

Local artists give Mickey Mouse an African makeover

'Mickey: The True Original' exhibit sees the world's most famous mouse get a fresh, African-inspired look for his 90th birthday

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Artist Dominic Tshabangu adds the finishing touches to his Mickey statue, which he says reflects a mix of 'contemporary sensibilities and African traditional patterns'.

Image: Tyrone Selmon/Art Eye Gallery

Mickey Mouse has inspired works by many acclaimed artists over the years, including Andy Warhol, Keith Harding and Damien Hirst. Now we can add South African heavyweights to the list.

To celebrate Mickey's 90th birthday, Disney Africa and Art Eye Gallery asked 10 local artists to give a statue of the world's most famous mouse an African-inspired makeover.

They are Colbert Mashile, Dominic Tshabangu, Trevor Coleman, Lee Scott Hempson, Toni Bico, Cassius Khumalo, Louis van den Heever, Nika Mtwaba, Phumzile Bhuthelezi and Welcome Danca.

Now awash with colour, the customised 1.8m-tall statues are on show at Sandton City, Joburg, as part of a roving exhibition called *Mickey: The True Original*. Going to the show will bring a smile to your face and conjure up happy memories of watching Disney cartoons as a child.

This was certainly the case for Durban artist Hempson, who particularly loves the sense of community that Mickey brought to the small town where she grew up. "All the kids would come together to watch [his] movies."

Hempson collaged her Mickey statue with shweshwe prints adding playful South African emblems, such as a rugby ball, an afro comb and even a chicken.

"South Africans love chicken," she explains. "[My favourite symbol] is the Zulu sandal on a roller blade [which appears on Mickey's right foot]; you can imagine yourself rollerblading along the Durban beachfront."



Lee Scott Hempson collaged her Mickey statue with shweshwe prints.

Image: Disney



Colbert Mashile used pattern and colour to 'Africanise' his Mickey statue.

Image: Disney

Growing up in rural Mpumalanga, Mashile didn't get a chance to watch Mickey on TV. "My first glimpse of Mickey was in comic books and the fantastic world he lived in is what stayed with me after all these years," says the artist.

He used colour and pattern to "Africanise" his statue, swapping Mickey's trademark red shorts for a pair in a geometric print. "Mickey has become a mystical creature in this sculpture, much like those I have come to depict in my previous work."



Africa's sunshine was the inspiration behind Toni Bico's Mickey statue.

Image: Disney



Dominic Tshabangu's Mickey statue wears an African mask.

Image: Disney

Soweto-born Tshabangu was also keen that his Mickey statue have a connection with his other artworks, which portray cityscapes and everyday township scenes.

His statue is a mixture of "contemporary sensibilities and African traditional patterns". Mickey wears an African mask, Ndebele jewellery and a pair of patchwork dungarees made from African fabrics.

Bico, who originally hails from Mozambique, took a more abstract approach to decorating his Mickey statue. "Africa is known for the sun and that's how I depicted Mickey – covered in sun rays. A son of Africa," he says.

Mickey: The True Original is on in Johannesburg until October 14. It will then move to Gateway Theatre of Shopping in Durban and Canal Walk in Cape Town.
