

IZIBONGO

Celebrating Art in Africa and the Diaspora

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Patron Saint of the African Miner Celebrating John Mohl

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Ediforria

Alongside the Nigerian Aina Onabolu, the featured one is one of the first African teachers of fine art, in sub-Saharan Africa.

A committed educator, as well as artist, he was one of the first to portray city living for Black people, passing the baton on to others such as Ephraim Ngatane. With brush and oils, he told the stories of Sophiatown and Soweto: paragraphs and chapters dedicated to the miners.

One of the things I admire most about him, is his raising of the awareness and appreciation of art to the general public, through his garden school and the outdoor exhibitions. He showed them the potential for art in their lives and the possibilities of a career in it.

One of the true greats of South African Art, I am happy to present to JOHN MOHL.

Editor – Natty Mark Samuels – africanschool.weebly.com – An African School Production

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Only Patch of Sunshine

from *South African History Online*

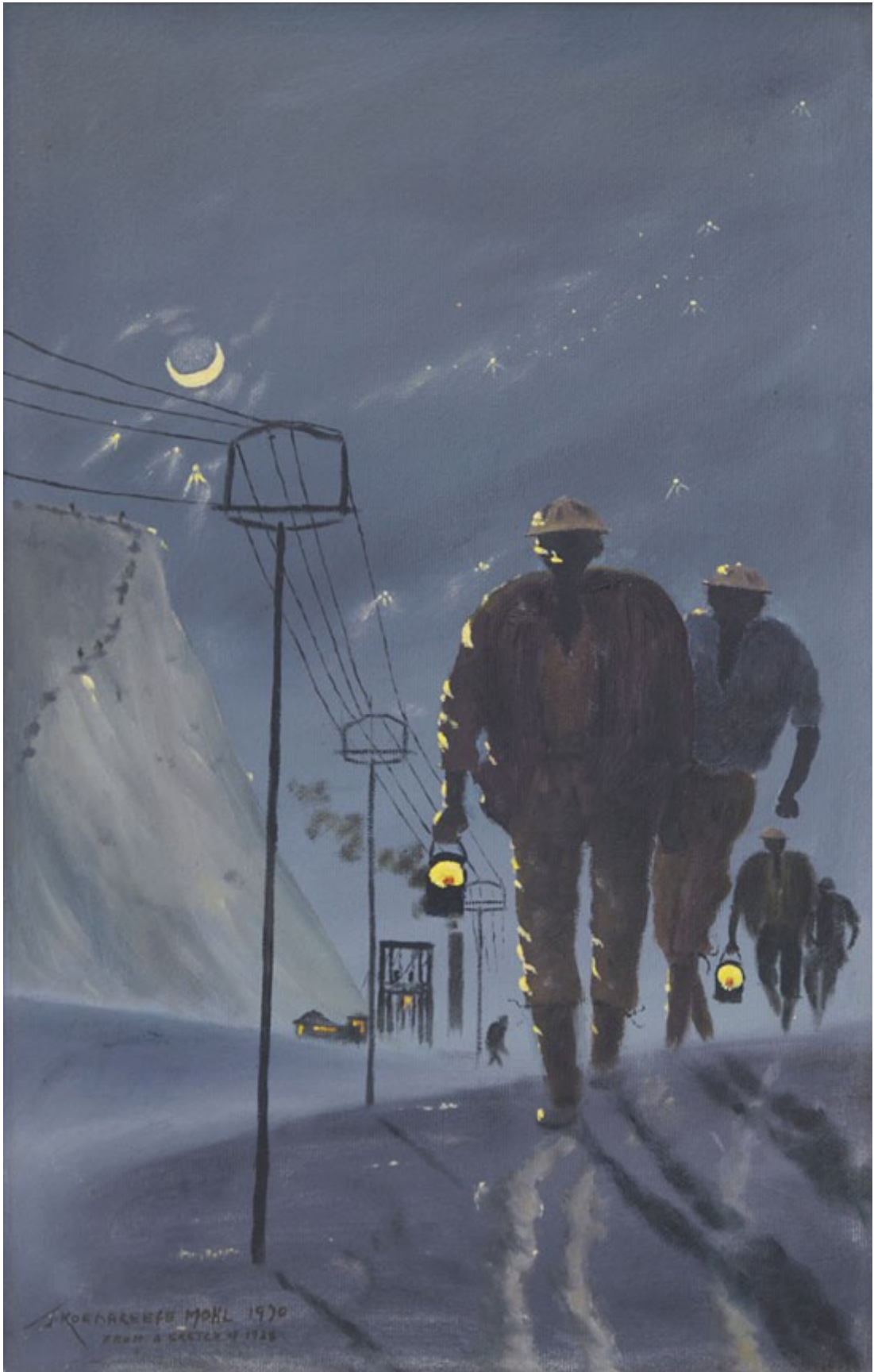
<https://reggaediscography.blogspot.com/2018/01/izibongo-magazine-2018.html>

