

**URBAN BLACK LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS IN  
JOHANNESBURG, DEPICTED BY TOWNSHIP ART  
(1940s TO 1970s)**

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**Stedelike swartes se lewens- en werksomstandighede in Johannesburg, soos uitgebeeld deur *Township*-kuns (1940's tot 1970's)**

Die doel van hierdie artikel is om beter begrip vir die lewe in swart stedelike gebiede te bewerkstellig deur gebruik te maak van kunswerke deur swart kunstenaars wat van die vroeë 1940's tot die middel van die 1970's in Soweto en die omliggende gebiede gewoon en gewerk het. Hierdie kunstenaars het die volgende ingesluit: Gerard Sekoto, Durant Sihlali en John Mohl. Werke deur hierdie kunstenaars sal ontleed word ten einde die lewe in die woonbuurtes uit te beeld, veral die lewens- en werksomstandighede van die swart inwoners. 'n Ontleding van hierdie werke, wat deel van *Township*-kuns uitmaak, behoort die leser aan 'n belewenis van die lewe in die woonbuurtes bekend te stel en kan as 'n beginpunt vir verdere ondersoek dien. Dit kan die leser en aanskouer van die kuns voorts ook tot beter begrip vir die sosiologie van verstedeliking in die woonbuurtes lei. Dié artikel sal die kultuurhistoriese waarde van *Township*-kuns onomwonde beklemtoon.

**Slutelwoorde:** Durant Sihlali, Gerard Sekoto, Johannesburg se stedelike swart woonbuurtes, John Mohl, lewensomstandighede van stedelike swartes, Soweto, *Township*-kuns; werksomstandighede van stedelike swartes

The aim of this article is to form a better understanding of life in black urban areas, using art that was created by black artists who lived and worked in Soweto and surrounding areas from the early 1940s up to the mid 1970s. These artists included Gerard Sekoto, Durant Sihlali and John Mohl. Works created by these black artists will be analysed in order to formulate an idea of what life was like in the townships, especially the living and working conditions of the black inhabitants. An analysis of these works, which form part of Township Art, ought to introduce the reader to an experience of township life and serve as a doorway for further investigation. It

can also provide the reader and the viewer of the art with some understanding of the sociology of urbanisation in the townships. This article will clearly emphasise the cultural-historical value of Township Art.

**Keywords:** Durant Sihlali, Gerard Sekoto, Johannesburg urban black townships, John Mohl, Soweto, Township Art, urban black living conditions, urban black working conditions

## Introduction

Works of art can be of great value to the cultural historian as it can CONVEY meaning, make a political or social comment and be a symbol of events, which have been experienced and seen. Township Art provides the viewer with a piece of history from the artist's point of view, which depicts his or her culture and history. The artist John Mohl in particular, felt that black artists should be the interpreters of black people to the other races.<sup>1</sup> He, together with several other black artists, worked in a genre that interpreted and depicted the culture of urban black Johannesburg between the early 1940s and the mid 1970s.

This urban black environment was rooted in the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand (Rand) in the 1880s, which signalled the end of rural living and the start of urbanisation.<sup>2</sup> The industrial growth on the Rand increased the need for cheap labour, which resulted in a major influx of black labour from rural areas into Johannesburg and the surrounding areas. By the 1940s, almost 90% of blacks living in urban areas lived on the Rand.<sup>3</sup> Conditions in the rural areas, drought, poverty and overpopulation also forced many blacks to migrate to Johannesburg.<sup>4</sup> By the 1950s, the population in the Johannesburg black township of Sophiatown alone was 40 000.<sup>5</sup>

Life in the urban areas exposed blacks to a different way of living, which led to the process of acculturation. Many adapted to life in the cities by adapting to a more westernised lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> This also influenced the artistic practice of blacks, changing

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<sup>1</sup> E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (Cape Town, 1997), p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh. Everyday life on the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* (Johannesburg, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa III. A place in the city. The Rand on the eve of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 1987), p.3.

<sup>4</sup> D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa: the real story* (Cape Town, 1994), p. 354.

<sup>5</sup> P. Gready, The Sophiatown writers of the fifties: the unreal reality of their world, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16(1), March 1990, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> J.E.H. Grobler, Ontspanning in die Suid-Afrikaanse swart gemeenskap: 'n kultuurhistoriese perspektief, *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Kultuur- en Kunstgeskiedenis* 1(4), Desember 1987, p. 322.

it to a more westernised aesthetic rather than the African aesthetic, which consisted of craftsmen and women making objects for social, cultural and religious purposes.<sup>7</sup> The modern urbanised black painters adopted more westernised ideas and methods in their art, just like they adopted more westernised ways of living. This resulted in the development of an art genre among black artists classified as Township Art, which was concerned with representational depictions of township life and urban slum culture.<sup>8</sup>

By looking at paintings in this genre and using art as a way to explore human culture, the article aims to investigate the relationship between art and urban living and working conditions in the black townships in and surrounding Johannesburg. In an article about art in the townships, Rebecca Lammas notes that the geographer can make good use of this art genre as it presents a perspective from the inhabitants' point of view on life in the townships. It can furthermore clarify and embellish urban activities.<sup>9</sup> The cultural historian can also make use of artworks from this genre as they offer the viewer of the works a view into the culture, documented from an insider's perspective. Cultural products like these paintings, as well as poetry, plays, literature, music and art convey, in a sense, the existence, experience and conditions of township life.<sup>10</sup> As a source, it can be likened to a visual diary, in which the artist conveys his or her perspective on township life. In this article, the artworks will be interpreted in a similar way as diary inscriptions, as both art and diaries are very personal and will provide a more personalised perspective on the broader cultural historical view.

Artworks created by black artists, in particular Gerard Sekoto, John Mohl and Durant Sihlali, who lived and worked in Soweto and surrounding areas from the early 1940s up to the mid 1970s, are used in this article. This period has been chosen as the first township artists like Gerard Sekoto and John Mohl began painting township scenes just before the 1940s. The stylistic genre in which they worked, Township Art, then continued to grow and develop until the mid 1970s when Township Art began to take on a new, more militant and radical form.

