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TRADITIONAL AND CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS

in

CONTEMPORARY PICTORIAL AFRICAN ART IN SOUTH AFRICA

with special reference to the works of

John Muafangejo, Azariah Mbatha and Dan Rakgoathe.

An extended essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art.

by

Julie Kilian.

Department of Fine Art
Rhodes University
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CONTENTS.

	page
Acknowledgements	(iv)
Preface	(v)
Abstract	(vi)
1. INTRODUCTION. Aims and objectives.	1
1.1. Concerning traditional elements.	2
1.2. Concerning Christian elements.	2
1.3. Considering the term 'Primitive'.	3
2. PREAMBLE. 2.1. Rorkes Drift.	5
2.2. A brief historic background to Contemporary African Art in South Africa.	6
3. ART IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY.	
3.1. The status of art and the artist in Traditional African Society.	8
3.2. Traditional and 'Suitcase' or 'Airport' Art.	9
3.3. Contemporary African Art.	9
4. AFRICAN RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS.	11
5. BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION.	
5.1. Azariah Mbatha.	13
5.2. John Muafangejo.	16
5.3. Dan Rakgoathe.	18
6. TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS.	
6.1. Narrative.	20
6.2. Frontality.	23
6.3. Proportion.	25
6.4. The African time concept.	27
6.5. Design and the decorative aspect.	30
6.5.1. two-dimensionality.	30
6.5.2. rhythm.	31
6.5.3. negative/positive opposition and space-filling.	32
6.6. 'Christian' influence or psychological affinity?	34

	page
7. CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS.	36
7.1. The symbol of the 'cross'.	37
7.1.1. the 'cross' as subject or 'motif'.	38
7.2. The 'Mother and Child' symbol.	39
7.3. The concept of the 'priest' or 'mediator'.	40
7.4. The concept of the 'trinity'.	41
7.5. Biblical stories.	41
7.6. Biblical themes or 'motifs'.	42
7.7. The 'halo' or 'aura'.	42
7.8. Christian symbols, and their counterparts in traditional African religions.	43
7.8.1. cattle.	43
7.8.2. the snake.	43
7.8.3. mythical trees and the tree of life.	44
7.8.4. the 'Sun' symbol.	44
7.8.5. bird images.	45
7.9. Prayer.	46
Conclusion	47
Bibliography	48
List of Illustrations	50
Illustrations	53 ff

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PREFACE.

Apart from the three publications compiled by Prof. E.J. de Jager, Esme Berman and Bruce Arnott, (see Bibliography) there is a considerable poverty and lack of authoritative publications and literature and coherent bodies of information on Contemporary African art in South Africa. The data that is available is mostly contained in periodicals, exhibition brochures, newspaper articles and other minor papers, all of which are scattered throughout a variety and range of sources. Consequently, it has been a major task accumulating information and photographic reproductions of artists' work, toward compiling a paper on the traditional and Christian elements in Contemporary African art in South Africa. It is, therefore, with heartfelt appreciation that I acknowledge the assistance which I received and the contributions which have been made.

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ABSTRACT.

Art is the outward, visual manifestation of the undying soul of a people. The genius displayed in the day to day articles produced in traditional tribal society is equally present in the art produced by the Contemporary African Artist. The Contemporary African Artist finds himself in an interesting position, in that he is, at one time, a part of two different worlds, two different cultures, and his art provides evidence of the acculturation that has taken place, the coming together of indigenous, traditional African culture and 'European' or 'Western' culture. It follows that the Contemporary African artist's work would display characteristics and elements derived from both of these worlds, since art is not created in a vacuum, but is, invariably, the outward, visible expression and symbol of an artist's environment, culture, emotional and intellectual responses and his beliefs.

The study of Contemporary African Art reveals that despite the many divergences from the traditional or classic forms, a great many traditional influences and characteristics still persist in the same. An analysis of Contemporary African Art will also show that a significant body of works bear a marked influence of Christian teachings and biblical themes, as well as the influence of exposure to various forms of Swedish Medieval, Byzantine, Romanesque and Carolingian art.

INTRODUCTION

1.

Aims and objectives:

The aim of this essay is two-fold: firstly, to identify the Traditional elements of Classic African Art and how they are applied in Contemporary African Art, and secondly, to identify 'Christian' elements in Contemporary African Art, to establish where the influences are those of 'Christianity' or of 'Christian Art', and to ascertain whether these influences are either indigenous or 'received-Western' concepts.

One unfortunate problem that has to be contended with is that there is no history or precedent of pictorial African art in South Africa. For this reason, the traditional elements that are referred to will be those found in sculpture, household crafts, e.g. matwork, beadwork, weaving and basketry, and ceremony-related crafts, e.g. fetishes and masks, as well as dance, music and folk-tales.

Although this essay initially began as an attempt to identify and explain the nature of the Christian influence on symbolism and imagery in Contemporary African Art, it became increasingly apparent that the Christian elements in African art were integrated with elements which traditionally occur in Classic African Art, and which occur in Contemporary African art as well. In traditional African society, art and religion were not regarded as separate disciplines or entities, but, as in all other departments of life, were inseparable. This can further be explained in terms of the status which art had in Traditional African society. Art was a religious/philosophic/sacral system.

"Classic African Art,.... comprised a philosophical statement of a certain world view, expressive of the relationship between art and the societies in which it was produced. The basic aim and function of Classic African Art was to assist society in controlling the social, psychological, spiritual, and cosmic forces at work in every aspect of existence, including agriculture, education, initiation, burial,

politics, magic and medicine, etc."(1)

In much the same way, Contemporary African art comprises a statement of a specific world view, namely that of the 'Modern' African artist working under new conditions, as we shall see in chapter 3.3.

1.1. Concerning traditional elements.

A study of African Art reveals that, despite the powerful influence of Western values, technology and industrialisation on the African people, not to mention the the socio-economic strains and social revolutions and changes which the African is experiencing, the Contemporary African artist has not succumbed, and although he has become estranged from his society, and is as independent an individual as any other western artist, he has retained a considerable amount of traditional elements and concepts in his work. Some of these elements are rhythm, balance, design, two-dimensionality and limited space, frontality, narrative, a cyclic time-concept, anthropocentricity, and ontological orientation.

