a strong American hybrid' (Cruise 1991: 10). The Anglo-Oriental style of Bernard Leach was supported by the early 'studio potters' in South Africa who were 'awarded the status of cult figures within craft circles, on the basis of their production of anachronistic imitations of wares popularised by Leach in St. Ives, Cornwall c.1940' (Munnik 1985: 7). These included amongst others Esias Bosch, Hyme Rabinowitz and Andrew Walford.

Ceramists such as these, approached their craft with humility and an understanding of Leach's values. In an interview with Walford (Bauer 2004 (af) (ii)) he mentioned that as a

young man he went to Cornwall with his copy of *The Potter's Book* (by Leach) and some of his own work, based on Leach's tenets. He stated that Leach was generous with constructive appraisal and this inevitably greatly informed his work. Such aspects were later reinterpreted into his own style creating what Walford declared was his 'Zen Zulu' approach absorbing the two identities to produce a unique hybrid (Bauer 2004 (af) (ii)).

Interest in ceramics was growing in South Africa due to the influence of these established craftsmen and exposure to their work through workshops (Frisch 1974:11, No. 3). Tertiary facilities were producing trained ceramists such as David Walters and Marietjie van der Merwe who encouraged the growth of ceramics in South Africa. Teaching studios run by competent craftspeople such as Suzanne and Peter Passmore in Durban and Garth Hoets were encouraging the growth of amateur ceramics and this enthusiasm led to the formation of the South African Potter's Association (APSA) in 1973. Regional groups developed first in Johannesburg and the Cape in 1973, followed by Natal the next year. The benefits of a national organisation included workshops, exhibitions and networking amongst the members to encourage on-going improvement of standards. It would also work towards gaining government recognition for ceramics as both craft and art, educating the public, and maintaining a support structure for international representation (Fisch 1974: 9, No. 7).

Bosch, one of the founding members of APSA, with the 'legitimate claimant to the title of father of ceramics in South Africa' (Cruise 1991: 178), had trained with Michael Cardew, the first and most influential of Leach's students (Cruise 1991: 12). His early work epitomised the ethos of the Anglo-Oriental style, though, interestingly, in an article in the South African periodical '*Lantern*' (1960), his work was said to be 'rooted in Africa. It embraces the solidarity of the country in its shapes and reflects the rich dark atmosphere in its colour, the deep greens of the Knysna forests, the brown glaze in the colour of ploughed fields, the lighter browns of the Free State winter' (van Biljon 1960: 269). In praising his work, Van Biljon, contrasted it with 'Bantu pottery' based on European design and decorated with Bushman drawing and Bantu motifs 'to produce a sort of 'African' art' that too many local potters were producing, and to their detriment (Wood 1960).⁷

⁷ Van Biljon could have been referring to the figurative and decorative imagery painted on mass produced ceramics such as that manufactured by The Kalahari Studio in Cape Town, The Grahamstown Pottery, Drostdy Ware and the Bushman ware from Crescent Potteries in Krugersdorp (Gers 2000: 132-144). These studios had been established to cater for the local market during and just after the 2nd World War when

Cruise (1991) emphasised that there appeared to be 'a moral obligation' to follow the Anglo-Oriental creed making it 'particularly difficult in the seventies for ceramic artists in South Africa to express themselves freely' (1991: 12). Cruise reiterated that in 1975 there was an obvious lack of any ceramics that manifested a challenge of form or colour to the 'restraint advocated by the Anglo-Oriental approach or the diluted concepts of the Arts and Crafts ideals' (Cruise 1991: 12). This was made evident by the statements of Gordon Wales, who as one of the judges of the Brickor competition, *Ceramics 1975*, 'unwittingly delivered a mortal blow to the tentative explorations in ceramics' (Cruise 1991: 12). He condemned these attempts of individualism as lacking sensitive form or line quoting Leach: 'One measures art by the standards of truth, beauty and vitality...' (Cruise 1991:12). Although Wales did not say how a ceramist could rectify the work he inferred 'a moral obligation to adhere to the Anglo-Oriental tenets of good form' (Cruise 1991: 12).

This led to ceramists, who not even having read *The Potter's Book*, developing work based on the outward form of Anglo-Oriental tradition without understanding the central ideas or motivations behind its principles. Cruise reflected that this resulted in 'a plethora of poor reduced stoneware pots' (Cruise 1991:41) appearing everywhere from craft markets to all the early APSA exhibitions.⁸ Andrew Walford implored the ceramist to respect his/her discipline. He felt that the if person 'has a sound knowledge of mixing clay, working out glazes and decorating, of firing the kiln' and the finished piece has charm then he/she deserves respect as a craftsperson (Walford in Fisch 1978: 7No, 14). He deplored those who bought ready- pugged clay, copied an image from an old overseas magazine and got someone else to fire the piece. He added that there should be separate

imported items were unavailable (Fransen 1982: 337). Gers says the Busman ware from the Kalahari Studios was manufactured to accommodate the need of decorative 'bric-a-brac' in 'lower income homes' substituting for paintings due to the factor of cheaper cost and thus frequent replacement when re-decorating (Gers 1998: 11). These hand decorated 'native studies' were produced until the early 1980's in South Africa. They depicted stylised bushman figures, or semi-erotic images of black women with exaggerated features (Gers 2000: 94). Other pieces incorporated patterns associated with African material culture.

⁸ Interestingly some ceramists were attempting to simulate reduction glazes in electric kilns, producing very inadequate results. This was due to the difficulty of firing in a reduction atmosphere. This included the cost of equipment and the difficulty of building it, together with the low success rate due to lack of skills. The affordability and suitability of small electric kiln firings in urban homes was another factor.

categories in judging for the craftsman and those who were 'creating objects in clay' (Fisch 1978: 7No, 14).⁹

Author and art critic Garth Clark felt there was room for new means of expression. Commenting in *Sgraffiti*, the South African Potters' Association magazine in 1975, he criticised 'the total arrogance of the humble craftsman being consumed with his retrogressive doctrine to the point he could not tolerate another approach' (Clark in Fisch 1975:4, No. 7). He was referring to the narrow focus of the traditionalist Anglo-Oriental craftsman who refused to recognise the tendency in modern ceramics to embrace new styles of expression.

Clark added there was a move by younger British ceramists to 'aim for a more primitive and spontaneous approach to pottery ...trying to get back to primal roots' citing Cardew's move to Africa to 'get to the virile pottery of the Continent' (Clark in Fisch 1975: 4No, 7). He also suggested that more recognition should be made in respect of the making of ceramic objects and the preoccupation with making functional pots was not the only ceramic tradition (Fisch 1975: 4, No. 7).

Cape architect Gawie Fagan opened the First Cape *APSA National Exhibition*, in 1975. He noted that the ceramists' names were reflected in the catalogue, that he said was a recognition which had until recently (in world ceramic history) seldom been recognised or taken into account. Fagan concluded by calling for South African ceramists to initiate the construction of an unselfconscious identity, including the absorption of local influences. He compared it with local architects who were generally expressing the 'genus loci' to perfection (Fisch 1975: 8-10, No. 7).

By the 1970's David Walters, a South African ceramist, exclaimed that local ceramics should evolve a new vocabulary involving fresh interpretations that merged local influences, instead of imitating English traditions (Fisch 1975: 12, no.6). In a *Sgraffiti*

⁹ Andrew Walford acknowledged in an interview that he respected Mikula's ability to build and fire her own kiln and to mix her own glazes. He mentioned that she blended her own clay and successfully created 'the iron spot' in her stoneware. He commented that 'she pulled it off' working in the suburbs with a tiny kiln. He said her 'work was 'complete' it was 'her's', she did not make it to impress but because she need to for herself' (Bauer 2004 (af) (ii)).

article in 1976, Malcolm MacIntyre-Read, then a lecturer at the University of Pietermaritzburg, concurred and even pleaded with the makers of 'hairy brown stoneware' to engage in an active attempt to reassess their mode of production (Fisch 1976: 4-5 no. 10). This statement was seen by many as 'nothing short of heretical' (Cruise 1991: 13). In reply to his considerations, Gillian Anderson agreed, condemning the complacency of ceramists and their refusal to consider alternatives (Fisch 1976:16, No. 11). In a letter to the editor of *Sgraffiti* John Heymann of Cape Town stressed the need for a serious re-evaluation of South African ceramics or it would perpetuate stagnation. Commenting on the 'lack of spirit' in local work, the author challenged ceramists to assimilate, reflecting 'we are a young country, with a deep art/craft tradition going back centuries' (Fisch 1976:18, No.12).

Articles and letters began to appear in *Sgraffiti*, the official APSA ceramic magazine, exhorting ceramists to develop a freedom of expression. Included in a 1977 edition, was an article by Cora Leibowitz commenting on current ceramics in Australia and New Zealand. In the article, mention was made of the exciting possibilities of combining other media with clay – such as perspex, wood, steel and glass. This work was described as vibrant and exciting 'that by contrast is all too rarely seen or felt in South Africa' (Fisch 1977: 8, No. 16).

By 1980 at the *Third National Exhibition of Ceramics*, comment by the National Chairman of APSA, Barry Alleson, reflected a tentative move from the 'pseudo-Leach and Hamada influence inexorably changing to a more 'indigenous pottery' (Fisch 1979: 8, No. 19). Bosch, too, exhibited an innovative and challenging work that was primarily a two-dimensional lustre painting on clay. However, Alleson bemoaned the fact that the overall ethos of the exhibition reflected a lack of direction (Fisch 1979: 8, No.19).

Changes were starting to occur incrementally in South African ceramics. In the 1980 *Western Cape Regional Ceramic Exhibition* comments from Dr. R.H. van Niekerk, in the opening address, were encouraging. Mention was made of the positive growth of invention and a willingness to embrace new ideas in painting and sculpture. He cited this as an example for ceramists to follow even if their work was unconventional or seen as mocking

traditional styles. Van Niekerk encouraged ceramic artists to avail themselves of the possibilities inherent in their medium such as its malleability, and so discover new ideas (Fisch 1980: 5, No. 23).¹⁰ The first mention of Maggie Mikula, in a group exhibition at the Natal Society of Artists Gallery, (N.S.A.) was made in this article.

Due to the ongoing dearth of creativity and the complaint that good craft appeared to be an end in itself the 1981 *Transvaal Regional Ceramic Exhibition* was divided into two sections. – The Open Section and one titled *African Odyssey*. The *African Odyssey* section was to encourage personal responses to the African environment – warning given that there were to be no derivative ‘pseudo-primitive artifacts’ (Fisch 1981:9, No. 25). Wilma Cruise’s comment on the winning pieces noted that the work translated from a personal vocabulary and transcended stylistic boundaries to produce a new direction that could reflect the beginning of a genuine South African art – ‘neither English, Japanese, American or pseudo-Black African’ (Fisch 1981: 9, No.25). The award winning work was a ‘smoked’ pot by Gerald Swart that was seen by the judges as transcending ‘all stylistic boundaries in its quiet perfection of form’ with its ‘peasant African feel’ (Fisch 1981: 9 No, 25). M. Weideman supposed that this small step forward led to a greater expression of personal ideas in the work submitted to the 1981 *National Ceramic Exhibition*. She felt this was also in part due to the more open-minded attitude of the various selection committees who accepted more experimental work made from a diversity of clays and techniques (Fisch 1981: 8, No. 27). She was, however, surprised to see many works still reflect inhibited concepts of design and lack of originality adding that ‘one’s own true feelings and character should be evident in the work ...’(Fisch 1981: 6, no.27).

The visit to South Africa by American ceramist, David Middlebrook (in 1982 to 1983), was a pivotal point in the change being realised in South Africa, bringing new techniques, concepts and attitudes with him. He presented several two-day practical workshops with group participation, at various centers including a weeklong workshop in Natal in the Ceramic Section, at Fine Arts Department, at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. He was also resident artist at the University for some months. Middlebrook challenged local

¹⁰ Supporting this notion, in the March 1981 edition of *Sgraffiti*, Suzette Munnik’s article, *On Originality*, exhorted ceramists to cease their endless repetition of form and content. Focusing on the concept of originality – not defined as innovation or invention – but as an intuitive and unconscious base developed from the artist’s own inner reality – ‘the part of each person that is truly unique’ (Fisch 1981: 8, No. 24).

ceramists to reconsider the methods as well as the origins of the work (Cruise 1991:13). This was supported by the outspoken approach of the School of Art and Design at the Technikon Witwatersrand under Suzette Munnik, who condemned the conservatism in South African ceramics particularly during the mid to late 1980's (Cruise 1991).

During 1982, collaboration between Corobrik, the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and APSA resulted in the inception of a collection of ceramics that was intended to form a comprehensive record of this medium in South Africa. In 1983 the Corobrik Collection of Ceramics was opened at the Natal University (the collection has subsequently been moved to Pretoria). Works were sourced from amongst APSA competition prize-winners, as well as pieces of significance representing some merit or interest (Calder in Fisch 1986: 4, No. 45). Included in the early 1980's purchases were works that focused on an unglazed, burnished surface, mention being made of the ceramics by Lesley Anne Hoets,¹¹ Austin Hleza¹² and Maggie Mikula. Ian Calder (lecturer at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg) observed that this 'attest[ed] to a shift in emphasis in recent ceramics away from influences situated abroad towards the beginnings of a ceramic vernacular with local references' (Calder in Fisch 1986: 5, No. 45).

During the 1960's an Arts and Crafts Centre was initiated by Swedish art teachers Peder and Ulla Gowenius at the Lutheran mission at Rorke's Drift in Natal. Under their guidance and the subsequent support from an expanding group of coordinators from Europe, who then trained the local black students to run the workshops, this school developed skills in weaving, printmaking and ceramics, intended to help improve conditions in the rural community. The emphasis at Rorke's Drift was the encouragement of a 'traditional African expression in the visual arts' (Calder 1999: 40 re le Roux 1987) resulting in a unique and successful venture in cross-cultural art and craft production (Sack 1988: 20).

During the following twenty-odd years this project stimulated and birthed a generation of the country's foremost black artists (Hobbs and Rankin 2003). The Polly Street Art Centre, mentioned in Chapter One, was urban and sought to create a new idiom through a 'romantic re-connection to Africa' (Sack 1988: 20). Rorke's Drift, however, was rural and

¹¹ Reference to Lesley Anne Hoets is found in more detail in Chapter Two, section Two.

according to Sack was 'in' Africa. Polly Street was almost exclusively made up of men, as was the graphic department at Rorke's Drift, whereas Rorke's Drift craft section consisted predominately of women (Sack 1988: 20-23).

Initially the skills taught were weaving and screen- printing. Pottery was introduced in 1964, with simple hand building (traditional coiling method used by the local women) done by a small group of women. The ceramic studio was established in 1968 by a Danish couple, Ole and Anne Nielson. Marietjie van der Merwe, the first white South African appointment, took over in 1970 as a consultant. This undertaking set a unique precedent, of developing indigenous yet westernised crafts at Rorke's Drift, fed from the traditional skills of the local women ceramists (Hobbs and Rankin 2003: 58). The studio went on to produce many well known ceramists including hand coiled work by women such as Dinah Molefe and Elizabeth Mbatha and wheel thrown work by the men under the guidance of Gordon Mbatha. This included Joel Sibisi, Ephraim Ziqubu and Bhekisani Manyoni. A Fine Arts programme was started in the 1970's and was dominated by the men (the Fine Arts programme was closed in 1982) (Sack 1988:22). A cross- pollination of styles and techniques existed between the various disciplines at the center.

Fée Halsted-Berning established another ceramics centre, Ardmore studio, solely involved in ceramic production, in 1985 in the midlands of Natal. The work was and still continues to be collaborative, and the processes are shared amongst different artists. The vibrant ceramics ranges from domestic ware to large sculptural pieces. The work is derived from an eclectic mix of influences initiated by Halsted-Berning, who started the studio with Bonnie Ntshalinshali. Ntshalinshali developed her own language inspired by her Catholic schooling combining biblical narratives with traditional African rituals. Winning many awards, Ntshalinshali and Halsted-Berning helped place ceramics in the art arena when they jointly received the nationally acclaimed Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Visual Art in 1990 (Scott 1998: 4-28). This award was given in recognition of the cooperation between the two artists and their mutually supportive working environment. This occurred at a period when the local art community was dealing with social and historical issues, reflecting and assimilating ' fusions between different practices and

¹² Austin Hleza (and the work by Euriel Mbatha) both from Rorke's Drift have work in the Corobrik Collection. However, they do not represent the concerns of vigorous traditional pottery of black ceramists. Hleza's piece in the collection is terracotta *Tractor* (Calder in Fisch 1986: 5, No. 45).

concepts, and with different responses to the issue of African identity and colonial experience' (Scott 1998: 26).¹³

With the demise of Modernist Formalism, which had denied the decorative arts any serious attention, women and black artists were finding respect for their work from the established art community (Arnold 1996). The gradual eroding of racial and social prejudices in the 80's reassessed the parameters of 'art' as defined from a Western perspective. A Eurocentric reading that was exclusive and elitist made way for eclecticism and plurality, both of which are pivotal features of Post-modernism. The deconstruction of the meaning of 'art' enabled the objects created by women to be regarded seriously. In 1985, attention was given to hosting conferences and presenting exhibitions, focused specifically on women's art (Skawran 1994: 275-282).

This change in attitude coupled with the new Post-modernist dictates posited a revival of expression and individualism in work by local white ceramists and allowed marginalised black traditional ceramics and crafts a fresh reading and reception. Post-modernism had its roots in America in the 1960's and a decade later in Britain (del Vecchio 2001: 10). In South Africa the Post-modern frame of reference, together with 'a general shift in perception as to the nature of South African society, produced 'a willingness to look afresh at traditional crafts of all sorts' (Cruise 1991: 130). Breaking down the distinction between high art and crafts afforded a shift towards re-categorising the position of ceramics as a respected form of expression. In 1985 an exhibition entitled *Recent South African Ceramics* highlighted developments in contemporary local work that reflected this engagement. In the catalogue preface, Liz Biggs declared 'this exhibition testifies to the flexibility of clay as a medium and its suitability as a vehicle for the expression of individual concerns' (Biggs 1985: 2). A second exhibition in 1987 shown at the Annexe of the South African National Gallery, entitled *Figurative Ceramics and Decorated Textiles*, further demonstrated recognition of this medium, affirming the new position of ceramics in the art context (Cruise 1991: 13).

¹³ This exhibition toured South Africa and established Ardmore as a thriving and viable concern with a respected reputation. The work is produced by more than sixty artists today and sells internationally in Britain, America and Germany. Ardmore is represented in every gallery in South Africa as well as many private and public collections internationally including the White House.

Mikula had work represented in the 1985 *Recent South African Ceramics* exhibition. It was catalogued as 'mixed media, burnished and sawdust fired' (Biggs 1985: 22) and was on loan from the Corobrik collection. Other work included earthenware and slip-painted works by ceramists such as Wilma Cruise and Clarissa Hawthorn. Andre Meyer's piece incorporated mild steel and welded elements. Many works were raku fired and others incorporated on-glazes and enamels. Works in the above exhibitions signaled experimentation and a clear deviation from the Anglo-Oriental traditions of the early 1970's (Munnik 1985: 5-10). The 1985 touring exhibition moved around the main centers of South Africa including Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban.

Within this new framework, studio ceramists could enjoy artistic and technical freedom, their work, not produced merely for functional necessity but also for an 'artistic' quality that would 'give it a unique status and would also reflect the individuality of the maker' (Freestone & Gaimster 1997: 206). Post-modern eclecticism would also allow traditional rural potters a position in South African ceramics, regarding them as part of the 'current expressions in clay' (Cruise 1991) thus enabling their work to be read as art, rather than ethnic objects. This allowed women such as Nesta Nala, a Zulu potter, and Phophi Maligana, from Venda, a place within the western art/craft frame of reference.

By 1989 the question of what was to be considered as contemporary South African ceramics was still fraught with controversy (Hayward-Fell 1989: 45). Writing in the catalogue for the 1989 *Corobrik National Ceramic Exhibition*, as Chairperson APSA Natal, Carol Hayward-Fell emphasised the need for unity amongst ceramists and selection judges at exhibitions. Commenting that 'purist potters' would create an elitist group if they continued to 'punish' those who created works using mixed media, Hayward-Fell implored them not to feel threatened (1989: 45). She said this would alienate even more of the top South African ceramists who now refused to participate in ceramic exhibitions, and this could only widen the gap already between craft and fine art. While due appreciation should be given to those who started the ceramic movement in South Africa, she felt that the younger generation of ceramists should be given 'freedom to experiment and develop a form of ceramics that is relevant to South African society of the 80's and 90's' (Hayward-Fell 1989: 45). Interestingly, work from Natal, included in this Exhibition, incorporated new materials such as wooden pedestals, quills, glued mosaic tiles, cement and metal.

Hayward-Fell added that exhibitions such as *Recent South African Ceramics*, *African Heritage*, and *Clay +* further strengthened this argument (Bauer 2002 (d)).¹⁴

The 1988 *Corobrik National Ceramics Exhibition* saw the award winners' pieces incorporating mixed media. This included Hayward-Fell's piece that included a painted wooden table, Rodney Blumenfeld's works that combined with lead and Zulu earplugs, and Ntshalintshali's work entitled *Noah* that was painted with Plaka paint and varnish (Brown 1988: 31)

Juliet Armstrong, Ceramics lecturer at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, herself an award winner and judge, admitted that she was a 'purist' in the early 1980's and remembers not approving of works that incorporated other materials such as feathers, twine and other non clay additions. She said she preferred the aesthetics of clay only (Bauer 2003 (s)). It should be noted that the 1989 Corobrik National catalogue included reference to *The Volkskas Atelier 1989 Award*, First Prize- winner. It was given to a Natal ceramist, Hennie Stroebe, for a ceramic sculptural work that combined glass and embroidery. This reaffirmed the increasing acknowledgement of ceramics as a significant art form, situating it within mainstream art.

In the 1989 *Ceramix*, Stefan Welz (then Director of Sotheby's London) wrote that in recent years British ceramists had realised that 'the world did not begin in St. Ives in 1921 and that they had centuries of history to draw on'. He stressed that the South African ceramist was starting to understand that there is a centuries-old African tradition, which can be sourced (Welz 1989: 14).

The latter part of the seventies brought a narrowing of the gap between professional, full-time professional ceramists (mainly men) and part-time but equally serious ceramists (mainly women). Andrew Verster, working as a full time artist himself, claimed this was partly owing to the support of ceramic associations encouraging healthy rigorous

¹⁴ *African Heritage 1987*, was a collection of 83 pots decorated by individual artists and ceramists with the intention of raising funds for Operation Hunger. The works auctioned at Sotheby's, reflected the diverse talents and mediums of ceramics and painting techniques and brought a collaboration amongst ceramists and Artists (Guassardo 1987: 25, No. 1). The aim of *Clay +* exhibited at UNISA (University of South Africa) in July 1988, was to collate innovative works in ceramics that moved beyond the traditional expectations of work produced in that medium (Guassardo 1988: 10, No. 4). It aimed to explore clay as a sculptural medium.

competition and the meetings and information generously shared by the professional ceramist (Fisch 1979: 11 No.19). It was into this small, enclosed environment that Maggie Mikula's career in ceramics began.

2.2

Biographical Overview of Mikula

Maggie Mikula (1941 - 1989) came from a Zululand pioneer family¹⁵ and was born and lived in South Africa her whole life. Maggie and her younger sister, Jenny, were brought up in a close, secure and happy environment. They lived in Durban North until 1949 when they moved to Kloof, Durban.

Their Scottish, 'Victorian' father, David Suttie, a sugar farmer and former Bank Inspector, was retired by the time they were both born. Together with their South African, 'Edwardian' mother Gladys (née Adams), he gave the two girls every opportunity to develop themselves (Bauer 2003 (w)). Gladys Suttie studied speech and drama in London and gave elocution lessons in Eshowe (Mikula 1981: 128), so it was understandable that the girls would be taught etiquette, and Sundays were for crosswords, and working with the dictionary and encyclopedia (Bauer 2003 (w)). Jenny Hawke, Mikula's sister, (née Suttie) remembers that even from a young age they always had access to a cupboard full of paper, pencils, brushes, watercolour paints and poster paints. Due to scarcities during the 2nd World War, her parents would cut up envelopes so that paper was always available (Bauer 2003 (w)).

Schooled at Kloof Primary School, Maggie and her sister moved to St. Mary's in Kloof, a private girls' school, in standard six. Jenny stressed the fact that Maggie was always involved in art at both school and at home. She recalled, as the girls matured, the visits to P.W. Storey's, an art shop in Durban, to purchase proper watercolour blocks and paints. This stressed the active ongoing encouragement of their parents (Bauer 2003 (w)).

¹⁵ Alfred Adams, Maggie's great grandfather, came to Africa as one of the first white men in the Zambesi area of Central Africa (now Malawi) in 1860. He came as a missionary with Livingstone. He was later influential in starting the mission station at KwaMagwaza near Melmoth and went on to work in transport and trading culminating in the establishment of Adams Store in Eshowe. This pioneer, along with his son Charles Adams were intrinsically linked with the historical and political development of Zululand. Charles, no less a pioneer, generated expansion and progress through the times when Zululand was undergoing a traumatic evolutionary process, and as a confidant of the Zulu king and Natal government alike, he served a unique role in the Zululand community' (Mikula 1981: Preface).

As young girls they were constantly exposed to the culture of other societies. The parental home had beautiful sculptures of Bali heads. Continuous visits and interaction with the Adams family store in Eshowe¹⁶ exposed them to woodcarvers selling their wares in the street. Local crafters weaving baskets and woven grass mats, and pot and bead makers came to the trading store to barter and buy. Trips to museums were enhanced by personal visits to people such as Hezekile Ntuli at his homestead in the 50's (Bauer 2003 (w)).

The excitement of Zululand country life was in part derived from the Saturday morning auctions of 'native' Nguni cattle at the Adams store that continued until 1949. Jenny Hawke affirmed that the dusty corrugated roads and the atmosphere was part of their upbringing 'it was a wonderful sight, the sorting pens brimming full of 'native' cattle of all grades and all in beautiful condition' (Mikula 1981: 118).

Until his death in 1942, Maggie's grandfather, Charlie Adams, had conducted the auctions. He was a fluent linguist well versed in the way of life of the Zulus (Mikula 1981: 119).¹⁷ He worked tirelessly to develop and maintain good relations with local Zulus and acknowledged that it could be achieved only by 'knowledge of the soul of the Zulu' (Mikula 1981: 112). He was given the name *Shali Ladamu* by the Zulus (Mikula 1981: 79). Charlie Adams had an intimate relationship with them and was allowed access to their ceremonies as a friend¹⁸

The respect that all cultures had for Maggie's grandfather was evidenced at his funeral. Maggie wrote in her book *The Adams Story* (1981), that his funeral was the largest ever held in Zululand. After the church service, where wreaths two feet deep lined the entrance,

¹⁶ Alfred Adams started Adams store in 1881, after which his son Charlie came to Eshowe in 1892 and took charge of the store until his death in 1942. Basil, Charlie's son, then continued the business until 1952 when Gladys and David Suttie, Maggie's parents took over the concern.

¹⁷ Comment found in an article entitled 'A Circular Tour of Zululand' (author unknown) written in the early 1930's, described one of these auctions. It noted 'a most interesting feature was the absolute confidence' the black cattle farmers appeared to have in the advice given in part by Charlie Adams and 'the sale being conducted at times in Zulu evidently was the reason for the great confidence in Mr. Adams', by both the buyers and sellers (Mikula 1981: 118).

¹⁸ Charlie Adams was intimately involved with the First Fruits Ceremony at the king's kraal in 1866. He was requested by Panda to fetch a wife of Senzangakona and bring her to the planned events (Mikula 1981: 144-145).

a second service was conducted at the Masonic temple in Eshowe. The funeral procession then halted at the family farm boundary and the coffin was transferred to an ox wagon drawn by a team of black oxen. Pallbearers included Paramount chief Mshiyeni ka Dinizulu, who 'gave a moving speech at the graveside on behalf of the Zulu nation' (Mikula 1981: 124).

