

Resource c: semekazi willie bester

[Parts of the World](#), [Africa](#)



Resource C: Semekazi — Willie Bester Willie Bester Born 1956 in Montagu, a small town 150 km from Cape Town, South Africa, Willie Bester is a South African artist famous for his installations made of found objects. Since early years, his talent could be easily observed: when other boys made basic wire cars, his cars were elaborated and decorated. He began to paint at the age of seven. However, his father was a Xhosa and his mother was classified as a Colored according to the apartheid system of the time. When he was 10 years old, his family was forcibly removed in accordance with the Group Areas Act. Bester soon had to leave school to help the family economically. In his late teens, Bester, like many township and rural youth in similar situations, joined the South African Defense Force. He spent a year there and another in a military camp for unemployed black youth. The experiences of raw and naked racism and the war were important influences to his future career. At the age of 30, Bester returned to the childhood interest of art. The Community Arts Project (CAP) in District Six gathered a community of socially committed artists he began to associate with. He used his art to express a political conscience and became active in the anti-apartheid movement. In the 80's, Bester became gradually more successful and well known both nationally and internationally. He made his professional debut in 1991 and now lives and works in Kuilsrivier, a suburban area in Cape Town. Bester's works are collages assembled from scraps and junk — such as shoes, bones, tins, newspaper clippings, and metal pieces from flea markets, townships, and scrap yards combined with the use of oil paints and photographs. The themes of his artworks stem from the political issues of the time they were created: During the Apartheid, forced removals and

brutalization of society, today, crime, greed, poverty and corruption. " People have built up a resistance to anything that addresses the psyche of mankind or people or themselves. I believe that we must protest against that which is wrong. There is no form of escape; remaining apolitical is a luxury that South Africans simply cannot afford" (Bester). Historical Context For 46 long years, from 1948 to 1994, the National Party (NP) government ruled over the land of South Africa. The system of Apartheid, or the " status of being apart" in the Afrikaan language, was enforced by the NP legislation. Apartheid was a system of racial segregation under which the rights of the majority black inhabitants of South Africa were curtailed and white supremacy and Afrikaner minority rule was maintained. It was developed after the World War II by the Afrikaner-dominated National Party and Broederbond organizations and was also practiced in South West Africa, which was administered by South Africa under a League of Nations mandate until it gained independence as Namibia in 1990. Racial segregation in South Africa began in colonial times under Dutch and British rule. However, Apartheid was introduced as an official policy after the general election of 1948. New legislation classified inhabitants into four racial groups — Native, White, Colored, and Asian —and segregated residential areas, sometimes by means of forced removals. In 1970, Non-white political representation was completely abolished, and black people were deprived of their citizenship, legally becoming citizens of one of the ten tribally based, self-governing homelands called " Bantustans", four of which became nominally independent states. The government segregated education, medical care, beaches, and other public services, providing black people with services far

inferior to those provided for white people. Apartheid sparked a significant internal resistance and violence as well as an international long arms and trade embargo against South Africa. Since the 1950s, a series of popular uprisings and protests were met with the banning of opposition and imprisoning of anti-Apartheid leaders within South African borders. As unrest spread and became more effective and militarized, state organizations responded with repression and violence. Reforms to apartheid in the 1980s failed to quell the mounting opposition, and in 1990, President Frederik Willem de Klerk began negotiations to end Apartheid. Multi-racial democratic elections were held in 1994, which were won by the African National Congress under Nelson Mandela. Although the official abolishment of Apartheid occurred in 1990 with repeal of the last of the remaining Apartheid laws, the end of Apartheid is widely regarded as arising from the 1994 democratic general elections. The vestiges of Apartheid still shape the South African politics and society today. Analysis of Artwork Semekazi is a 125cm by 125 cm mixed media piece made on a board with oil, enamel, and scraps of junk by Willie Bester in the year of 1993. It depicts an important theme through a man named "Semekazi" shown at the center of the painting. Bester tried to portray the lives and living conditions of migrant workers in South Africa, thus explaining the second name for this artwork: "Migrant Miseries". The top of the artwork is used covered with a dripping pattern of various colors such as red, yellow, blue, black, and green. Alphabets and numbers written in white can be seen behind the drips. About a quarter way down, there is a line of used cans with numbers and letters painted on in black, yellow, red, and white. The cans are covered with colored stains

behind the numbers. A picture of a dark-skinned family is painted with dramatic shading below the cans to the left. To the right below the cans is a portrait of a laborer and the words NZ S SEMEKAZI painted in white. At the center is a dark skinned man seemingly being held captive in a prison. Down below, there is an identification book, a chain linked to a bible, and a lock. There also are a painted used bicycle wheel and a portrait of a man to the bottom left. To the right, clear red words that say “ NO JOBS” can be seen. Overall, the painting is dark with vivid colors. The 4 colors most well used — Black, red, yellow, and white — represent the four sections that the different races of South Africa were divided into: Native, Colored, Asian, and White. The junk symbolizes the reality of life under the Apartheid regime, where the government disregarded the minorities as if they were nothing more than a piece of trash. The images of the piece are symbols of rampant oppression and deprivation of the government affecting all the people while the single portrait of the worker in the center serves as a single case study of the life of a migrant worker. The artwork outlines the fact that during those times, none of the migrant workers received a pension or a secure and respectable retirement once their tenure was over. Semekazi (Migrant Miseries) is a collage of images depicting the various aspects of Bester’s life as well as the different parts of the lives of migrant workers. It strives to show the reality of life under the Apartheid regime through a series of images. The man Semekazi caught behind a bed frame represents how the migrant workers lived in a prison-like reality, lonely and harsh. The chain linked to a bible shows how even though the African nations were run on Christian beliefs, the world was still linked to the harsh and bleak world of a prison. The words NO

JOB and the picture of the laborer along with the identification book shows how difficult life was for the laborers, how few jobs were open for non-white people. Bester tells the story of his life through his creation, the Semekazi. Even though he had extraordinary talents, he had to live a life imprisoned in the harsh reality of the Apartheid. The picture of the family shown in the left shows how Bester always aspired to lead a family life. Bibliography 1. 2. 3. 4.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willie_Bester <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid> <http://akorra.com/2010/08/17/top-10-famous-african-paintings/> http://www.studyblue.com/#flashcard/edit/6167323/ALL_IN_ORDER