1.2. Concerning Christian elements.

Frank Willett points out that Christianity has existed in Africa even longer than Islam, that Coptic Christianity, in Africa, dates back to the time of Christ, and that Nubia was 'Christianised' as early as the sixth century. (2) In South Africa, however, it was only introduced in the 1800's, by missionaries who came from the British Isles and the Continent. Whether the African peoples in South Africa received any Christian influence or teaching from Northern tribes prior to the arrival of these missionaries is unknown and probably never will be. We must thus only presume that the African people had no formal knowledge of Christian principles and teaching. Today, however, Africa has become very widely Christianised as a result of missionary endeavour, and vast numbers of African people now embrace Christianity as

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1. de Jager. E.J: 'Man and Cosmos: The Visual Cosmology of Dan Rakgoathe.' Fort Hare Papers. Vol 7. No 2. 1980. pg. 95.
 2. Willett. Frank: African Art. pg. 244.

their religion.

In Contemporary African Art, in South Africa, the main source of Christian influence has lain in ecclesiastical and educational institutions, e.g. Rorkes Drift E.L.C. Art and Crafts Centre and the N'daleni Training College. Within the context of this essay, we will be dealing with the work of students from the Rorkes Drift school. The direct effects on the artists' work have been in the spheres of compositional devices and in subject matter. These have come from the body of Christian thought and teaching received at the mission art school, and from exposure to various types of Christian Art, e.g. Romanesque, Byzantine, Medieval Swedish and Carolingian art. The 'Christian' influence finds its expression in the depiction of biblical stories, personal interpretation of moral and biblical principles, representations of symbols and sacraments synonymous with the Christian Church and expressions of personal sympathies with, or antagonisms toward, the Church.

1.3. Considering the term 'Primitive'.

The term, 'Primitive', has raised considerable controversy and confusion in the past, and I think it is necessary, at this stage, that it be made quite clear that the term, which covers basically three categories, namely:-

- a) in describing African art as that of a 'primitive' culture,
- b) with reference to that art which was created before the Renaissance, for example, Byzantine, Romanesque, Medieval and Carolingian art, and
- c) in describing 'naïve', 'untutored' expression, 'Sunday' painting and Folk Art,

when used, will be limited to categories a) and b).

Definition 1.

The term 'primitive' was originally based on the mistaken evolutionist assumption that the life styles and patterns of 'primitive' societies represent the 'nursery' or 'kindergarten' stage, through which the 'greater' civilizations have already passed, and that the art produced by these primitive cultures was characterised by aesthetic and technical inferiority,

and were merely the 'dregs' of misunderstood and poorly simulated versions of the creative expression of the 'higher' societies. This interpretation has changed, however, and the term is now used to imply artistic expression which has "reached maturity within a system of social organisation and technology which is 'different' from that of Western civilization, and not an art which represents a degenerate or infantile stage in a process of maturation." (1)

Definition 2.

The second understanding of the word has to do with Pre-Renaissance art, which was originally referred to as 'primitive' because it did not display an understanding of scientific perspective and anatomical accuracy. The term was used, somewhat disparagingly, to imply an inferior understanding of formal compositional scientific devices, such as perspective and proportion, in this art. Fortunately, the term is no longer used for evaluation but is used to describe or refer to the art created by societies before the time of the Renaissance.

Since we will be dealing with African art as such, as well as the influence of Early Christian art, both of these definitions are essential. The third will not be referred to, to any great extent.

Several passages on 'African Religious systems', 'the status of the African artist in traditional and contemporary society' and a very brief 'history' of African art in South Africa have been included, merely to provide a background or context, within which to understand the significance of the occurrence of traditional elements in Contemporary African Art, and the influence that Christianity has had on imagery in the same.

1. Osborne. H: Oxford Companion to Art. pg. 924.
(Editor)

PREAMBLE.2.1. Rorkes Drift.

I am dealing specifically with the work of artists trained at the Rorkes Drift E.L.C. Art and Crafts Centre, since their work displays both Christian and traditional elements, simultaneously. The work of these artists is noticeably distinguishable from that of the artists who hail from the 'township art-schools'. The township artists' work tends to be sociologically orientated, expressing the socio-political and economic fears, hopes and aspirations of the black urban community. These works also bear the stamp of profound Western sophistication in style and expression. By way of contrast, the mission-type art-school students produce work which is representative of a more rural environment. I do not mean to suggest that their work lacks sophistication, but rather that it expresses a sophistication which is typically 'African' rather than 'Western'. Consequently, traditional elements occur more readily in the art of mission-type art-schools. Whilst the environment of the urban black artist motivates him to produce socio-politically orientated works, the mission surroundings, for example, at Rorkes Drift, and the teaching received there, gives rise to spontaneous portrayal and interpretation of Biblical stories and themes which are synonymous with the Church and with Christianity. (Much of the art produced at Rorkes Drift is narrative, and artists have used various devices for relating Biblical stories, which invariably involve a sequence of events well suited to a narrative expression.)

The limits of this essay have deemed it necessary that the number of artists whose works will be discussed, be restricted to three. However, the works of John Muafangejo, Azariah Mbatha and Dan Rakgoathe have proved sufficient in providing all the evidence needed to ascertain the extent to which Christianity has influenced Contemporary African artists in South Africa, and the extent to which traditional elements still prevail in the same today. Although all three trained at the same school and thus have a shared basis, they all hail from varied backgrounds and represent three different tribes, peoples or groups. Muafangejo is an Ovambo (S.W.A.), Rakgoathe is from Johannesburg and represents the South Sotho's, and Mbatha is Zulu. This does make for variety in expression and idea.

The Rorkes Drift Evangelical Lutheran Church (E.L.C. hereafter) Art and Craft Centre is one of the focal points in the Contemporary African Art scene in South Africa today. The school has been instrumental in introducing the art of a number of Black artists to the South African art scene, making their work available to a wider audience and clientele, and in this way, gaining wide recognition and acceptance for these artists.