Previous studies on Township Art have been done by Gavin Younge in his *Art of the South African township* (London, 1988), which consider a later period in this genre. Matsemela Manaka's *Echoes of African art* (Braamfontein, 1987), E.J. de Jager's *Images of man* (Fort Hare, 1992), Anita Nettleton and David Hammond-Tooke's *African art in Southern Africa – from tradition to township* (Johannesburg,

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<sup>7</sup> A. Nettleton & D. Hammond-Tooke, *African art in Southern Africa – from tradition to township*, (Johannesburg, 1989), pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> A. Nettleton & D. Hammond-Tooke, *African art in Southern Africa* (1989), pp. 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> R. Lammas, Townscapes, townshapes, townships: investigating experiences of urban South Africa through black art, *Geo-Journal* 30(1), May 1993, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> R. Lammas, Townscapes, townshapes, townships (1993), pp. 45-46.

1989) also refer to and provide insight into this genus of art. Other sources include the exhibition catalogue from *The art of urbanisation* exhibition, curated by Warren Siebrits (Johannesburg, 2003), as well as other exhibition catalogues in which some of the works that will be analysed were included.

Elsa Miles's *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (Cape Town, 1997) and *Polly Street – the story of an art centre* (Johannesburg, 2004) provided more insight into the lives and experience of the artists themselves. These sources, together with the articles in Hayden Proud's *Revisions. Expanding the narrative of South African art* (Pretoria, 2006), as well as N. Chabani Manganyi's *Gerard Sekoto 'I am an African'* (Johannesburg, 2001), and S. Sack's *The neglected tradition: towards a new history of South African art* (Johannesburg, 1988) provided the information needed to understand the artists' experiences and depictions.

In her article, "Townscapes, townshapes, townships: investigating experiences of urban South Africa through black art" (*Geo-Journal* 30(1), May 1993), Rebeca Lammas provides valuable reasoning for the use of art in understanding township life.

The sources on urbanisation were used to create an understanding of the environment in which the works were created. Luli Callinicos's books *A people's history of South Africa II. Working life: factories, townships and popular culture on the Rand, 1886-1940* (Johannesburg, 1987) and *A people's history of South Africa III. A place in the city. The Rand on the eve of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 1987) were useful sources, providing information on most of the aspects of urbanisation, which are examined in this article. However, her books do not go into depth on these issues, requiring the use of more sources on the topic.

This information was found in the source of P. Smit and J.J. Booysen, *Swart verstedeliking: proses, patroon en strategie* (Pretoria, 1981) and in the chapter of P.S Hatting and J.J Olivier, "Swart verstedeliking in Suid-Afrika: 'n fasemodel van prosesse en ruimtelike strukture", in F.A. van Jaarsveld's book *Verstedeliking in Suid-Afrika*, (Pretoria, 1985). The chapter by E.P. Hellmann, "The native in the towns" in *The Bantu-speaking tribes of South Africa: an ethnological survey* (London, 1937), edited by I. Schapera and the article by S. Parnell, "Racial segregation in Johannesburg: the Slums Act, 1934-39" (*South African Geographical Journal* 70(2), September 1988), provided excellent information and insight in the creation of the black urban environment. The book *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (Johannesburg 1990), by W.J.P Carr provided a more detailed look at Soweto itself, where many of the artists lived and worked. P. Gready's article, "The Sophiatown writers of the fifties: the unreal reality of their world" (*Journal of Southern African Studies* 16(1),

March 1990), gave specific information on the life and the experience of living in Sophiatown. These sources provided information on the shaping of urban areas, as well as the mindset of white South Africans, which was also communicated through the work of the township artists.

The article by Krige, “Some social and economic facts revealed in native family budgets” (*Race Relations* 1(6), October–November 1934), which looked at the economic aspects (the budgets of black families) in the townships, was also of value as it not only provided information on the economic aspects, but also showed how these aspects had an impact on black urban township life as a whole.

However, the most important source of information was the artworks themselves through which the experiences of urbanisation in Johannesburg’s black townships are told.

By combining the different types of sources, one hopes to create a better understanding of the living and working conditions in the urban black townships of Johannesburg, and to give a view of how the people who lived there and tried to exist in that environment, experienced township life.

## Historical background

When looking at any art genre, it is important to understand the historical events that could have influenced or led to its creation. When looking at Township Art, one must also understand the causes and historical processes that created these environments. Various reasons led to the increase in urbanisation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The biggest reason was the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand and the growing industries, which caused a great need for cheap labour and thus resulted in the recruitment of labourers by mine owners. The shortage of land also created a push force amongst blacks to move to urban areas to make a living.<sup>11</sup> Taxes were also imposed on the blacks to cover administration costs and to force them into labour in the mines, which increased their financial burden. More exposure to the Western culture also created a demand for Western products that could only be obtained through money.<sup>12</sup>

The gold mining industry continued growing, drawing more and more people to the city resulting in overcrowding and causing the development of slum areas.<sup>13</sup> *The*

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<sup>11</sup> P.S Hatting & J.J. Olivier, Swart verstedeliking in Suid-Afrika: ‘n fasemodel van prosesse en ruimtelike strukture, in F. A. van Jaarsveld (red.), *Verstedeliking in Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria, 1985), p. 33.

<sup>12</sup> A.A. Dubb, The impact of the city, in W.D. Hammond-Tooke (ed.), *The Bantu speaking peoples of Southern Africa* (London, 1974), p. 445.

<sup>13</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people’s history of South Africa II. Working life: factories, townships and popular culture on the Rand, 1886-1940* (Johannesburg, 1987), pp. 68-71.

*Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923* enforced the myth that the black migrant workers would only stay in the cities for a short time by propagating the idea that they were only there to work. It was also one of the major legislations that contributed to the policy of urban segregation.<sup>14</sup> Its aim was to control the urbanisation of blacks by using influx control and a pass system. The Act also made the different municipalities responsible for providing housing and services to the locations. Municipalities were, however, unwilling to spend money on housing as the people for whom they were providing homes could often not afford to pay the rent.<sup>15</sup> This meant that services were, at most, limited, if existent at all. Basic needs like fresh water, sewage and rubbish removal were neglected, turning the townships into places with serious health hazards.<sup>16</sup>

The continuing fear of health hazards and slum conditions contributed to the forced removals of many urbanised blacks during the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> When the National Party came into power in 1948 a system of Apartheid was instituted: this supported separation of inner-city living areas based on race. One of the main aspects was the removal of black townships out of so-called white residential areas, leading to large-scale removals and demolition of places like Sophiatown as well as Pimville and the Western Native Township in the 1950s.<sup>18</sup>

Sophiatown, Newclare and Martindale were early freehold townships on the Rand in which blacks could own the land.<sup>19</sup> People were forced out of the inner-city areas, due to closure of unsanitary properties, which caused more people to stream to these townships. Consequently these freehold townships started to fill up with people who had nowhere else to go.<sup>20</sup> Orlando was built in 1930 in order to help relieve the need for housing but many blacks chose to live in freehold townships, which were free from municipal control.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Although incorrect, the idea of temporary urbanisation persisted into the 1970s (P. Smit & J.J. Booysen, *Swart verstedeliking: proses, patroon en strategie* (Pretoria, 1981), p. 23.)

