Ubuhle
Women
Beadwork and the Art of Independence
Ubuhle Women: Beadwork and the Art of Independence showcases a new form of bead art, the ndwango, developed by a community of women living and working together in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The six artists featured in the exhibition call their paintings in beads ndwangos, which translates as “cloth” or “rag.” The black fabric on which the Ubuhle women work is reminiscent of the Xhosa headscarves and skirts that many of them grew up wearing. By stretching this textile like a canvas, the artists transform the flat cloth into a contemporary art form colored with Czech glass beads.

Using skills handed down through generations, and working in their own unique style “directly from the soul,” according to artist Ntombephi Ntobela, the women create abstract as well as figurative subjects for their ndwangos.

Ubuhle means “beauty” in the Xhosa and Zulu languages and it describes the shimmering quality of light on glass that for the Xhosa people has a particular spiritual significance. From a distance, each panel seems to be formed from a continuous surface, but as each tiny individual bead catches the light, the viewer becomes aware of the meticulous skill that went into each work and the scale of ambition: a single panel can take more than 10 months to complete.

“Ubuhle Women: Beadwork and the Art of Independence provides guests with an opportunity to experience a new perspective, yet also represent universal and relatable themes, making this exhibition accessible as well as impactful.”

Katherine Ryckman Siegwarth, Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, The Dayton Art Institute

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

Number of Works
38 works, including beaded mosaics, photographs and video

Organized by
Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, Washington, DC

Curators
Bev Gibson, Founder of Ubuhle Women; James Green, Co-Curator

Requirements
Moderate security; 200–300 linear feet

Shipping
IA&A makes all arrangements; exhibitors pay outgoing shipping costs within the contiguous US

Booking Period
12 weeks

Tour
June 2017—April 2022