The Centre was first begun in 1960 by Swedish Missionary, Peder Gowenius. It was initially situated at Umpumulo, which was also the location of a theological college, (which provided the art students with a variation of stimulus for discussion and debate). In 1963 the art school moved to its permanent 'residence' at Rorkes Drift in the Oskarberg in Natal (approximately forty-five kilometers from Dundee). It then became known as the Rorkes Drift E.L.C. Art and Crafts Centre.

At the outset the main medium and technique taught at the school was graphics, i.e. etchings, drawings, lino- and woodcuts and engravings. However, recently some students have undertaken oil painting as a medium, and the crafts which have been introduced, namely weaving and tapestry, have gained the students and the school some considerable recognition and repute. In 1968, Azariah Mbatha designed and wove an enormous tapestry for a church in Stockholm, Sweden. Thus far, little sculpture has emerged from Rorkes Drift, with the exception of the work of the late Cyprian Shilakoe.

2.2. A brief historical background to Contemporary Pictorial African Art in South Africa.

The cultural wealth of the African people in South Africa is one of longstanding tradition. Despite the overwhelming effects of Western thought and technology on these people, they have retained this great heritage of customs, rituals, dance, songs and beliefs. In the area of the pictorial arts though, i.e. in representational sculpture, drawing and painting, this wealth and heritage does not exist. Apart from the decoration found on household utensils, clothing, beadwork and house murals, the Africans in South Africa have no traditional representational art. (Pictorial art as produced by the Contemporary African artist in South Africa is a purely Twentieth Century innovation.) There is a variety of reasons and factors which have contributed

to the lack of any precedent of pictorial art. The black artist in South Africa did not have the materials and facilities which are normally used in Western societies, e.g. canvas, oil-paint, water-colours, acrylics and intaglio and relief painting. These European introductions have enriched the creative and expressive possibilities of the Contemporary African artist.

Another contributing factor to be considered is the 'nomadic' existence which the Africans once led. The tribes were constantly 'on the move', fleeing marauding tribes, seeking a more favourable environment, or themselves going to war. As a rule, nomadic or migratory groups don't produce any representational artworks as such, since these would only prove to be an encumbrance rather than a valuable asset. Any art that was produced was utilitarian and functional, e.g. carved 'kieries' and fighting sticks, decorated kitchen and other household utensils, clay pottery, decorated gourds and the occasional sculpture, all of which had to be compact and portable. When migrating, they often went into areas where there were little or no trees, but where grass was plentiful. During such periods, sculpture was no longer produced, and basketry flourished.

When considering African art, it must also be borne in mind that prior to their southward migration, the Africans in South Africa were once under the dominance of Islam, in Central and East Africa. Islam, as a religion, forbids the 'graven image', and instead, it favours geometric non-representational design, the influence of which can still be identified in the adornment of the walls of 'Ndebele houses in the Eastern Transvaal, and in African handcrafts, which display a strong sense of design.

3. ART IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY

3.1. The status of art and the artist in traditional African society.

In traditional African society there is a strong corporate relationship between all the aspects and departments of life - philosophy, religion, thought processes, value systems, birth and death and the perpetuation of life. All of these aspects of life are drawn together by a spiritual/religious motive, and are given visual expression in the cultural activities of the community, e.g. in dance, ritual, song and folktales, as well as in the plastic arts, e.g. sculpture and pottery.

"Verder is die primitiewe gemeenskap een wat geen barrières tussen die verskillende kunsvorms ken nie. Alles is in aansluiting met mekaar en komplimenteer mekaar. So is die mimiek (dus drama), die lied (dus musiek), die dans, die masker (dus die beeldende kunste) en die verhaal dikwels nou verweefd." (1)

Fundamentally, the function and purpose of art and the artist was to protect the community, and to ensure its continuation and growth. The motivating forces behind the production of artworks were social and religious, whereas within the Western context the motivating forces were purely aesthetic and artistic. I don't mean to suggest that the aesthetic aspects of a work were not considered at all by the traditional African artist, but rather, that aesthetics was not the motivation or force behind the creation of a work. The 'Western' concept of the artist as an 'autonomous creative individual' was also not part of the Traditional African social structure, for the artist's ascribed status was one of being bound to the society, and of playing a specific role in it's perpetuation. He was a servant of the community, and was believed to exercise certain powers, on behalf of the people. By means of the powers vested in his art, he was believed to be able to control the cosmic and spiritual forces. He was also believed to have a certain measure of 'communication' with the gods and spirits. These powers were inherent in the

1. Marais, Estelle: Die Primitiewe en die Primitivisme in Dwaalstories van Eugene N. Marais. pg. 2.

masks, festishes, sculptures or in whatever medium the artist chose to work. These served to 'induce' or 'appease' the wrath or the pleasure of the gods, and in this way served to ensure that the community would be blessed with fertility, with good rains and a plentiful harvest.

The artist was also a teacher, in that his work helped to explain and interpret to the people the nature and meaning of the gods and the heavenly powers. So, the emphasis, in traditional African society, was not on the artist as an autonomous creative expressive being, but rather, on the art work and its religious and sacral function and value. If perhaps, the artist was highly creative, expressive and innovative, that was purely incidental, and of no importance or relevance to the group or community. The artist was subject to the group-orientated thought processes of his society, and was not creatively independent. This would make for psychological disadvantages because he would be bound by the rules, norms and prescribed requirements of his society, which would shape and restrict his depth of expression. What he creates then would not necessarily be the expression of his own deep personal belief or creativity.

3.2. Traditional and 'Suitcase' or 'Airport' Art.

There are basically three types of African Art prevalent in South Africa today. The first is the traditional tribal artist, and of this type there are very few still practicing. The second type is referred to as 'suitcase' or 'airport' art, and is directed toward the tourist trade. It is usually devoid of creative, spiritual and aesthetic content, though it often borders on technical perfection. Apart from the fact that it ensures the artist of a moderately stable source of income, this type of art is of no creative or spiritual benefit to the artist or to the community of which he is a member.