<sup>15</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), pp. 170-171; P. Smit & J.J. Booysen, *Swart verstedeliking: proses, patroon en strategie* (1981), p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa I* (1987), p. 175.

<sup>17</sup> S. Parnell, Racial segregation in Johannesburg: the Slums Act, 1934-39, *South African Geographical Journal* 70(2), p. 110.

<sup>18</sup> J.J. Olivier & P.S. Hattingh, Die Suid-Afrikaanse stad as funksioneel-ruimtelike sisteem met besondere verwysing na Pretoria, in F. A. Van Jaarsveld (red.), *Verstedeliking in Suid-Afrika*, (1985), p. 50; W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (Johannesburg, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> P. Gready, The Sophiatown writers of the fifties (1990), p. 141.

<sup>20</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), pp. 179-180.

<sup>21</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 177; W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (Johannesburg, 1990), pp. 21-22.

Massive forced removals meant that conditions of overcrowding took over in the townships and in turn caused illegal settlements to grow as more and more blacks were left homeless. The increase in the black urban population during the Second World War caused more problems with a shortage of housing, transport, medical and recreational services.<sup>22</sup> To stop the increase in squatter movements, the Johannesburg City Council enforced strict influx control measures. The Council then began planning new segregated black townships beyond Orlando, where they could move the squatters, as well as the slum dwellers of Sophiatown.<sup>23</sup>

Soweto, which is derived from *South Western Township*, was built by the Johannesburg City Council to supply homes for the overflow in the 1930s. As the squatting problem grew, more land was added to Soweto to provide housing.<sup>24</sup> When enough land became available after 1946, planning for Orlando West, Meadowlands and other townships was started. The then 21 existing townships in 1951 were still not enough and more land was purchased on which serviced sites were given to blacks where they could build their own temporary shacks after which a permanent dwelling would be constructed at a later stage.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these attempts at providing housing, services and amenities to urban blacks, life in the urban black townships was difficult and a continuous struggle to overcome poverty and suffering. These circumstances thus created the historical backdrop in which Gerard Sekoto, John Mohl & Durant Sihlali found their inspiration for their works of art.

Through investigating the living and working conditions of urban blacks, in conjunction with the artworks made about these topics, one hopes to construct a better understanding of what life was like in this historical context.

### **Urban black living and working conditions as seen through Township Art**

Moving from a rural environment to the urban townships was often very daunting and even confusing for those entering into the city for the first time. The artist George Pemba, who worked mainly in Port Elizabeth, for example on visit to Johannesburg experienced the modern City of Gold as overwhelming, comparing it to a “host of giants”, while at the same time seeing tribesmen working together in their traditional clothing on the mines.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), pp. 24-25.

<sup>23</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa III. A place in the city. The Rand on the eve of Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 1987), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), p.10.

<sup>25</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), pp. 47-50.

<sup>26</sup> E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (1997), p. 71.

On arrival, the new inhabitants in the city had to face the daunting task of finding housing. Those who had family, friends or fellow tribesman in the township stayed with them, while others found space in hostels or mining compounds. One of the most common ways of finding accommodation was renting an available room.<sup>27</sup> Sophiatown was a working class township occupied by mostly tenants and sub-tenants.<sup>28</sup> Blacks could own property but, because the mortgage was expensive, many landlords took in tenants to help cover the costs.<sup>29</sup> This was because the difference between the property owners and their tenants was mainly their social aspirations, rather than their financial standing.<sup>30</sup> Leasing rooms was also an alternative way of earning the necessary income to survive economically, with rents per room equalling and sometimes excelling that of municipal houses.<sup>31</sup>

One of the aspects that characterised Sophiatown was that the stands were occupied by one house in the front and as many as possible rooms fitted into the backyard. This was because the bylaw, which limited the amount of dwellings on a stand to one shack, was only partially enforced leading to an average of eight families per stand.<sup>32</sup> On Sundays the streets would fill with visitors and residents, while under the surface poverty, filth, crime, overcrowding and hopelessness dwelled.<sup>33</sup> It was described as a place where the “best and the worst of urban life were bedfellows.”<sup>34</sup> Life on the streets was, however, one of the most important aspects of the townships.<sup>35</sup> This was an experience that the artist Gerard Sekoto was probably very familiar with.

Jan Gerard Sekoto was born in 1913 to the missionary couple Andreas Sekoto and his wife Anne Serote near the missionary station Botshabelo.<sup>36</sup> His father lived and worked as an evangelist and teacher on the farm Wonderhoek, in the vicinity of Botshabelo.<sup>37</sup> It was on this farm that Sekoto spent his childhood years, moving to Botshabelo only in 1928 when he was 15, to receive further schooling.<sup>38</sup> After school,

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<sup>27</sup> A. A. Dubb, *The impact of the city* (1974), p. 446.

<sup>28</sup> P. Gready, *The Sophiatown writers of the fifties* (1990), p. 141.

<sup>29</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> P. Gready, *The Sophiatown writers of the fifties* (1990), p. 141.

<sup>31</sup> E.J. Krige, Some social and economic facts revealed in native family budgets, *Race Relations* 1(6), October-November 1934, p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> P. Gready, *The Sophiatown writers of the fifties* (1990), p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), p. 85.

<sup>34</sup> P. Gready, *The Sophiatown writers of the fifties* (1990), p. 140.

<sup>35</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (1997), p. 77.

<sup>37</sup> L. Spiro, *Gerard Sekoto: unsevered ties – Johannesburg Art Gallery 1.11.1989-10.2.1990*, (Johannesburg, 1989), p. 9; E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (1997), p. 77.

<sup>38</sup> N. Chabani Manganyi, *Gerard Sekoto 'I am an African'* (Johannesburg, 2001), p. 5; L. Spiro, *Gerard Sekoto: unsevered ties* (1989), p. 11.