In 1871, the Zulu Paramount Chief, Mpande, gave 1100 acres of land to Alfred Adams. The gift was probably as a result of the close relationship between the two men (Mikula 1981: 45). This grant was subsequently endorsed by his son and successor, Cetewayo and is still owned by the Adams family today. The farm, St. Andrews, is on the Tugela River, eight kilometers from the mouth, and is the sight of two historic battles, the Battle of Tugela in 1838 and the Battle of Ndongakasuka in 1856 (Mikula 1981: 45-46).

At *Norwood*, the family home in Eshowe, the Adams entertained peoples both local¹⁹ and from abroad, many of who were distinguished Government house visitors and politicians from Britain.²⁰ Gladys, Maggie and Jenny's mother, created a 'magical garden' (Mikula 1981: 132) which was later to be part of an initial source of inspiration for Maggie as a theme in her ceramic work – that of nature (Bauer 2003 (w)). Maggie's mother had a beach cottage at Salt Rock called *Crannogs* and she spent much of her youth and adulthood there where she drew inspiration from nature, shells and her mother's garden (Bauer 2004 (af) (ii)).

After her schooling, Mikula attended the Natal Technical College and obtained a National Diploma in Commercial Art (1960-1962). She worked as a Commercial artist doing screen-printing and posters, made batiks for sale at the Aiden Walsh shop, and then

¹⁹ John Dunn, who had a 'staunch relationship with Cetewayo, and appointed as one of the thirteen Zulu 'kinglets' who ruled Zululand, was a good friend of Alfred Adams. His children were baptised and educated at the St. Andrew's farm, and Alfred was godfather to each of them. Charlie continued the relationship with the Dunn family and negotiated land rights and sugar production quotas for them with the government (Mikula 1981: 142-143).

²⁰ In 1923, Charlie who was then mayor of Eshowe received the Prince of Wales as a houseguest. Forty thousand Zulus in full tribal dress gathered to welcome 'the great white king himself' (Mikula 1981: 96). It was rumoured that the prince was guest of honour one evening at a riotous party at Norwood and concluded the festivities by dancing on the large dining room table that is now an heirloom in the Mikula home in Durban (Bozas 1994: 86).

worked for Claude Neon as a Commercial artist²¹ (Bauer 2002 (b)). Mikula also painted many watercolour pictures, Jenny recalling that the first acclaim she had for her art was for two small watercolour impressions of the houses in Iskea, Ireland (Bauer 2003 (w)).

Maggie (née Suttie) married Durban architect Paul Mikula and had two children, Max and Ilse. While at home raising her family, she started to work in clay, as she loved craft – work (Bauer 2001 (a)).

She started working in ceramics in 1972 (Zaalberg 1985: 80), although her husband claims she had been working in clay from 1968. Maggie Mikula, together with Lorraine Wilson, Durban painter and ceramics teacher, took some evening classes with Jim Hall (Bauer 2002 (g)). Hall, a good friend, was the Sculpture and Ceramics lecturer at the Technikon (Bauer 2002 (b)). He recalled that she learnt basic technical expertise with him including coiling, throwing and glazing using electric firing and he commented that her work was very well executed and was full of praise for her approach to her crafting (Bauer 2003 (y) (i)).

Mikula also knew and spent time with Andrew Walford who willingly shared his knowledge with her (Hayward 1983: 6-7). In a rare interview with her, Mikula acknowledged that Walford was the catalyst for her growing interest in ceramics (Broughton, 1984: 5). She acquired a momentum wheel from him, which he taught her to use. With Walford's able assistance, the Mikulas constructed a small gas kiln in the garden and Walford educated Maggie Mikula in its use. He also gave her information on glazing (Bauer 2004 (af) (ii)). Paul said Maggie subsequently rejected this method of firing 'which was always a nightmare' (Bauer 2002 (b)) and changed to electric firing, eventually owning three kilns (Bauer (g) 2002). Lorraine Wilson claims that Mikula worked in a range of clays including terracotta, Rosetta (usually mixing her own said Wilson) (Bauer 2002 (g)), stoneware and porcelain. Maggie worked with a few glazes and occasionally added lustre, but often she left the pieces bare, working the surface and embedding it with oxides (Bauer 2002 (g)).

Mikula was largely self-taught and working from a studio at her home in Durban, enabled her to work independently and privately. She was a member of the South African Artists

²¹ Mikula designed the sign above the Four Seasons Hotel in Durban that is still in situ.

Association (SAAA) and APSA (Association of Potters of South Africa) from as early as 1977 (Read 1988) and attended workshops in order to stimulate new ideas, and access new concepts, that she would incorporate into her work. Wilson recalls Mikula and herself attending workshops by Lesley-Ann Hoets and Esias Bosch and said they could possibly have had an influence on her (Bauer 2002 (h)).²²

The Mikula home was and still is, an eclectic mix of artifacts – Persian carpets, eastern ceramics, objects from other cultural groups as well as miscellaneous African items. These include Zulu ceramics (from the Nala family in particular) There are many of Nesta Nala's small pots in the Mikula collection which Maggie chose when she visited their home in the 1970's. The Mikulas also collected Zulu earplugs (*iziqhaza*) at this time and Zulu basket ware. Paul Mikula acknowledged that she particularly responded to the texture of the Moroccan carpets (Bauer 2003 (v)).

A wooden cabinet that was specifically built by Russel Walford (brother of Andrew Walford) to house African beadwork doubles as the lounge coffee table. Carvings by Bheki Myeni, sculptures by Lib Steward, Nelson Mukhuba and Zamokwakhe Gumede vie for floor space with two wooden stick figures boxing carved by Doctor Phuthuma Seoka, a large set of figures by Ruben Xulu (dated 21/10/1968) and old tables originating in Mozambique. A Carved wooden fish by Jackson Hlungwane hangs over a doorway. Many examples of the Zulu headdress, *isicolo*, (Mertens and Schoeman 1975:37) from the Inanda area in Kwa-Zulu Natal, hang on the wall along with wire baskets by Elliot Mkhize and Bheki Dlamini. There are prints by E. Madiba (1986), Azaria Mbatha (Rorke's Drift) and Walter Battiss. A wall cabinet situated in the bedroom is full of ceramics and local basket-ware (Sorrell 1994: 86-87).

German born Paul was one of the first architects to design low-cost housing. Most of his work from the 70's onwards was in the black townships, involving housing, schools and

²² Lesley-Ann Hoets is noted for her low-fired raku vessels she terms 'universal primitive' (Cruise 1991: 72). Her patterns are derived from nature and are integrated with the form of the vessel that she produces by slowly hand building. Cruise comments that there is a 'specific African influence manifest in the round bellied forms of Hoet's pots (Cruise 1991: 72). Esias Bosch is 'the father of ceramics' in South Africa (Cruise 1991: 178) and has always shared his knowledge at workshops and through APSA. He has worked in earthenware, stoneware and porcelain and initially in the period in which Mikula was active, was a proponent of Anglo-Oriental 'Zen Buddhist zeal' (Cruise 1991: 178). His appreciation for this medium and his attitudes to the craft helped develop a strong style within South African ceramics.

community facilities, where he, Paul, acted as architect/facilitator on these projects (Bauer 2003 (v)). Highly innovative, passionate, artistic (Bauer 2002 (g)) and avant-garde he owns the Phansi Museum – a private collection of black Southern African artifacts displayed in the basement of his architectural offices in Roberts House (Cedar Road), a Victorian historical monument.

From 1987 to 1990, prior to the establishment of the Phansi Museum, the basement of Paul's offices was offered for exhibitions and workshops. Many of the artists from the African Art Centre in Durban went there to develop new skills, through the art lessons given there, such as appreciation and understanding of the qualities of different papers and lino- cut training from Jan Jordan (Bauer 2004 (ae)). Paul also provided accommodation for artists in need such as Zamokwakhe Gumede and Derek Nxumalo who stayed at Cedar Road for a time (Bauer 2004 (ag)). Terry-Anne Stevenson, then at the African Art Centre, organised several exhibitions at Roberts House such as the Zasha Group Exhibition in 1988 that included artists Gert Swart, Rodney Blumenfeld, Sfiso ka Mkame, Zamokwakhe Gumede and Lucky Shabalala. This was where artists such as ka Mkame and Thamsanqa 'Thami' Jali met and grew to respect Mikula as a person and for her work (Bauer 2004 (ag)). The work at Roberts House led to the later development of the BAT Centre where black artists were afforded an opportunity to develop a 'professional' status that had been denied them due to the socio-political realities of the predominantly white art establishment.²³

The 1980's in South Africa was a highly volatile era, politically and creatively (Clark 1992). Unions and local cells supported local community resistance in townships. This often involved art centers that would work closely with the struggle for freedom and basic human rights (Koloane 1997: 33). Maggie did not allow her 'privileged' position as a white woman to deter her from her beliefs. The Mikulas supported this counter to the apartheid system, Maggie working for the Progressive Party during elections and being

²³ The BAT Centre (Bartel Arts Trust) is a multi-purpose art venue, with art shops, studios, music theatre and restaurant, situated on the Durban harbour. It was the vision of Paul Mikula who received the necessary funding from an Austrian engineer, Hugo Bartel. It is a 'place where people could be informed, learn skills and market them' said P. Mikula. Artists work in residence, in studios on the premises and can exhibit in the gallery on site or/and sell their work through the various shops situated in the complex.

involved in the Black Sash movement's, 'Women for Peaceful Change Now'.²⁴ The Black Sash was a pressure group made up of women over eighteen, of all cultures, who stood for 'Strength Through Unity' and used the organisation 'for the restoration and encouragement of political morality and the preservation of Constitutional Government' (Grant 1956: 1: 1-2, Vol. No.1).²⁵

Both Paul Mikula, working mostly in black areas, and Maggie, often helped people in the townships with schooling and personal issues (Bauer 2003 (v)). Apart from the support given to artists through Roberts House, the Mikulas pledged their support through the development of the Natal Visual Artists. Ka Mkame stated that he was a member of this group that consisted of black artists working at Mariannhill, just outside Durban. He said individuals such as the Mikulas together with others interested in helping, like Terry-Anne Stevenson, created and coordinated an infrastructure that provided them with materials, contacts and any necessary aid at a time in South Africa when there was little interaction between cultures (Bauer 2004 (ag)).

The Mikulas knew many black artists, who appreciated and loved Maggie's work (Bauer 2001 (a)). Her daughter supporting this in a separate interview, said that many Africans and black artists in particular revered her, she thinks 'because her 'Africanness' was so authentic' (Bauer 2002 (e)). Jenny Hawke's elderly domestic worker, Margaret Vundla, who made traditional style Zulu grass mats insisted on presenting Mikula with a special one because of Mikula's sense of design, which Vundla said she recognised as similar to the Zulu work that she did (Bauer 2003 (w)).

ka Mkame acknowledged this affinity with other cultures, affirming that Mikula was 'like a mother to me' stressing the close and warm connection they developed (Bauer 2004

²⁴ ... Interestingly a work by Maggie was raffled at one such contact meeting the recipient was appropriately Mrs. Alan Paton.

²⁵ Constitution of The Black Sash – Aims and Objectives:

'The Organisation shall be non-party political and undenominational and by non-violent and peaceful means shall pursue the following objectives:

- i. To promote justice and the principles of parliamentary democracy in South Africa.
- ii. To seek constitutional recognition and protection by law of Human Rights and Liberties for all ;
- iii To further the political education and enlightenment of South African citizens and others;
- iv. To understand whatever other activities may further the objectives of the organisation.

(Archives Alan Paton Centre, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal).

(ag)). He declared they also had a mutual respect for each other as artists. Thami Jali confirmed similar sentiments in a separate telephonic interview (Bauer 2004 (af) (i)). These artists have gone on to become well- established professionals themselves (Bauer 2002 (b)). This was in large part due to the Mikulas' support for ka Mkame as a 'consequence of a meeting of like-minded souls' (Bauer 2004 (ag)).

Paul Mikula remarked that Maggie used to teach and run ceramic workshops at King George V TB hospital in the early 1980's. He recalls that she loved working with the people there but found it a problem to sustain the project once the patients had been discharged (Bauer 2003 (v)).

The Mikulas traveled extensively in Southern Africa absorbing influences and avidly collecting works from other cultures. They visited such places as the Zimbabwe ruins, Ndebele homesteads, Rorke's Drift, Zulu crafters like Nesta Nala from the Tugela district²⁶ and went on field trips to see crafters and traditional ceramists from the Eshowe district. In 1983 Maggie took a weekend tour to Shakaland, where she went by donkey to see the clay deposits used in Shaka Zulu's time (Bauer 2003 (w)). They also knew and visited black artists such as Jackson Hlungwane and Nelson Mukhuba in Venda, acquiring some of their work (Bauer 2002 (b) and Bauer 2002 (e)).

The family exposed themselves to ancient European culture on their many trips overseas where they visited museums such as the Friesian Keramik Museum in Northern Germany, and others in and around Hamburg that Walford had suggested they visit (Bauer 2003 (v)). Here Maggie reveled in peasant 'pottery', including the famous Blue Beard pottery, as well as the Stone Age and Iron Age pottery and relics (Bauer 2002 (b)). In 1974, the Mikulas spent a year 'on the road' journeying through Europe, particularly Morocco and Turkey absorbing the culture and collecting artifacts (Bauer 2002 (b) and Bauer 2002 (e)).

In 1987 Paul, Maggie, Ilse and their close friends Marianne and Dennis Claude traveled to the United States and South America where Maggie deliberately sought out Pueblo Indian ceramics specifically visiting the Santa Fe Museum to see the work of Maria Martinez

²⁶ Maggie went with people from the Vukani Museum in Eshowe, to visit Nesta Nala in the- mid to late seventies (Bauer 2003 (v)).

whom Maggie revered. They also made a planned visit to Acoma to see the work of Lucy Lewis (Bauer 2003 (q)). Maggie also saw and was influenced by the International collections of African Art they saw in museums (Bauer 2002 (c)).

Mikula further derived great inspiration from the British potter Dorothy Feibelman whom she met. Feibleman 'often made pieces that incorporated non-ceramic inlays of tiny feathers or minute tapestries, designed to be fixed in place after the final firing' (Lane 1980: 46). She developed a technique of laminating coloured clays (usually porcelain) to create an 'inlay' pattern in her ceramics. Lane mentioned she occasionally included silver and precious stones in her work. These performed a complement to the work and provided 'a visual and tactile adventure for its owner' (Lane 1980:46). Mikula owns a piece of Feibelman's laminated 'marquetry ware'. Lucie Rie is another potter Mikula appreciated because of her simple wheel thrown bowls and beautiful glazing (Bauer 2002 (b))

In 1987 Mikula took a six-week course in glassmaking in Western Scotland and later back home she learned some jewellery making techniques which she then incorporated in her ceramics (Bauer 2002 (b)).

Maggie Mikula also drew inspiration from contemporary South African ceramists. She respected Hyme Rabinowitz, one of South Africa's major ceramists, for his humble, serious approach to form and surface. She appreciated his work for its historic integrity (Bauer 2004 (al)). Mikula also responded to the fine porcelain work of Marietjie van der Merwe (who taught at Rorke's Drift) and whose work she acquired for her own collection (Bauer 2002 (b)). The Mikulas knew and visited the teachers at Rorke's Drift and collected their weaving, prints and ceramics (Bauer 2003 (v)).

Maggie Mikula collected ceramics and artifacts from her travels which she found inspirational and had special meaning to her (Bauer 2002 (d)). Many of these are now on display at the Phansi Museum in a cabinet alongside Mikula's own work.²⁷

²⁷ In addition is work from Rorke's Drift, Andrew Walford, Pueblo potters, Zulu crafters, Thami Jali, Carol Hayward-Fell and two burnished pods by Wiebke Von Bismark. She also possessed two Korean pottery bottles, a Roman jug and dish, an Egyptian alabaster bowl, Chinese ceramics and glass from Tahiti. Mikula also enjoyed Ardmore ceramics especially the work of Ntshalintshali (Bauer 2003 (v)).

The Mikulas began collecting African material culture from 1979, inspired by Maggie's grandfather's collection of Zulu artifacts²⁸ that are on permanent loan in the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg and were only discovered by Maggie while she was doing research on her mother's genealogy. Known as the 'Adam's Collection' it includes two ivory snuff containers and a delicate rhino horn snuff box that Paul mentioned as being of particular relevance to her (Bauer 2003 (v)). Her sister Jenny feels they had a degree of influence on her (Bauer 2003 (y) (ii)). Maggie Mikula subsequently wrote *The Adams Story* to commemorate the centenary of the shop A. Adams in Eshowe. This was a history of the family and their interface with local Zulu culture. Mikula claims her 'roots run deep, as ... my family have been in Zululand since 1865, and I have spent much of life there. I'm deeply interested in Zulu history', admitting that this has subsequently heavily influenced her work (Mikula C.V. 1980). This has been continuous through her work from 1980 onwards.

Exposure to the material culture of other cultures was complimented by a vast selection of books on these subjects such as *Africa Adorned* and *The Africa Ark* by Angela Fischer and *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* by Roy Sieber that Maggie admitted in her C.V. were her 'constant inspiration' (Mikula scrapbook).

²⁸ 'Adam's Collection' – personal gifts to Alfred and Charlie Adams from members of the Zulu Royal family:

1. King Mpande's Ivory SnuffBox – given to Alfred Adams by Mpande.
2. Rhinoceros Horn Snuff Box – given to Alfred Adams by Sambana Nyawo (chief of the tribe to have murdered Dingane).
3. King Cetewayo's Gold Ring – presented by Queen Victoria to Cetewayo on his visit to England, after the Zulu War.
4. Ivory Drinking Cups and other items made from the tusks of elephants, killed by Cetewayo's hunters and the late John Dunn, in the area of Eshowe and Gingindlovu.
 - (a) Ivory Drinking Tumbler.
 - (b) Large Ivory Wine Cups (2).
 - (c) Small Ivory Wine Cups (2).
 - (d) Large Ivory Snuff box, with stopper.
 - (e) Small Ivory Snuff Boxes, with stoppers (2).
 - (f) Small Ivory Salt-cellars (2).
5. Solomon ka Dinizulu's Walking Stick.
6. Solomon ka Dinizulu's personal Beer kamba.
7. Large Brass Bracelet, bought in Portuguese Territory by King Dingane, during his reign . (Mikula 1981: 104-105).

In South Africa, Arnold claimed that women were not actively encouraged to be artists and 'entered a system that did not endorse female assertiveness and independence or give them a voice in negotiating change' (Arnold, M. 1996: 1-9). Despite this there were many women artists and with the gradual breakdown of social and racial prejudices in the 1980's the definition of 'art' and the western notion of 'high art' was subject to revision. With this deconstruction of hierarchies attention was given to objects made by women and in 1985 much opportunity and recognition was given to the art of women (Skawran 1994: 275-283).

As a woman working in the 1980's, Maggie Mikula exhibited her work in shows specifically aimed at exposing the marginalised 'other' including *Works by Natal Women Artists* at the NSA in 1985 (to coincide with the end of the International Decade of the Woman) and a few two-women exhibitions. She first exhibited with the painter Lib Steward at the Grassroots Gallery, Westville, in 1983 and had a very successful exhibition with Juliet Armstrong at the end of 1985 at the same venue. In a review of this second exhibition, Carol Brown noted that up until then ceramics in South Africa had been relegated to a minor art status traditionally seen for most as no more than a hobby.²⁹ She declared that this was no longer the case as in the examples of the recent touring *South African National Ceramics Exhibition* and the Armstrong/Mikula exhibition (Brown 1985). In 1986 Mikula showed work at the *Corobrik Regional Ceramic Exhibition* that included work by Halsted-Berning and Ntshalishli from the recently established ceramic studio Ardmore (established 1985). (A comprehensive list of exhibitions by Maggie Mikula can be found at the end of Chapter Two).

Mikula's ceramic career lasted over twenty years. She passed away on 29th of July 1989 after a nine-year battle with cancer. Her friend, Lorraine Wilson, emphasised that the last two years were incredibly taxing for Mikula. As an amateur woman ceramist Mikula never thought that what she was making was ever seriously recognised by the established ceramic community. Although well liked, Paul says, she was always 'treated with disdain by the local 'master' potters' (Bauer 2001 (a)) and Ilse acknowledged that she felt

²⁹ . Details of these two-woman exhibitions are found in Chapter Three. Brown's comment on this exhibition raising the status of ceramics in South Africa from a hobby is misleading as there were ceramists such as Bosch in the Transvaal and Walford in Natal with enormous standing in the 1970's (and up until today).

intimidated by the 'academic' world of art that 'deconstructed' the meaning and motives behind the work' explaining that Mikula was uncomfortable talking about her work (Bauer 2002 (b)). However, during her last two years Mikula was awarded the commission to produce ceramic murals for the six stair landings of the Malherbe Library at the University of Natal in Durban. This was achieved 'against stiff opposition from many well-known artists working in diverse media and so was a great honour' (Wilson 1989: 27). Mikula managed to complete only two of the panels given her declining state of health.

Mikula tried to live her life and create her work in harmony with her beliefs. She was a vegetarian, loved and respected nature, was very concerned about and conscious of pollution of the ecology, and interacted with her community (Bauer 2003 (w)). She expressed an 'evolving relationship between personal creativity and social responsibility' (Gablik 1991:6) rejecting former modernist patterns of alienation and individualism in favour of 'the need for openness, the need for contact, the need for wholeness' (Gablik 1991: 7). Walford affirms this explaining she had a 'spiritual' awareness, not of a specific religious persuasion but of a quiet, meditative reverence that sought peace and harmony (Bauer 2004 (af) (ii)).³⁰

Writing about Mikula's life, Verster said:

The great lesson of Africa is that everything must be made with the same care- a stool, a house, a village, a bowl, a statue. There is no Sunday best, and there is no hierarchy of beauty. A true African, she (Maggie) would say that she was just another maker of things, no more and no less important than others.

This modesty, this realisation of the independence of everyone, is a lesson to a world that prizes ambition and celebrity. She understood this whole myth. In everything she was the same person – wife, mother, friend, companion, writer, maker of objects. (Verster in Meijer 1989).

³⁰ Maggie Mikula was very aware and sensitive of her role as a mother and wife. She was conscious of not allowing the recognition that she was beginning to receive to change the roles in her relationships (Bauer 2003 (w))

She was a strong, independent, humble, self-effacing woman. She worked quietly, unassumingly and with serious intent, creating well-controlled and slowly evolved pieces that spoke of her proud roots and heritage. In the process she developed a unique cross-culturally sourced style that reflected this history and assimilation.

EXHIBITIONS MAGGIE MIKULA PARTICIPATED IN

'Trevean'		1978
Westville	Lorraine Wilson's home	1978 –1983
N.S.A. Gallery	'Boxes and Banners'	1979
N.S.A. Gallery	'Seven Potters'	1979
National Ceramic Exhibition Durban		1980
N.S.A. Gallery	'Our Environment'	1980
N.S.A. Gallery	'Nine Potters'	1980
National Ceramic Exhibition R.A.U.		1981
N.S.A. Gallery	'Ceramics, Graphics and Artifacts'	1981
Gallery 150 Durban	Regional Ceramics Exhibition	1982
Corobrik National Ceramic Exhibition	Cape Town	(H.C.) 1983
Corobrik Regional Ceramic Exhibition	N.S.A. Gallery	(H.C.) 1983

Grassroots Gallery Westville	with Lib Steward	1983
University of Zululand	Invited Exhibition	1984
Zululand Society of Arts	Invited Exhibition	1984
Corobrik National Ceramic Exhibition	Durban Art Gallery	1984
(National Award & H.C.)		
Gallery International Cape Town	'Myth and Magic'	1984
N.S.A. Gallery	'Natal Invited Artists'	1984
N.S.A. Gallery	'Tactile' with Tactile Carpets (Monica Gobel)	1985
Natal Regional Exhibition	Grassroots Gallery (H.C.)	1985
N.S.A. Gallery	'Women and Art Today'	1985
Recent South African Ceramics	National Gallery Cape Town	
	Johannesburg Art Gallery	1985
Grassroots Gallery	with Juliet Armstrong	1985

Corobrik National Exhibition R.A.U.	Guest Exhibitor	1985
Natal Technikon 100 Year Exhibition	N.S.A. and Tatham Gallery PMB	1985
Strydom and Jordaan Gallery, George		1985
David Walters Group Exhibition, Caversham		1985
N.S.A. Gallery	December	1985
Cameo, Stellenbosch	‘April 1986 Group Exhibition’	1986
Natal Regional Exhibition N.S.A. Gallery	(H.C)	1986
Eastern Cape Regional Exhibition Port Elizabeth	Guest Exhibitor	1986
Rennie Johnson Gallery	Exhibition with Barry Dibb and Hannah Lurie	1986
Grassroots Gallery	‘Africa Exhibition’	1986
Grassroots Gallery	‘Ceramic Exhibition’	1986
Beuster-Skolimowsky Gallery	‘National Award Winners Exhibition’	1987
Grassroots Gallery	‘Birds’	1987
Strydom Gallery, George		1987

Grassroots Gallery	'Ceramic Exhibition'	1987
Craft Gallery, Johannesburg	'National Award Winners'	1987
P.E. Art Gallery	Rotary	1987
Grassroots Gallery		1987
Strydom Gallery, George		1988
N.S.A. Gallery	'Personal Visions'	1988
Durban Art Gallery	Corobrik National Exhibition	1988

COMMISSIONS

Malherbe Library, University of Natal	Commission – 6 Tile Murals	1989
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CHAPTER THREE

Ceramic Technology and Sourcing Processes

employed by Maggie Mikula

Maggie Mikula first captured the attention of the ceramic world in the early 1980's with delicate, finely crafted tactile work in which she merged, absorbed and assimilated iconographic styles from many cultures. Over the next decade Mikula processed and combined materials and mediums into a unique visual language. Her work is represented in many major public collections in South Africa and private collectors passionately sought out her work wherever she exhibited. This chapter presents the first comprehensive overview of her works and processes.

Mikula began her ceramic career in the early 1970's initially favouring functional glazed - ware, using skills she acquired from part-time lessons at the Durban Technikon (Bauer 2002 (g)). She mainly produced thrown ware such as bowls, coffee mugs, jugs, plates and candle stick holders, working in high fired glazed stoneware and porcelain, her pieces reflecting considerable skill and craftsmanship (personal observations from work seen in the collections of Paul Mikula, Jenny Hawke and Dennis Claude). Interestingly, Mikula soon tired of this method of working and Claude mentions (Bauer 2003 (q)) that Mikula, when making a jug for him, under duress, thought it 'ugly'. She responded far more to the making of unique individual pieces that enhanced an art rather than craft aesthetic (Bauer 2003 (q)).

At an early stage of her artistic career Mikula created small, delicate, detailed ceramic pieces that she incorporated into jewellery, an interest she had pursued from an early age. Jenny Hawke remembers her taking objects from their mother's 'glory box' such as buttons, florins and silver chips and soldering them into rings and pendants. This predilection continued with the creation of glazed clay beads that Mikula used to form into necklaces strung on leather cord, the ceramic beads interspersed between metal bolts and

spacers typical of the 1960's 'ethnic' jewellery at the time **Figs. 1.A, 1.B** (Bauer 2003 (w)). This alluded to the glass trading beads and North African jewellery.

Mikula gave most of her early work to friends and family members. She produced many pinch-pots decorated with detailed oxidized and impressed designs, her background in textile design influencing these designs. Mikula designed patterns and images for fabrics while completing a Commercial Art course at the Natal Technikon (now the Durban Institute of Technology) (Bauer 2003 (w)),³¹ and part of the curriculum of this course involved stamping repeat patterns onto cloth. Mikula seems to have assimilated this concept into the impressing³² of designs on her ceramic work.