3.3. Contemporary African Art.

In this, the third and most important category or type of African art, we are presented with art as created by the Contemporary African through the use of media which have been introduced to him by Europeans, namely oil-paint, water-colours, acrylics, graphic printing techniques, and modern sculpting techniques. These media were previously unknown to the African artist.

The Contemporary African artist is active and practicing in the townships, in missions art schools, universities, galleries, arts associations and abroad. He is no longer bound to his society, but practices his skills and creative abilities as an independent creative individual. This is one of the most significant 'modern' innovations and developments that have resulted from the contact between the European and the African. The artist now works under 'new conditions', and is thus relieved of all of his former duties and 'roles' which once bound him to his society. He is now able to pay as much time, attention and energy as he wishes, toward developing his creativity. By the same token, the 'art work' produced by the artist no longer performs a social function. Neither the artist nor the art work have a protective or providential function any longer. Whereas before, the motivating force behind the creation of an art work was religious and social, the motivation now is of an aesthetic and artistic nature, a result of the new freedom afforded the artist. His freedom has altered his stimulus and source of inspiration. This change in motivation can be attributed to the new emphasis on the 'right' of the artist to be an expressive, innovative individual. He no longer has to interpret life and existence according to the rules and demands of his own community, but rather in accordance with his own experience of reality and existence.

As is the case in traditional African art, Contemporary African art is anthropocentric. It centres around man, his environment and his response to it, his cosmos, his world view, his relationship to the present and to all time, and the real meaning of life.

4.

AFRICAN RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS.

As I mentioned in the introduction, religion was inseparable from art, in Traditional African society. It is useful to acquire a brief understanding of the basic principles and motivations behind Traditional African religious thought. Dr. John Samuel Mbiti, in his work, "African Religions and Philosophy", (1969), provides a very clear and concise description and explanation of the traditions in African thought and religion, and how they are realised in African society.

Firstly, he points out that "Africans are notoriously religious...."(1), and that religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible to isolate it."(2) He goes on to say that ".... a study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately a study of the peoples themselves in all the complexities of both traditional and modern life." (3) According to Mbiti, religion is the strongest element influencing and shaping traditional African thought and life. In the African context, there are no irreligious people, for to be, is to be religious. "Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being."(4) African religion is essentially an ontological phenomenon, as Rev. Placide Tempels observed.(5)

However, religion in essence, is for the whole community, and not primarily for the individual. Whatever the African is or does, he does as unto the whole community. Mbiti points out that, "To be human is to belong to the whole community, and so to do involves participation in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group for so to do is to be severed from his roots, his foundations, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence.... to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society and

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1. Mbiti. John S: African Religions and Philosophy. pg. 1.
 2. Mbiti. John S: loc cit.
 3. Mbiti. John S: loc cit.
 4. Mbiti. John S: ibid. pg. 3.
 5. Tempels, Rev.Placide. Bantu Philosophy. Chap. 11.

African peoples do not know how to exist without religion." (1)

1. Mbiti, John S: African Religions and Philosophy. pg. 2.

5. BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION.5.1. AZARIAH MBATHA.

Azariah Mbatha was born in 1941 at Mabeka in Zululand. After completing his schooling at Ceza Secondary School, he worked as a clerk in Vryheid. During this time he contracted tuberculosis and was admitted to the Ceza Mission Hospital for treatment. Whilst he was convalescing, Mbatha met Swedish Missionary, Peder Gowenius, who became aware that Mbatha had great potential creative ability. Subsequently, he introduced Mbatha to linocut-printing as a form of Occupational Therapy. Gowenius had, at this stage, established the beginnings of what was to become the Rorkes Drift E.L.C. Art and Craft Centre at Umpumulo, which Mbatha attended once he had been discharged. He completed his first two years of study at Umpumulo, and when the centre moved to its permanent location at Rorkes Drift, he completed his third year of study there.

Initially, Mbatha worked only in linocut and serigraph techniques, but later he began to use copper etching, and at the same time he increased his use of serigraphy. His work is essentially graphic, with bold simplified forms and strong two-dimensionality. A number of his linocuts and serigraphs have been modified and adapted for murals and tapestries which were woven by he and his wife. The works which will be referred to in this paper will be limited to Mbatha's early works done before 1970. Since then Mbatha has been in Sweden, and there might possibly be new developments in his work of which I am not yet aware.

Mbatha makes extensive use of Biblical themes in his work, as exemplified in "Revelations" (ill.55), "Invitation" (ill.54), "Peter" (ill.61) and "He went to Jerusalem" (ill.59). In fact, very little of his earlier work deals with secular subjects at all. Mbatha's interest in stories and themes from the Holy Scriptures was initiated and nurtured during his time at Umpumulo. It is reported that he was acquainted with the theology students at the seminary at Umpumulo, and that this lent him opportunity for lengthy discussion on matters theological.

"When Mbatha tackles the great Testamental epics of the life of Moses, the birth of Jesus, the Passion or the Revelations of Saint

John, he brings us close to the vision of truth. Truth as it has been revealed to him...." (1).