Sekoto qualified as a primary school teacher from the Grace Dieu Diocesan Training College where he received his first art lessons.<sup>39</sup> At the end of 1939, Sekoto left the teaching profession and moved to Sophiatown to start his career as an artist.<sup>40</sup> This decision propelled Sekoto out of his rural existence into the urban world.

Sekoto's move to Sophiatown was motivated by his opinion that he needed to explore his country and its people before travelling overseas.<sup>41</sup> Gerard Sekoto felt that the vitality of Sophiatown was "a great stimulus" for him.<sup>42</sup> The fact that his parents had already been exposed to Western ideas, through their missionary lives, also helped him in adapting to the modern urban world. Becoming urbanised then enabled him to further his career as an artist, as well as exposing him to life in urban townships.

The South African period of Sekoto's work was filled with urban scenes, depicting streets in the townships, social pastimes and vices. Sekoto said about his topics that he wanted to capture the "life of the people and their expressions."<sup>43</sup> However, he expressed his own experience of being a black artist in a white art market as rather negative, saying that the South African black artist had very little access to the exchange of ideas and possibilities.<sup>44</sup>

His street scene of Sophiatown provides an image of what Sophiatown looked like. *Yellow houses – Sophiatown* (1940) (**Figure 1**) was painted while he lived with his cousins in their house in Gerty Street.<sup>45</sup> It had a big window that faced the street. From this position, Sekoto was able to view the people and their activities in the street, which he depicted in his work.<sup>46</sup> A dusty road, full of stones leads the viewer's eye past a pile of rubbish, both signs of the lack of public services, showing the substandard state of conditions in the townships. According to Callinicos roads in townships were mere dirt tracks. Water was drawn from open wells, which was often infected by refuse and drowned animals, and sewage buckets were collected on an irregular basis.<sup>47</sup> The colouring of the painting itself, however, communicates the idea that Sophiatown had a positive atmosphere, regardless of its lack of public services. After its destruction, Sophiatown was remembered for its liveliness and sense of freedom, and was even called 'the little Paris of the Transvaal.'<sup>48</sup>

<sup>39</sup> N. Chabani Manganyi, *Gerard Sekoto 'I am an African'* (2001), p. 19; L. Spiro, *Gerard Sekoto: unsevered ties* (1989), pp. 11-13.

<sup>40</sup> N. Chabani Manganyi, *Gerard Sekoto 'I am an African'* (2001), pp. 23-25.

<sup>41</sup> E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (1997), p. 78.

<sup>42</sup> N. Chabani Manganyi, *Gerard Sekoto 'I am an African'* (2001), p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> N. Chabani Manganyi, *Gerard Sekoto 'I am an African'* (2001), p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (1997), p. 79.

<sup>45</sup> L. Spiro, *Gerard Sekoto: unsevered ties* (1989), p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> N. Chabani Manganyi, *Gerard Sekoto 'I am an African'* (2001), pp. 29, 31.

<sup>47</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 180.

<sup>48</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 179.



**Figure 1: Gerard Sekoto, *Yellow houses – Sophiatown*, 1940**

From: <http://www.art.co.za/gerardsekoto/>

Despite the poor conditions, blacks still preferred the freehold townships to municipal housing provided in places like Orlando. Some of the reasons for their preference of the freehold townships above the municipal locations were the relative freedom from the control of the state-owned townships with its fences, superintendent and regimented geometry.<sup>49</sup>

A comment that Sekoto made about *Yellow houses – Sophiatown*, may also provide a reason. He said that “...the inquisitive eye was attracted by the wall covering the illicit beer holes...”<sup>50</sup> As beer brewing by blacks themselves was illegal (municipalities had a beer-brewing monopoly and used the money derived from that to cover the cost of housing and services in urban black townships), it had to be done without the authorities noticing. While it was dangerous doing this in a freehold township like Sophiatown, it was even more dangerous doing it in any municipal township.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> P. Gready, *The Sophiatown writers of the fifties* (1990), p. 142.

<sup>50</sup> Gerard Sekoto Foundation, <http://www.art.co.za/gerardsekoto/default.htm>, s.a. Access: 2009-04-30.

<sup>51</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 177.

Another artist whose work included street scenes of places that were later destroyed, was John Koenekkeefe Mohl. Born in 1903 in Dinokana near Zeerust, the young Mohl already had a strong artistic sense while still in school. Reverend Hale of the London Missionary Society recognised his artistic ability and later enabled Mohl to attend the Tigerskloof Training School in Vryburg.<sup>52</sup> After he received his teacher's diploma he went to Namibia and Germany to continue his studies.<sup>53</sup> On his return from Germany, Mohl settled in Sophiatown.<sup>54</sup> He had a strong need to communicate the importance of art to his people and to show that black artists could also produce quality art works.<sup>55</sup> He felt that it was of great importance that there were black artists who could paint their own people, life and way of living without being influenced by apartheid or the spirit of submission.<sup>56</sup> Because of this strong need to educate his people, he started an art school, 'The White Studio', in 1944 in the backyard of his house in Annadale Street, Sophiatown. His aim with the school was to encourage black talent by providing talented students with quality training.<sup>57</sup> He continued to give art classes until the mid 1950s when he, together with the rest of Sophiatown, was forcibly removed.<sup>58</sup> After the forced removals, Mohl moved to Soweto where he finally settled in Moroka Township. He also continued to give art classes at the Madibande High School in Soweto and held exhibitions in his garden.<sup>59</sup>

Mohl worked in oils, depicting scenes from the townships in which he lived. The emphasis is mostly placed on the atmospheric qualities of early morning, rainy, misty or night scenes.<sup>60</sup> In the urban scenes he often depicted the devastating side of life in townships. He also depicted the dehumanising effect of the mining industry on its workers in the numerous paintings of mine workers, which will be discussed later in this article.<sup>61</sup> His work observes life in the township, and provides a softer impression of what he saw. His exposure to Western notions of art helped him to create visual accounts of the people and the places in the townships as well as interpreting their culture in a visual way

<sup>52</sup> E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (1997), p. 58.

<sup>53</sup> E. Miles, "John Koenekkeefe Mohl", in H. Proud (ed.), *Revisions. Expanding the narrative of South African art* (Pretoria, 2006), p. 112.

<sup>54</sup> E.J. de Jager, *Images of man. Contemporary South African black art & artists* (Fort Hare, 1992), p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> S. Sack, *The neglected tradition: towards a new history of South African art (1930-1988)* (Johannesburg, 1988), p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (1997), p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> E. Miles, *Land and lives: a story of early black artists* (1997), p. 62.

