

Shakes Tembani

Born in 1975, Meshack 'Shakes' Tembani grew up in Crossroads, an impoverished region in Cape Town. From a young age he loved art and doggedly persevered to find a way forward in the profession. With no formal art training, and against improbable odds, Tembani succeeded to gain momentum within Cape Town's art community at the turn of the millennium.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Tembani is not interested in depicting township life with its crowded shacks and failing infrastructure. He reduces detail to serve his chief objective of monumentalising his subjects and their contributions to society; he celebrates the beauty in the seemingly ordinary moments of township life in South Africa.

Using a deliberate stylised technique of bold, flat colour, graphic edges and minimalistic tone, Tembani portrays human figures recognisable by their group identity rather than their individual characteristics.

The artist is drawn to female figures as pillars in his community – the hard workers, solo parents, breadwinners and churchgoers. He often depicts uniformed groups with their accordant dress code, symbolic of equality, dignity, solidarity and adherence to a cause greater than the individual.

Tembani completed a certificate in screen-printing, paper-mâché, fabric painting and craft at Ruth Prowse College of Art and Design in 1999, a Diploma in Adult Education at the University of Cape Town (2003) and a Product Design and Development Course at Madesa, Observatory (2004). He was a resident artist at the Castle of Good Hope Art Studios (2007-2011). He has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions and his works are part of private as well as corporate art collections.