The ecclesiastic influence which he received at Rorkes Drift, he combines with imagery and symbols that are synonomous with African culture and society, for example, in "Invitation" (ill.54). Here we are presented with a religious work depicting Christ, enthroned, surrounded by robed figures, presumably priests and elders, as well as a scene of the 'Last Supper' and of Christ preaching to a crowd. He gives this work a distinctly 'African' character, by including 'African' images or objects, e.g. African oxen, African people, assegais and shields. Phil du Plessis points out, in an article entitled "Hedendaagse Swart Kuns - 'n Genealogiese Skets"(2), that with Mbatha, ".... is daar 'n diep Christelike orientasie te bespeur, gekoppel aan elemente wat net uit Afrika kan kom." Mbatha portrays these biblical stories as he understands them, and we are thus presented with a distinctly personal expression which communicates a 'Christianity' which is as much a part of contemporary rural Africa as of Rome or Jerusalem. Prof. Neville Dubow writes, "In everthing he does, he draws from personal images. Thus in the "Birth of Jesus", a rampant elephant or rhinoceros are added to the customary (and not seemingly paltry) allocation of the staturory ox or ass".(3) "Similarly, the Magi and the Holy Trinity come out of Africa and Moses with his blanket and hat is a tribal chieftain of more than just the ancient Hebrews."(4)

Mbatha has been described, along with Gladys Mgudlandlu, Andrew Murray and Tshidizo Motjoadi, as a 'Primitive'.(5) Mbatha's works reveal that whilst he is a 'primitive' artist, (i.e. in style and idea) he is also a sophisticated thinker. He has refined all the seemingly 'primitive' devices which he has used in his work to convey his ideas, and in the process, has developed these devices into forms of remarkable aesthetic quality. To quote Prof. Dubow once

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1. Dubow, Prof. N: 'An African Visionary's Work of Vitality'. The Argus, 11 June, 1968. pg. 13.
 2. du Plessis, Phil: 'Hedendaagse Swart Kuns - 'n Genealogiese Skets'. S.A. National Gallery Bulletin, March 1983, pg. 3.
 3. Dubow, Prof. N: ibid.
 4. Dubow, Prof. N: ibid.
 5. Berman, Esmé: Art and Artists of South Africa. pg. 243-244.

more:

"One of the lessons of our time is the nostalgic leanings of a self-styled sophisticated society towards that which it fondly imagines to be the naïve. On this level, particularly in his interpretations of biblical subjects, Mbatha's work has an obvious appeal. But there is more to it than that. And this has to do with more strenuous stuff than naïvete and charm. I am talking about talent, vision and belief." (2)

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1. Dubow. Prof. N. 'An African Visionary's Work of Vitality'. The Argus, 11 June 1968, pg. 13.

5.2. John Muafangejo.

John Muafangejo is an Ovambo, born in 1948 at Oshikango, a village close to the border which separates Namibia from Angola. He received his schooling and his training as a secondary-school teacher, at the St. Mary's Anglican Mission at Oshikango, and then went to the E.L.C. Art and Crafts Centre at Rorkes Drift in Natal, where he trained as an artist. He majored in graphic and textile design, and lino-cuts are his speciality.

Muafangejo's works are autobiographical, betraying the artist's responses, his relationship toward his world, his God, his religion and all that it involves. These works have a decisive narrative quality, are two-dimensional, and are characterised by disproportion between objects in the compositions. The subject matter is drawn from African legends and myths, from rural African life and society, and more specifically from incidents and experiences in his own life. His work reflects a deep preoccupation with these memories and experiences, with the puzzlements of life, with the past and with his active involvement in his work and in the church. His highly personalised style, which does not make any attempt at special effects, is simple yet bold and direct, revealing his thoughts about himself and his world, and his response to these.

These spontaneous expressions are accompanied by frank written remarks which supplement the meanings and add an 'air of authority' to his pictorial statements. In the May-June 1982 edition of *Arts International* (Vol. XXX 15 - 16), an article on Muafangejo reads as follows: "The effect, in a curious way, is like being confronted by a black David Hockney: there is the same air of compulsive, autobiographic truth telling with the improvising visual conventions as he goes along in order to give form to what he has to communicate." (1)

The two missions with which Muafangejo had connections, namely, St. Mary's in Namibia, and Rorkes Drift in Natal, had a marked influence on him in his

1. _____ John Muafangejo. Arts International (Vol. XXX 15-16), May-June 1982.

world-view, and consequently in his art. His work displays a mixture of nostalgia and love for traditional rural life as well as a deep respect for the Christian values and teachings which he received at these missions. The former is expressed in "Kuanjama wedding" (ill.9), whilst the latter is poignantly depicted in "Jesus for Christians" (ill.1), "Holy Communion" (ill.6), "Oniipa Press" (ill.13) and "Cathedral Church of St.George, Windhoek" (ill.3).

Muafangejo gained widespread recognition at a very early stage in his career, the high-light of which being the opportunity he had of representing South Africa at the Sao Paulo Bienale in 1971. Together with this highlight and a number of other exhibitions which he has held in South Africa, he has also exhibited in London, Stockholm and throughout Canada.

5.3. Dan Rakgoathe.

"I believe every honest artist is a messenger of God, not in a religious sense, but in the sense that he has got to fulfill himself by reflecting the message of God to mankind." (1)

Daniel Sefudi Rakgoathe was born in 1940 in Randfontein, Transvaal. Dan says of himself, "My deep abiding love for art manifested itself at a very early age in my home in Transvaal. Even before I was seven and had begun my schooling, I remember drawing on different parts of my body with reeds and stalks. Sometimes I would be punished for filling walls with charcoal drawings." (2) From Standard six he was taught art by a Mr. Maseko, and during the years 1959 through 1961, he studied at Bothasabelo Training Institute and at Ndaleni Art Teachers Training College. He studied at Rorkes Drift Art and Craft Centre from 1967 until 1970, and later graduated with a B.A. Honours degree in Fine Art at Fort Hare University.

".... in his art he creates on two levels: First, on the aesthetic level, he creates pictorial and artistic images and works, and secondly he creates philosophically on the metaphysical level a particular cosmology, world view and vision." (3)

Rakgoathe's art is certainly an expression of a particular world view, rooted in an essentially mystical world, "ordered by awareness and principles inherent in the cosmos, as cosmos containing an order of its own kind." (4) Man is the central feature of Rakgoathe's philosophy and art, a feature which in itself is not out of character with African art. The cosmos and its force is related to man as well as being composed of human characteristics. This universe is expressed in terms of human emotion, e.g. "Litany" (ill.34) and "Praying" (ill.44). Another aspect of Rakgoathe's philosophy is that it is

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1. Rakgoathe, Dan: 'Notes on My Work'. African Arts. Vol.V. No 1. 1971.
pg. 58.
 2. Rakgoathe, Dan: *ibid.*
 3. De Jager. E.J: 'Man and Cosmos: The Visual Cosmology of Dan Rakgoathe.'
Fort Hare Papers. Vol 7. No 2. 1980. pg. 95.
 4. De Jager. E.J: *ibid.*

ontologically orientated. Dan is at once an artist and a philosopher, putting into visual and pictorial form, his personal philosophy. The work of Rakgoathe forms a continuity with Traditional African Art, since both seek to communicate a specific philosophy and world view. The one exception is that Rakgoathe's is 'his' individual belief, and not that of an entire community. In Traditional African society, no system of writing existed, and apart from word-of-mouth record, the visual media was the only other alternative. In the most fundamental sense of the word, the artist in Traditional African society was a philosopher as well, in that he puts into visible expression, his and his societies convictions and aspirations.