Glass paperweights, which she avidly collected (Bauer 2003 (v)) appear to have been a possible source of reference for her early 'pebble pots'. These were small hand constructed pinch-pots joined together, some with 'scalloped edges' (Bauer 2002 (e)) that were often incised and coloured with oxide designs. The patterns were also probably sourced from her training as a commercial artist **Fig. 2A**. She took great care to produce works that were pleasing to hold. Her ceramic pieces were always light, balanced, and the weight and size of the piece in correct relationship with each other. The ceramics in **Fig. 2 A** were exhibited at the *National Ceramic Exhibition* at the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) in 1980. The Gallery purchased the porcelain piece on the far left in the front row, the first of many it would buy over the next few years as Mikula's work developed and matured.

Mikula was also inspired by nature, particularly shells, sea urchins, plants and seed pods. Hawke, her sister, claims that as children, they collected shells at their mother's beach cottage. In their formative years, both while at the family farm on the Tugela River and at the family beach cottage, they were exposed to beautiful gardens and acquired an appreciation for nature (Bauer 2003 (w)). This was to be an ongoing passion for Mikula

³¹ Her lecturer was involved with Frame Mills that produced fabrics for the local Durban market.

³² Impressing denotes decorations or patterns pressed into soft clay with stamps of wood, metal, plaster bisque-fired clay or other materials (Shafer 1976:159). Mikula created her stamps by carving patterns into the flattened end of rolled coils of clay. These custom-made texture stamps were then bisque fired to remain durable. Such stamps could then be used to produce patterns in the ceramic piece while the clay was still soft enough to accept an impression. This would create borders and repeat patterns. Mikula incorporated this method to construct her blocked patterns on her forms.



Fig. 1.A.



Fig. 1.B.

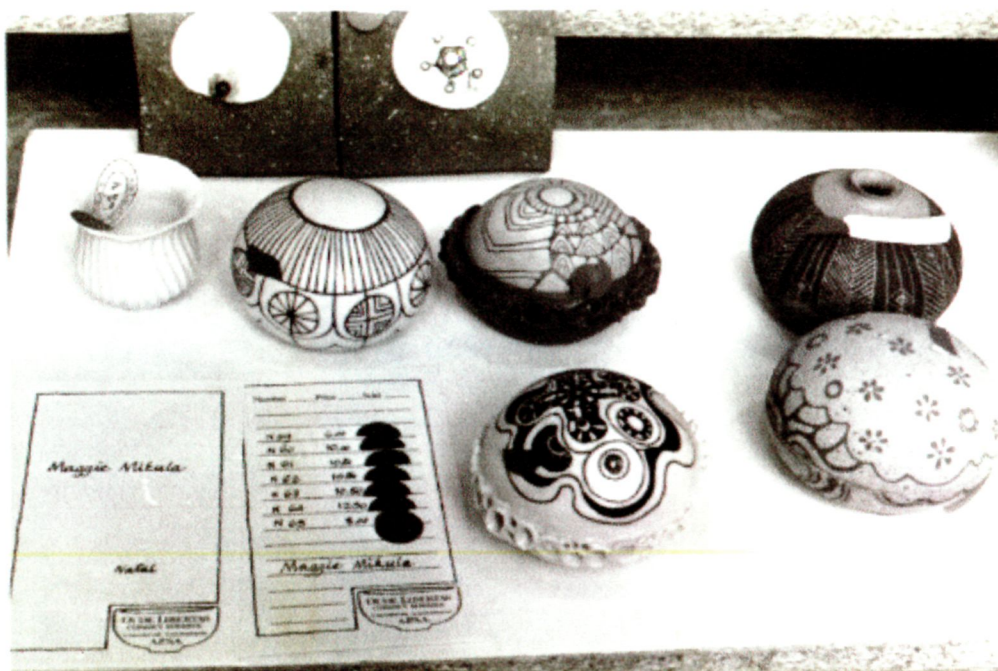


Fig. 2.A.

who sourced imagery for her early tiles from fish and plant forms as seen in **Fig. 3 A, 3 B, and 3 C**.

After her marriage, the garden of Mikula's first home on the Berea in Durban consisted of plants that reflected the tropical growth so prevalent in the region. The verdant green was complemented by Mikula's terracotta pieces and Hawke attributes this as the reason that Mikula elected to work in this medium (Bauer 2003 (w)). Mikula continued to base her pieces on pod forms, the shapes of sea urchins and pebbles **Figs. 2B, 2C**. The first piece **Fig. 2 B** in porcelain with a matt manganese glaze on the rim is scratched through in thin lines to reveal the clay beneath. **Fig 2C** is unglazed stoneware with a cap of red oxidized clay built over the pod. The top layer has been incised with thin lines and circles reminiscent of sea life such as the starfish. Both pieces are delicate and light in weight. Important here is that although Mikula based her inspiration on nature, she stylised the imagery so that her work reflected a reminiscence of the source but did not mimic it. She referred to the markings and patterns found on these forms, transposing them into her own decorative stylised vocabulary.

As well as the pod forms, Mikula also worked on flat slab forms, producing a varying selection of tiles. Her early ones focused on plant and sea imagery **Fig. 3A, 3B, and 3C**. These tiles used a combination of carving and incising together with impressing. The works were then enhanced with coloured oxides, usually red iron or cobalt. Mikula made clay stamps to create repeat patterns, and would at times press actual plants or shells into the clay to leave a negative impression (Bauer 2003 (w)). Mikula influenced Lorraine Wilson in the use of this as a teaching technique for Wilson's ceramic classes and David Wilson adopted the plant pressing method for a range of commissioned tiles (Bauer 2002 (g)). The Wilsons still continue with this method of decoration.³³

Using the stamping technique, Mikula embossed her work using a stamp carved with a symbol derived from her name. An example can be seen in **Fig 3A**. She would press this

³³ Lorraine and David Wilson were friends of the Mikulas' and remain so with Paul, Maggie's husband. Lorraine attended many APSA workshops with Maggie Mikula and they shared a mutual appreciation of ceramics. See Chapter Two. Lorraine gives ceramic classes from her home. David is a ceramic artist producing tiles from his home based studio in Westville, just outside Durban.



Fig. 2.B.



Fig. 2.C.



Fig. 3.A.



Fig. 3.B.



Fig. 3.C.

bisque-fired stamp firmly into the base of her piece, leaving her impressed 'signature' in the soft clay before firing.

Mikula produced many square tiles – obviously for practical reasons, the square format allowing for a simple method of creating a large image from many small tiles. She produced commissioned murals for clients such as the panel for Mr. and Mrs. J. Park in Miller Grove and P. Didcott both of Durban. Alternatively Mikula would vary the shape of individual tiles preferring to create unique pieces of work. This demonstrates her increasing rejection of repetition that is characteristic of mass production pottery **Fig. 3 A**.

The first mention of an exhibition of Mikula's work is at the Trevean Arts and Crafts Centre launched at the Lee³⁴ home in Bellair, Durban in 1978. This was a three-day exhibition, including dance and music, aimed at encouraging creative crafts of a high standard among all races in Natal and Zululand. Mikula exhibited 'an unusual collection of tiles' alongside work by Barry Dibb and Rorke's Drift ceramists that may have included Gordon Mbatha and Joel Sibisi (Verster, 1978: 10) (Hobbs and Rankin 2003: 63).

Mikula's subsequent exhibitions included participation in the group shows at David and Lorraine Wilson's home for six successive years. She exhibited there with Barry Dibb, Anthea Martin, and Jane Bedford (who markets and has developed a range of beadwork produced by local Zulu women to her design).

In 1979 the Natal Society of Arts (NSA) staged an exhibition titled *Boxes and Banners* to which Mikula contributed eighteen pieces. Most of the works were done in porcelain and included her decorative patterning. Reviewing the show for the Daily News, Diana Kenton commented on the distinctive signature of Mikula's work, observing 'her style has a diminutive preciousness without being self-conscious' with a light hearted humour and witty patterned nuances (Kenton 1979: 5).

³⁴Brian and Ester Lee, owners of Trevean a late Victorian home near the University of Natal, Durban, utilised their grounds to present an exhibition of arts and crafts. This exhibition was hoped to offer a genuine possibility for the development of a cross-cultural reservoir of creativity that could reflect the diversity of South African talent. Work included basket ware from the Vukani Association in Eshowe, jewellery by Carin Stuart and crafts such as quilting. Barry Dibb, a well-established Durban potter, interpreted an art nouveau style in his ceramics. He has gone on to work in porcelain utilising strong geometric designs on a tonal surface (Cruise 1991: 28).

Mikula attended many APSA workshops with Wilson who recalls attending one conducted by Lesley-Ann Hoets³⁵ and suggests it may have had some degree of influence on Mikula (Bauer 2002 (g)). She acknowledged how they were both intrigued by Hoets' new method of coiling and her construction of lids joined with clay hinges. Mikula and Wilson also responded to the decorative style Hoets embraced of creating contrasting areas of incised³⁶ 'dots' separated by plain areas (Bauer 2004 (al)). They both also attended the workshops presented by David Middlebrook from America. Although he had a profound impact on many ceramists in South Africa at this time, Mikula continued to work in her precise and delicate language uninfluenced by the trend towards making large ceramic pieces (Bauer 2002 (d)).

Many ceramic artists in South Africa during the 70's were engaged in work that was high fired, based on prevailing Anglo-Oriental traditions discussed in Chapter One. Although Mikula had been exposed to this approach, and indeed had produced pieces of a similar kind, her work was soon to change direction influenced by changing factors in her life. In 1979, following a mastectomy after being diagnosed with cancer, Paul Mikula explained that 'this focused her life (all of ours). Maggie kept looking and trying to come to grips with being from Africa and mortal. She was very proud of her roots and heritage' (Bauer 2002 (b)).

The Mikulas traveled extensively from as early as the mid 1970's. They spent a year exploring Europe, including such places as Turkey and Morocco, absorbing other cultures and purchasing their artifacts (Bauer 2002 (e)). The attraction of these cultures together with changes in her life, effected through personal problems, was to contribute towards Mikula's transformation in style of work.

Her friend and co-exhibitor, Anthea Martin (at present Director of the African Art Centre, Durban) notes that 'she suggested to Mikula that she look at African artifacts as a source

³⁵ As considered in Chapter Two 2.2

³⁶ Cutting into the soft (unfired) clay surface utilising various tools to produce marks and patterns creates incised decoration. Coloured oxides can be rubbed into the decoration to accentuate the design prior to bisque firing and glazing. The type of tool and the state of the clay determine the quality and definition of the designs (Cosentino 1990: 47).

of inspiration as she was working then on a sea theme'. Martin felt that with Mikula's background being so rooted in Africa this would be appropriate (Bauer 2004 (ac)). Paul Mikula shared this attraction to indigenous iconography from all across the continent of Africa, and as an architect also working with designs, he and Maggie supported each other in their search for a local identity in their work. Ilse Mikula acknowledged that her parents had an active dialogue and inquiry with the imagery of Africa. This is reflected in their large collection of objects from other cultures (Bauer 2002 (e)).

At the same time Mikula made a pivotal discovery while conducting research for her book about her family history in Zululand. Finding the Adams collection became as significant for her artistic development as were the trips abroad. The effect of this experience resonated in new work. This experience now resulted in a change of direction in her work.

The first significant change can be noted in the 1980 exhibition *Our Environment* at the NSA. She submitted her now celebrated finely thrown porcelain bowls bordered with oxide-impregnated triangular patterns. Her handmade tiles emphasised stamped impressions and oxides, but now Mikula also included an enclosed hand built stoneware sphere in a dry matt manganese glaze, strung with a leather cord hung with white stoneware beads **Fig. 4**. This piece has incised markings of triangles, circles and scratched lines worked into the surface. The cord is attached to the pod form by means of clay lugs built onto the top perimeter of the pod. The white beads are patterned with pressed stamp markings. This piece, though very finely constructed, has an energy that conveys a timeless quality, echoing ancient archeological finds - a hint of work that was to follow.

This was followed by new work submitted in the 1981 NSA exhibition *Ceramics, Graphics and Artifacts*. This diverse collection of artifacts was assembled by Thomas Welz, renowned writer and collector, and included fragments of a Roman bronze miniature, juxtaposing a hand-sculpted, primitive axe, African beadwork, enameled basins from Morocco and Czechoslovakian and Chinese bowls. Such items would have presumably inspired Mikula. The exhibition also included drawings and graphics by Toni Morkel, a Natal Technikon graduate, and work by ceramists such as David Walters, Carol Hayward-Fell, Heidi Smallwood and Martha Zettler, all recognised potters from Natal. In his review of the show, Verster, in particular mentioned 'the carefully detailed miniature sculptures of Maggie Mikula, with their distinctive decoration and colour, objects whose

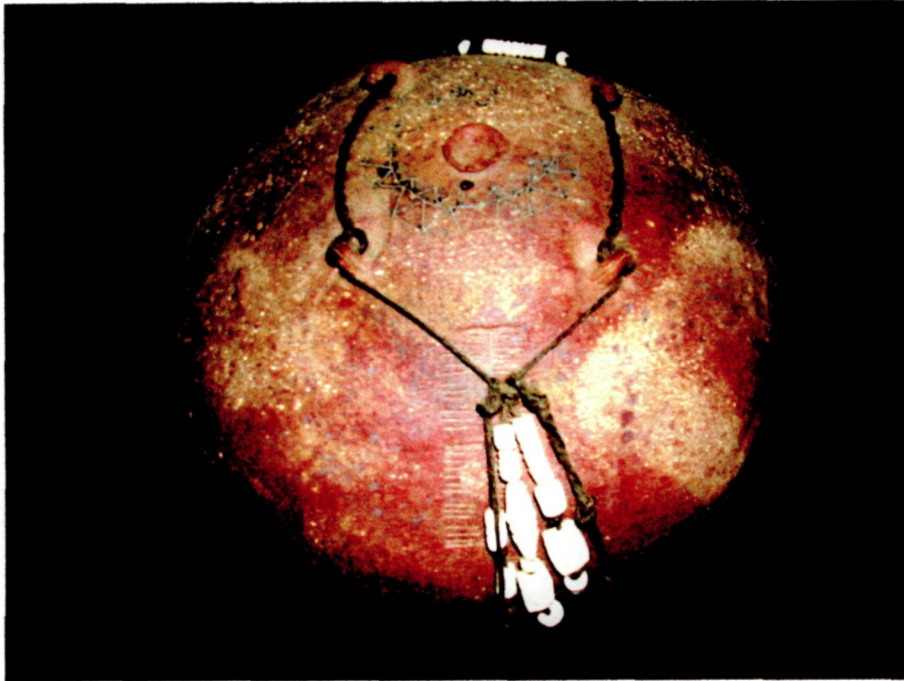


Fig. 4.

only function is to delight the eye and give pleasure' (Verster, 1980). Commenting on the same exhibition, Marilynne Holloway noted that Mikula brought a 'strong ethnic interpretation to her work' which she said contributed to its popularity with the public (Holloway, 1981).

Mikula's vessels began to embrace a specifically cross-cultural dimension in the early 80's. The mixture of sources, cultural iconography and materials heralded a new chapter in her expressive vocabulary. This development was situated within the changing political demographics at this time in South Africa. The United Nations cultural boycott isolating the country and denying artists exposure to the rest of the world forced artists to process their imagery through a local consciousness that many artists developed into anti-apartheid statements. Mikula, however, used her work to celebrate an engagement between the different cultures rather than a critique of the political situation. She reassessed her own role in South Africa by actively participating in anti-apartheid groups and teaching and financially aiding other racial communities.

The opening of the Grassroots Gallery in 1982 in Westville, outside Durban, allowed Mikula access to a permanent venue for exhibiting her ceramics. The then owner, Vera Poole, who expected the gallery to reflect a unique South African flavour, said that Mikula's pieces 'in particular have 'grassroots'³⁷ impact (1982 – article from Mikula scrapbook) and she was invited to have a permanent exhibition of her work in the showroom.

One of her works shown at the gallery in 1983 was a porcelain vase covered in a white crackle glaze. Clustered around the neck of the pot is a generous group of shell and pod forms that crowd tightly next to the delicate pinched and softened rim **Fig. 5**. Although this work is sourced from her original interest in nature, it could also refer to Zairian head ornaments piled with fibre and cowrie shells or from neck ornaments produced by indigenous cultures that incorporate natural objects such as shells and wood (Sieber 1972: 77, 78). Paul Mikula acknowledged that Maggie steeped herself in reading the

³⁷ Work that reflected a local 'African' identity developed from sound skills sourced from craft orientated products.



Fig. 5.

book *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* by Roy Sieber (Bauer 2003 (v)). Images that are found in this book exhibit subtle references to her new work (Sieber 1972: 15,139). In 1984 she acquired *Africa Adorned* by Angela Fischer and this book, amongst many others in her personal library, provided her with the stimulation and information that she assimilated, and then re-processed into a unique vocabulary.

Ilse Mikula recollects that her mother's early work was inspired by nature but that later her ceramics derived stimulation from her travels and her respect for African arts and crafts (Bauer 2002 (e)). Another bowl on the 1983 exhibition was a smoked, burnished earthenware piece with carved porcelain beads hung around the neck with black cotton. The cotton, joined with a tight knot and left to hang in strands, has white glass beads strung onto some of them **Fig. 6**. This work was created employing the traditional low firing techniques that many ancient cultures utilised, including Zulu pottery, and with which Mikula would have been very familiar (Bauer 2003 (w)). The miniscule beads are strung irregularly along thin cords that, tied together, hang down the side of the pot. The grouping of these beads is reminiscent of traditional African jewellery that hangs in clusters and also references some indigenous hairpins where the delicate cords are interspersed with tiny beads at irregular intervals along their length. (Sieber, 1972: 119)

The decorative patterning on Mikula's pod forms was also now transforming. The organic, free flowing circular pod shapes (**Fig. 1 front, left**) and simple incised lines in oxides that wrapped around the form found in her early work (**Fig. 1 back, right**) gave way to pods that had definite geometric patterns stamped, carved and incised into the surface **Fig. 7**. These motifs appear to have a correlation with the patterns seen on African textiles (Sieber, 1972: 156 – 225).³⁸ In particular, Mikula refers to Kuba Raffia cloth and the beaten bark cloth of the Pygmy, in notes from her sketch books. The design on the ceramic sphere seen in **Fig. 7**. has an affinity with the bark cloth cited in Sieber (1972: 156) (**Fig. 7.A**.) The blue triangular patterns on this cloth have a close correlation with the pale blue cobalt, diamond forms found on **Fig. 7**. This pattern formation is also found on Zairian wooden headrests (Phillips 1999: 274-275). Mikula recontextualises these sources into a

³⁸ Her blocked stamped designs may have been a response to the blocked stamping of Adinkira hand-stamped cloth using dyes from the bark of the Badie tree. Interestingly the word *Adinkira* means good-bye or farewell and this cloth was worn at functions for departing guests and at funeral ceremonies (Jefferson 1974: 94).



Fig. 6.



Fig.7.

new synthesis, merging hybrid images, with those sourced from personal experiences. She was also familiar with the weaving looms used by the Senufo men to create linear strips that would be sewn together after completion (Mikula sketch books). This technique bears a resemblance to the linear patterning she carves into the clay surface of her work. The breadth of Mikula's sourcing was vast, accessing many African cultures, she used this to inform her own working context. Her individual stampings and markings are placed in bands in relation to each other, to create an overall pattern similar to weaving (Sieber, 1972: 202). Here, too, she again used different oxides to emphasis the designs (**Fig. 7**).

Included in these new pieces created for the Grassroots Exhibition in March 1983, was a large sealed pebble pot painted with a geometric design utilising different coloured oxides **Fig. 8**. The design placed on the top of the piece appears to have strong links to the geometric detail on Zulu earplugs (*iziqhaza*). Further pieces seen in **Fig. 9** show the 'pebble' pot form (on the right) again decorated in simple geometric lines. The piece on the left has been inverted into a drum shape with a similar colouring and patterning. Her unglazed surfaces show the open character and natural colour of her blended clays. These contain grog³⁹ and oxide (in this case iron oxide) to add texture and strength to the clay.

Fig. 10 (from the same exhibition) takes this theme further and now links two grogged stoneware drum forms by means of clay lugs. The tops of the forms are painted with organic designs using coloured oxides.

From the same 1983 exhibition, the ceramic pot in **Fig. 11** again reflects the developmental process that Mikula evolved in her drum forms. She has used the simple geometric patterning, sourced in the Zulu earplug, and incorporated it, using coloured oxides, to create her pattern on the surface of the work. She has further developed the theme by carving⁴⁰ into the clay following the form of the pattern to create an additional visual dimension to this work

³⁹ Grog is fired ground clay obtained in different grain size. It is blended into the clay to add strength and improve both its texture and colour. Walford acknowledges that Mikula blended her clay and managed to successfully create the 'iron spot' effect, usually only achieved in reduction firing, by using an electric kiln (Bauer 2004 (af) (ii)). The effect produced gives the clay a speckled surface due to oxygen deprivation pulling the iron in the clay to the surface (Cosentino 1990: 40).

⁴⁰ Known as piercing, this technique is done when the clay is leather hard. Sharp tools are utilised to cut into the surface of the clay leaving decorative holes (Cosentino 1990: 60).

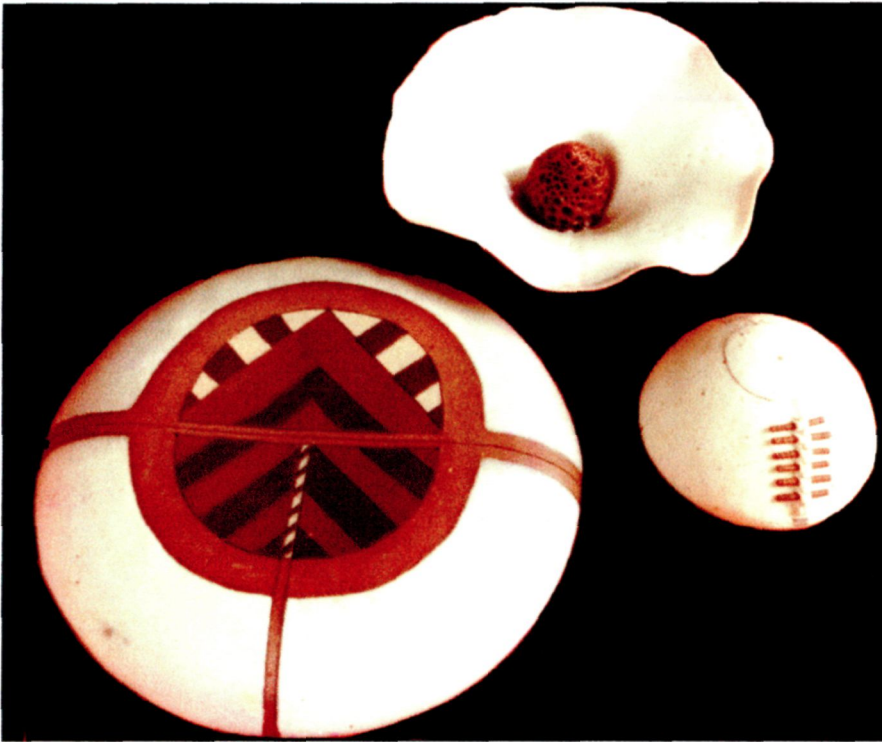


Fig. 8 Extreme left.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.

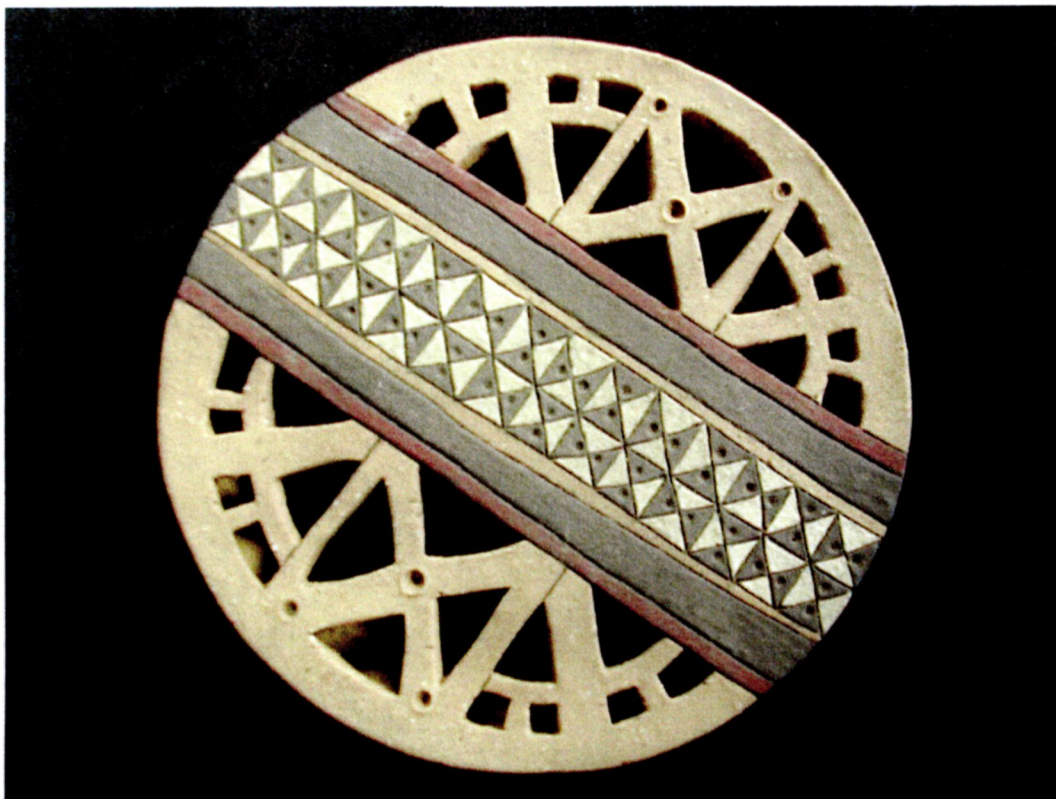


Fig. 11.

This echoes the pierced and painted *iziqhaza* (Phillips 1991: 219). Mikula has assimilated her pod form with the imagery sourced from other cultures, using both the drum shape and the earplugs, to produce a unique form. The carving gives a new dimension to her sealed work and this feature represents a step towards her next development seen in **Fig. 12**. (also from the same exhibition) Here the drum form is open at the top and she replaces the clay lid with new materials to create a fresh vocabulary.

The idea of adding fabric and woven elements in a ceramic piece would certainly not be foreign to an artist familiar with African weaving and ritual dance masks. Mikula's familiarity with African material culture again informed this development (Bauer 2002(e)). The hierarchy of clay as the only medium in the ceramic world was challenged and, in great part due to Mikula, mixed media in ceramics became an accepted form of expression in this art genre from the mid 1980's (Bauer 2002 (d)).

Fig. 12 was a collaborative work between Mikula and weaver Terry-Anne Stevenson. The drum shape appears to be derived from her on-going experimentation with form and her continual absorption of the design elements found in African forms, particularly musical instruments. Reference to drum designs can be found in one of Mikula's sketch books which include drawings of traditional cylindrically shaped drums, based on Adinkira designs in Ghana, the Ogboni Society in Nigeria, Yohure, Ivory Coast and the Goblet drum from Ghana. Over these drums animal hide is pulled tightly across the top surface and tied down by means of leather cords wound around wooden plugs situated around the neck of the form (Jefferson 1974:149). **Fig. 12** has drawn historically from these multiple cultures to create a unique personal perspective.

The vessel in **Fig. 12** formed from grogged porcelain was inlaid with fine black oxide designs of simple triangular shapes. Weaving, utilising black and white wool and cotton, was pulled tightly across the opening of the vessel and tied down by means of threads woven through the holes pierced around the neck of the piece. The wool was then tied around ostrich eggshell beads and others made by hand from porcelain and stoneware clay. The threads hang freely much like the raffia skirts on ceremonial masks seen from various African cultures (Sieber 1972: 207).