<sup>58</sup> E. Miles, "John Koenekkeefe Mohl" (2006), p. 112; W. Siebrits, *Sekoto to Sihlali: nine black pioneers of South African art*. Exhibition catalogue (Johannesburg, 2004), unpaginated.

<sup>59</sup> E. Miles, "John Koenekkeefe Mohl" (2006), p. 112.

<sup>60</sup> E.J. de Jager, *Images of man. Contemporary South African black art & artists* (1992), p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> E. Miles, "John Koenekkeefe Mohl" (2006), p. 112.

One of the places that Mohl recorded was Newclare Location, which was in many respects very similar to Sophiatown as it was also a privately owned freehold township.<sup>62</sup> Overcrowding in Newclare and in Sophiatown, as well as Martindale and the Malay Location, became a problematic issue during and after the Second World War (1939-1945) as people streamed to Johannesburg in need of work and accommodation. Many people looked for a place to stay in the privately owned townships, which resulted in conditions of overcrowding that was considered to be worse than in the municipal townships.<sup>63</sup> Newclare had the same fate as the rest of the ‘Western Areas’ (which included Sophiatown, Newclare and Martindale), which at first faced stricter administrative control, an increase in rent and transport, and lastly forced removals.<sup>64</sup> Eventually the whole of the Western Areas was removed by the late 1950s.<sup>65</sup>

The street scene of Newclare, *A view of New Clare Location, Johannesburg* (1948) (**Figure 2**), provides a panoramic view of the township. A dirt road leads down a hill past several buildings. In the distant background one can see the next hill covered with more dwellings, which covers the entire background landscape. Three dirt roads run through them over the hill. The fourth dirt road leads the eye to the horizon that, together with the dwellings covering the entire landscape, creates the idea of an almost infinite stretch of houses, which continues beyond the horizon.

The foreground gives an idea of the condition of Newclare. The dirt road is slanted and appears to be uneven. As this was a freehold township like Sophiatown, the Johannesburg City Council did not accept any responsibility for amenities.<sup>66</sup> The houses also appear to be small with a small tin shelter in between. Since this was not a municipal built township, each building is different with its own character. A few people fill the street. Like Sekoto’s *Yellow Houses – Sophiatown, A view of New Clare Location, Johannesburg*, provides historical reference of what the township looked like in the late 1940s. It also creates the sense of overcrowded conditions with the house-filled landscape that was common in most townships.

Residents in Pimville, another township in the Johannesburg area, were originally allowed to build their own homes. This led to a variety of shapes, sizes, and mud or brick homes, all with corrugated iron roofs. Like in Sophiatown, the inhabitants of Pimville built rows of extra rooms in their backyards, which they then rented out to others to earn an extra income. Conditions were poor, with overcrowding as well as

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<sup>62</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), p. 42.

<sup>64</sup> P. Gready, *The Sophiatown writers of the fifties* (1990), p. 157.

<sup>65</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), p. 88.

<sup>66</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), p. 85.



**Figure 2: John Mohl, *A view of New Clare Location, Johannesburg, 1948***

From: <http://www.johansborman.co.za/sa-masters/mohl-john/>

no water-borne sewage that led to very unsanitary conditions.<sup>67</sup> The conditions were so bad that it had one of the highest mortality rates for children under the age of five. The Johannesburg Native Affairs Department showed that in 1940, Pimville only had 36 drains, 230 rubbish bins, 63 taps and 2 392 houses with an average of 16 people per house. In comparison with the other townships, Pimville had the least services available, which explains the conditions of squalor in this township.<sup>68</sup> Eventually in the 1960s, new housing was made available for the inhabitants of Pimville and they were removed from the township.<sup>69</sup>

An artist that recorded many scenes depicting this particular township was Durant Sihlali. He was born on 5 March 1935 in Germiston. His artistic abilities were stimulated from a young age by his father's own interest in art.<sup>70</sup> He was also influenced by the nomadic lifestyle in which he grew up. He said "[w]hat really influenced my childhood was the fact that we used to live a nomadic life, moving from one area to another and the memory of the past places used to haunt me..."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), pp. 11-12.

<sup>68</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 188.

<sup>69</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> E.J. de Jager, *Images of man. Contemporary South African black art & artists* (1992), p. 52.

After school, at the age of sixteen, Sihlali enrolled at the Polly Street Art Centre where he received training from Cecil Skotnes, as well as the artists Carlo Sdoya, Sidney Goldblatt and Ulrich Schwanecke.<sup>72</sup> Like Mohl, Sihlali also taught fellow artists at various art centres in Soweto in the late 1970s, as well as heading the fine arts department at FUBA (Federated Union of Black Artists) from 1983 to 1988.<sup>73</sup>

As an artist, Sihlali believed that it was necessary for him to record the people and the townships where he had lived, including the neighbourhoods where people were removed from.<sup>74</sup> For him, his art was a voice to use against issues of social injustice and degradation of fellow human beings in the townships.<sup>75</sup> It was also important for him to document the places in Soweto as he felt that it would one day serve as a visual reminder of the history of Soweto and the townships.<sup>76</sup> He was particularly interested in scenes depicting the destruction of older black townships. His work in this sense is of historical value as it provides images of demolished places, as well as of the culture of the township inhabitants.<sup>77</sup>

Sihlali's oil painting, *Pimville* (1971) (**Figure 3**), depicts the abject living conditions, which people in this township had to endure. Sihlali purposefully portrayed the wretched conditions in his paintings to serve as a reminder to future generations. In his comment on these works, which includes the oil painting *Pimville*, he says: "Pimville, which was demolished some time ago wasn't a good time, but it is good for Africans to remember it."<sup>78</sup>

In this painting, one can see three houses built closely together. One can almost make out another building, which is almost visible through the open spaces between the building in the middle and the building on the right-hand side. Several figures fill the foreground. In the foreground is a pile of dirt, which could possibly be a rubbish heap. The fact that people were living with a rubbish heap between the dwellings, conveys the unsanitary conditions in which they had to live. This is emphasised by the painting technique that creates the feeling of dilapidation in the buildings but also in the people's clothing. It almost appears as if the houses are about to fall apart, while the

<sup>71</sup> W. Siebrits, *Art and urbanisation. South Africa 1940-1971*. Exhibition Catalogue (Johannesburg, 2005), unpaginated.

<sup>72</sup> E. Miles, *Polly Street – The story of an art centre* (Johannesburg, 2004), p. 42.