Rakgoathe's works reflect a deep preoccupation with death, with tragedy and with mysticism, and this is attributed to his own experience of tragedy in his life. He lost his mother when he was seven years old, and then his sister died in 1956. In 1964 his elder brother died and in 1967 his younger brother also died. Probably one of the most deeply felt tragedies in his life was the loss of his close friend and fellow artist, Cyprian Shilakoe, who died in 1972. Most of his works are endowed with a profound sadness or pathos, especially in the facial expressions and the bodily deportment of the figures which inhabit his compositions. Even some of the compositions, e.g. in "Lunar Fantasy" (ill.39) suggest this pathos. In a sense, they are much like the primitive Spanish Pietas of the 15th and 17th Century. e.g. the Pieta of Canon Luis Despla' by Bartolome Bermejo (1490), the "Burial of Christ" by Florentino (ill.67) and Gregorio Fernandez's "Pieta" (ill.68).

Bound up with this sense of tragedy is a deeply mystical other-worldly quality, like being confronted by the work of an 'African William Blake'. In his works one finds celestial bodies, e.g. the sun, moon, stars, as well as lonely figures huddled together in small groups or alone at the mercy of the cosmic forces. These are all held together by intricate decorative patterns and tracery.

Although Rakgoathe's work encompasses various aspects of traditional African religion and culture, i.e. the perpetuation of life, the society's dependence on the cosmic forces, its ontological orientation and anthropocentricity, its close affinity with the dead and the ancestral spirits, and the strong unity in all departments of life, his interpretation of these is not the corporate philosophy of Contemporary African Society, but is intensely personal.

6.

TRADITIONAL ELEMENTS.6.1. Narrative.

The narrative element has always been a traditional characteristic of Primitive art, even in that of the Pre-Renaissance, e.g. in Romanesque tableaus and Carolingian manuscript illumination, of which the page from the Utrecht Psalter in (ill.50) is an example. In the African context, though, this characteristic has not been realised in pictorial form. However, story-telling has always featured strongly in African culture, as in most cultures where literacy is absent. (The educational purpose of the narrative in Carolingian and other Medieval art is explained later in Chapter 7.) Most of what is known about such a culture's past is revealed to us through tales and myths which have been passed down from one generation to another. As a body of information, these stories contain the culture's philosophy and view of life.

As we saw earlier, much of the art produced by the artists at Rorkes Drift is characterised by a strong narrative element. The art of Azariah Mbatha is a prime example. His works are always narrative and eposodic in character, as well as being two-dimensional in composition with a highly decorative quality, e.g. "Peter" (ill.61). Mbatha deals with Biblical subjects, themes and stories relating them in a manner reminiscent of Byzantine tableaus and of the shallow relief friezes produced by the Zulu.

There are several devices that are used to achieve this narrative effect. One such device is that of dividing the picture space into registers, and these, in turn, into sections, to form little compartments, each of which is used to delineate successive incidents in the unfolding of the story. In this way, a whole series of events can be related within a single composition, as in Mbatha's "Revelations" (ill.55), "Birth of Jesus" (ill.60), and "Peter" (ill.61). Here the picture space is divided strictly into registers and, in turn, the registers are divided into compartments. The dividing lines are either solid black lines as in "Peter" (ill.61) and "Christ appears to the people" (ill.62), or irregular shapes, as in "Birth of Jesus" (ill.60), or even a pattern of small motorcars as in "Invitation" (ill.54). It is not

always a hard and fast rule that the picture-space is divided into strict registers, and often the registers 'flow' into one another, as in "Invitation" (ill.54), and in Nxamalo's "Shembe Story" (ill.47).

Another device used to create the narrative in these works, is to use images, figures and symbols which are peculiar to, and characteristic of the particular story being related. In much the same way that the story in Massaccio's 'Tribute Money' is recognised by specific characteristics which make it immediately identifiable, so in "Peter" (ill.61), we see a figure walking on water (Peter), toward a halo'd figure (Jesus), a cock in a tree (the bird which is synonymous with Peter's denial - Luke 22:54-62), and a figure hanging upside-down signifying Peter's crucifixion. In Muafangejo's "Preparation for the Flood" (ill.2), a large boat (the Ark) fills the entire top register. The second register contains faces of various people, and a paragraph of script which reveals that the faces are those of the members of Noah's family. In the third and fourth registers, there is a collection of birds, buck, elephant and other animals. All of these characteristics, grouped together, are quite obviously associated with the Biblical account of the 'Great Deluge'.

Repetition of certain objects in a composition is yet another way of creating a narrative effect. Franz Boaz points out that "rhythmic repetition of contents and form is found commonly in primitive narrative" (1), and that it "... is not confined to the larger units, but is applied as an artistic device in the detailed structure." (2) Mbatha uses this device in "Revelations" (ill.55) and in "Peter" (ill.61), where he repeats the figure of 'John' and 'Peter', several times in each, respectively. These figures are common to all of the scenes, and act as divisions between these scenes, enforcing the idea of a story being 'told' within the perimetres of the picturespace.