Fig. 12.

Fig. 13 (from the 1983 Grassroots exhibition) is a terracotta drum carved deeply with vertical linear markings interspersed with tiny triangular indentations tooled into the unglazed surface. A rough woven cloth of brown and black fabric cut across with thin white threads is stretched across the opening of the vessel. The fabric is tied to the pot with white wool cord that is wrapped around eight clay lugs that protrude horizontally from the shoulder of the piece. From the cords hang porcelain discs and terracotta shapes reminiscent of teeth and horns. These objects would have been sourced in the many books on African material culture relating to body decoration (Sieber 1972).

The 1983 exhibition at the Grassroots Gallery included Mikula's tiles that were now also reflecting an innovative format. Using her white crackle glaze on the surface of these porcelain pieces she sets a black oxide pattern into the middle of the form. She adapts the flat form, changing from the square format she usually explored, transforming the work in **Fig. 14** into a circular piece, and **Fig. 15** into a flat spade shape. Playing with different widths of lines, and contrasting with oxides, patterns are more geometric with a strong emphasis on triangles and circles. These designs bear some common relationship with African designs in textiles such as beaten bark cloth from Uganda (Sieber 1972: 157) with the dark circle of patterns expanding outwards to a border of enclosing triangles formed from solid colour. The design could also refer to the geometric triangular henna designs painted by some cultures such as the Tuareg and the Hindu community, onto hands (Fischer 1984: 220).⁴¹ The spade disc could also be loosely derived from the shapes found in Tuareg jewellery (Fischer 1984: 211). Hayward-Fell suggests they reflect the designs found on indigenous carved wooden objects (possibly reflective of Zimbabwean headrests and many African musical instruments) (Phillips 1999: 204-205). She also supposes the influence of carvings on old ivory (such as bracelets from Zaire (Fischer 1984: 79-80) and Zulu combs (*izinsingulo*) (Grossert 1978: 13) with the familiar dark incised circular markings) (Sieber 1972: 119) (Hayward-Fell 1984: 11).

Mikula extends her use of the flat circular tile by miniaturising them and adding bases to create tiny sculptural pieces **Figs. 16 A, 16 B**. These forms, exhibited at the same 1983 show, seem to echo the shape of Ghanaian fertility dolls, flattened spoon shapes, or possibly a Fang fly-whisk from Gabon. Oblique reference could also have been made to a

⁴¹ These communities do not only use geometric patterning but also incorporate floral designs in their work.

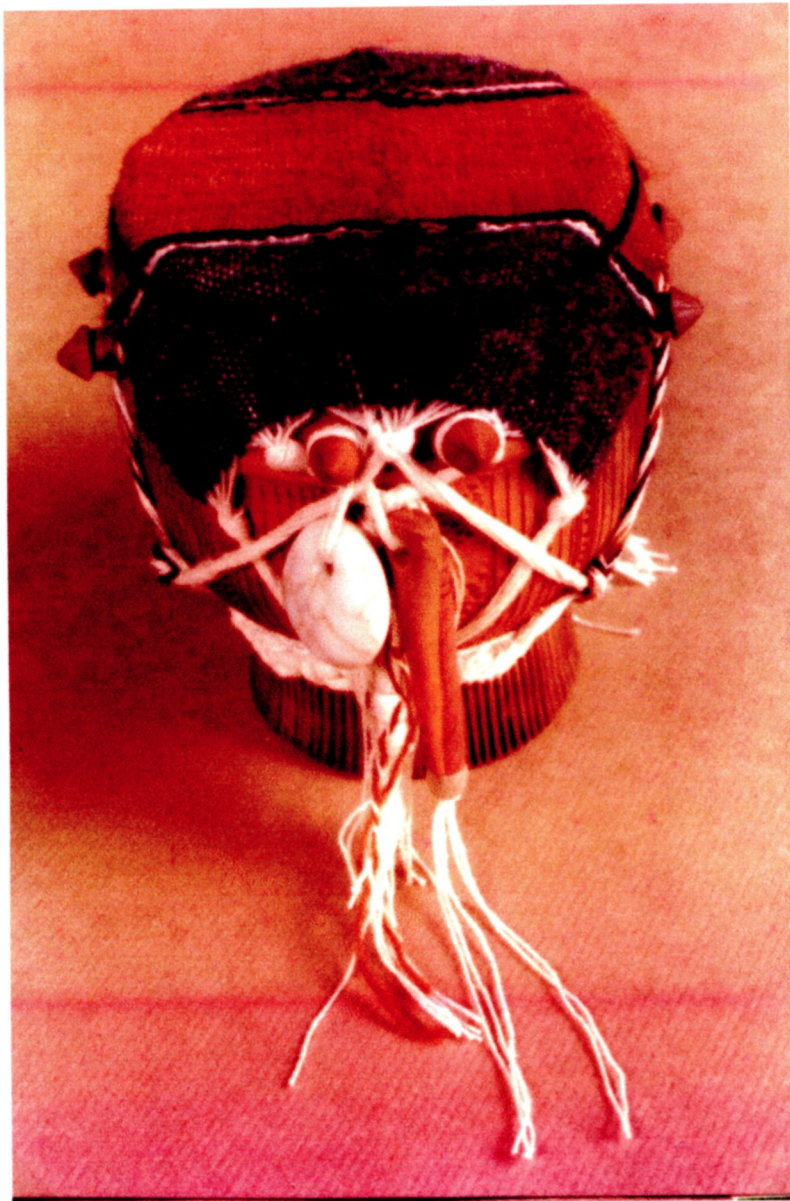


Fig.13.

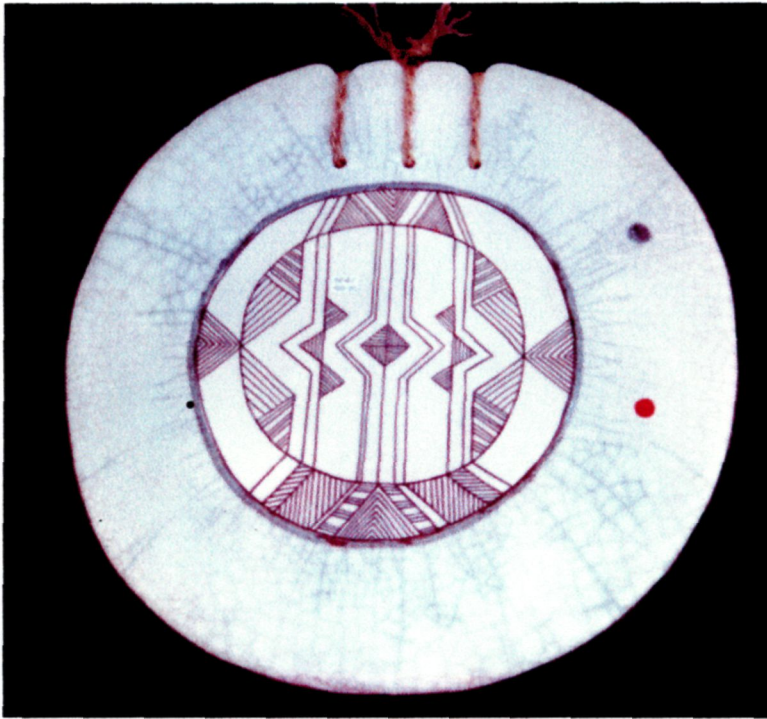


Fig. 14.



Fig. 15

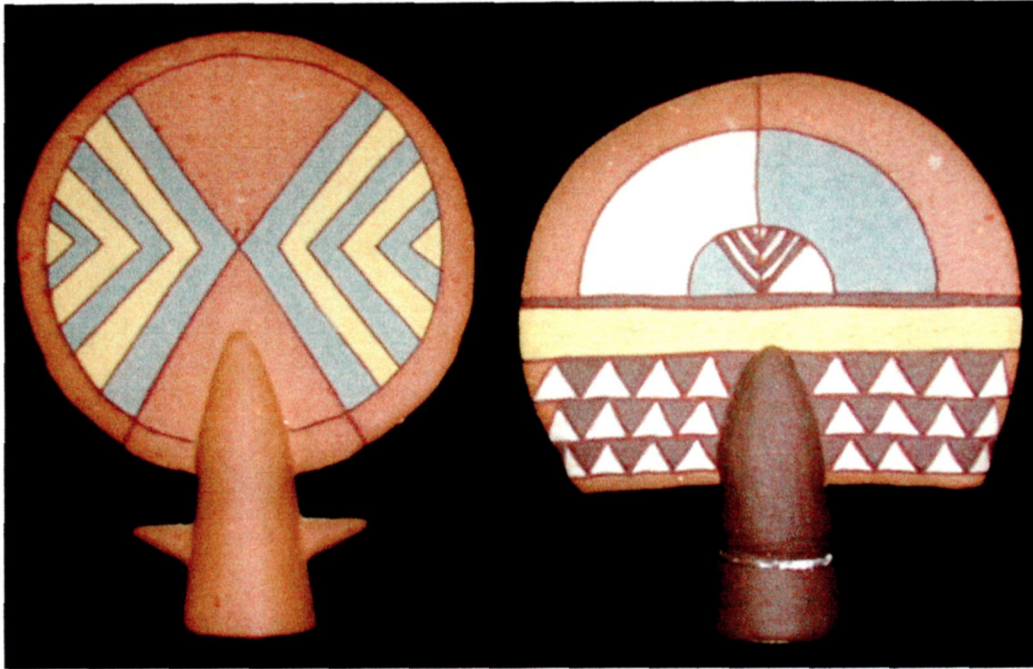


Fig. 16.A.

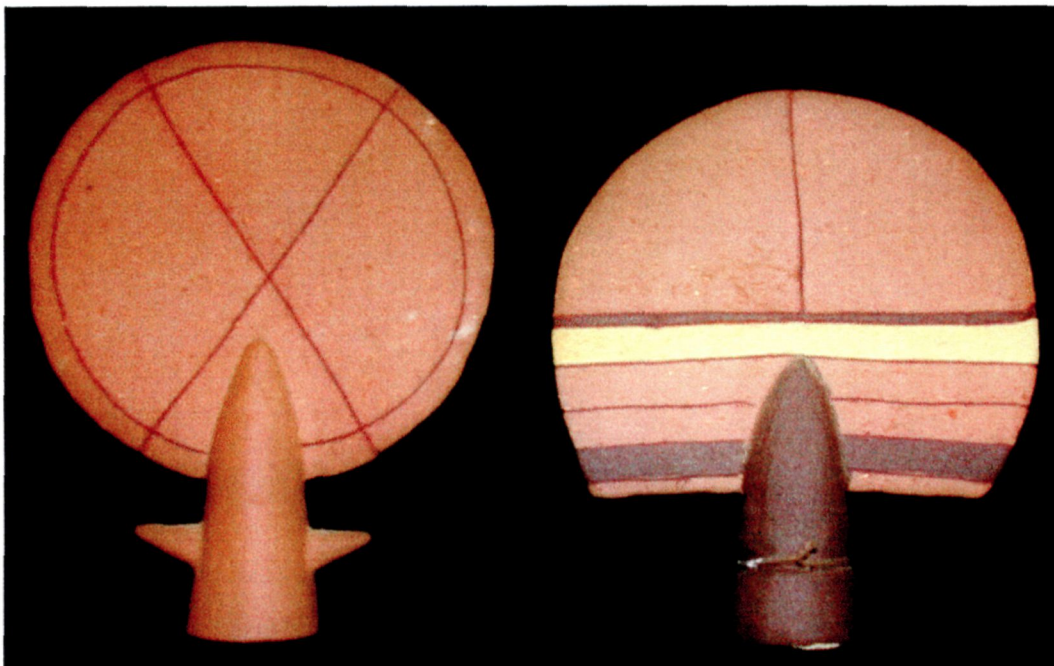


Fig. 16.B.

wrist knife from Southern Sudan and Sierra Leone that appears in Fischer (1984: 62). The decorative elements again are geometrically stylised circles and triangles and finishing the work with refined precision, Mikula has completed the back of the pieces as carefully as the front. The integrity of form and colour was felt through out the work and was as integral as the applied images and designs.

At the same Grassroots exhibition Mikula uses the flat format again, as seen in **Fig. 17**. It appears that Mikula may have assimilated the imagery of the wooden neck ring from Cameroon (Sieber 1972: 134) or the gold earrings of the Fulani in Mali (Sieber 1972: 101), adapting it to speak her own hybrid language. She has created a new representation of the original object and with her recognisable decorative qualities has transformed it. Sketches of this form were sourced from amongst her drawings and notice was taken of the changing ideas and problem solving that she worked on meticulously before starting the work in clay (Mikula sketches referring to Sieber, 1972: 134).

When Mikula created her cylindrical forms they were either thrown and/or hand constructed with exacting precision. Meticulous care and time was spent developing clarity of shape and design (Bauer 2002(b)). Mikula demanded and set very high standards for herself, often destroying and re-doing pieces again and again (Bauer 2002 (b) and Bauer 2002 (g)). Her work was 'precious', recalled Hayward-Fell, claiming that her pieces were tactile and 'invited you to touch' (Bauer 2002 (d)). She recalls that Mikula embellished the surfaces with fine details and clear designs. Hayward-Fell felt this came from her respect and awareness of archeological artifacts and ancient relics in particular ancient talismans, amulets, symbolic icons of protection and small ethnic devotional pieces (Bauer 2002 (d)). Small items had a special meaning to her, says Hayward-Fell, and this was reflected in her need to create small scale work, with meticulous attention to detail both of form and decoration 'almost to the point of obsession' (Bauer 2002 (d)). All her pieces were very considered, even the bases were completed beautifully with extra markings and little nuances for the observant viewer (Bauer 2002 (d)).

The first public recognition of her work was for a smoke fired, earthenware pot with porcelain and terracotta beads suspended from a cord on its shoulder seen in **Fig. 18**. She received a Highly Commended for this piece in the *Natal Regional Ceramics Exhibition*

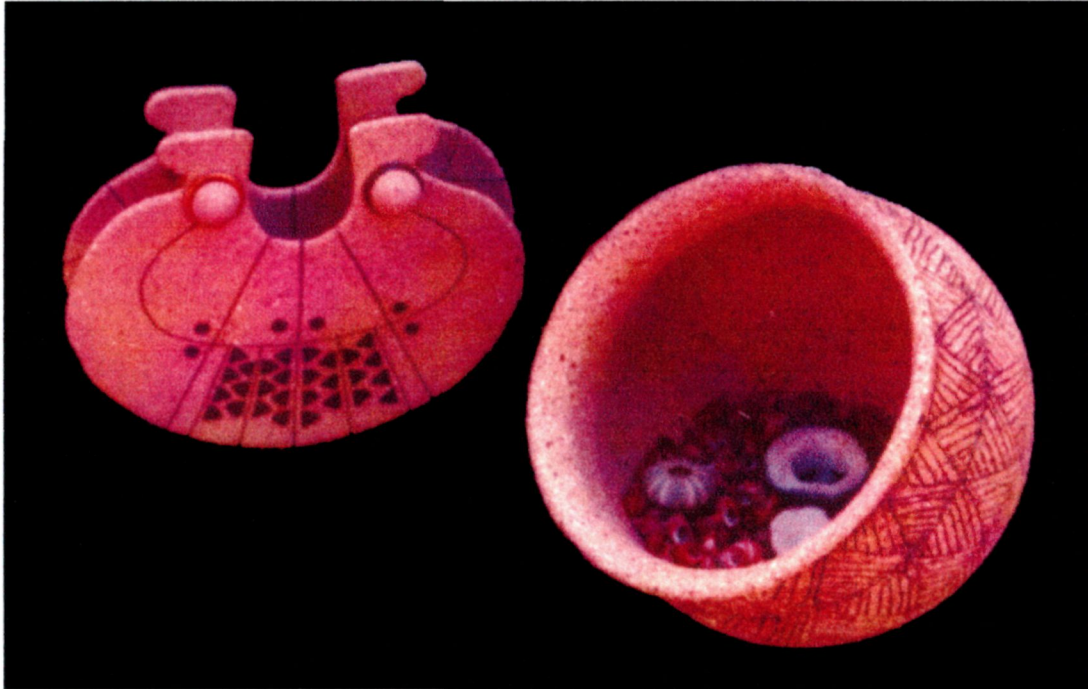


Fig. 17.Extreme left



Fig. 18.

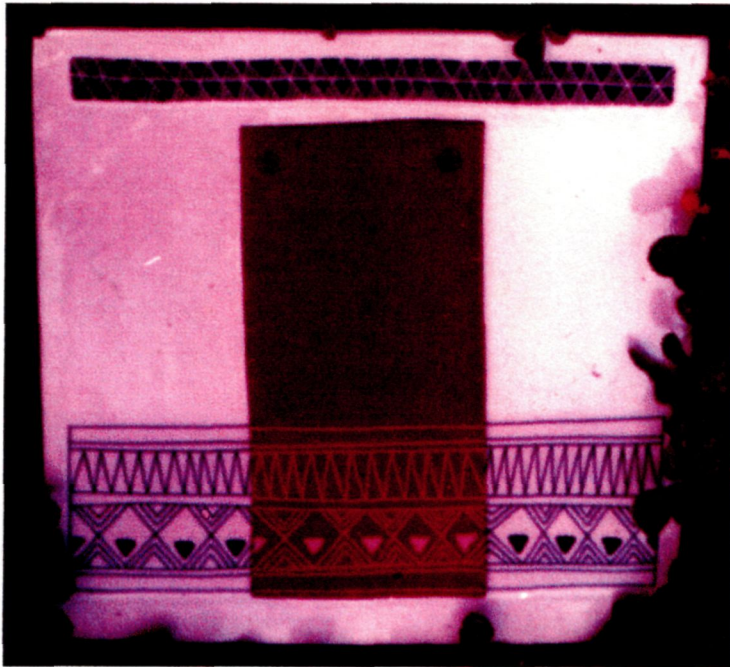


Fig. 19.

shown at the NSA Gallery in 1983. Mikula followed this success with another Highly Commended evaluation, this time at the *National Ceramics Exhibition* in Cape Town the same year. The piece was entitled *African Textile* made of glazed porcelain with red clay overlay and oxide inlay design **Fig. 19**. This seems to be the first time she titled her work.

Rousso commenting on this exhibition in the *Sgraffiti* No. 33 remarked on the conservative atmosphere amongst most potters but mentioned Mikula and Heide Marie Smallwood 's work as being unique, praising them for 'trying new ideas' (Rousso 1983: 8, No. 33). Verster supported this in an article in the Daily News calling Mikula's work 'gems' (Verster 1983: 6). Rousso mentioned in an article in *The Gallery* that the 'ethnic aspect has now established itself as inherent in the maker's relationship to environment and nature, and not so imitative of 'African' craft' (Rousso, 1983: 9).

Mikula's passion and indeed obsession with local artifacts (Bauer 2002 (b)) ensured that she created innovative new work and continued to produce a non mimetic language using various materials such as woven grass, wool, leather and string to enhance the pieces. Her combination of contrasting textures and clays and her distinctive choice of decoration incorporating smooth white slips with dark metallic oxides, gave her work an originality that would set a precedent for others in the ceramic field. Jill Addleson (the Curator of the Durban Art Gallery (DAG)) collected work by Jill Restrom and Dale Stansbridge that quoted Mikula's influence, and so too a few years later, the piece by Rodney Blumenfeld (Bauer 2004 (ab)).

Writing about Mikula's work seen in a 1983 exhibition at the Grassroots Gallery, Hayward-Fell felt Mikula's assimilation of impressions absorbed from the many sources she accessed explained why her work was unique ' - never a direct translation of a specific object' (Hayward-Fell, 1983: 6-7, No. 32). Quoting Mikula, Hayward-Fell said ' she attempts to combine the excitement and emotions imbued in primitive art with their centuries old traditions, with generous inspiration from nature' (1983: 6 No. 32). Using her skill of form and design, Mikula derived patterns, colour and texture from her collection of shells and stones, to enhance the geometric form and finish of her work that was based on the cultural artifacts. Hayward-Fell defined her work as 'of another culture, not new-looking, it could have been sourced from an archeological dig'. She said her pieces spoke of age, of weathering of time (Bauer 2002 (d)).

Hayward-Fell specifically acknowledged the paper-thin, flat decorative forms that ‘appear to float in shallow perspex boxes’ seen in **Figs. 20 A and 20, B** included in this March 1983 Grassroots exhibition. Hayward-Fell credits their success with the contrast that Mikula manages between the hard edge of the black and white perspex frame against the porcelain object set into them (1983: 7 No. 32). The circles imprinted and slip-painted on some of the work are reminiscent of the shapes and finish seen on Zulu bone carvings such as combs (*izinsingulo*) and hairpins. These are solid circles of black circumscribed by a narrow black circle. This simple motif is then grouped in and around the form creating selected geometric patterns informed by the original individual shape. (Sieber 1972: 118) Ivory necklaces, such as those worn by chieftains in Zaire, are also informed by this the same motif. Mikula’s technique of patterning refers to the design on these neck decorations where the black circles are placed in patterns on the edges of ivory blocks. These blocks (120cms long) are individually strung onto leather cord to form the completed necklace (Fischer 1984: 74).

Mikula had her first two-woman exhibition with painter Lib Steward at the Grassroots Gallery in October 1983. Verster noted that it was the first time the public had seen a substantial collection of Mikula’s work and proposed that this endorsed his belief that she was probably the most unique talent in ceramics in South Africa (Verster, 1983: 5).⁴²

Evidenced by the new work on this two-woman show with Steward, Mikula had also pursued the use of the drum form even further.⁴³ Open unglazed bowls with slip and oxide designs, had holes pierced into their rims to which earth toned strings, wool and cords that created miniature tapestries stretched across the open form so ‘negating its function as a bowl’, were threaded (Hayward-Fell 1983: 7 No. 32). Beads hung from the threads that were extended through the bowl’s rim. Hayward-Fell observes that these drum forms provide a link with the ancient crafts of weaving and music (1983: 7 No. 32).

⁴² Lorraine Wilson recalls how Mikula had to be persuaded to have this exhibition due to her extreme modesty. Such was the interest in her work it all sold within minutes of the opening (Wilson 1989: 27).

⁴³ Before Mikula made her first works combining fibre and clay, she took weaving lessons with Terry -Anne Stevenson in the early 1980’s (Bauer 2004 (ae)). Terry-Anne is a weaver that worked in collaboration with the Mikulas’ on many community projects that are mentioned in Chapter Two.

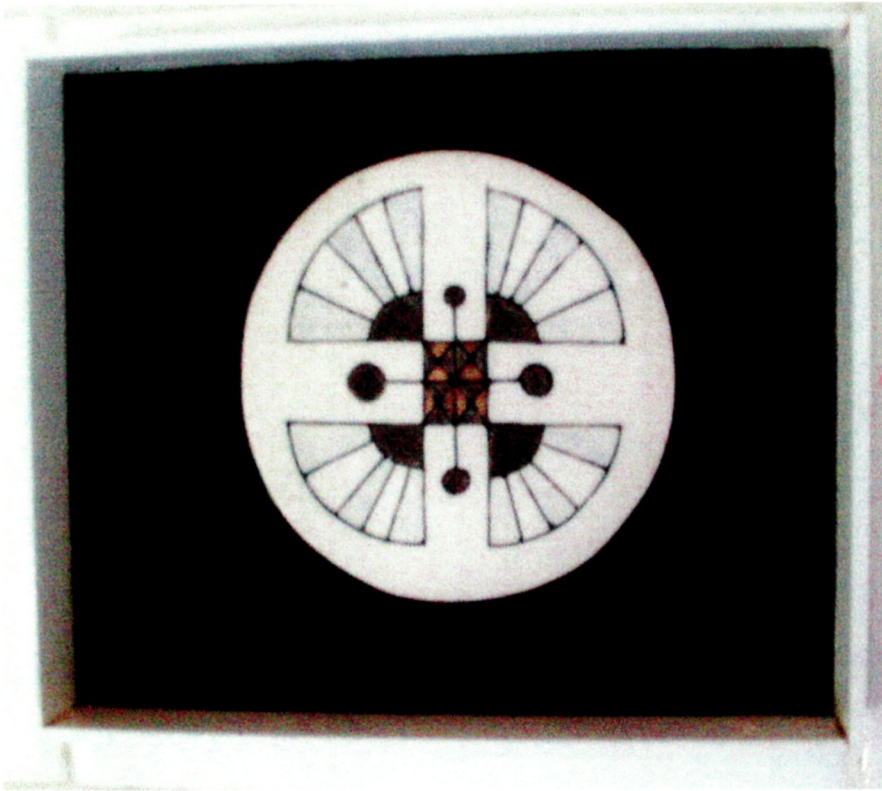


Fig. 20.A.

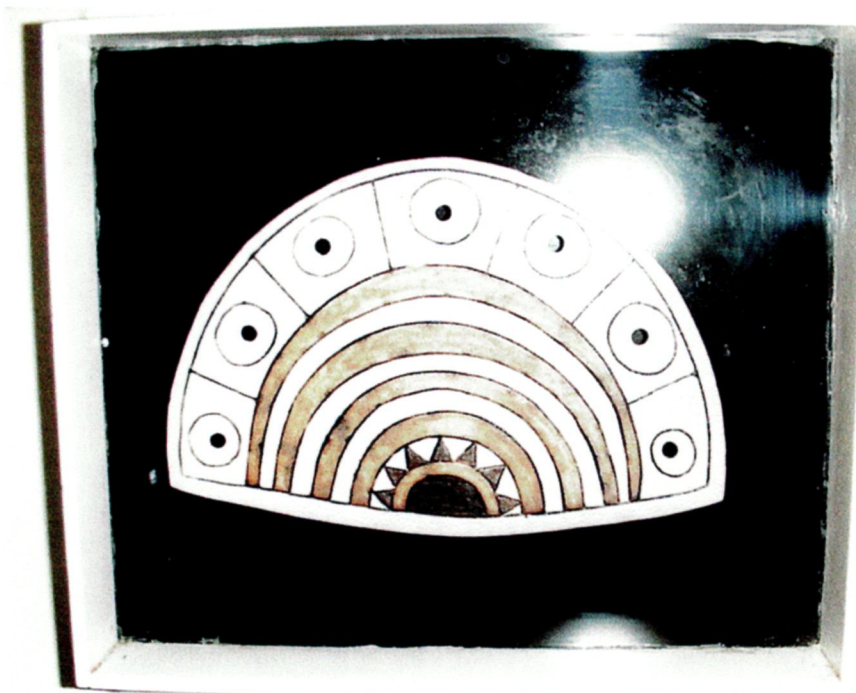


Fig. 20.B.

Mikula's work has as much to do with the tradition of pattern-making involved on and in the surface, as it has to do with form. This was now also reflected in her weaving. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, she responded to the weavers of Yoruba and to the Fulani men who produced their characteristic long strips of cloth using a double-heddle, narrow-band, horizontal treadle loom (Sieber 1972: 155). Her new pieces also reflect the similar colour choices sourced in this traditional weaving, where the natural dyes from plants give earthy tones as well as black, red and yellow (Sieber 1972: 201).

Mikula makes reference to images sourced from this book *African Textiles and Decorative Arts*, by Sieber, in drawings and notes found in her sketchbook, for example her sketch of Yoruba men's weaving seen in **Fig. 21**. Mikula particularly mentions the Senufo men's looms and made a written reference to the fact that they are a 'special caste whose wives are potters' (Mikula sketchbook). She also took note of the Yoruba weaving on page 202 and drawings of this reference are amongst her notes (Mikula sketchbook). Again there appears a strong interest in sections and strips of cloth / imagery and it is a technique that Mikula utilises in her own work, that of creating patterns and forms in enclosed blocks and segments both into the clay form and now in her weaving. She was obviously aware of the varying ceremonial usage of these fabrics for funerals, births and other community rituals, as there are detailed images and information pertaining to this subject in Sieber.