<http://rastaites.com/>



from South African History Online

**John
Koenakeefe
Mohl**



from *Out and About in Africa*

Patron Saint of the African Miner

The Bringer of Easels and Hope

Dinokana

Once upon a time, the Muse began to visit Dinokana. Like the people who were there before his people moved into the area, a boy started to create on rocks. Not limiting himself to one medium, he also commenced experimentation with clay.

Mafikeng Blues

A fisherman must cast his nets, whether on river, lake or sea,
A fisherman must cast his nets, whether on river, lake or sea,
As the artist must use pencil and paints, wherever he happens to be.
First blues of the artist,
In Mafikeng Primary.

The Artist as Goatherder

As your father sent you to school to learn books, when you continued to use your time there to draw, he sent you to look after the goats. What did you dream of, when danger wasn't around and your mind wandered? Did your mind dream of a studio stacked with oil paints and canvases? Of visiting exhibitions? Of your paintings hung in a Jo'burg Gallery?

Reverend Hale

Although the minds of many,
Moved in tandem with the snail.
We shall honour the dreamers,
We shall remember Reverend Hale.

He saw the dream in your head
And the skill in your hands.

The one who convinced your father,
That you were born to create.
He came and then he praised you,
Where others came to berate.

He saw the beauty in your head,
And the talent in your hands.

Old Tiger

With the heartiness and help of Hale, you went off to Tiger Kloof School: institution of prestige and pride.

Seretse Khama,
First president of Botswana,
Another Old Tiger.
Quett Masire,
Khama's successor,
Another Old Tiger.
Ruth Mompoti,
South African Ambassador,
Another Old Tiger.
John Mohl,
Artist and educator,
Another Old Tiger.

After a few years you graduate with a teaching diploma. But you are not ready to teach, as you burn to paint and desire to learn more about its mixing and application: time for Namibia.

Albatross and Oystercatcher

Our hero decides to study in Windhoek. Some sources say he studied at the art school there; others, that he studied with the French artist Mary Du Pont. Could it have been both, that he learnt under her at the Windhoek School of Art. I heard he worked the Luderitz docks, to pay for his tuition.

There go the allbatrosses,
There goes another case of fruit;
The movement of all around Luderitz dock.

Tell us of Mary du Pont. Why her? What drew you to her? Another source says that you actually accompanied her to Namibia. At that time, was there more possibilities for a Black artist, as far as art education was concerned, in Windhoek, than in Johannesburg?

There go the oystercatchers,
There goes another case of fish:
The movement of all around Luderitz docks.

Herero and Nama

You must have known what Shark Island was used for,
A venue of genocide.
When Eugen Fischer was funded,
On that dark perverted ride.

Eiskellerstasse

Blessed by the continued patronage of Reverend Hale and the London Missionary Society, he began years of art study at the Kunst Akademie Dusseldorf, one of Europe's finest.