In a number of his works though, Mbatha does not divide the picturespace into registers, but instead, arranges the characters into sweeping semicircular

1. Boaz, Franz: Primitive Art. pg. 311.

2. Boaz, Franz: ibid. pg. 314.

compositions, as in "Israelites crossing the Red Sea" (ill.58) and "He went to Jerusalem" (ill.59). Nevertheless, the narrative is not undermined. Here, it is the arrangement of the subject of the composition that communicates the story, e.g. in (ill.58) the phalanx-like arrangement of the multitudes of people creates the impression of an army advancing. Albert Ndlovu's "Israelites crossing the Red Sea" (ill.48), displays this characteristic, too.

In his work on the life of Muafangejo, Bruce Arnott makes the following statement regarding the artist's work: "Characterisation is shrewd and economical and, while there is little formal sophistication, there is no trace of traditional influence." (1) My suggestion is that this is inaccurate, and that Muafangejo's work most certainly displays traditional formal elements. The narrative element is one example (as well as two-dimensionality, frontality, rhythm, disproportion, decorative space-filling, and negative/positive opposition).

Muafangejo achieves the narrative quality through formal devices - composition, design and written comments - and through content - economic, sagacious description and highly personalised expression and interpretation of Biblical themes. Regarding content more specifically, Muafangejo presents his objects economically and with bold directness. He uses only those details which are relevant to the story which he is depicting, e.g. "Vision of Eden" (ill.8). This work depicts 'Eden' at the completion of Creation. The story of creation is condensed and composed within a circular formation, symbolising the 'wholeness' and 'completeness' of Creation. Nothing is omitted. Every bee, every animal, every tree, fish and other creature that is associated with, and relevant to the account of Creation, is included. For the African, everything has a place in the cosmos, and the neglect of one essential detail may perpetuate a progressive deterioration. In considering this close affinity between man and nature, Cottie Burland makes the following observation: "It appears that the members of many of the simpler human communities feel not only a closer unity between individuals but also a kinship with the whole natural world. With such an extended awareness the moods of nature assume a personal importance." (2)

1. Arnott, Bruce: John Muafangejo. pg. 2.

2. Burland, Cottie: Gods and Demons in Primitive Art. pg. 53.

In some of Muafangejo's works, e.g. "As the serpent leers...."(ill.10) and the "Ancient people had a long beard...."(ill.23), he divides the picture space into registers, and the various events and aspects of the story are 'acted out' within these registers, and as in Mbatha, the story is 'told' within a single composition. Mbatha's characters are immediately recognisable, either by their 'action', e.g. 'Peter' walking on the water in (ill.61) and 'Jesus' riding on a donkey in (ill.60), or by some symbol synonymous with a specific story, e.g. the winged figures (angels) arranged in two parallel vertical rows above a reclining figure (Jacob) in (ill.63). On the other hand, with Muafangejo the story is not always blatantly obvious, with the result that the written remarks become a necessity in the completion of the story, e.g. in "Moses" (ill.15). The inclusion of written remarks might well be due to the influence of Medieval or Carolingian Manuscript illustration, since the Carolingian artist incorporated written text in his compositions, e.g. in (ill.50).

The body of Rakgoathe's work, seen in its entirety, is narrative in the sense that it explains the artist's interpretation of the cosmos. However, individually they are symbolic rather than narrative. This symbolism is conceived of in celestial bodies, e.g. the sun, as seen in (ills.30-46), and the moon (ills. 35,36,38-40,42 and 43), radiating rays (ills.30,31,41 and 44), darkspots in the heavens (ill.31), and star-like shapes in (ill.33).

6.2. Frontality.

Another traditional formal element in African Art - more specifically in sculpture - and also found in Contemporary African Art in South Africa, is that of 'frontality'. Frank Willett (1) writes: "African sculpture has been described as frontal, i.e. the figures are symmetrically disposed about a vertical axis, and face forward. There are, of course, exceptions to this but asymmetrical pieces are uncommon." Apart from its occurrence in sculpture, e.g. in the BaLuba and N'dengese ancestral figures, it has also been identified in rare examples of pictorial African art, as in a 'painting' on a cave wall at Mbafu (ill.27), depicting the first Congolese bishop, Don Henrique, dated approximately 1518, as well as in a more recent work, namely

1. Willett, Frank: African Art. pg. 144.

in traditional and contemporary African art. The most common tendency is to represent the head disproportionately larger than the rest of the body. Apart from being seen as a 'child-like' trait, disproportion was regarded by historians as a characteristic typical of the art of 'untutored artists', and that the artist neglected the overall wholeness of the composition for the sake of trivial detail. This, however has been disproved by further field-research, which revealed that sculptors actually plan the overall composition of the work before they commence carving. Proportions are deliberately 'distorted' and established in advance. This is done for formal reasons, as well as for specific 'meaning'. Willett points out that 'James Fernandez' made some discoveries regarding the meaning of proportions in Fang sculpture. (1) "... The large torso, the big head and the flexed disproportionately small legs are definitely infantile in character.... While the Fang argue that the statues represent age, the ancestors, and their august powers in their descendants' affairs, they also recognise the infantile qualities of the figures themselves." The explanation is given that infants are felt to be especially close to, and have an affinity with, the ancestors. In a paper on artistic expression in Fang culture, James Fernandez explains the reason for disproportion: "...what the statue represents is not necessarily the truth, physically speaking, of a human body, but a vital truth about human beings symbolically stated. This symbolic intelligence seems to arise from the way the statue holds opposite balance - old age and infancy.... What is expressed in these statues, then, is the essence of maturity."(2)

In Mbatha's work, the heads are proportionately larger than the bodies of the figures, as in "Israelites crossing the Red Sea" (ill.58), and "He went to Jerusalem" (ill.59). This is seen in Muafangejo's "A Good Shepherd" (ill.5), "Joseph's story in Egypt" (ill.18), "As the serpent leers" (ill.10) and "The love is approaching...." (ill.16).