Mikula's daughter, Ilse, maintains that she felt her mother's work evolved intuitively – looking at books and seeing the real artifacts she then combined this with her own innate sense of design. She explained that Maggie was uncomfortable discussing her work and would create quietly in her studio, working alone (Bauer 2002(c)). Mikula's process of working suggests a serious continuous, contemplative engagement with techniques and themes. It could also suppose an almost meditative inflection in her approach to her work. The work was deeply considered and she engaged in a reflected focus on the process, allowing her concepts to evolve from her experiences.

Mikula's work is rooted in both an historic and contemporary grounding within the decorative arts. While some of her pieces appear utilitarian, their craftsmanship and delicate finish translate into work that is more in keeping with contemplation and display.

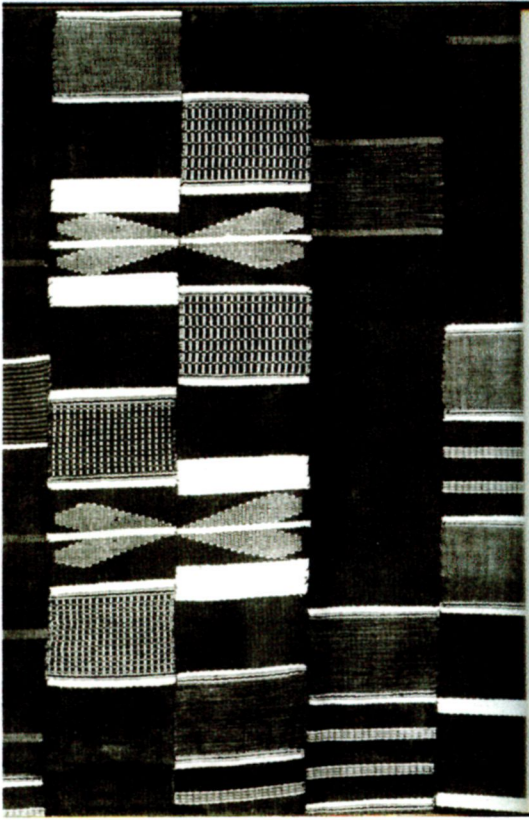


Fig. 21.A.

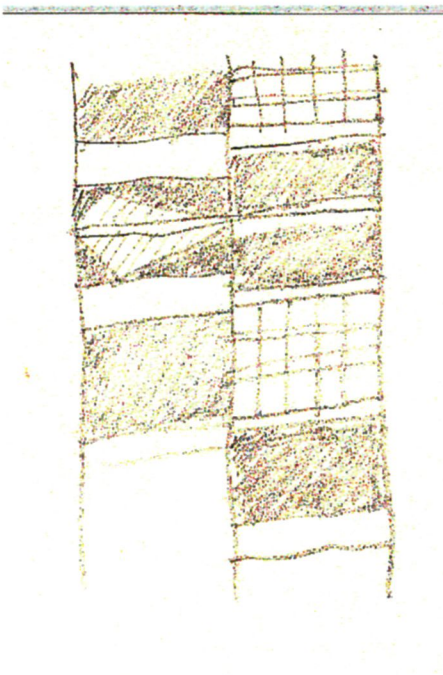


Fig.21.B Sketch from Mikula notes referring to Fig 21A

She perfected her craftsmanship demonstrating an extreme sense of care that resonates with ethnic integrity. She transforms her vessels into sculpture extending the parameters of her craft to create work that becomes art. Ilse explained that Maggie saw herself as a decorative artist emphasising that through the incorporation of design and patterning that were important to her, she could 'create beautiful objects' (Bauer 2002 (e)). Ilse insisted that 'she treated her work with the utmost diligence and respect as if she were making something quite sacred' (Bauer 2002 (e)). Nothing was random or left unresolved emphasised Kirkwood (Bauer 2003 (aa)). Paul Mikula acknowledged that she was focused on the meaning and the intention of the piece and her work was not characterised by its functional utility although she never considered herself an 'artist' (Bauer 2003 (v)).

In 1984 Mikula received critical acclaim when she won the *Corobrik National Ceramics Exhibition* sharing first prize with Juliet Armstrong and Katherine Glenday.⁴⁴ Wilson recalled Mikula's surprise and appreciation for this recognition. She remembers Paul saying Maggie felt that if she did not go down to her studio she felt the day had not been spent wisely. 'She was driven and professional in her work' (Bauer 2002 (g)).

Working mainly in unglazed ware 'preferring a natural finish', Mikula affirmed in a published interview about this work 'I love making burnished pots, because they are very traditional' (Broughton 1984:5). From Mikula's perspective it is likely to be a reference to the burnished finish of indigenous Zulu ceramics. At this time Mikula had not visited Martinez, nor seen her burnished ware. The Zulu women utilise the method of rubbing the leather hard vessel with a smooth tool such as the back of a spoon or a stone until a smooth, high sheen known as burnishing has developed (Levinsohn 1984: 76).

Mikula's award winning piece was a burnished, smoke-fired black pot, hung with thin clay 'shells' with a delicate brass amulet tied to the cord, similar to the shape of Tuareg crosses (Fischer 1984: 210-211). **Fig. 22.** Again the work respects the traditional techniques of the Zulu women ceramists both in form and surface finish and alludes to the beer-drinking vessel (*ukhamba*). The piece although deriving a certain degree of influence does however have personal modifications. The opening is much smaller than a traditional beer vessel.

⁴⁴ Katherine Glenday graduated from the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg and now lives and works in Cape Town. Her move to the Cape afforded her the opportunity to work with Marietjie van der Merwe. She uses porcelain and exploits its fineness and translucency in her small vessels (Cruise 1991: 26).

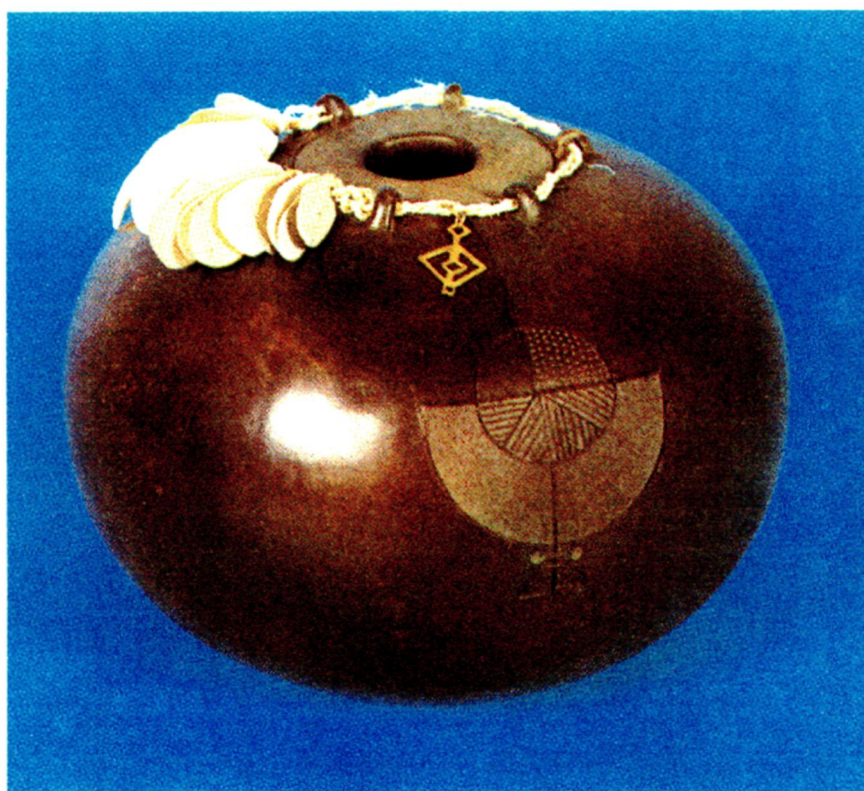


Fig. 22.

Lugs are built around the shoulder from which pinched porcelain 'wafers' are strung together with a brass icon. She contrasts burnished and unburnished areas and includes a delicate incised motif on the side of the pot unlike traditional pots that have a carved or applied pattern of clay running in a band around the rim of the ware, especially in work seen by the Zulu ceramists from the Eshowe area (Lawton 1967: 54).

Defying the traditional high glazed functional ware being produced at this time she continually explored new ways of working with clay. Her covered vessels, although possessing the formal qualities of the utilitarian and functional, were transformed into sculptural pieces with a distinct personal iconography. Two other pieces submitted to the same *Corobrik National Exhibition* in 1984 were fine examples of this process **Fig. 23**. Mikula repeated her closed drum form but now incorporated brass shapes inlaid into the flat clay surface on the top of the pot. The metal was hammered and engraved as a continuation of the same pattern as the coloured slip on the surface. The larger of the two drums was Highly Commended. The brass shape inlaid in this piece echoing the spade shape she incorporated in her flat discs. Her visits to Turkey and Morocco presumably reinforced her interest in metal work and patterning.

At this stage she had been taking jewellery lessons with Benny Jordaan from the Bluff, Durban, in order to extend her interest and skills in metal work. This technical proficiency allowed her to assimilate the brass and copper pieces into the decorative language of her ceramics. Her interaction with the clay form and surface was one and the same to Mikula. When her daughter was questioned as to whether she believed her mother felt 'function cannot be prised apart from aesthetics in African visual culture' (Arnold 1996: 142) she confirmed this. Ilse explained that Mikula admired and loved the beauty and simplicity of an *ukhamba* or other functional pieces although she thought her mother 'could also separate the design qualities and see them as important enough in themselves (Bauer 2002 (e)).

Through the discipline of focused labour, drawing, studying and constantly re-working of images, the emerging ideas produced significant dimensions in her work. Her drum form theme was again repeated this time for the *Natal Invited Artists Exhibition* in 1984 at the NSA Gallery. Mikula titled them *Tribal Drums III* (**Fig. 24.A. and 24. B**). Never repeating an individual piece, these new works brought their own unique vocabulary though derived from the same sourcing. Her search for self-expression was tempered by



Fig. 23.Highly Commended (one of two similar works)

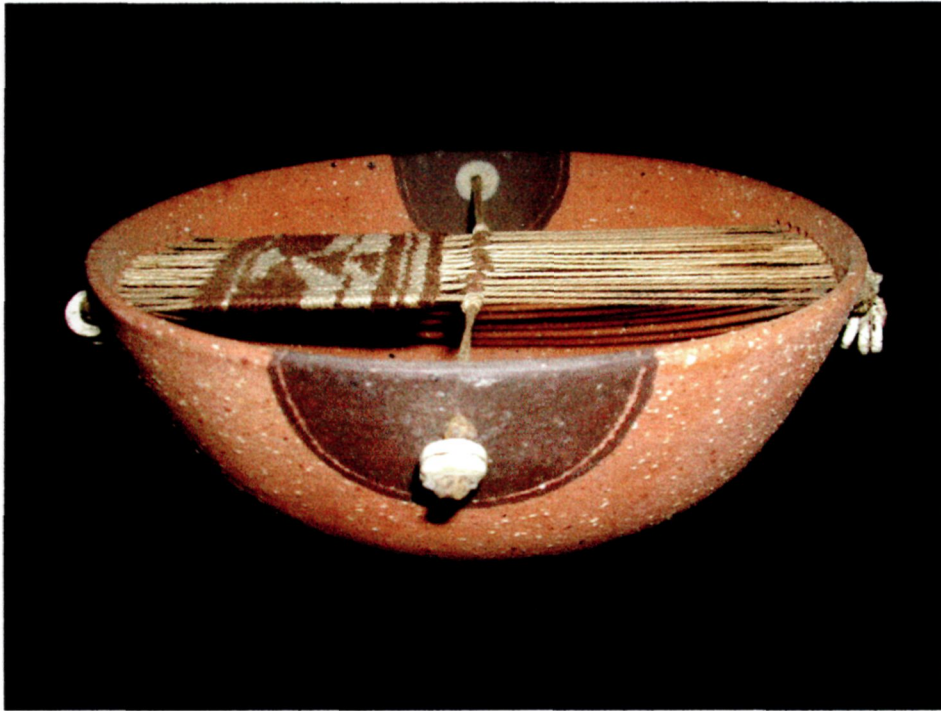


Fig. 24.A



Fig. 24.B.

her reverence for the environment, her respect for other cultures and her love of their artifacts.

During the middle 80's Mikula continued to be immensely productive. Her creations sourced in their multiple origins and symbols had become personally significant. Mikula's ceramic piece submitted to the *Award Winners of APSA National Exhibitions* held in 1984, was a double *ukhamba*⁴⁵ pot decorated with blue, black, white and green beads hanging from the top half and set into a clay ridge. It is interesting to note the 2003 work of Ntombi Nala that reflects a similar manifestation (**Fig. 25, 26**). Nala's piece shows the use of hanging small coloured beads from areas of her vessel. In an interview with her, Nala admitted that she made this work to produce 'something different from everyone else' (Bauer 2003 (x)).⁴⁶

Mikula's ethnically derived work produced for the *Natal Regional Ceramic Exhibition* in 1985 was tempered by influences from numerous traditions that she filtered through her personal experience as an artist. She assimilated many styles into her own authoritative vocabulary. **Fig. 27** from this exhibition has oblique references to beaded neck rings of many African cultures including Samburu, Tanzanian and Masai (Fischer 1984: 35 and Sieber 1972: 14) and Ndebele (Fischer 1984: 100-103). The vessel seen in **Fig. 28.**, was Highly Commended on this show. It has overt association with Zulu *amasumpa*⁴⁷ ware but Mikula's work sets the raised pellets of clay in a vertical pattern on the piece in contrast to traditional work where the additions are normally set horizontally on the pot. She has separated these vertical sections by thin incised lines on either side of vertical lines of deep incised circles. The work exhibits contrasting burnished and unburnished areas.

⁴⁵ This is traditionally a spherical Zulu serving or drinking vessel with the decoration placed around the belly of the pot (Garrett 1997: 9). Mikula has placed one pot on top of the other in reference to this traditional form.

⁴⁶ Like her aunt, Nesta Nala, the prominent Zulu ceramists from the Tugela district near Eshowe, Ntombi also produces large burnished pots for collectors and the tourist market. She deals with Hawke (Mikula's sister) at the Eshowe Museum and with certain galleries in Durban such as the Bayside Gallery owned by Greenberg.

⁴⁷ Raised pellets are referred to in published texts as *amasumpa* meaning 'warts'. This decoration takes the form of small lumps of clay attached to the wall of the vessel. They can be placed singly, in rows or to create a motif (Garrett 1997: 18).

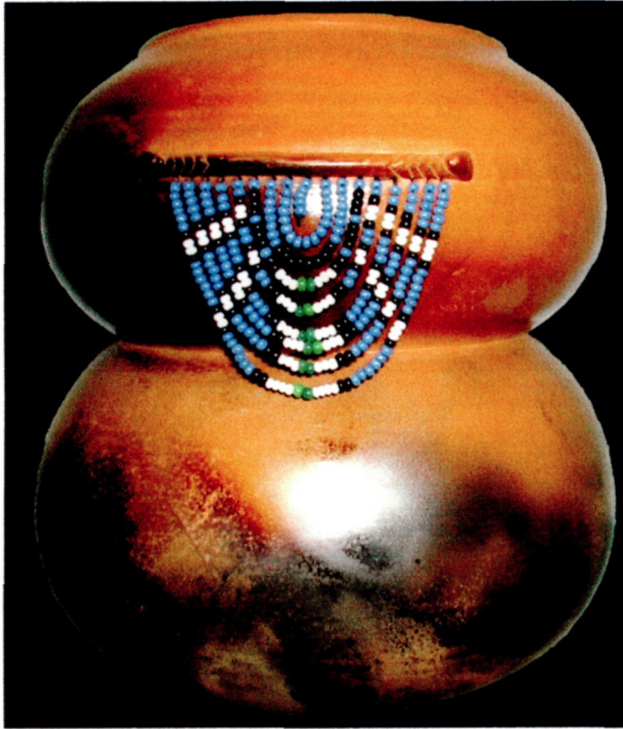


Fig. 25 Mikula's work



Fig. 26 Notombi Nala and her vessel



Fig. 27



Fig. 28

A twisted natural string cord is knotted around the neck of the vessel.

Her work submitted to the *Tactile Exhibition* at the NSA in 1985 was approached with the same mature synthesis, echoing ancient cultures and assimilating them into a unique language as shown in **Fig. 29**. Her work continued to develop crisper, more refined elements. The finish shows strength and ever growing confidence in the medium, which is manipulated with tight control and focused precision.

Her flat forms have again been transformed from simple decorated one surface pieces, to a sculptural piece she named *Ndebele Matron* **Fig. 30**. This work also shown on the 1985 *Tactile Exhibition* was created from porcelain rolled into a flat rectangle with raised edges. Slip and oxide painting alluding to the wall art of the Ndebele culture covers the border and the central area of the work. Two-thirds down the piece a raised cord of clay supports strings of coloured beads reminiscent of an apron or skirt.

Mikula's work in **Fig. 31**, on the *Rand Afrikaans University Exhibition*, also in 1985, shows her adaptation of the synthesised techniques and ideas she incorporated. Weaving is now wrapped around the lower middle of the piece and she has included nails that cluster at the sides of the work and pierce into the pot. This has overt reference to many cultures with the smoked-fired finish, the geometric black and white woven structure and the hanging beads, in the center. The innovation now is the inclusion of nails reflecting influence from the ritual statues of the Nkondi Nkisi figures of the Bakongo from Zaire (Phillips 1999: 245).

In Mikula's second two-woman exhibition, this time with Juliet Armstrong, in 1985, Mikula again produced unique and stimulating work. *Loom Sculpture* **Fig. 32** was a new development from the *Ndebele Matron* noted above. Describing this piece Mikula explains the inspiration behind the piece. 'Most weaving looms are in themselves interesting sculptural forms, and I liked the idea of contrasting the delicate fibres of the weaving against the more solid structure of the clay frame'. She acknowledged that 'the shape of the frame was inspired by a very old wooden carved Zulu meat platter, and the smoked clay suggests wood fires, grass huts, pastoral environment' (Mikula scrapbook C.V.). Mikula declared 'the pattern for the weaving comes from the fine decoration on the



Fig. 29



Fig. 30.

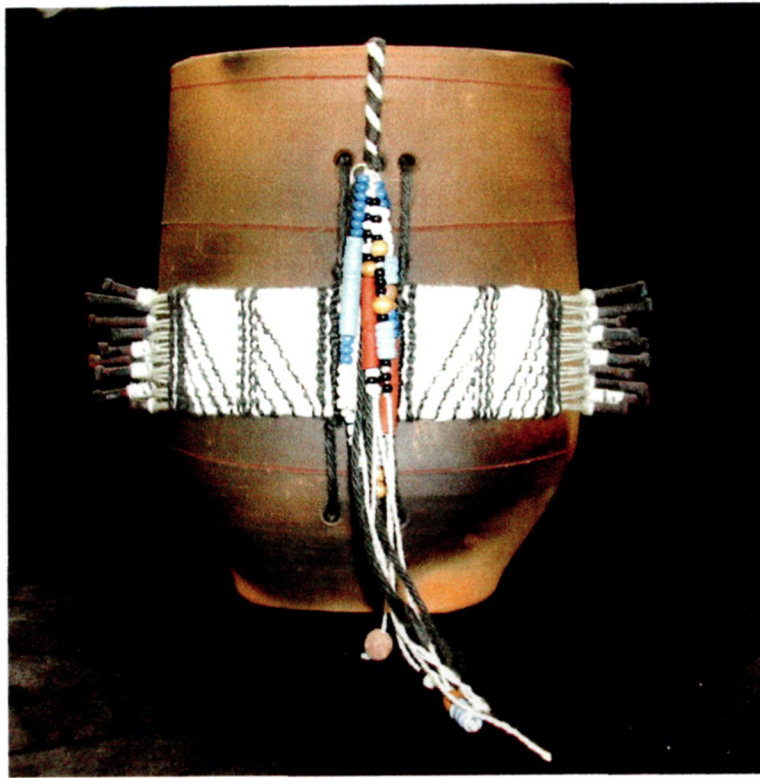


Fig. 31.

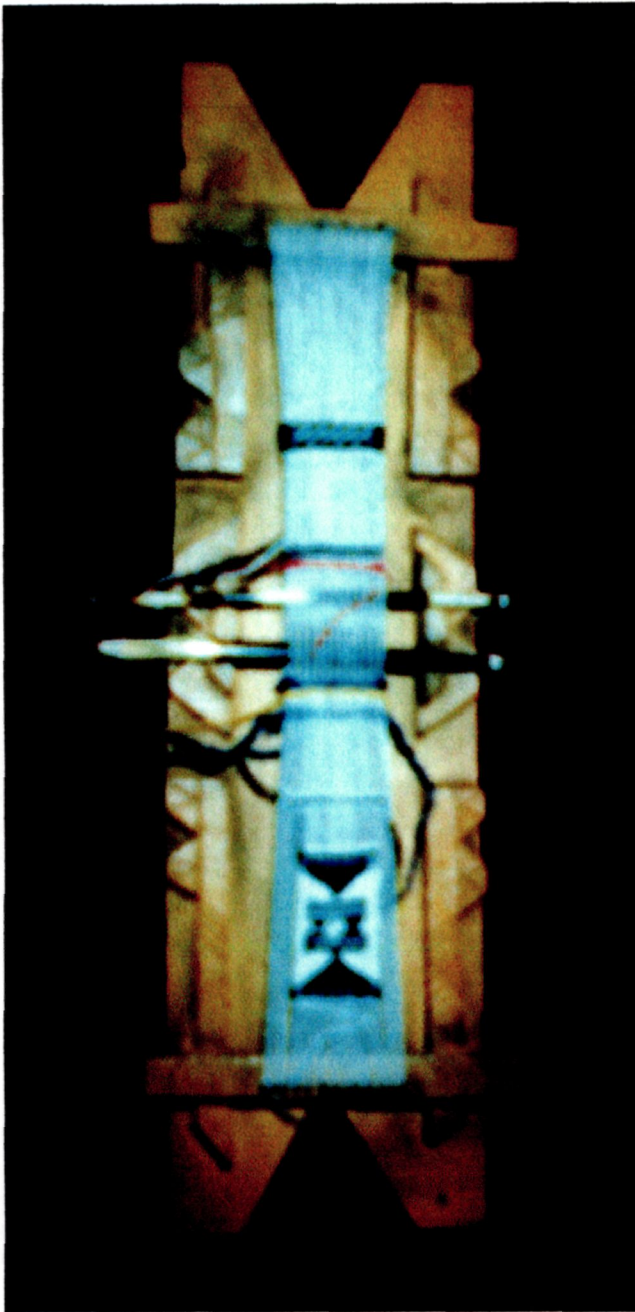


Fig. 32.

blankets woven by the Peul (Fulani) tribe of North Africa' (Mikula C.V. from her scrapbook) This work also included porcupine quills as part of the structure to which the weaving was then attached. Mikula would go on to create variations on this theme over the next few years (Sieber 1972: 189). With a later work she entitled *Fulani Weave*, Wilson proposed that she named the piece to explain the reference in her work, and to acknowledge and credit the authorship of the symbols (Bauer 2002 (g)).

Work on this 1985 exhibition that bears oblique reference to African jewellery is the three small sculpture forms seen in **Fig. 33**. They seem to have common factors with the hairpin of the Wodaabe women (Fulani culture) (Fischer 1984: 164).

As noted earlier the Mikulas spent considerable time visiting places such as the Zimbabwe Ruins, Ndebele homesteads, Rorke's Drift and black artists such as Jackson Hlungwane (Bauer 2002 (b)). Mikula absorbed imagery and brought back artifacts to fill their home. The ultimate purpose of her work appears to be the creation of objects that are exquisitely made and their beauty reflects an inherent mystery. Her work is informed by ancient culture, by the art of Africa as well as ancient eastern cultures. Her home reflected this passion with an eclectic mix of artifacts – Persian and Moroccan carpets, African pots, traditional weaving, primitive artifacts and numerous natural objects (Hayward – Fell 1984: 7).

In the 1987 visit to South America to see Pueblo potters, mentioned in Chapter Two, the artist experienced the ongoing tradition of an ancient culture (and new process of working). She particularly sought out Maria Martinez's ceramic work (Bauer 2003 (q)) that reflected one of the great folk arts of the world (Peterson 1981). This provided her with another non-European source she could filter through her experience and contextualise into a fresh vocabulary.⁴⁸ The result of this experience resonates in the fine finish in her ceramics. Juliette Leeb-du Toit claims Mikula's highly refined work echoes this influence even more substantially in her later works than of the local Zulu

⁴⁸ The technique of Pueblo black ware is passed down through the generations and Martinez and her family have not only enriched the history of pottery in the world today but directly are responsible for many innovations (Peterson 1981: 11).



Fig. 33.

iconography (Bauer 2003 (t)). Mikula owns a small vessel from this area and it is kept with her own work in the sealed cabinet in the Phansi Museum.⁴⁹

She appeared deliberately content to show only pieces she thought were satisfactory to her strict standards and strong opinions. Although humble and discrete about herself and her work she treated her ceramics with total professional respect (Bauer 2002 (e), Bauer 2003 (v) and Bauer 2003 (w)).

There were rewards for her disciplined and professional approach with the ongoing demand for her to show her work in increasingly successful gallery shows (Bauer 2003 (j)). Her inclusion in many national exhibitions, invited shows and as a Guest Artist was a ready reflection of her skill and dedication to her art form. Commissions from overseas clients who wrote, personally requesting specific works, and letters complimenting her work comparing it with that of international artists and insisting her work was of a much higher standard (letter from Mr. & Mrs Park 1984 in Mikula Scrapbook). This supported the notion that Mikula was now establishing herself as a significant presence in the ceramic community.

Sometimes working continuously throughout the day and into the night for forth-coming exhibitions Mikula explained that 'inspiration isn't something that can be switched off' (Broughton 1984: 5). In the same article she stressed that she kept to a disciplined schedule, starting early between seven and eight o'clock in the morning and working through the day and into the evening. She would work for six months at a stretch and then take time off. This was confirmed by her son Max Mikula, though he added that this depended on and fitted around her 'motherly and household 'duties' that she did daily and took just as seriously' (Bauer 2004 (aj)). Max observed that she tended to work thematically, producing a series of works inspired from a particular idea or subject (Bauer 2004 (aj)). By noting the type of pieces she presented at various exhibitions such as her

⁴⁹ Their work is coil built and burnished after covering in a high iron content slip. Some pieces are then decorated with designs painted with even more refractory greenish-grey clay that leaves a matt finish contrasting with the polished surface after firing. If the pieces are oxidised the surface has a deep red finish. Smothering the fire at peak temperature allows carbon to be trapped in the clay surface thus creating the blackest black surface that this ware is renowned for (Peterson 1981: 173-175).

drum series and her later 'funeral series' this can indeed be substantiated.

Mikula worked with extreme focus, taking upwards of three days to complete a piece. Broughton attributed this to the type of work she produced stating 'so intricate is a pot's embellishment, with its fine carving and delicate weaving' (Broughton 1984:5). Hawke recollected that the Zulu woman who works for the Mikulas, Mavis Mbandwa, told her that the house was always very quiet, not even music was to be played as Mikula did not want to be distracted from her work (Bauer 2003 (w) and Bauer 2003 (z)).

Addleson (DAG) admits that interestingly Mikula's work though very small, photographically appears monumental (Bauer 2003 (i)). Martin (Director of the African Art Centre) affirms this, acknowledging that her work possessed a 'precious and special quality that made you want to touch it and keep it in a safe place. They were like small jewels' (Bauer 2004 (ad)).

Hawke said Mikula was a strong independent woman who believed everything must have a purpose, or a reason (Bauer 2003 (w)). Paul explained she liked to work slowly, evolving a piece with control and care (Bauer 2002 (b)). Wilson supports this, emphasising that Mikula was 'fanatical about having her work finished just the way she wanted and spent an inordinate amount of time on each piece. Every thing had to be perfect' (Bauer 2002 (g)).