<sup>73</sup> E.J. de Jager, *Images of man. Contemporary South African black art & artists* (1992), p. 52; J. Dolby, "Durant Sihlali", in H. Proud (ed.), *Revisions. Expanding the narrative of South African art*, (Pretoria, 2006), p. 166.

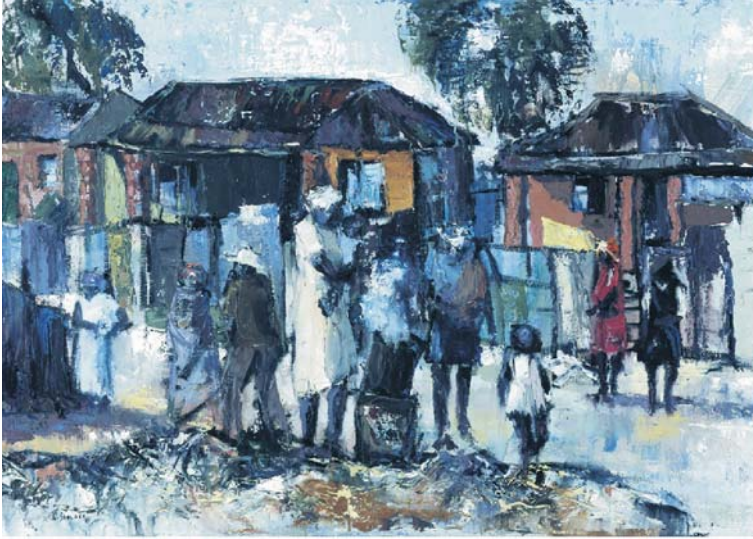
<sup>74</sup> E. Miles, *Polly Street – The story of an art centre* (2004), p. 42.

<sup>75</sup> W. Siebrits, *Sekoto to Sihlali: nine black pioneers of South African art* (2004), unpaginated.

<sup>76</sup> W. Siebrits, *Art and urbanisation. South Africa 1940-1971* (2005), unpaginated.

<sup>77</sup> E.J. de Jager, *Images of man. Contemporary South African black art & artists* (1992), p. 52.

<sup>78</sup> W. Siebrits, *Art and urbanisation. South Africa 1940-1971* (2005), unpaginated.



**Figure 3: Durant Sihali, *Pimville*, 1971**

From: W. Siebrits, *Art and Urbanisation. South Africa 1940–1971*.  
Exhibition catalogue, (Johannesburg, 2003), unpaginated.

overall blue tone of the painting emphasises the fact that this is a depressing situation. Not only does this painting provide the viewer with a historical reference of what Pimville looked like, but it also creates the idea of what the inhabitants experienced while living in these hopeless conditions.

The move from the rural to the urban areas also brought extra expenses with it. Before, families could live from the food that they produced on the farms. In the townships there was no space, which meant that they had to buy all of the food. Newly acquired demands for Western products like salt, tea and soap, together with rent and tax payments also put more strain on an already thinly stretched income.<sup>79</sup> There were several ways of earning money. Men would usually go into the cities where they would try to find work on the mines or in offices, shops and garages.<sup>80</sup> Renting out rooms in the backyard was a popular way of earning income for those who owned a house. The shortage of housing made a place to stay a valuable commodity, but was also the cause of overcrowding that led to the poor living conditions as seen in the works mentioned above. In most cases, the income from these rooms were more than the

<sup>79</sup> A.A. Dubb, “The impact of the city” (1974), p. 445.

<sup>80</sup> E.J. Krige, *Some social and economic facts revealed in native family budgets* (1934), p. 95.

standard wage, even after deductions had been made for repairs and other expenses had been paid.<sup>81</sup> These rooms were built in the backyards, often with very little, if any space between them. There was almost no ventilation or any proper sewage system. This led to extreme unsanitary conditions.<sup>82</sup>

One of the watercolours painted by Sihlali from his Pimville series illustrates these extra rooms. *Pimville location* (1971) (**Figure 4**) depicts two sites with houses built on it. Extra rooms, made out of corrugated iron and other available material, have been added on behind the house on the right-hand side. A single lavatory services this site with all its tenants. Although the house on the left has no added rooms, it is in the same dilapidated state as the rest of the buildings. The wall that divides the yards have crumbled down and large pieces of brick have been exposed by plaster that has fallen off. Children are playing on a dustbin, while two women gossip and another woman with a baby enters from the left. Despite the unsanitary and crowded conditions, many people found a place to stay in these rooms. In some cases, one could find up to 80 people living on stands with an average of 16 rooms.<sup>83</sup>



**Figure 4: Durant Sihlali, *Pimville location*, 1971**

From: <http://www.warrensiebrite.co.za/show.php?id=124>.

<sup>81</sup> E.J. Krige, *Some social and economic facts revealed in native family budgets* (1934), p. 96.

<sup>82</sup> E.J. Krige, *Some social and economic facts revealed in native family budgets* (1934), p. 96.

<sup>83</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 180.



Many black men, who entered the urban areas, worked on the mines. The mines of the City of Gold was thus one of the biggest employers of blacks.<sup>84</sup> Mining was a field that particularly interested John Mohl. Many of his paintings after the 1960s were painted within this subject matter. He usually exaggerated the miners and placed them in contrast with their surroundings, which gave a sense of courage and strength to the figures.<sup>85</sup> Mohl's *Miners in the moonlight* (1970) (**Figure 5**) depicts several men, walking back from the mines with their flashlights. They are walking next to the power cables, which is dwarfed by their size. A mine dump and shaft can be seen in the distance. The men in the image are strong and muscular as one would expect from miners. This painting was made in the 1970s and shows how these mine workers remained exploited as they could only leave work after the sun had set. The other possibility is of course that these men were on their way to start their night shift at the mines. These miners worked long hours for very little pay. Their large figures,



**Figure 5: John Mohl, *Miners in the moonlight*, 1970**

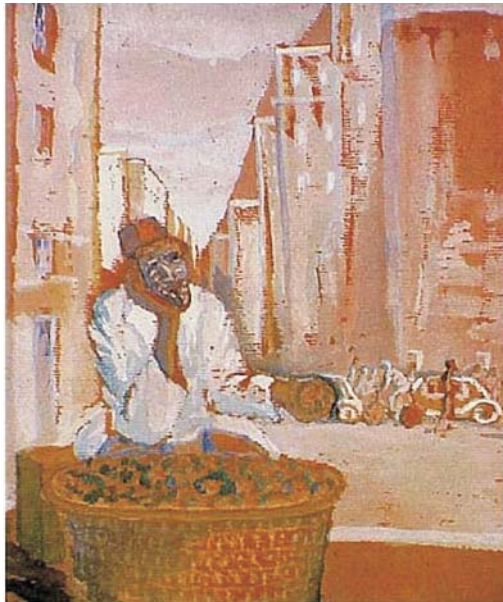
From: <http://www.johansborman.co.za/sa-masters/mohl-john/>

<sup>84</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 259.