Five years at one of the best,
I see you sketching on the Konigsallee.
You sat in the same lecture rooms,
As the former student Paul Klee.

You were there in the early thirties
So you were there in '33.
What did you think of the Nazis
And their brand of bigotry?

Did you take a boat along the Rhine?
Shocked by the Dusseldorf Vampire?
I imagine you at the Academie,
You head and hand on fire.

You left that building with its great facade for the last time. After five years away from South Africa, time to return.

John and Ben

The years rolled on and so did the paintings, including portraits of the known and unknown; one of which was displayed at an Empire Exhibition. Was this the one held in 1938, in Bellahouston Park, Glasgow? If it is, your fellow pioneering artist, the Nigerian Ben Enwonwu, exhibited there also.

Sophia

to Trevor Huddelston

One day, a man called Herman bought some land; wishing to demonstrate his love for his wife, he named it after her: Sophia.

Singer of all our songs,
Serenade a paeon for Sophiatown.

I imagine the inhabitants saying "If the authorities leave us alone, we'll get on alright together. We'll still have our problems, but all in all, we'll celebrate our shared humanity."

Poet of all anthologies,
Recite a ballad for Sophiatown

They manoeuvred and jumped the hurdles of gargantuan racism, to find a little sweetness. Imagine living in an area where during the day you could receive fine art teaching from John Mohl – and in the evening, go and hear Hugh Masekela. The authorities saw the goodness: they sent in the bulldozers.

Artist of every collective,
Paint the dance of Sophiatown.

Annadale Street

Over time, back gardens have been used as locations for things such as barber shops, advice centres, exhibition spaces and schools: John Mohl used his for the penultimate and for the latter.

First

As Haile Selassie was the first African leader, to send youth abroad for art study, you were the first Black South African, to teach art in your homeland.

Significance and Brilliance

Is there an official marker in Annadale Street, where the 'White Studio' was located? Is it part of a culture tour? Are local school children told of its significance? Of the brilliance of its founder?

Plea and Farewell

"Don't go Gerard,
We need you here.
To help tell our story:
Please don't go."
But he left in '47,
Never to return home.
"We'll miss you Gerard,
Farewell Gerard Sekoto."

Preference

Did you have a preference?
Masuka or Makeba,
Mbaqanga or Kewla.

We shall speak of Desmond Tutu.

For The Odin or Balanskys
Edward G. or Jimmy Cagney

We shall speak of Wally Serote

For gin or brandy
Synco Fans or Pitch Black Follies

We shall speak of Daniel "Can" Themba

A Time to Go

One day, hundreds of uniforms came, accompanied by guns, bulldozers and clubs; a brutal conclusion, to a sojourn with unity; forced now, towards the epoch of division. Blacks to Meadowland; the Indians, Chinese and Coloureds, to their designated enclaves.

The Shantytown Man

When I think of James Mpanza, he reminds me of other figures of protest and action, such as the Maroon leaders, Yanga (Mexico), Zumbi (Brazil) and Nanny (Jamaica).

He took the people from Orlando
Laid the groundwork for Soweto:
Sing a song of the Shantytown Man.

As the three aforementioned former slaves founded communities in their countries of involuntary residence, so James Mpanza took the people from an overcrowded city slum, to a place in the gift of green. Dispossed in their own land, he led the people to reclaim a piece of it.

His name was on every lip,
Throughout South Western Township:
Sing a song of the Shantytown Man.

Rubies and Diamonds

He gave them the golden key, saying, "Go ahead, unlock the silver casket of creativity - and enjoy all the treasures that you find inside."

Blessed were the students at the Orlando and Madibane High Schools, who received the omnipresent glow, from the rubies and diamonds of your teaching.

Metamorphosis

to Helen Sebidi

Her life began to change,
Through commencing tuition with you.
After the darkness of domestic service,
Light began to filter through.