The shapes of her vessels was now becoming more complex, incorporating blocks of pattern with geometric decoration placed on and in the surface by cutting and applying various coloured slips to create a graphic field of pattern rather than of a drawing. Images were also drawn and created by adding raised lumps of clay, forming them into small separate icons. In **Fig.34** created in 1987, the reference sourced from Dogon gold weights is translated into the clay forms that circle the perimeter of the unglazed terracotta vessel. The imagery of masks, fish, and bovine heads all represent a symbolic meaning in African material culture. Mikula used these icons in their most literal translation of cross-cultural assimilation. References to these forms can be seen in her copies of *Africa Adorned* (Fischer 1984: 105,87,117) and *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (Sieber 1972: 131,133,137).

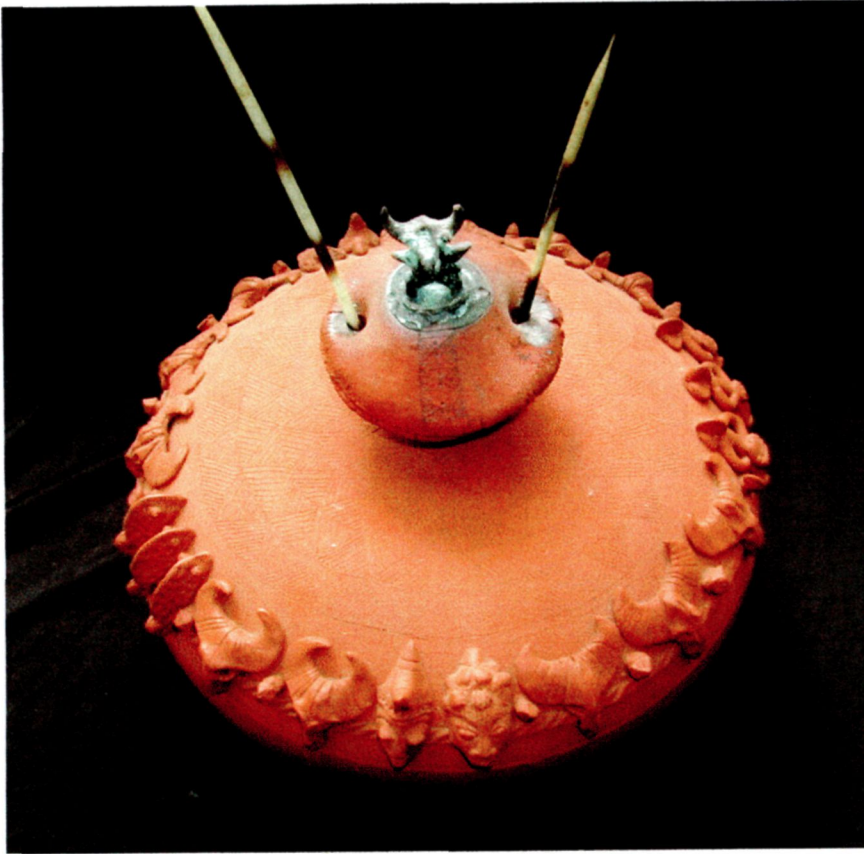


Fig. 34.

Mikula saw her work as a means of expressing and dealing with abstractions and feelings engaged with solving the question of 'being' in South Africa. Ilse Mikula thought Maggie identified closely with her Zululand heritage and supposed it made her mother 'feel unique as she had a great tie with Africa and wanted to explore its past and its creativity' (Bauer 2002 (e)). Ilse acknowledged that Mikula used her work to explore internal and external realities pertinent to her own life.

Paul Mikula emphasised that as 'she was brought up in a colonial community that believed that until Africa had been 'tamed' (i.e. until it became 'European'; singing opera; growing roses etc.) it could not talk for itself', he felt that she needed to explore her position in South Africa, and perhaps find a sense of peace within her self (Bauer 2003 (v)). Her work challenged this colonial attitude. It repudiated the notion of western superiority that vilified the local cultures. She embraced Africa through her heritage, her interests and her relationship with the continent reflecting it through her work and her respect for its sourcing. Paul Mikula supposed that she tried to understand and be a part of the 'place' through her art, her community activities and political stand (Bauer 2003 (v)). He added 'she kept looking and trying to come to grips with being in Africa and mortal' (Bauer 2002 (b)). He and Maggie supported each other in their endeavour to 'deal with their roots and heritage in Africa' (Bauer 2002 (e)). The Mikulas took note of their environment and the diverse communities that they were exposed to through Paul's work in the townships, their community activities and their political affiliations during the current political developments in South Africa in the 1980's.⁵⁰ Lorraine Wilson wrote of them - 'her amazing creativity in all she did was shared by her husband Paul, and together her art and his architecture reinforced each other to create an environment of incredible beauty' (Wilson 1989: 27).

Constantly re-evaluating her form of expression seen through her role in her community as an artist, Mikula worked hard to produce work that reflected her beliefs and motives. In 1987 Mikula rejected the themes and techniques she had initially been engaged with and strove to develop a new language sourced from funeral and burial rites in ancient cultures

⁵⁰ Reference to the Mikulas' involvement and the political situation in South Africa can be found in Chapter Two.

such as Egyptian, Dogon and Bushman (Mikula sketch books and drawings). She drew and referred to the use of red ochre in Bushmen burial ceremonies and could possibly be the reason she worked in terracotta for some of these pieces (Figs.34, 36, 37).

Her use of the boat form encasing small human figures from her funeral series function as symbols and references to her own mortality Fig.35. The figures used in the boats and on her new urns (such as Fig. 36.) were obliquely sourced from small West African figures that she and Paul bought through a newspaper advert (Bauer 2003 (v)). Paul acknowledged that this all came about due to the return of her illness. Her work was now becoming sculptural rather than craft orientated observed Ilse (Bauer 2002 (e)).

Her work for exhibitions now responded to Egyptian iconography with pieces such as her *Nile Tablet* that Carol Brown said ‘hails back to Egyptian art which inspires her along with traditional African craft – there is a timeless and simple air in both which echoed in her work’ (Brown 1986: 3).

The results of these experiments demonstrated a passion for the medium and a passionate desire to seek meaning and answers to who she was and where she was going. Hawke remembers Mikula growing crops of indigenous plants that she harvested and then burned inside a twenty five-gallon drum. She utilised the subsequent ash to make a glaze for her funeral figures (Bauer 2003 (w)). This could be a reflection of her personal quest for visual expression that would relate medium to meaning.

Notes sourced from Mikula’s sketchbook reveal many experiments with a copper / bicarbonate recipe which, when successful, produces a finish akin to patinated bronze and ancient metals. She worked hard to achieve this, experiencing many failures, such as her work melting onto the kiln shelves, but eventually succeeded, and used the glaze on the figures in her funeral boats and on top of her funeral urns. Mikula refers to the article on *Glaze and Metal* by Oldroyd in a *British Ceramic Review* (Mikula sketchbook notes). This article details working techniques involved in the formation and application of copper carbonate and sodium bicarbonate in a heated atmosphere to give metallic effects. The images this ceramist was working on were very sympathetic with Mikula’s themes (Oldroyd 1986: 21-23).

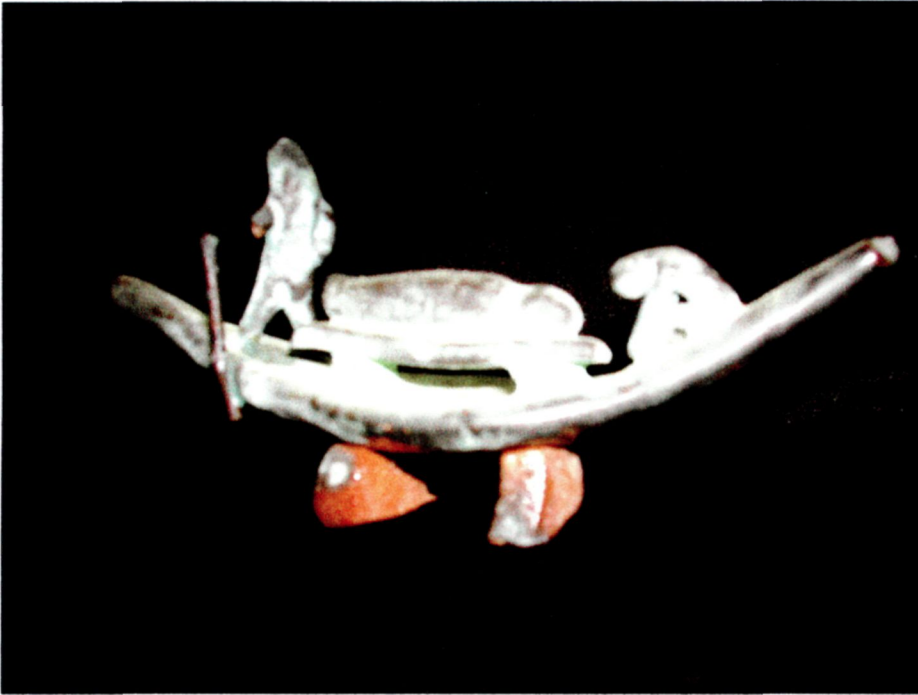


Fig. 35.



Fig. 36.

Mikula was affected by the political situation in South Africa in the 1980's disclosed her sister Jenny Hawke. When questioned about the 'dreary things' she was making, Mikula told her this is what artist must do – they must express the essence of the times (Bauer 2003 (w)). Paul Mikula stressed that her art was a reflection of her ideology and she used it as a method of engaging with the issues in South Africa (as well as her personal one). She achieved this by considering the history, symbolism and beauty of other cultures and synthesising the 'essence' of it in her work. This allowed the pieces she created to reflect the beauty of the country and helped exposed cultures to each other (Bauer 2002 (b)). Jill Addleson claims it gave a new reading to indigenous craft work (Bauer 2003 (o)). Many thought she was African because of her work (Bauer 2002 (d)) and she 'inspired a lot of people to feel proud about themselves – the Biko thing' (Bauer 2002 (b)).⁵¹

Using drawings and tiny sketches to explore and consolidate her thought process she evolved her imagery into small evocative works **Fig 36**. Mikula presented one of these pieces to Sfiso ka Mkame at the opening of his art exhibition at the NSA in 1988. He was very honoured to receive it and recalls Paul's comment to them about the fact they both 'liked to depict the dead' (Bauer 2004 (ag)).

Mikula had an exhibition with Hannah Lurie and Barry Dibb in 1987 at the Coppin Johnson Gallery in Durban, where she presented her *Funeral series*. She gave the work titles such as *Funeral Relics*, *The Procession*, *Memento Mori* and *Requiem* (Mikula sketchbook).

The symbolic framework she engaged with is reflected in her closed and sealed vessels, that present the viewer with a further aspect of this personal (also a universal theme) engagement. **Fig.37** is a terracotta vessel from the exhibition at the Coppin Johnson Gallery. The lid is sealed with cord threaded through a lug in the lid then pulled down inside the pot and woven back out through the sides and knotted with a bead so that the vessel cannot be opened. The raised clay symbols give an impression of ancient rituals and

⁵¹ This was through her own work and her work within the community. She was continually supporting families in need both financially and through teaching them skills. The Mikulas subsidised schooling to help educate and in some small part to redress the educational discrimination in South Africa by helping to build a sense of independence and pride in the various communities.



Fig. 37.

cultures. The refined motifs stand boldly from the surface engaged in a multiple referencing that allows the observer to make an individual response to the meaning. It has been suggested that this piece relates to her imminent death (Bauer 2003 (k)).

A very unusual piece in the Tatham Art Gallery (TAG) collection is also in unglazed terracotta and is tied with dyed string, sisal fibre thread and beads (Fig. 38). This piece has the appearance of an enclosed pod and consists of five swollen protuberances around the belly of the form. This piece echoes the ancient Mali tradition that used similar enclosed forms to seal funeral ashes.⁵² Mikula's synthesis creates a narrative of individual interpretation.

Mikula combined sound studio practices and a keen knowledge of decorative design and together woven with her mature assimilation of cultural iconography turned a utilitarian-based object into a means for personal contemplation. Her daughter emphasised that her designs and the way they were presented were like a 'language of symbols in themselves' (Bauer 2002 (e)). Ilse Mikula reasoned they 'represented a spiritual harmony for her of symmetry. The design element became the symbol' (Bauer 2002 (e)). Jenny Hawke acknowledged that Mikula's 'sense of design was excellent' (Bauer 2003 (w)). She had perfected her craft and could now process her imagery to create harmony and balance not only in the literal sense but her simplistic forms with tiny appendages, could speak of ritual objects and are associated with and connected to the 'spirit' of the continent (Bauer 2003 (aa)).

In the Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion the word *symbol* is commonly regarded as a 'sensuous representation of a transcendent reality' (1996: 178). Even if Mikula did not reflect this consciously in her own work, she nevertheless was aware of some of the philosophies and beliefs attached to the objects. She responded to the icons and relics that abounded with symbolic intent and through her considered choice of patterning and motifs she recontextualised this imagery into her own language of symbols. She did not convey these motifs in an explicit fashion so it is left to the viewer to interpret.

⁵² Hannah Lurie has an ancient Mali sealed funeral urn formed in the shape of an enclosed 'pod' shape similar to Mikula's 'pod' form in the Tatham collection.

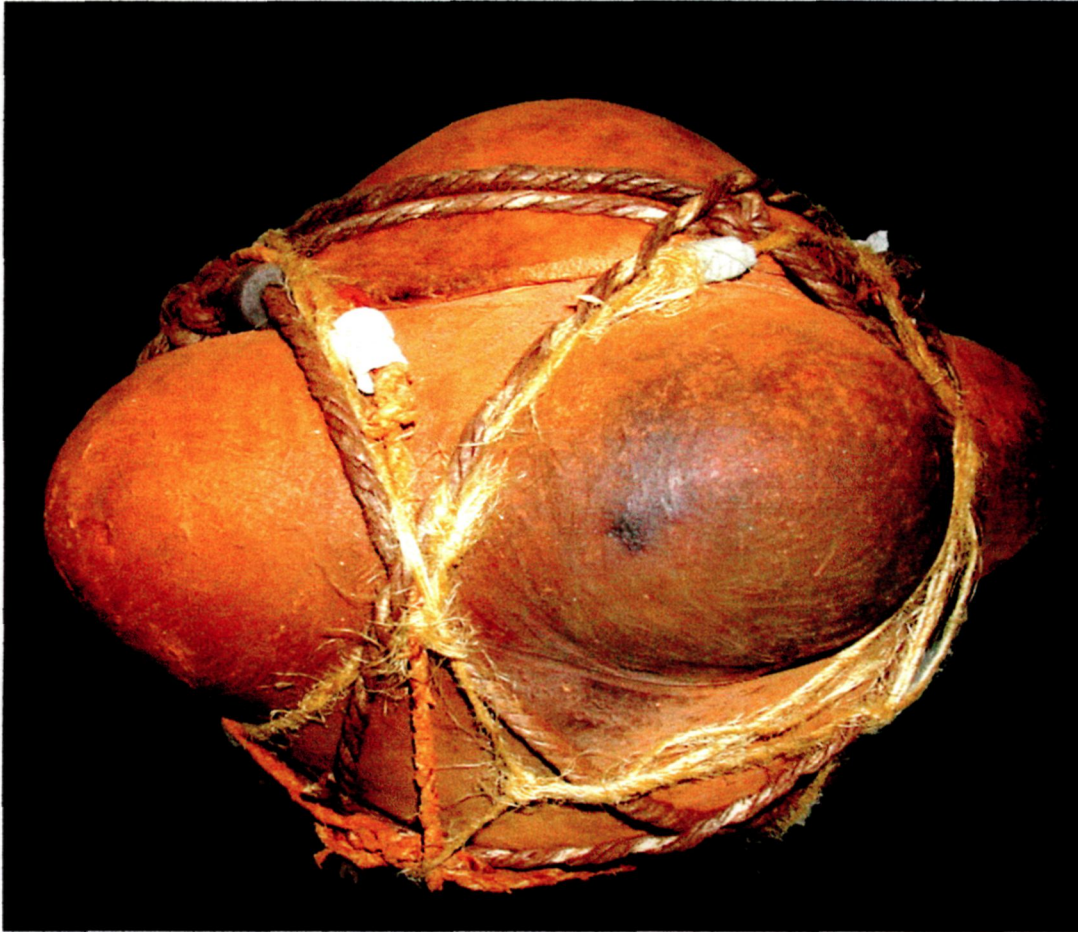


Fig. 38.

Ilse confirmed that some of her work was intentionally symbolic such as the funeral boats and the fertility dolls. Mikula was more literal in her intent in this work, assimilating the symbolic qualities from ancient civilisations to infer a narrative in her work that spoke in a universal voice.

Talking at the University of Natal in 2003, world-renowned potter Magdalene Odundo spoke about the fact that working in clay is working in a universal language. You cannot work in a vacuum but need to feed from diverse, eclectic images and then extemporise, add to and then make it your own. Odundo looks at similar cross-cultural iconography to Mikula – Egyptian, African and Japanese and also has a reverence for rocks and nature. She realises the human need to make a mark but says to copy makes work repetitive and has no identity. Odundo feels an artist must let the influences seep in and then must be instinctive (Personal notes 2003). This is the way Mikula worked, feeding from sources and internalising and transmuting them into her unique vocabulary.

In 1988 Mikula was commissioned to design and produce six large murals for landings of the new Malherbe Library at the University of Natal, Durban. The prestige of being selected to produce the murals for the University was an acknowledgement of her skill and talent and gave credit to all her past achievements that led to this recognition. Ilse Mikula acknowledged that her mother was deeply honoured by being chosen amongst many well-known artists, working in diverse mediums, vying for the commission (Bauer 2002 (c)).

Walford lent her an old printing press to make the tiles (Bauer 2004 (ai)). Wilson offered to help with the preparing, wedging and rolling of the slabs of clay for the tiles. A week after commencing the work, Mikula felt seriously ill and finally only managed to complete two of the ceramic murals. Max Mikula and Paul Mikula helped her with the application of the designs (Bauer 2001 (a)) and Walford fired the murals (Bauer 2004 (ai)).

The theme of these murals was derived from the designs and colours of African textiles. Wilson declared 'her preparatory drawings filled me with such an overwhelming sense of excitement – this would really be an incredible tribute to Maggie's skill and talents as her work is usually so small' (Wilson 1989: 27). The finished panels were a mix of glazed and unglazed pieces in contrasting earth tones.

The first panel designed for the lower ground-floor, was made up of simple square hand built unglazed, terracotta tiles placed in conjunction with buff-coloured faggots to produce a textile motif, playing on the rhythm of tone and shape (**Fig. 39.**). This is the more successful of the two murals.

The design element of the second mural, (**Fig. 40**) created for the first floor, followed the reference to patterns in African weaving and was set on a vertical plane. An elongated slab of unglazed terracotta clay stands proud at the top of the mural. There is a copper glazed sculptural piece at its center. The main panel consists of white glazed porcelain tiles with geometric oxide designs reflecting a textile image.⁵³ These flank a central sculptural panel that stands higher than the tile surface. These vertical strips of unglazed terracotta clay are inset with small figurative symbols in the copper glaze. While this work reflects her great integrity and aesthetic skill this glazed piece is less compelling perhaps due to the fact there is a larger proportion of glazed tiles so there is not as strong a contrast between the glazed and unglazed areas.

Mikula had three solo exhibitions at the Grassroots gallery and participated in countless group exhibitions through the APSA association and with other artists like Dibb, Lurie and Armstrong. She produced pieces for National Exhibitions such as *Women in Art Today* (1985) and is represented in the Corobrik Collection in Pretoria, Tatham Gallery, Durban Art Gallery, and the Port Elizabeth Art Gallery. She was one of a very few ceramists to be included in *The Dictionary of South African Painters and Sculptors* published in 1988 by Everard Read (Ogilvie 1988: 52).

With the expertise of years of experience and self-criticism, tempering the influence of those who inspired her in the art world (Rabinowitz, Feibelman and Rie as well as the African and other ancient cultures) Mikula emerged as a highly skilled artist whose work in the latter part of her career ‘reached a peak of creative excellence usually only seen in the work of much older craftsmen’ (Verster 1989: 3). Shirley Bishop who knew her at the

⁵³ In Mikula’s original drawing submitted for the commission she had planned to design these tiles with her usual black sgraffito decoration. The designs for the remaining four murals that she was unable to complete all incorporated inlaid tiles using various coloured oxides and clays to create ‘different patterns resembling Ghanaian men’s weave – Kente cloth’ (Mikula notes).

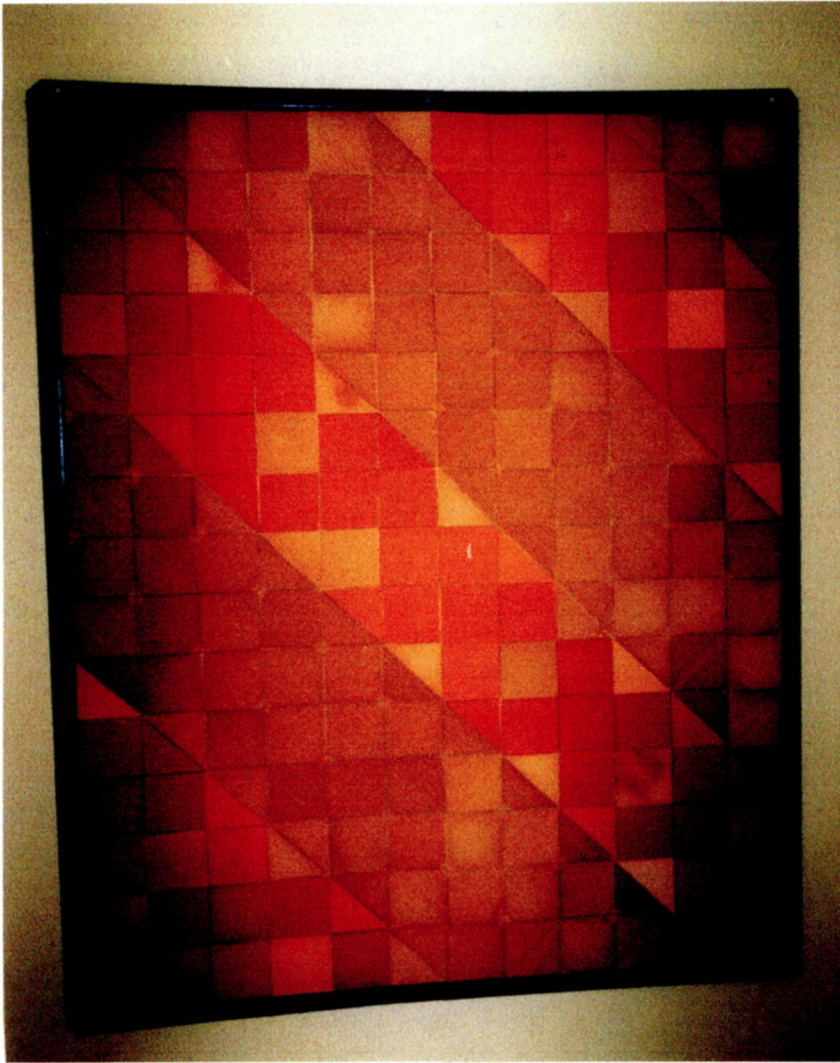


Fig. 39.

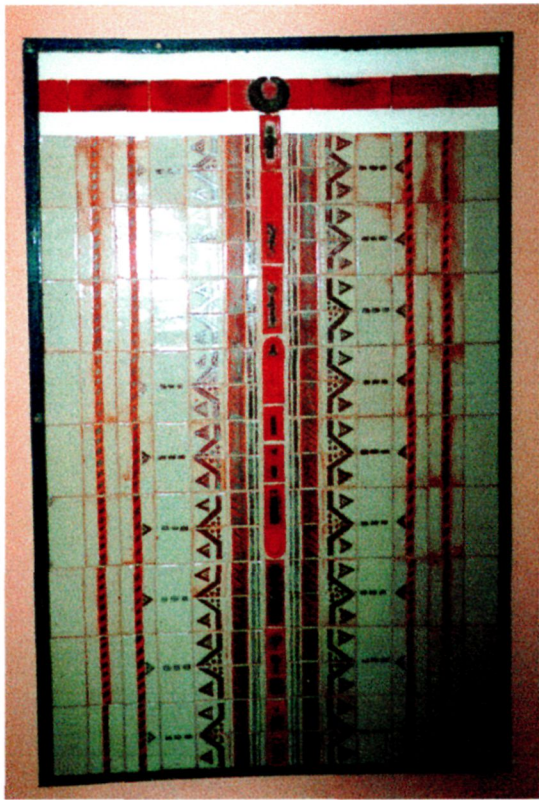


Fig. 40.A.



Fig. 40.B. Close up of Fig. 40.A.

early part of her career insists the integrity of her work was born out of her profound craftsmanship and as her skill as an artist (Bauer 2004: ak).

Interestingly her later work, still in the family's possession, has been placed in a locked glass cabinet amongst the special pieces she collected. These are in the Phansi Museum that houses a fine collection of Southern African indigenous artifacts including Zulu ceramics, basket ware and beadwork as well as wooden headrests, meat platters and carved spoons.

She respected and honoured the strength and beauty of indigenous work (Bauer 2002 (h)). Her pieces were small which meant anyone could hold them, own them. Every-one of her works was unique. Verster explained each piece is an 'answer to a different problem. Each a meditation'. He insisted that ' if what you have to say is worth hearing, you can, as she did, speak in a quiet voice and alter forever the lives of the people around you' (Wilson 1989: 29).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Reception and Influence of Mikula's Work

There cannot be self without other; there cannot be other without self. They exist only and always in a secret embrace. They are a mutually dependent, eternally interlinked pair (McEvelley 1992: 147-148).

In 1983 the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) acquired several new pieces of Maggie Mikula's ceramics for its permanent collection. The then curator Jill Addleson, who intentionally waited for the APSA Regional and National exhibitions, so the gallery could collect the finest works for the DAG ceramic collection, consciously collected her work. Addleson was very aware of the transitions and developments in styles and genres of South African ceramics and from 1969 she actively built up a diverse and comprehensive collection for the gallery.

This close attention to the acquisition of specific pieces was regarded by Addleson as essential as it would 'turn out to be a microcosm of the history of South African ceramics' (Bauer 2003 (i)).⁵⁴ Addleson noted the very broad trends in style and technique beginning to manifest as the collection grew from 1969 till 1995 when collecting ceased. She said Maggie's work was 'fresh' and unlike other Kwa-Zulu Natal ceramic artists in terms of its small scale and very distinct choice of decoration. Her use of incised geometric patterning was in strong contrast to the decorative oxide brush strokes on the Anglo-Oriental styled ceramics that was so prevalent then. Addleson felt Mikula's work was deeply rooted in South Africa but said 'this was difficult to express or explain in the early 80's as very few of us had any knowledge of indigenous ceramics' (Bauer 2003 (i)). Nevertheless she admitted that Mikula's work had 'more of an affinity with South African indigenous cultures than with the Anglo-Oriental tradition that had so dominated South African ceramics from the early 60's and even into the late 70's' (Bauer 2004 (ab)).

⁵⁴ Addleson referred to the large collection of Chinese ceramics in the DAG acknowledging they had an influence on her both encouraging a personal fascination for ceramics and challenging her to question why they were in the gallery. This she said led her to examine why South African ceramics were not included and initiated the acquisition of local ceramics by the DAG from 1969 (Bauer 2004 (ab)).