<sup>85</sup> W. Siebrits, *Paintings – past and present*. Exhibition catalogue (Johannesburg, 2005), unpaginated.

however, show that they are not weak, but are in fact the strength with which the mines were run.

Although working in the mines was hard work, it brought some of the necessary income. Any job was better than nothing as the struggle to balance income with expenses was a daily problem. However, not everyone was able to rent out rooms and wages earned working for the mines were mostly under the Poverty Datum Line (or the bare minimum wage one could survive on).<sup>86</sup> The income earned by the main breadwinner was often not enough, which meant that the wife had to supplement the rest of the income to ensure that the incomes and expenditures balanced.<sup>87</sup> One of Sekoto's earlier watercolours, *Poverty in the midst of plenty* (1939) (**Figure 6**), illustrates the hopeless financial condition that many urbanised blacks found themselves in. In this watercolour, the subject is trying to sell fruit to people passing by. The expression on his face and his attitude show that he has lost confidence. Sekoto's use of colour and line in this work creates empathy for the desperate situation.



**Figure 6: Gerard Sekoto, *Poverty in the midst of plenty*, 1939**

From: <http://www.art.co.za/gerardsekoto/>

<sup>86</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 203.

<sup>87</sup> E.P. Hellmann, The native in the towns, in I. Schapera (ed.), *The Bantu-speaking tribes of South Africa: an ethnological survey* (London, 1937), pp. 408-409.

Because of the lack of income, other sources were found to supplement the finances. Almost every member contributed in some way to earn money for the family.<sup>88</sup> Another source of additional income was the brewing of beer that was then sold in the shebeens. This was a common practice with about 70% of township inhabitants, deriving some sort of income through the brewing and selling of beer, even though it was declared to be illegal. However, the township people did not regard this practice as wrong because it was part of their culture and a common product in their diet.<sup>89</sup> The beer brewed for commercial uses were stronger than the traditional beer and also quicker to prepare, a quality that made it preferable above the traditional beer. After it was prepared, the women would usually hide the beer in barrels, which were then buried underground to keep it from being discovered by the police.<sup>90</sup>

During weekends and workers' night off, the shebeen queen would clear the rooms in her house except for benches against the walls for the customers. To attract customers, she would usually hire people to make music and entertain the clients. To add to the income, the customers were usually charged an entrance fee.<sup>91</sup> As drinking and visiting shebeens was a popular pastime, it was sure to provide the shebeen queen with some income. The *Shebeen, Sophiatown* (1940-1942) (**Figure 7**) is a good



**Figure 7: Gerard Sekoto, *Shebeen, Sophiatown*, 1940-1942**

From: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/08jan/news/auction.html>

<sup>88</sup> E.J. Krige, *Some social and economic facts revealed in native family budgets* (1934), p. 96.

<sup>89</sup> E. J. Krige, *Some social and economic facts revealed in native family budgets* (1934), p. 96.

<sup>90</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), pp. 206-208.

<sup>91</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 208.

example of a shebeen scene. It clearly shows the interior of a house, which has been turned into a place for customers to gather. Two tables are placed in the centre of the room around which the customers congregate in conversation and drink beer. A light source in the middle of the room creates an inviting atmosphere in which patrons could relax and spend more money.

Another painting by Sekoto informs the viewer of another alternative source of income. *The street photographer* (1939) (**Figure 8**) shows three people posing for a group photo. Two other people are viewing the action. This painting was made from a sketch that Sekoto drew on the spot of the actual event. Although there are some differences between the sketch and the final product (for compositional purposes), the main idea of the painting remains the same.<sup>92</sup> This is an example of the entrepreneurial spirit that some urbanised blacks used to make a living. The photographer earns a living by taking photographs of people in the streets. The painting also illustrates the historical usefulness of art as a source. Nowhere in the sources that were used for this article was there any reference to photography being practised in the townships. However, this work shows that it did exist, and was an alternative way of earning an income.



**Figure 8: Gerard Sekoto, *The street photographer*, 1939**

From: <http://www.districtsix.co.za/collection.htm>.

<sup>92</sup> L. Spiro, *Gerard Sekoto: unsevered ties* (1989), p.37.

Some black women directed their economic activities at their fellow black township inhabitants by selling their products on the streets.<sup>93</sup> When Alexandra was developed in 1913, many of its people became market gardeners as no trains went to Alexandra. Space, however, became limited as more people became urbanised.<sup>94</sup> The watercolour by Durant Sihlali, *Spinach vendor, Kliptown* (1977) (**Figure 9**), depicts a woman sitting on a street corner aiming to sell spinach to people passing by. She has used an old carton on which she is displaying her goods. One can, however, see that her produce is limited as she probably had very little land on which she could have planted it. Due to limited space for gardening that was available in Soweto, this probably was not a viable option for most people. It does, however, show how this woman took the opportunity in order to earn an income.

Most black people working in the urban environment were not as fortunate as the spinach vendor to earn her income in the township itself. This was because the



**Figure 9: Durant Sihlali, *Spinach vendor, Kliptown*, 1977**

From: <http://www.warrensiebri.co.za/show.php?id=119>

<sup>93</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 196.

<sup>94</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 186.

government restricted black townships to the boundaries of the towns. This meant that townships were pushed further away from the centres of work. Overcrowding also led to the expansion of the cities, which also forced people further and further from the city centre.<sup>95</sup> This of course meant that workers needed transportation to take them to their work places, which increased the cost of living because of the higher transportation expenses.<sup>96</sup>

Several of Gerard Sekoto's paintings are set on trains, or depict some sort of transportation. *Cyclists in Sophiatown* (1940-1942) (**Figure 10**), shows a line of men leaving Sophiatown in the early morning on their bicycles. Bicycle transport was much faster than walking, and cheaper than using the railway systems. The use of bicycles already had a place in the mid 1890s, creating a slump in the cab industry.<sup>97</sup> Ways of saving money was important in the townships as income was limited; using bicycles was then a more affordable option.