To Those Who Empower

to Artists Under The Sun

They came together to share their art, as restrictions had been placed on the sharing of it.
Give thanks for those who believed in equality and worked towards it. God Bless Cecil
Skotnes, God Bless Bill Ainslie.

You gathered them together, boosting each other, a collective celebration of creativity. As
well as you, there were others who empowered, who also walked the streets of Soweto:
God Bless Nelson Mandela, God Bless Walter Sisulu.

Joubert Park

to all the artists who exhibited there

You couldn't sit on the benches,
But showed paintings and sketches:
Easter exhibition in Joubert Park.

You couldn't drink from the fountain,
Realist and abstraction:
Easter exhibiton in Joubert Park.

Garden of Light

Sometimes a man will forge his own pathway,
When others are closed to him.
Hosted garden exhibitions,
So the light would not grow dim.

You broke dependence on the galleries,
Formed outdoor versions of your own.
You made sure that in Soweto,
Art would not be unknown.

Patron Saint of the African Miner

We shall remember you John Mohl,
As artist and as educator.
Bringer of Easels and Hope,
Patron Saint of the African Miner.

Sources

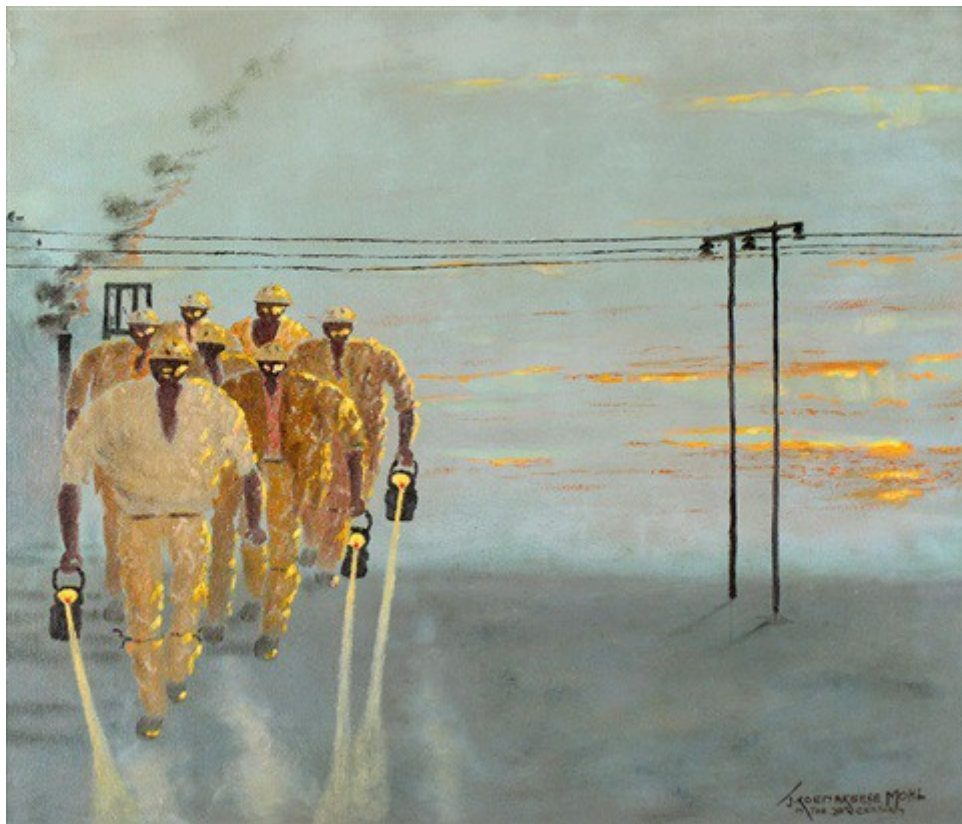
South African History Online

John Koenakeefe Mohl – Elza Miles

Pressreader: Sunday Times July 2016



from *Mutual Art*



from *Artnet*