Addleson, as the ex-officio member on all the DAG Advisory committees, started to collect African art for the DAG as a result of exhibitions initiated in the 1960's, such as Art – South Africa – Today. Her introduction to these was the 1967 exhibition where she was exposed to a few works by black artists. In 1970 she organised an exhibition of Rorke's Drift ceramics. From this exhibition she purchased the first ceramics by black artists for the DAG (Bauer 2004 (ab)). Wheel thrown pieces by the male ceramists from Rorke's Drift and the coiled ware by the women differed from traditional ceramics from this area in form and decoration. Their work was high fired in modern electric kilns.⁵⁵

Addleson acknowledged that she started to collect indigenous ceramics for the gallery only in 1980, just before the Mikula purchases in 1983, with the acquisition of three small clay pots by Miriam Mbonambi. This work was sourced from a traditional cultural background in contrast to the Rorke's Drift ceramics.⁵⁶

The importance of Mikula's work at the time lay in the fact that it can not be traced to any specific tradition or style that was then dominating ceramics in South Africa. Addleson claims that she set a precedent, stating 'I remember quite clearly being bowled over by her works because they didn't resemble anything else that I had seen in what you might loosely call the mainstream of South African ceramics: works produced throughout the country which followed the history of ceramics of the West' (Bauer 2003 (o)).

Addleson thinks that on a subconscious level she recognised that Mikula's work introduced a unique and exciting new direction for South African pottery. As the gallery was not at that time concentrating on acquiring indigenous ceramics, she says she could not make a precise connection but suggests that Mikula might have been the first to fuse images cross-culturally. During the 80's whenever Mikula's work went on exhibition, remarks were

⁵⁵ Addleson feels permission to purchase the ceramics was due to their relatively modest price. She managed to acquire prints by black artists only later, due to the reluctance by the Director of the Durban Museum at that time, to collect contemporary art. (Bauer 2004 (ab)).

⁵⁶ Women make traditional ceramics. Made using the hand coiling method the pots are then burnished, sun dried and fired in open pits to about 900 degrees Celsius. Indigenous plant material such as aloe leaves and fibrous woods together with dried dung are used as fuel. The work is either left the terracotta colour of the clay or blackened. The traditional blackening process (*ubukufusa*) is done to respect the ancestral shades (Zulu convention) (Garrett 1997: 9).

passed about the influence of indigenous ceramics on her work and Addleson emphasised that she was consistently highly praised for this. She said that the ceramic audience believed that Mikula had created 'an exciting new note into South African ceramics and that the concept of South African pottery (i.e. by white ceramic artists) had broadened' (Bauer 2003 (o)).

Importantly, Addleson notes that 'this opened up the way for indigenous work to enter South African art museum collections' (Bauer 2003 (o)). Mentioning Mikula's work that was purchased by the Corobrik Ceramic Collection, in the early 1980's, Ian Calder wrote that her 'self-consciously decorative rendition of a Zulu *ukhamba* pottery form refers obliquely to the activities of an otherwise much ignored but yet highly significant number of traditional black artists and craftspeople using clay as a medium in this country' (Calder in Fisch 1986: 5, No. 45). Anthea Martin (Director of the African Art Centre) supported this, claiming Mikula raised the awareness of the superb decorative tradition in African artifacts (Bauer 2004 (ad)).

Prior to this these indigenous works had been displayed only in anthropological collections, such as those in the Natal Museum, where the work was mostly anonymous. This linked with the prevailing political views in South Africa that categorised everything, separating cultures and what they made, by compartmentalising them. Socially and culturally marginalised black artists were excluded from the same education as their white contemporaries and very few galleries recognised their work as art (Martin 2001: 38-41). So to, their work was unacknowledged by museums and their curators who preformed 'a seminal role in shaping the public's concept of what constitutes art's standard corpus' (Martin 2001: 38).

The finite borders between 'white art' and 'black craft' was progressively eroded during the late 1980's, influenced by Post-modernist theories. Aiding this process was the changing political and social awareness amongst many South Africans following the 1976 Soweto Riots. Liberal artists and art historians were denouncing the policy of segregation and emphasise on difference⁵⁷ (Marshall 2001: 47). They stressed the development of black art and the creation of a non-racial language for all South African artists.

⁵⁷ Note in Chapter Two the reference to these changes as early as the 1979 Art Historian conference *The State of Art in South Africa*.

This contributed to the migration of black art and craft wares from the labels 'transitional art' and 'artifact', to 'art', and succeeded in developing recognition of other cultures and their traditions, affording them the respect and prominence that they deserve. This forced curators to address and absorb new criteria when assessing and including works and also led to many black artists, rural ceramists and craftspeople attaining representation with a broader audience (Munnik, 1995: 27).

As an artist and critic, Verster was afforded many opportunities to evaluate and comment on South African ceramics. Quoting from his article, in *The State of Art in South Africa, Is there a South African Art or is it still to Happen?* 'Art is to do with change, with moving into new and unexplored territory. Creation involves not the restatement of old truths, but the discovery of new ones' (1979: 32), Verster could have been commenting on the changes to take place within the South African ceramic tradition. In his article reviewing nine potters at the NSA Gallery in 1980, he praised certain ceramists including Mikula, for affirming individuality and implored the craft purists to express themselves utilising the strengths of their own environment and unique local influences rather than European hybridity.

Challenged by these changing developments, committees such as APSA had to reassess judging and categorising criteria. Annette Henderson, Vice Chairperson of APSA in the 80's, remarked that there was confusion over what should be classed as 'African' work and even whether this work should be placed in a separate section. There was also ambivalence over questions of both the identity of the maker and of their work. Decisions had to be resolved about issues such, as for example, whether low fired, blackened, burnished pieces could be recognised as authentic when made by a cultural group other than the one to whom the process was attributed to historically and traditionally (Bauer 2003 (1)).

Now, Post-modernist discourse had made way for eclecticism and pluralism thus supporting increased acknowledgment of black artists' work. As well as often re-categorising their 'craft' work as 'fine art', Post-modernism also allowed a re-examination of both their work and that of other marginalised groups, such as women (Cruise 1993:10).

An exhibition named 'No Man's Land' shown at the Durban Art Gallery in 1994, was one of the earliest exhibitions at the time devoted to showing the work of women artists in

South Africa. Amongst the works were pieces by Maggie Mikula (from the permanent collection) which Carol Brown described as 'tributes to the traditional potter'. Brown (then Education Officer of the DAG, now Director) (1994:5) wrote that her works were not replicas of original Zulu material culture produced for specific traditional functions. Mikula's work transcended representation and seen by her from the 'perspective of a 'privileged' person'... 'her loving and careful renditions of these traditional objects leads the viewer to reassess the originals in the light of an aesthetic system which has previously ignored the everyday craft of black women' (Brown, 1994: 5). This pioneering exhibition included ceramic pieces by Nesta Nala, the Magwaza family, Rebecca Matibe and Ntshalintshli from the Ardmore Ceramic Studio reflecting and acknowledging the diversity in art production that now challenged the Eurocentric paradigms that prevailed in ceramics. This exhibition was in part due to the continuing need to redefine art within a changing South African society.

Mikula was honored by many exhibitions and commissions and yet was never included in the putative mainstream. At a time when the Leach/Cardew Anglo-Oriental tradition held sway in South African ceramic circles, she produced work that distinguished her as an individual and by 1983 Verster acknowledged her unique talent (Verster 1983: 5). He called her a pioneer, and in an interview with Verster (Bauer 2003 (n)), he said he was not aware of anyone working the way that she did and reasoned that she was ahead of her time. He described her approach as sophisticated and elegant, yet rooted in an African idiom. (Verster, 1983: 5). He felt she sourced her imagery from many ancient traditions and from contemporary iconography, conflating them into a unique and highly original format that many artists in other fields had attempted – 'the fusion of different cultures'. (Verster, 1983:5).

Such was Mikula's influence, that a mere three years later in 1986, while reviewing the *Corobrik Regional Exhibition*, Carol Brown was able to assert that Maggie Mikula's influence had far reaching effects, noting that there were 'echoes of her style throughout the show' (Brown, 1986: Daily News). From this exhibition, Addleson collected similar

work by ceramic artists Dale Stanbridge, and a beaded pot by Jill Restrom, and although these were competent, she felt they were not as successful as Mikula's (Bauer 2003 (i)).⁵⁸

Mikula also set a precedent in South African ceramics in the 1980's with her unique style and the exceptional standard of finish in her work (Bauer 2002 (d)). Carol Hayward-Fell acknowledged that Mikula's meticulous attention to detail of both form and finish was evident and was carried through the entire piece, even to the underside of the work where great attention was afforded to the foot ring. She said the judging of ceramics on the exhibitions during the 80's was focusing more on 'the work being very considered and complete'.⁵⁹ A criterion Hayward-Fell insists that was already important to Mikula (Bauer 2002 (d)).

Hayward-Fell as a past Chairperson of APSA and a highly respected ceramist in her own right, explained the fact those regional exhibitions and national shows enabled ceramics to travel to all the main centers and so exposed Mikula's work to a wide audience in South Africa. As her fresh, syncretic language gained obvious attention inevitable mimetic adaptations of her imagery led to innovative new styles developing. Ironically many thought with her unusual surname that Maggie was an indigenous artist.

Several artists and gallery personnel have all emphasised that Mikula set a precedent in the cross-cultural borrowing of imagery in ceramics, and indeed was highly influential in changes in ceramic style in KwaZulu-Natal, if not nationally.⁶⁰ Martin summarised their views when she concurred that Mikula was ahead of her time, her unique vocabulary 'made us aware of African artifacts by seeing them used delicately in her work. Her

⁵⁸ Sue Greenberg (then owner of the Grassroots Gallery) remarked that Stanbridge's terracotta pieces with pastel geometric patterning were too derivative. She said this caused a problem with the perception of copying of Mikula's work. Greenberg stated that both she and many members of APSA and the public were upset, and discussions ensued regarding the judging and purchasing of this work from this APSA exhibition. She acknowledged that many people were very protective over Mikula. (Bauer 2003 (j))

⁵⁹ Judging on the APSA exhibitions in Natal was greatly influenced by Barry Dibb's teaching methods of refined, carefully considered work that was finished well. Work made then was mainly small, joining had to be precise and the fit of lids exact (Bauer 2002 (d)). Dibb, a highly skilled ceramist ran a large teaching studio in Westville in the 80's. The influence of Andrew Walford and his insistence on fine finish, especially on bases, also being considered

⁶⁰ This includes ceramists Andrew Walford, Thami Jali and Rodney Blumenfeld, Director of the African Art Centre Anthea Martin, Sue Greenberg, Bayside Gallery, as well as artists Fiona Kirkwood and Sfiso ka Mkame.

sensitivity to her crafting and tooling and the appreciation of the oblique sourcing of imagery gave her work a precious and special quality' says Martin (Bauer 2004 (ad)). Her work became collectors' items and museum pieces says Fiona Kirkwood (Bauer 2003 (aa)).

Ceramist and author, Susan Sellschop, writing in the 1989 *Ceramix* journal, referred to the renewed interest in design and surface decoration in the ceramic community in the-mid 1980's. Citing 'this re-evaluation of surface embellishment ...as particularly relevant in Africa where traditionally most objects in daily use are decorated, thus making the spread of pattern into the ceramic field more familiar' (Sellschop 1989: 35). Mikula had already been working with pattern for many years.

Hayward-Fell (Chairperson APSA Natal 1989) added that ceramics was beginning to be recognised as an art form in South Africa although there was still a certain resistance amongst ceramic purists to the acceptance of work that included materials other than clay. Mikula had for many years included materials such as shells, bone, beadwork and weaving into her pieces (Hayward-Fell, 1989: 45). In an interview with Hayward-Fell (Bauer 2002 (d)) she emphasised that she was surprised by the inclusion of the weaving in Mikula's pieces. Mikula was one of the first ceramists to use woven segments threaded into pottery, combining textile and clay in a conceptually new negotiation of imagery and style.

This inclusion of non-ceramic pieces further collapsed or at least eroded boundaries in this medium, questioning the integrity of form in ceramics, and providing a debate about the inclusion of non-ceramic additions and appendages. In addition Mikula negotiated the syncretism between perceptions of fine art versus craft which function as binaries that implicitly separate women, product and racial difference in art.

In the hierarchy of image making informed by western perceptions and traditions located in art history, art made by men was judged superior to the art of non-western cultures, the decorative arts and crafts and women's art (Arnold in Hemp 1993: 3). In the western concept of classification and categorisation, 'fine art' was synonymous with intellectual needs and 'craft' with physical needs. Women's art had generally been declared decorative, functional and regarded as 'something trivial and less important' (Arnold in Hitge 1989:28). However Arnold challenges this notion insisting that 'decorative objects

and art made by women is a concern for the totality of the thing – a wish to bring together a number of conflicting issues into total harmony’ (Arnold in Hitge 1989: 28). Arnold insists this separation is also absurd regarding the work made by African cultures where ‘a respect for tradition and the close interaction between the material and spiritual world meant that objects were never divorced from social use’ (Arnold in Hemp 1993: 4). She reasoned that ‘good ‘art’ takes cognisance of working processes and good ‘craft’ possesses an aesthetic dimension’ (Arnold in Hemp 1993: 4).

Verster claims that Mikula’s work reflected this concept, observing that as she respected the tradition of these other cultures it followed that her work would and does assume their connections and associations (Meijer 1989). With the increasing influence of Post-modernist theories, the questioning of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art and a rising interest in marginal cultures opened up the gradual recognition of art by women and also work produced by other cultures (Marshall 2001: 50).

Work with cross-cultural influences were now more easily accommodated within the visual art practices and by the late 1980’s were seen as one of the specific characteristics that made work that was unique to South Africa (Bauer 2003(o)). Works by Rodney Blumenfeld collected by the DAG from 1988 onwards demonstrated an emphatic and even exaggerated assimilation in cross-cultural borrowing (Bauer 2003 (o)). His incised and painted platters on the 1995 FNB Vita Crafts Exhibition were, according to Munnik, the best assimilation of indigenous material culture, the work ‘generated by the appreciation of tradition, yet transcending mere representation’ (Munnik, 1995: 27).

However, not all cross-cultural syncretism was celebrated. Criticism was still leveled at those who appeared to copy rather than use other cultural iconography in a personal and syncretic incorporation of cross-cultural dimensions. These critics, however, did not indicate any specific examples or techniques that they might have found more appropriate. Ian Garrett’s work on the same 1995 exhibition, was condemned as ‘merely a glamorised reproduction of the real thing’ (Munnik 1995: 27). This was countered by Lindsey Scott’s review of Garrett’s work, who praised him for his mastery of form, design and technique. In the June 1997 *National Ceramics* article, Scott recognised that the work stimulated questions related to its cultural complexity. He acknowledged that while mastering new techniques a ‘period of imitation is to be expected’ (Scott 1997: 31) but he stressed that

Garrett had modified not only the surface patterns but also indeed the original forms. Garrett had also extended the purpose of his vessels beyond the original domestic purpose placing his work in a new category, that of the 'contemplative object' (Scott 1997: 31). Indigenous work did not reflect this aesthetic, except for the ceramics by Nesta Nala that had only recently been adapted for a new market within the art community (Scott 1997:31).

When Vera Poole, then owner of the Grassroots Gallery, emigrated to Australia in 1985, Sue Greenberg (potter, and now owner of Bayside Gallery) took over the gallery with Beryl Brink.⁶¹ Mikula was already established as an exhibitor at the gallery and Greenberg continued this relationship, dealing subsequently with Mikula's work for many years. Greenberg commented that her 'work was exquisite and the public queued at her exhibitions before the openings to buy her work' actively seeking it out (Bauer 2003 (j)). Greenberg felt Mikula's upbringing and background gave her the authentic honesty required to legitimize her assimilation of indigenous imagery. She claims that as Mikula was exposed to the real artifacts and lived and engaged in the traditions and cultures that produced these wares, her work reflected an authenticity avoiding artificiality and was built from a genuine and lived experience. Greenberg believes that Mikula's influence is still apparent in the cultural assimilation found in many contemporary local ceramics. She observed that both white and black ceramists are keen to work in an acculturated manner, especially after 1994 elections and particularly for work focused for the international market. She acknowledged that buyers from overseas, specifically African American, respond well to this imagery. Greenberg adds that although purchasing from ceramists such as Blumenfeld, they have no desire to question the identity of the artist (Bauer 2003 (j)).

Ceramic artists such as Cilla Black, Lynnley Watson and Ann Marais are all working in their own local vernacular, but are borrowing from the influences initiated by Mikula, claims Greenberg (Bauer 2003 (j)). Blumenfeld credits Mikula with modifying his own iconographic language attributing this to her unique use of fine shape and pattern that was so unlike anything else at the time (Bauer 2004 (ah)). Thami Jali who was trained in fine

⁶¹ Greenberg and Brink were at this time chairwoman and Vice-Chair Woman of APSA Natal.

art at Rorke's Drift and later studied at the Durban Technikon (now Durban Institute of Technology) affirmed that Mikula was highly responsible for his move into ceramics. He insists that his work, even eleven years later, in the mid 1990's continued to be influenced by her, especially her use of fine sgraffito marking and intricate patterning (Bauer 2004 (af) (i)). He emphasised that he saw her as the first ceramist to lift this 'craft' based medium to an art form, and although her work was of Africa it was not derivative, reflecting instead elements of an acculturated synthesis that managed to retain a personal narrative.

Clive Sithole, a prominent local ceramist, also acknowledges the effect that Mikula's work has had on his own efforts. He traces his use of pattern and design to Mikula's unique ceramic collaborations, explaining that he responded to the precise detail used delicately in her work, which is enhanced by decorative additions. He spent many hours at the Durban Art Gallery and at the Mikula home taking notes and absorbing the iconography he saw on her tiles and ceramic pieces (Bauer 2003 (u)).

Interestingly, new work by Ntombi Nala (Nesta Nala's niece) on the Utshwala Ceramic Exhibition at the University of Natal in November 2003 uses beads, hanging from the shoulder of her vessel. This was decidedly reminiscent of work by Mikula states Armstrong, indicating that Mikula's work has now subsequently been referred to by other cultures, if not indeed, directly emulated (Bauer 2003 (s)).

Verster (Bauer 2003 (n)) and Addleson (Bauer 2003 (o)) both strongly defend Mikula's adaption and assimilation of indigenous iconography within her work. They acknowledge that historically artists have always looked at other cultures, adapting and borrowing imagery, styles and ideas, modifying them to give the work individual distinction. "Purity is sterile. We must be open to influence. It enriches. The laager mentality is death" advocates Verster (Bauer 2003 (n)). The importance of intention is what is required. Both Addleson and Verster defend the work if the intent is honest, and there is a reverent respect towards the syncretism (Bauer 2003 (n) and Bauer 2003 (o)).

Rhetoric dealing in particular with white artists' engagement with either the black body as the subject, or with the appropriation of black cultural iconography, has led to heated

debates in post-apartheid South Africa (Atkinson & Breitz 1999). The criticism leveled at these artists claims they are depicting blacks as 'voiceless, silent, passive and as sources of entertainment' so vilifying any sense of authority or power they may possess, and subsequently the result 'renders the subject mute' (Burnett 1999: 80).

In his article, *Private Parts and Public Selves*, Burnett argues that there are many facets to this debate and raises the idea of subjectivity as a means of exploring questions of authenticity. He asks 'when does the other cease to be other and become part of the fabric out of which self is constructed?' (1999: 80). Affirming this, Gikandi, while commenting on Spivak's theory that the 'empire messes with identity' (mentioned in the Introduction), claims that the exchange is reciprocal by altering the identity of both the coloniser as well as the colonised (Gikandi 1996:31).

Acknowledging the reality of this concept, artist Sfiso ka Mkame reasons that a person reflects and assumes the influences around them. He asks 'how do you differentiate cultures? – if you are born in Africa and are brought up with these influences you have to reflect what you grew up looking at' (Bauer 2004 (ag)). Ka Mkame felt Mikula's assimilation was justified observing that she grew up in Natal, both on farms and in urban settings, and was deeply involved with her community. (Bauer 2004 (ag)). Other black artists support this such as Raymond Ngcobo writing in *Grey Areas*.⁶²

Andrew Verster, a contributor at the 1979 Art Historians conference, *State of Art in South Africa*, asserted that an artist couldn't work in a vacuum. His/her work is the result of a *mélange* of language, cultural contact, historical background and personal experiences that ultimately shape the person and subsequently their art. An artist functions within the society in which he/she identifies and this 'identification develops his [/her] confidence and gives meaning to his [/her] personal experiences' (Verster 1979:29). Verster stated that 'observations carry weight when they come from real experience' (1979: 29).

A decade later, Verster wrote 'Maggie Mikula was of Africa. It was never an issue. She resolved the question of identity years before the problem became fashionable. She was here and the things she made were of Africa too.'

⁶² See Conclusion p.94-95.

The easy conversation between her and the place, its traditions and history, was her life' (Verster in Wilson 1989: 29).

Burnett asserts that the issue of the understanding of 'representation' could affect the perception of the viewer. He lists some of the meanings of 'representation' as 'to stand for in the sense of advocacy; to present again; to present again in altered form; to act as a metaphor by way of compressing complexity and so on' (1999: 81). He emphasises that the critics only privilege the first meaning, disregarding the others, which immediately limits the notion of art as subjective. Insisting that 'if authentic representation is restricted only to those icons, images and symbols to which you have claim by birth, by skin colour, by gender and so on, then the primary ground for art making moves away from engagement with complex exterior worlds and moves towards interiority and manufactured complexity' (1999: 81).

Dubow, in his article '*Observations and Reflections*' argues that the politically correct insistence on self-representation becomes 'sterile and ultimately self-defeating'. He asks how one is likely to develop a complete understanding of self without trying to understand and engage in discourse with what one is not? He situates this inability to engage as reminiscent of the 'cultural ghetto policy premised on apartheid ideology' (1999:127-128). In the article '*Checking One Another's Credentials*', Lola Frost adds that the postcolonial theory of the relationship of 'self' and 'other' is assumed as a dominant versus abusive relationship, and cannot always be read as such. She suggests that this model has been the 'guiding principle of political correctness so prevalent in South Africa today'. As an alternative she advises that 'we speak for ourselves and to each other' (Frost 1999:133-136). She added that the work should be read in context through the codes found in the images and also take cognisance of the audience to whom it was addressing. Frost cautioned that the work should not be judged simply on the identity of the artist.

Regarding the work by Mikula, Verster further strengthens this argument when he asserted that 'because she respected the tradition of which she was part, each piece extended that tradition. And belonging to that tradition meant that each object is encased in memories, allusions and associations' (Meijer 1989).

The avoidance of appropriating the 'other's' language should be realised through an ethical rather than an epistemological context (Elam 1995: 231-237). In attempting to do justice to the 'other' the artist is not autonomous but has to assume a subjective bias when working. This has to reflect the personal interpretation of the artist who is not after all reproducing an ethnographic exhibition but a personal commentary developed from a creative rather than from an objective or scientific position (Ginsberg 1999:137-140).

Ethnocentricity⁶³ and its accompanying belief in 'universal' values is being replaced by a nonhierarchical pluralism that is aware of cultural interaction. In South Africa this realisation began in the late 1970's through the socio-political changes taking place at that time. Until then exchange between black and white artists was limited to occasional social contact and so shared ideas and experiences were negligible (Weinek 1988). Weinek suggested that a cross-pollination between the cultural groups could lead to a 'new identity, a feeling of belonging, part of a tradition fundamental to an artistic future for this country' (1988: 83). Mikula achieved just that by engaging actively with other cultures, sharing, teaching, exhibiting with and producing work that respected the tradition that they were part of.

Modernism was the language of the self, the ego and patriarchal ideals reflected in the 'autonomous individual' (Gablik 1991). Gablik writes that this led to an increasing 'emptiness at the core of this ego-centered desire for autonomy, the cost of which has been a diminished sense of community, a loss of social commitments and a truncated ability to care for others' (Gablik 1991: 168). Writing in the early 1990's the writer insists that art has a new role to play in the Post-modern era – that of a sense of community – of 'transforming the paradigm of alienation to one of healing and contact' (1991: 169). At this time in South Africa Albie Sachs (controversial author and critic) also saw the role of the artist as crucial to discovering a common sense of identity in the country. He said art could be a catalyst for overcoming the problems of diverse cultural traditions and heritages

⁶³ Ethnocentricity is the belief in the superiority of one's own cultural group or society over another's and consequent dislike or misunderstanding of other groups. In this paper it refers in particular to the Western philosophy of European imperialism, during Colonialism, of marginalising any race or culture not the same as itself. Its 'universal' values were defined through opposition – relegating 'others' to an inferior position thus not affording them equal rights, as under apartheid rule in South Africa.

and 'help to discover who we are, what it means to be South African' (Bertelsen 1990: 43).

Because art is susceptible to cross-cultural influences, with the development of new artistic forms comes the potential to transform society as it asks new questions and determines new boundaries (Chaplin 1994: 66). In South Africa in the 1990's the ideological underpinning of nation building encouraged the concept of *ubuntu* (an African term embracing the idea that community is more important than the self – a person is a person through other people). Williamson noted that some artists 'feeling themselves to be at last in a truly African country ...began vigorously investigating the possibilities of more interesting cultural identities - trying on each other's skin, as it were' (Williamson 1996: 7).

In *Writing History in Postcolonial Africa – Does Africa Exist?* Strauss and Smit explain that we are part of our history, or past, and are therefore 'bearers of a tradition' (Strauss/Smit 1995: 15). Acknowledging that tradition and community are closely linked, they point to the fact that once a pattern of behaviour has been established it is continued by younger members of the community and thus becomes a tradition. Strauss and Smit propose that 'at creation God folded into reality a great many possibilities. As we unfold and shape and crumple, we begin to settle into patterns of historical practice, which we pass on to our historical heirs. After a while it becomes possible to recognise resemblances among the folds and crumples of a community with a shared heritage of some kind' (Strauss/Smit 1995: 15).

This knowledge can lead to a more sensitive understanding of works like those by Mikula whose source influenced by innumerable traditions, has subsequently been filtered through personal experiences. Mikula was intent on avoiding stereotypical perceptions of and allusions to, local ethnically derived identities, using instead more oblique references to diverse African sources based on design, structure and decoration. This implicitly eluded reference to any one specific cultural group. In this she elected to rather situate her work within a broader construct of African identity in which her voice and that of many other groups are tempered and formed into a new cross-cultural, stylistic language.

CONCLUSION

Culture is... not only an attempt by populations to establish a sense of internal coherence but also to create a larger world which establishes their difference, against which their ways of speaking and doing are seen as different and have value by virtue of being different (Simone 1999: 240).

Travel and globalisation have inferred multiple ways of being a citizen in local, national and international contexts and the 'essential integrity to specific cultural formations is fast disappearing' or exists as a counter to hybrid relationships (Simone 1999: 240). The author insists that societies need to sustain means of engagement and expression that refute the notion that culture must remain static and preserved. 'Cultural exchanges can be used to constantly and provisionally reformulate new forms of belonging' (Simone 1999: 241).

For most of this century, South Africa has had to confront its own tormenting demons. In fact, it is a wounded country, scarred by a terrible political process of racial domination and exclusion. When we examine South African history, we find, like in many other places of trauma, that it is through the critical practice of culture that history is not only brought alive and given urgency but is, most importantly, a vital way that societies humanise and define their common interests (Enwezor 1997: 8).

South Africa has gone through profound change, with existing social and cultural identities and communities shifting and reorganising themselves through post-colonial and global recontextualisation. In *Colonialism as Historical Trauma* van Alphen blames the fact that when one essentialises identity 'one continues to use the concept of identity which underlies racist thinking, and which underpinned apartheid politics' (van Alphen 1999: 269). He claims an artist's racial identity is not conditional on its successful negotiation of representation and concludes 'only art that acknowledges the past and then modifies its traditions can work through it in ways that open up a space for a future without racism' (van Alphen 1999: 279).

This dissertation presented the beginnings of syncretism found in early South African artists such as W. Battiss, C. Skotnes and A. Preller seen from a contemporary post-

colonial perspective. Utilising literature written when these artists were active as well as contemporary texts has allowed for a degree of balance considering the hegemonic western shaping of identity. This narrow Modernist definition of art has broadened through a Post-modern discourse resulting in affording an increased position of power, favouring the marginalised female and black. This has contributed to a valid premise for research into the work of Mikula.

