



Bonakele Ntshalintshali
(Photograph: The Natal Witness)

*Obituaries**Bonakele (Bonie) Ntshalintshali (1967-1999)*

Born on Ardmore Farm near Winterton, Ntshalintshali suffered polio as a child, spending four years in Edendale Hospital. In 1985 she joined the Ardmore Ceramic Studio at the request of her mother, who felt that working with clay would be less strenuous than physical farm labour. After an apprenticeship making functional ware under the guidance of the studio's founder Fée Halstead-Berning, she began working on ceramic sculptures, often based on biblical themes. Her fresh, colourful approach to themes such as *The Last Supper* and *The Nativity*, interpreting them in a contemporary Zulu idiom, became a trademark of her production. As well as biblical themes, she interpreted Zulu customs such as *The Lobola*, in a similar contemporary idiom, based on her own experience as a young woman living in a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal.

In 1990 Ntshalintshali and Halstead-Berning received the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Fine Art. The result was a joint exhibition at the Grahamstown Arts Festival that year, where for the first time Ntshalintshali's work reached a wide audience. She was subsequently invited to exhibit at the Venice Biennale in 1993, and participated in many ceramic exhibitions in South Africa. The accessibility of her work to audiences unfamiliar with so-called 'high art' established her popularity, and the desirability of her works, which are now housed in public and private collections in South Africa and abroad.

The death of Bonie Ntshalintshali has deprived South Africa of one of its leading ceramicists, one whose obvious enjoyment in her work also brought much joy to others. Her legacy survives in what she has left behind.

BRENDAN BELL