

EDITIONS

OCTOBER 2019

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BLACK HISTORY
MONTH MAGAZINE

BLACK HISTORY MATTERS

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THE SLAVE ROUTE
PROJECT

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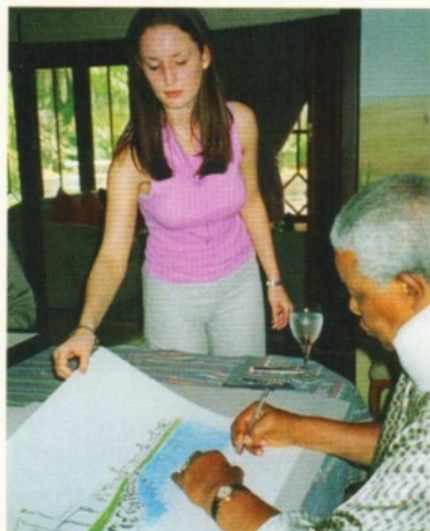
Making Memory

British-Ghanaian architect
Sir David Adjaye OBE

NELSON MANDELA HISTORY OF HIS ART

BLACK
HISTORY
MATTERS

by **Anna Hunter** Curator and Award Winning Gallerist



In 1997 we were at a meeting at St James's Palace to discuss some new watercolours by Prince Charles and the programme we were involved with publishing his art. One of the courtiers questioned why the sales had been so successful over the years - to which I replied - it's simple, "there are only three people in the world whose artwork sold for charity would attract so much interest: the Pope, the Prince of Wales and Nelson Mandela."

In 2002 whilst in New York, I learned that Nelson Mandela had indeed started to draw and that his lithographs were to be launched a few months later.

Belgravia Gallery was deeply honoured to be asked to be associated with this spectacular initiative. We were amazed at the work itself which was fresh, bright, well drawn iconic symbols of the struggle in South Africa and the triumph over the tyranny of the apartheid years.

In 2001 Mr Mandela was approached with a proposal for him to draw a series of works that could achieve similar results to Prince Charles. After very little persuasion and in his usual charming and self-deprecating manner, Mr Mandela agreed to attempt the project, however quickly admitting that his artistic abilities...if any... were "...in the far recesses of his very old mind."

In May 2002 he began with a series of sketches with the subject of Robben Island. He revisited Robben Island, scenes of some of the most painful years for so many whose lives were blighted by the cruel repressive regime.

At his home, under the watchful eye of his art tutor, Varenka Paschke, he quickly adapted from being a world leader to a budding artist. The works were completed in a series of colour separations, the strong black charcoal lines providing the guide to each of the colourful shades selected for sketches.

It was and still is inspiring for us to have been in Mr Mandela's presence as he signed many of the works. During the signing session at his home in Johannesburg in 2002, he shared many wonderful stories about his life experiences... those that make up the inspiration that he has become to so many of us. He made it very clear that he loved the experience of drawing and joked that when he retired he wanted to become a full time artist. We sharpened his pencils and placed the unsigned lithographs in front of him to sign.

When the Robben Island Series was delivered to our gallery in London we were quite astonished at the directness, the strong use of line and colour, the confidence with the form. The Robben Island Series are Mr Mandela's early works but few professional artists could have captured the appalling sacrifice of 17 years on Robben Island with such skill. Instead of the expected dark greys and morbid browns, the strong colours made a clear statement. For it is clear that although these were places where many suffered, they were drawn with a love which triumphed over adversity and brutality. His work emanates the grace with which he had triumphed over the past and offers us, as all great art should, an opportunity to reflect on its message in our own lives.

HAND OF AFRICA
AN ENDURING
SYMBOL OF
THE TWENTIETH
CENTURY



We first saw the lithograph 'Hand of Africa' with its paint still drying, on our visit to the Mandela home in 2002. A British newspaper called it, "an enduring symbol of the twentieth century."

In his speech, launching his art on Robben Island, Mr Mandela spoke of the vivid colours of Africa when he was a child, recalling the colours of the moon as it changed from silver to bright red and the colours in a rainbow. He contrasted these with the grey and khaki on Robben Island, then the experience of growing tomatoes which turned from green to red, and, much later the yellow of his first banana in 20 years.

Throughout history few have left so indelible an imprint on the international stage as Nelson Mandela. His courage, his compassion and his humanity are among the qualities that have led to this Nobel Laureate being recognised as the world's greatest statesman. It is therefore fitting that the extraordinary imprint of his right hand should so closely resemble the shape of the continent of Africa. It is as though its rhythms, sources of strength and dynamism were reflected in the character of this truly amazing man who was also a talented artist.