The period of Mikula's production, from the late 1970's till her death in 1989, reviewed in this study, coincides with the imbalanced power relations in South Africa. Within prevailing oppressive socio-political context, this borrowing from indigenous cultures conveyed concerns related to authority, validity and inter-racial polarisation.

Identifying the cross-cultural dimensions in Mikula's work is the primary focus of this paper. A consideration of her heritage, education, interests and motives both technically and aesthetically with regard to the 'other' has led to detailed analysis of her work. Through the process of personal interviews, literature research and studies of personal documents an identification of her evolving innovations has been formed.

The peril of 'a revisionist methodology is that it can become morally self-righteous: the enlightened theorist berating the culpable artist' (Arnold 1996: 3). This is no less true today than when it was written nearly a decade ago. In South Africa the argument around cultural ownership and the ethics of representation is still controversial. Post-modern discourse has shifted power and forced a re-mapping of the construct of 'self' and 'other'. Now white artists, critics and curators cannot expect an unquestioned closed authority regarding their work, nor too do black artists want to be marketed nor indeed should be narrated through the 'Africanness' in their work.

Raymond Ngcobo (1999: 154) stressed that artists are autonomous and Dubow, maintaining similar thoughts, states 'artists should not have to wait for the right to represent anything towards which they feel impelled' and challengingly questions 'who is going to confer this right on them?' (Dubow 1999: 127). 'Art has no colour, race, gender or creed' claims Ngcobo in his essay *'Apartheid and Alienation in the work of Art'*

(Ngcobo 1999: 154). Declaring it is racially blind, he purports that ‘not only blacks can create Steve Biko. Not only Afrikaners have the right to Verwoerd ’ (Ngcobo 1999: 154). He adds that artists were ‘forced by the dominant social formations to produce works of art, not for the conception of the producer, but for the expectations of the consumer’ (Ngcobo 1999: 154).

Maggie Mikula, a third generation South African, approached her sourcing, her work and her reaction to its public reception with humility. She admired the cultures to which she was drawn and was fascinated by their history (Bauer 2004 (aj)). Mikula was respectful of her own role in the use of symbols and imagery drawn from them.

She did extensive research, utilising many diverse sources and methods and was influenced by certain works she sourced herself such as Nesta Nala’s pots and the vessels of the Pueblo ceramists. Mikula was exposed to a wide field of iconographic imagery through reproductions, meeting with the artists and exposure to their work (including rural artists and craftspeople). She assimilated other cultures through her travels and sought out their historical and ethnographical museum collections (Bauer 2004 (aj)). Her vast library helped her need to understand other people that had originated from a reverent attitude towards these cultures. Kennedy proposed in *Sources of Synthesis*, that ‘art fed by experience is enriched by inspiration from diverse streams, including the cultures of other societies’ and acknowledged that ‘most contemporary art is responsive to injections – cross-cultural and cross-personal’ (Kennedy 1992: 21).

Mikula cared deeply for her community and her country and involved herself actively in helping individuals and groups towards a more equitable standing within the economic and political structures prevalent then. She was loved and celebrated by many people both black and white for her understanding and respect for humanity which she reflected in her art. Her work was a representation of her life and experiences. The contemporary South African artist, Greg Streak, commenting on representing ‘others’, explained that his encounters with so many other cultures during his own life has affected his responses and experiences, and now had become integral to who he is (Streak 1999: 267). This concept is evident in this research when considering Mikula and her work.

Mikula's ceramics are not superficial, contrived copies sourced in another culture. They refer and suggest, in particular building from thematic and stylistic issues of personal concern. The contemporary weaver and artist, Fiona Kirkwood, felt they possessed a mystical quality connected with the 'spirit' of the continent. Each piece in its simplicity had been formed through a subconscious, gradual assimilation of experiences, absorbing the 'energy and vibration' of the new elements to produce a new reference of seeing and engaging (Bauer 2003 (aa)). If there is a genuine response to one's environment and the work reflects this, then the 'art work should not be assessed only as a material or socialised object to the exclusion of its visual poetry and magic' (Arnold 1996: 3). Walford insists her work was in harmony with her life and this sincerity was reflected in 'word, thought and deed' (Bauer 2004 (af) (ii)). Mikula acknowledged the impermanent and evolving nature of life. This is reflected in her work and could be recognised as inherently spiritual.

Art on the African continent has and always will be 'interwoven – one form with another and all with life itself' (Kennedy 1992: 21). Historically, art was a means of communicating religious and cultural rituals that reflected life events, and then recording them as the social markers of the society. Art demarcated issues of birth, puberty, death and re-birth through its visual metaphors. Mikula engaged with her personal creativity in much the same vein creating work that reflected her humanness. She constantly returned to symbols of eternity and the fragile nature of the universe and towards the end of her life was trying to resolve these issues (Wilson 1989: 29).

The main focus of this dissertation has been the cross-cultural syncretism reflected in the ceramics of Maggie Mikula. This has obviated socio-political discussion specifically related to the context of a changing South African culture. I have surveyed opinions by diverse theorists to reveal and hopefully stimulate further examination of this topic and invite debate on a subject that is both complex and sensitive.

Mikula's innovative style during the Anglo-Oriental phase of ceramics in South Africa not only facilitated a change in the perceived reception of new methods of working in clay but also allowed significant contribution to the re-reading of indigenous ceramics.

Post-modernism has reassessed amongst many issues the position of non-western visual art practice and women's art. It has investigated the debate between art and craft and the position of ceramists, elevating them to a more respected and acknowledged place in the art world.

Maggie Mikula (1941-1989), a privileged, white woman ceramist, worked in South Africa during the colonial oppression but refused to participate in the closed categories of cultural and racial isolation. She embraced her land, her community and its aesthetic discourse, even looking to the whole of the continent and back through its histories to examine and honour it through her art.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Key

All the digital images and photographs were taken by the author except where indicated.

The following information is provided where possible:

Physical description of the piece

Date of production where possible

Dimensions in centimeters (length and /or x width x height) or as specified

Owner

Bibliographic reference of source of image, where applicable (if not by the author)

Awards for the piece

Fig 1.A.

Ceramic bead and metal necklace – 4 large and 2 smaller stoneware beads with manganese and cobalt oxide decoration separated by metal spacers and metal bolts

1970's

Approximately 43 cm in length

P. Didcott, Durban

Fig.1.B.

Ceramic bead necklace on leather cord with thin metal rings – one porcelain bead with black oxide design, 4 small stoneware beads, iron oxide lines

1970's

Cord is approximately 36cm long with porcelain bead hanging 12cm in length

J. Hawke, Eshowe

Fig.2.A.

Porcelain paperweight with oxide design

1980

6 x 6.2

Durban Art Gallery (DAG)

M. Mikula

Fig.2.B.

Porcelain 'pebble' pot with manganese oxide wash

Early 1980's

14 x 9.5

J. Copeland, Durban

Fig. 2.C.

Stoneware 'pod' with red iron oxide cap, Sgraffiti marking

1983

10.5 x 7

M. Zettler, Durban

Fig.3.A.

Flat stoneware slab: pressed triangular stamping in iron oxide, blue cobalt outline. Mikula personal signature on right impressed into corner.

Early 1980's

Approximately 17 x 14

J. Copeland, Durban

Fig.3.B.

Flat terracotta tile with impressed plant specimens highlighted in iron oxide wash, decorative relief on corners in natural clay.

Early 1980's

Approximately 15 x 15

J. Copeland, Durban

Fig.3.C.

Flat stoneware tile: decorative carving, pressing and stamping highlighted in iron and cobalt oxides.

Early 1980's

15 x 1.2 x 15

R. Marnoch, Durban

Fig.4.

Stoneware sphere with manganese glaze, Sgraffiti markings, leather cord and porcelain beads

1980

15 x 9

Phansi Museum, Durban

Fig.5.

Porcelain crackle glaze vase hung with shell and pod forms both hand made and real from the neck. Mikula changed the title to *Smoked pot hung with beads*

1983

9 x 8.6

DAG

Fig.6.

Terracotta bowl with black cotton hung with white porcelain beads

1983

9 x 8.8

DAG

Fig.7.

Stoneware sphere with iron and cobalt oxide patterns

1983

15 x 9

Unable to identify owner

M. Mikula

Fig.8.

Stoneware sphere (Large flat pebble) with matt white glaze, and red and black iron slip decoration

1983

18.1 x 8

DAG

Fig. 9.

Two stoneware spheres, iron speckle, white slip and red iron oxide patterns

1983

Approximately 12 x 9.5

Unable to identify owner

M. Mikula

Fig.10.

Grogged stoneware drums linked with clay lugs. Top surface decorated with red iron and cobalt slips

1983

Individual drums approximately 11 x 9 each

Unable to identify owner

M. Mikula

Fig. 11.

Stoneware half-drum form, carved with slips – white, red iron and blue cobalt

1983

12.6 x 4.2

M. Meijer

Fig. 12.

Grogged porcelain Drum, ostrich egg beads, porcelain and stoneware beads. Wool and cotton weaving by Terry-Anne Stevenson

1983

12.5 x 15.8

DAG

Fig. 13.

Terracotta Drum, carved with deep vertical lines, rough woven cloth pulled across opening and tied down with woolen cord hung with terracotta and porcelain beads.

1983

13 x 17

R. Marnoch, Durban

Fig. 14.

White crackle glazed porcelain disc with black oxide pattern
 1983
 22 x 23
 P. Didcott, Durban

Fig. 15.

White crackle glazed porcelain disc
 1984
 22.5 x 22
 M. Zettler, Durban

Fig. 16.A. and 16.B.

Two standing sculptures, terracotta with slips: white, blue and yellow slips.
 1983
 A. 6.5 x 9.9 B. 5.2 x 9.7
 Phansi Museum

Fig. 17.

Grogged stoneware with black iron oxide design
 1983
 Approximately 12 x 12.5
 Unable to identify owner
 M. Mikula

Fig. 18.

Smoked earthenware pot with porcelain and terracotta beads, string
 1983
 Approximately 11 x 11
 Unable to identify owner
 M. Mikula
 Highly Commended

Fig. 19.

African Textile - *glazed porcelain tile with red clay overlay and iron oxide inlay*
 1983
 Measurements unknown
 Unable to identify owner
 M. Mikula
 Highly Commended

Fig. 20.A.

Thin flat porcelain circle set into perspex frame, black oxide design
 1983
 10x 10
 P. Mikula, Durban

Fig. 20.B.

Thin flat porcelain disc set in perspex frame, red and black iron oxide patterns
 1983
 10 x 5.4
 P. Mikula, Durban

Fig. 21A. and 21B.

Sample of Yoruba men's weaving (Sieber 1972: 202)
 Sketch of the weaving sourced in Mikula's sketchbook

Fig.22.

Burnished, smoke fired earthenware, hung with porcelain 'shells' and brass amulet on cord.
 1984
 11 x 11.5
 Corobrik Collection, Pretoria
 Zaalberg 1985, P.81
 National Award

Fig. 23

Terracotta closed drum form, white and cobalt blue slip and brass inlay
 1985
 Approximately 16 x 10
 M. Zettler, Durban
 Highly Commended

Fig. 24.A. 24. B.

'Tribal Drums'
 1984
 A.14 x 5 B. 13 x 10
 M. Meijer, Durban

Fig. 25.

Thrown and sawdust fired earthenware, double gourd shape, hung with blue, green, black and white beads attached through holes in the body under a small ridge on the top gourd
 1984
 7 x 17.5
 Tatham Art Gallery (TAG), Pietermaritzburg

Fig. 26.

Ntombi Nala with her vessel hung with coloured beads
 2003
 Approximately 54 x 44
 Owner unknown

Fig. 27.

Stoneware pot with red iron oxide lines and ostrich shell around the neck
 1985
 17 x 12
 J. Copeland, Durban

Fig. 28.

Smokefired earthenware with cord. Raised pellets contrasting with indented circles in vertical lines
 10 x 12
 P. Didcott, Durban
 Highly Commended

Fig. 29.

Terracotta sphere with horns sculpture, hung with beads and shells on cord
 Approximately 16 x 12
 Unable to identify owner
 M. Mikula

Fig. 30.

Ndebele Matron – *Flat porcelain tile hung with beads and decorated with slips in rose, blue and tan*
 1985
 Measurements unknown
 Unable to identify owner
 M. Mikula

Fig. 31.

Smoked earthenware with weaving, beads and nails
 1985
 13 x 13.8
 Phansi Museum, Durban

Fig. 32.

Loom Sculpture – *stoneware with weaving and porcupine quills*
 1985
 9.1 x 33.4
 DAG

Fig. 33.

Three sculptures – stoneware and terracotta with black oxide patterns
 1985
 Measurements unknown
 Unable to identify owner
 M. Mikula

Fig. 34.

Terracotta vessel (unglazed) with small figurative emblems. Copper carbonate and bicarbonate
 1987
 'Metal glaze' on top central piece, two porcupine quills
 13 x 19
 Phansi Museum, Durban

Fig. 35.

Funeral boat with 'metal glaze' Three figures, one standing, one bowed, one laid horizontally in the middle of the boat, on terracotta base
 1987
 8.2 x 3
 Phansi Museum, Durban

Fig. 36.

Terracotta vessel with four figures on lid in 'metal glaze', cord wrapped around neck
 1987
 9.5 x 10
 S. Greenberg, Durban

Fig. 37.

Terracotta vessel sealed with string cord and beads, raised symbols on sides
 1987
 15 x 11
 H. Lurie, Durban

Fig. 38.

Terracotta pod with string and beads – hand-built sawdust fired
 1987
 17.5 x 12.5
 TAG

Fig. 39.

First Floor (Handmade) Mural - Mixed glazed and unglazed tiles in earth tones, small figurative symbols – copper glazed - inset in panels of red clay
 1989
 1840 x 1160
 Malherbe Library, then University of Natal, Durban Campus

Fig. 40.

Lower Ground Floor Mural – Buff coloured faggots and deep terracotta and tan tiles by Mikula, pattern forms diagonal lines, unglazed
 1989
 1600 x 1400
 Malherbe Library, then University of Natal, Durban

Three sample interviews are included to show the different approaches to interviewing.

1. Paul Mikula, Maggie's husband	03.01.2002	Questionnaire
2. Jill Addleson, white woman, gallery curator	14.05.2003	e-mail questions
3. Sfiso ka Mkame, black artist	17.02.2004	personal interview

I read that she was formally trained at the Durban Tech in Commercial art. Do you remember who taught her?

Natal Technical College, School of Art and Craft. Nat. Diploma in art 1961.
Baillie Smith. 1962 George D. Howe. School St. Mary's Diocesan School for Girls, Kloof.
She was a commercial artist doing screen-printing, posters, etc. Used to do a lot of batiques and sell them at Aiden Walsh shop. Then worked as a Com/A at Claude Neon. (sign at 4 Seasons Hotel is hers and is still up).

When did Maggie start working in ceramics?

She started in 1968. I think she did some with Jim Hall (a good friend) at the Tech. He would know who taught her, etc.

What prompted this?

She loved craft. We were very friendly with Andrew Walford, had a lot of his stuff, etc. She was at home – because we had kids. In those days we had built a little gas-fired kiln in the garden, which was always a nightmare, eventually we changed to electric. Lorain Wilson may know about this.

How did she acquire these skills?

She took lessons – might have been Ian Glennie. Later she also took lessons with a jeweller (Benny Jordaan?). Terry Anne Stevenson taught her some weaving.

Where did she work?

Always from a studio from home.

How would you describe her work?

Very fine. She loved fiddling. Originally she was making natural organic plant like sculptures, and then became more and more fascinated with African forms. Her very late work dealt with symbolism, decorations & techniques.

How did her grandfather's collection of African artefacts influence, direct or otherwise her choice of theme?

We were both nuts for African work. We had visited all the ruins in Zimbabwe, Ndebele homesteads, etc. We collected African artefacts together. She became very fascinated when she wrote a book on her family, her grandfathers' background with the Livingston/Mackenzie central African explorations, etc. She discovered her grandfather's collection in the Pietermaritzburg Museum during research.

Who else worked with her?

She always worked on her own, but was very friendly with lots of Potters. Walford, Smallwood, Zetler, Dibb, Sue Greenberg, Carol Haywood, von Bismark, M. van der Merwe, Fiona Kirkwood (weaving). She got on well with all of them.

What influence do you think they may have had on each other?

They all loved and collected her work, which she sold very cheaply. She always undervalued what she did. She learnt a lot about the technology from her friends. She also visited Nesta Nala and went on field trips to see traditional potters in the Eshowe area.

How did she influence other either in style or context? (I have identified a few ceramists that seemed to work in a similar vein soon after her work was known.)

She was always much admired and after her work receiving National recognition, she seemed to inspire other potters to explore the ideas. Lots of people started taking a closer look at our own environment, symbols, clues, techniques, etc.

Who were her close friends at the time? (perhaps she shared thoughts with them.)

I don't think she had very close friends. Marianne Claude – her sister – Loraine Wilson – maybe. Some friends overseas. Vera Poole (Grass Roots Gallery). Most of her friends revolved around: say the pottery group – the kids group – she also played tennis – the family group.

The 80's appears to be early to incorporate ethnic imagery. What was her attitude to the times?

We were always slightly left. She worked for Progressive Party during election time. Black sash – woman for peaceful change now. That kind of thing. We usually had someone who we were helping in townships. Knew lots of black artists. I worked mostly in "black" areas. Many black artists used to love her because of her work. Fiso Mkame, Tami Jali, etc.

How was she viewed, by others at the time, as far as thoughts on working cross-culturally were concerned?

She was appreciated. They all wanted her work. Quite a bit went overseas.

Do you have any documentation, press cuttings, catalogues or articles relating to her work that I might use? Also photographs?

We have a book of cuttings, photographs, etc.

I read that she was in Europe in 1985. How did this visit have an affect on her later work?

We went to Europe many times and always visited Museums, where she loved all the Stone and Iron age pottery, objects etc. Loved Frechen Keranikum Museum and North European "Blue Beard" ? peasant pottery. We also went to the States and toured the Poebela Villages, met Martinez, etc. In 1985 she spent 6 weeks in Western Scotland on a glass-making workshop.

She took jewellery lessons and worked in metal. Do you have some pieces that you wouldn't mind letting me see?

It was all done for her ceramics. She did not do independent jewellery pieces.

The Corobrick 85 yearbook of S.A. Ceramics said she had been working since 1972. Do you have examples of her early work?

Some! People always snapped up everything.

Do you have a list of collectors that have her art that I might contact?

Most older people in Durban have her work. At one stage very early on she used to sell through Shirley Bishop's gallery – I can't remember the name. She never sold anything and just kept most pieces. I don't know if she is still around but she is Clive Bishops from the shop in Broad Streets' sister.

Which museums / galleries house her art?

Durban, Thatham, Pretoria, George (or Knysna) bought lots, East London ?, others.

She appears to have done numerous commissions. Where are they?

She did a few joint commissions with Andrew Verster. Gifts from Mayor of Durban to Foreign Dignitaries. She did a commission for the University of Natal as a result of a competition, which she won. She finished it one week before dying by nodding when my son and I composed tiles, which she had made, onto panels. She also did a few architectural commissions, floor tiles, cupboard handles, etc. She was very proud that at last somebody accepted her work on a public scale.

Did she sell her work at galleries? If so, which ones?

- First Shirley Bishop's gallery in Fenton Lane (I forgot the name).
- Then Grass Roots in Westville (Vera Poole then Sue Greenberg, etc.)
- Cameo Gallery in Stellenbosch, which always bought her work. - Nana Wagner.
- Strydom Gallery I think in George.
- (There was a gallery in Pretoria.)

Could you tell me of any other person who might be willing to talk to me about Maggie and her work?

- Ilse Mikula (our daughter)
- Andrew Walford
- Andrew Verster
- Her sister Jenny Hawke from Eshowe, who is also a nut for all things African
- Loraine Wilson
- Most of the others mentioned. Try Shirley Bishop for a very early period.

She never really thought that what she was doing was seriously recognized by anybody. She felt that her work was considered "twee". In the days when she was doing pottery you had to dig your own clay, grind your own glazes, slips, etc. We built gas kilns, we did everything – but she discovered fairly quickly that her skills and love were not part of the hype of the Cardew & St. Iyves School, of exploding kilns, throwing vast posts at break-neck speeds, Zen miracles, etc.

She liked to work slowly and more controlled. She did not mind an electric kiln, bought oxides and clay – as a result of this Durban's 'master' potters – although they liked her very much, always treated her with disdain. Eventually the Leach School lost and the American Ceramic Art replaced pottery. Again she was outside it. Her heroes were Rabinowitz, van der Merwe, she loved Dorothy Feibelman whom she met, Lucie Rie.

Maggie was diagnosed with cancer and had a mastectomy in 1979. This focussed her life (all ours). We spent a lot of time travelling, she kept looking and trying to come to grips with being from Africa and mortal. She was very proud of her roots and heritage.

I hope this helps. Ilse and I can show you around at home. You can see her tiles, etc.

It may be useful to you to refer to dates that I purchased ceramics for the DAG collection and to view these in groups according to the year in which they were purchased. It was absolutely intentional on my part to wait for the APSA regional and annual exhibitions to be held so that I could collect what I considered to be the finest works for the DAG permanent collection. Also it enabled me to view whole collections of contemporary SA ceramics which afforded me an overview and a review, both at the same time. At the time of collecting I was aware of the different media that were currently popular: a period of porcelain, one of raku and so on. Studying the collection in that way will set a useful time frame for you to trace the history of collecting from 1969 to date which are the years I have been building up the ceramics collection of the DAG. It will, I think, turn out to be a microcosm of the history of SA ceramics during a specific period - also of the history of collecting SA ceramics.

The above answers your question of why I collected Maggie Mikula's work in the early 1980s, 1983 to be precise. She phoned me to say that she was holding an exhibition of her work at the NSA gallery and would I like a preview. I certainly did like a preview and I remember quite clearly being bowled over by her works because they didn't resemble anything else that I had seen in what you might loosely call the mainstream of SA ceramics: works produced throughout the country which loosely followed the history of ceramics in the West. This included a phase when SA potters followed Leach and Cardew (Bryan Haden Hyme Rabinowitz, Andrew Walford). It did not include the work of indigenous potters as the general attitude among museums of the time was that these belonged not in art museum collections but in anthropological collections, or collections like those in the Natal Museum. You can see that this ties up very well with the prevailing SA political view which categorised everything, from people to what they made and put all these into separate compartments. But back to Maggie's work: I think that subconsciously I recognised that her work introduced something which I felt was very exciting and which I hadn't seen in any other mainstream SA ceramics to date (which is in reply to your suggestion that Maggie might have been the first to fuse images cross-culturally). But because I hadn't concentrated on collecting indigenous ceramics, I wasn't able to make a precise connection - just a loose one.

When Maggie's ceramics went on exhibition, other people also remarked on the influence of indigenous SA pottery in her work and she was praised for this. I never heard a single adverse comment on her work. People recognised that she had introduced an exciting new note into SA ceramics and that the concept of SA ceramics (i.e. by white ceramic artists) had broadened. This opened up the way for indigenous work to enter SA art museum collections.

[In looking up the DAG records I see that already in 1980 i.e. before the Mikula purchases I had purchased 3 (small, but very beautiful) indigenous clay pots by Miriam Mbonambi].

I acquired Rodney's work much later - in 1988. By then everyone accepted that cross-cultural influences were one of the things that made SA unique. These influences became very emphatic, even exaggerated, in Rodney's work. I do not know if Rodney was influenced by Maggie. I think you should phone him and interview him to find out.

You ask what my feelings about assimilation are: well, I feel that it is something to be embraced; and if you look back on the history of (western) art you see that it is the history of people accepting and adapting styles, media, ideas and making them their own which gives their work its individual distinction. It is very exciting for me to see how a potter like Nesta Nala was influenced by the Gauteng potter, Rebecca Mtibe. If you ask Juliet Armstrong, she'll give you what I wrote about that influence as I personally saw Nesta Nala's amazement when she saw Rebecca Mtibe pots which I had acquired for the DAG.

1. How did you come to know Maggie Mikula?

I met her through Terry-Anne Stevenson from the African Art Centre. She introduced me to Paul Mikula who provided space at Roberts House for artists to work. The Zasha Group was formed with many black artists as well as Rodney Blumenfeld and Gert Swart. This group was provided with work areas and exhibitions were organised. We got exposure through it. Pamphlets of these were printed. I was also part of the Claremont Art Society – we did drama, music and poetry and opened exhibitions at the NSA (Natal Society of Artists) Gallery. We also exhibited at Roberts House. I met Maggie there and I knew her from 1987-1989. Paul also provided space to live there and Zamawahke Gumede and Derek Nxumalo stayed at Cedar House for a while. (The Mikula's home).

I also worked with another group at Marianhill Monastery. The Mikulas supported this group and pledged their help with organising materials, contacts etc. They helped as fellow artists. The Mikulas gave me a break- I hadn't exhibited before at big galleries and I saw their support as a development of like-minded souls/artists. I felt Maggie was a mother to me – I felt respected.

2. Did you work with Maggie?

No because I don't do ceramics.

3. What do you think of her ceramics?

I respected her work very much.

4. Paul said you loved her work. Why?

It was so different from what I saw every where. It had an African feel – in a fragile way. She incorporated other stuff. I think it is O.K. for whites born in Africa to absorb African imagery.

5. What was Maggie like as a person?

She was like a mother to me. We had a warm, close connection. As a South African artist she respected and admired my work – that was wonderful. We had a mutual respect for

each other's work. I did not feel patronised – I felt respected. I gave her one of my poster's entitled 'Africa my Motherland'. She loved it.

6. Did she talk about her work?

No. Not even about her pieces on exhibitions. She did give me one of her pieces – a small urn with black figures – Paul said you two like depicting the dead. She gave it to me at the opening of my first exhibition at the NSA- showing her appreciation. I felt very honoured to receive it.

7. Do you know why she incorporated images/shapes from other cultures in her work?

She assumed the influences around her. She wasn't a city person. I think as a person working in Natal - and she grew up in Zululand she knew the people who worked with clay (the locals- Zulus). I even grew up making cows out of clay. She knew the culture.

8. How do you feel about her using sources from different cultures – Egyptian, Zulu?

We all source from different cultures, that's how you grow as a person. You can't be stagnant – in one culture. Picasso also sourced from Africa – I now borrow from Cubism. You don't have to be black to own the black culture. For instance Andrew Walford and his use of Japanese images – you can't say you can't borrow. How are you going to learn about each other if you don't interact. You are entitled to borrow.

9. How did people see her at the time? Unique? Ahead of her time?

Yes. Thami Jali really respected her. He discussed his work with her. He looked at other ceramics and he and I went to the Corobrik exhibition so knew what the ceramics was about.

10. Do you feel she set a precedent? (Was the first to borrow images – in ceramics)
I don't know.

11. Were you aware of any criticism of this borrowing (in the 1980's)?

There was not much inter-action between the cultures then. That has slowly changed. I didn't exhibit with Maggie because she was already a top artist. I exhibited with Rodney

Blumenfeld in 1987 with the Zasha group. I also exhibited with Artists Against Conscription – with Andrew Verster.

12. What about criticism now?

No. There is no negativity about it and I don't even hear of anyone asking who made which work. Work is seen on its merit. For example work by Leonie Malherbe at the Bayside Gallery, September 2000- her cloth piece entitled 'Unplugged' was from Zulu earplugs. Her work inspired me. It didn't offend me at all.

13. Do you think she influenced others with her work?

Yes, definitely Thami Jali.

14. How do you see her work in the art context? As an African or as a white person looking at an African culture?

How do you differentiate race? If you are born and brought up in Africa you have to be influenced and then reflect what you grew up with and what you were looking at.

15. Ilse said you and Thami loved Maggie because she felt you saw her 'Africanness' as authentic- not condescending or patronising. How do you respond.

I agree.