**Figure 10: Gerard Sekoto, *Cyclists in Sophiatown*, 1940-1942**

From: <http://www.art.co.za/gerardsekoto/>

<sup>95</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 68.

<sup>96</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), pp. 68-70, 171.

<sup>97</sup> C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh* (2001), p. 181.

The use of bicycles is also illustrated in John Mohl's *Cyclists to the village on the hilltop* (1965) (**Figure 11**). It is late in the afternoon, as can be seen in the long shadows that are cast by the figures. The sun is almost setting on the horizon. This leads to the conclusion that while the cyclists in Sekoto's painting are heading out of the township on their way to work, the cyclists in this image are heading back home. The cyclists are riding back from work on a dirt road and are joined by a woman on foot. She carries her load on her head.

Many people also made use of trains as they travelled. Not only was this another daily expense but the train service itself was problematic. A loop line ran through Soweto, but it could not cope with the amount of people needing transport to the city from its beginning. Additional transport was added with a bus service run by the Public Utility Transport Corporation (Putco), as well as by private black taxis. What made matters worse, was that white railroad ticketing staff would only open the



**Figure 11: Gerard Sekoto, *Cyclists to the village on the hilltop* (1965)**

From: <http://www.art.co.za/gerardsekoto/>

offices to sell tickets moments before the train would arrive, which meant that many black people could not buy tickets in time and would have to board without a ticket. Using road transport was also problematic as there were only two roads that led in and out of Soweto. Another road was only added in 1964, with the sole purpose of being used for private transportation.<sup>98</sup> The use of bicycles was then a very plausible solution to this problem, and in most cases a safer option.

Despite the hard work of the whole family to earn income for the household, most black families remained poor.<sup>99</sup> To survive, the whole family had to work together in order to make ends meet. Mothers and daughters took on more work, while men supplemented their income in informal ways.<sup>100</sup> Some also resorted to taking on extra work in their spare time.<sup>101</sup> The average black worker left his or her home at six in the morning and would return at six o'clock in the evening. This left little time for socialising or leisure time activities.<sup>102</sup>

The paintings in this article can provide the viewer of these works with a view of a typical working day. The black workers leave the township early in the morning, using transportation that includes bicycles, as can be seen in Sekoto's *Cyclists in Sophiatown*. They then spend their day busy with their various professions. When evening starts, they return home as can be seen in Mohl's *Miners in the Moonlight*, as well as his *Cyclists to the village on the hilltop*.

The economic conditions shaped the lives of people in the townships as it dictated how they could live. Because of the need for income, they had to work long hours often away from home. These long hours meant that there was very little spare time left. After paying all the bills, there were also often very little, if any, money left. This meant that workers rarely had the time or money to enjoy leisure activities. They also could not provide for proper medical care and other necessities. All aspects of life were then affected by the the living and working conditions of workers.

## Conclusion

Gerard Sekoto, John Mohl & Durant Shilali are only three of the artists who form part of the Township Art genre. Others include Ephriam Ngatane, who lived and worked in Soweto, and George Pemba, who mostly worked in Port Elizabeth.<sup>103</sup> Two other

<sup>98</sup> W.J.P. Carr, *Soweto, its creation, life and decline* (1990), pp. 119-121.

<sup>99</sup> J.E.H. Grobler, *Ontspanning in die Suid-Afrikaanse swart gemeenskap* (1987), p. 323.

<sup>100</sup> L. Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa II* (1987), p. 196.

<sup>101</sup> E.J. Krige, *Some social and economic facts revealed in native family budgets* (1934), p. 96.

<sup>102</sup> J.E.H. Grobler, *Ontspanning in die Suid-Afrikaanse swart gemeenskap* (1987), p. 325.

<sup>103</sup> E.J. de Jager, *Images of man. Contemporary South African black art & artists* (1992), p. 10.



artists who also worked in this genre were Julian Motau and Andrew Motjuoadi.<sup>104</sup> Although their work can also be used to study township culture, very little of it has been documented and recorded and thus calls for further research. Even less is known of female black artists. Gladys Mgudlandlu is one of the few known black female artists who worked in Cape Town and also produced scenes of the urban environment.<sup>105</sup> Another black female artist whose work has become known is Helen Sibisi, who took art lessons from John Mohl and consequently worked in a similar style as her mentor.<sup>106</sup>

The artworks of Gerard Sekoto, John Mohl and Durant Sihlali offer South African township history a wealth of information. According to E.J. de Jager, the artworks of the period before the late 1970s are not only part of our South African art heritage, but these works also express the human condition of the black man in the urban context as a form of social realism in which the feelings and concerns of the artists for their people were expressed. The artworks also served as a visual notification to the public as it raised awareness of life in the townships that included all aspects of life of which only two aspects, the living and working conditions of urban blacks, were discussed in this article.<sup>107</sup> Lammas also adds that the value of Township Art lies in its “documentation of urban life and activities from an insider’s perspective... it provides a medium for descriptive social-realism towards an expression of urban consciousness...”<sup>108</sup> Because of its socially realistic style it then becomes a form of visual and personal documentation of the culture of township life, which makes it a valuable resource for cultural historical studies. This focus on the culture of the township makes it more accessible to the cultural historian as a source for cultural studies of township life.

Through depicting scenes from everyday life and aspects that shaped the experience of urbanisation, a heritage of Township Art was created that can inform generations to come about the culture of urbanisation in South Africa, and may even inspire them to read further. It is of particular importance as it was an art of transition that only lasted for a few decades.<sup>109</sup> This means that it is not only valuable as a source for cultural and social history but has an important place in South African art, history and cultural heritage.

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<sup>104</sup> E.J. de Jager, *Images of man. Contemporary South African black art & artists* (1992), pp. 65, 68.

<sup>105</sup> W. Siebrits, *Sekoto to Sihlali: nine black pioneers of South African art* (2004), unpaginated.

<sup>106</sup> W. Siebrits, *Paintings – past and present* (2005), unpaginated.

<sup>107</sup> E.J. de Jager, *Images of man. Contemporary South African black art & artists* (1992), p. 185.

<sup>108</sup> R. Lammas, *Townscapes, townshapes, townships* (1993), p. 45.

<sup>109</sup> F. Verstraete, *Township Art: context, form and meaning*, in A. Nettleton & D. Hammond-Tooke, *African art in Southern Africa – from tradition to township* (Johannesburg, 1989), p. 171.