

Mandeni bead artist strings together a creative career

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📷 Phumelele Nsele with one of her intricate beaded artworks.

Mandeni bead artist Phumelele Nsele uses her creativity to empower and celebrate women.

Describing herself as still an apprentice artist, she has nevertheless over the past year created stunning beaded work that keeps on evolving, attracting attention and boosting her confidence.

Nsele is currently exploring feminine subjects in her portraits, finding inspiration in women. She also relays personal stories through her art.

Her journey as an artist began with a cartoon-inspired piece, which taught her essential skills and allowed her to explore colours.

She had so much fun creating that artwork that she decided to make a career out of it, boldly leaving her secure job as an engineering surveyor in 2021 to chase her dream.

The mother of two said she was transfixed the moment she laid eyes on Morgan Mahape's beaded artwork at a Zanele Mholi-Somnyama Ngonyama exhibition.

"As fate would have it I met him a few years later and he agreed to mentor me at a time when I was looking for an art school to join. As Chinese Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu once wrote, 'When the student is ready the teacher will appear'."

Nsele's technique of vertical hanging strings is an ancient one, which was used functionally in some cultures to separate rooms where doors or walls were absent.

Her art is a fine interpretation of that, extending depth and texture into the artwork.

Beads are also an important part of African culture.

In the Zulu culture, for example, a woman gifts a string of beads to a suitor as a response to agreeing to be in union with him.

"I am inspired to translate those kinds of stories into my art in celebration of art itself, cultures and the stories told from generation to generation.

Nsele carefully plans each art piece before the first string of beads comes to life.

She is currently focusing on growing as an artist and solidifying her voice through gallery displays and private sales.

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