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1. Willett, Frank: African Art. pg. 162.
 2. Fernandez, James: The exposition and imposition of order: Artistic expression in Fang Culture. The Traditional Artist in African Societies: edited by Warren L. d'Azevedo. pg. 205.

the carved doors of the chapel of the Apostolic Delegation, Lagos, by West African artist, Ben Enwonwu (ill.28). The former, a rather crudely executed drawing, is of a figure presented in a frontal position with arms outstretched, whilst the latter is a far more sophisticated, 'Westernised' conception of a Biblical theme, with Christ as the central figure, also presented rigidly 'frontal'.

This characteristic occurs frequently in Muafangejo's work, e.g. in "Lonely Man...." (ill.11) and "Moses" (ill.15). Muafangejo tends to use this device mainly for portraying important figures in his compositions. In "Lonely Man....", as well as in the compositions depicting the induction of the Bishop of Namibia (ill.3), and a bombing incident at the St. Mary's Anglican Seminary (ill.4), the major figures, the artist, the bishops, priests and archdeacons, are portrayed frontally whilst the other figures populating the composition are represented in profile. This stressed frontality is also found in Rakgoathe's "Mystery of Space" (ill.31) and "Cosmic Trinity" (ill.32). The frontality serves to emphasise the centrality of the subject being portrayed.

Forced frontality often results in figures being contorted into awkward postures, e.g. the female figures in "Lonely Man...." (ill.11) and 'Eve' in "Vision of Eden" (ill.8). The result is that a figure appears to be presented in profile and frontally, simultaneously, as, for example in (ill.11). Here the females heads, legs and lower abdominal regions are presented in profile whilst their shoulders and torso's are turned, revealing their breasts clearly frontally. The anatomy is thus 'twisted' uncomfortably and unnaturally. A similar thing occurs in (ill.8) where the figures are presented frontally with the feet turned awkwardly into a profile position.

6.3. Proportion.

In some compositions the more important figures are larger and consequently given a larger proportion of the picture space, e.g. in "The Oniipa Press" (ill.13), a factor which Phil du Plessis pointed out: "... groter belangriker figure word groter uitgebeeld." (1) This brings us to the aspect of proportion

1. Du Plessis, Phil: 'Hedendaagse Swart Kuns - 'n Genealogiese Skets'.
S.A. National Gallery Bulletin. March 1983. pg.3.

With reference to Phil du Plessis's aforementioned observation that important figures are sometimes portrayed as being larger than the less important figures, this is seen in the enthroned figure of Christ in "Invitation", and the priest in Muafangejo's "Anglican Seminary Blown Up" (ill.4). This characteristic is also common in Benin bronze relief plaques, as in (ill.53), where the 'warriors' are larger (more important) than their servants or assistants.

6.4. The African Time Concept.

The concepts of 'time' and 'space' are specific in the African context, and have a strong influence on thought and way of life. These concepts also have their realisation in the African's creative artistic expression, shaping both the formal elements and the contents of a work of art. This influence is peculiar to both traditional and contemporary African Art.

Time, for the African, is understood only as the collection of those events which are taking place in the present, those which have already occurred in the past and those which are likely to occur in the immediate future. The Western concept of time is different, being both linear and progressive, rather than cyclic and immediate. Time, in the African context, has to be experienced for it to be real or for it to make sense at all, and since that which is in the future has not yet been experienced, it cannot constitute time. Only things which are almost certain to occur, those which are inevitable, e.g. the sunrise, the night, etc. constituted, and fall under what is referred to as 'potential' time.

Essentially, the African concept of time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, having a long, mysterious past, and a very real present and virtually no future. Because the African conceives of time as the realization of events, the future is virtually non-existent, since events lying within it have not taken place as yet and can, therefore, not constitute time. At best we can say that the future is only an extension of the present and is, therefore, limited.

One aspect of the unity which exists in traditional society is that of the unity of time concept. There is no distinction between past and present, as Trowell and Nevermann noted (1): "The visible and invisible world, the human and divine, the past and the present, formed one harmonious whole, and man had to fix himself into this unity." In practice, the past is understood in terms of the position of the ancestor or the ancestral spirit within primitive

1. Trowell, Margaret, and

Neverman, Hans:

African and Oceanic Art. pg. 16.

society. The ancestral spirit not only belongs to the past but is equally, a normal and natural part of every day life. In this way, the past 'participates', as it were, in the present and is involved in every day life, being brought forward into the present. The present is always of prime importance to the African, and is expressed in rituals and in the creative arts. Life and religion are a corporate body, as we have already seen, and both are ontological phenomena, pertaining to the question of existence and being. The cyclic nature of the African time concept has its realization in Contemporary African art as well.

Phil du Plessis noted,(1) that chronology is often absent in African Art, and often little distinction is drawn between past and present. This is the case in the work of Azariah Mbatha. Often, several events which take place at different times are portrayed as occurring simultaneously within one composition. In "Invitation" (ill.54), for example, Mbatha depicts 'Christ preaching to a crowd (past), 'the Last Supper' (past), and an 'enthroned' Christ being worshipped by a multitude' (future - the worship of God in eternity, as revealed to John in Revelation), and simultaneously, he includes motor vehicles (present - contemporary), African oxen (local), and figures dressed in contemporary clothes. This 'swinging' back and forth from the past into the present tense, within a single composition, creates the feeling of a general undefined, unrestricted, unplanned timespan. Other examples which display these characteristics are "He went to Jerusalem" (ill.59) and "The Birth of Jesus" (ill.60). The former portrays the historic entry into Jerusalem, of Jesus, on the back of an ass (past), set against the backdrop of African huts and township-type houses (contemporary), whilst in the latter the three black 'wise men' brandish 'kieries'.

Reference to a particular time outside that of the present does not necessarily open up any perspective into the past. Any distinction between present and non-present is not always clear, since past and present are so closely interwoven. An event being depicted, whilst being an historic event, might just as well be a contemporary event. In Muafangejo's "Birth of Christ

1. Du Plessis, Phil: 'Hedendaagse Swart Kuns - 'n Genealogiese Skets'.
S.A. National Gallery Bulletin. March 1983. pg. 3.

- 1977", the event of the birth of Jesus Christ is brought forward in time out of the past into the present, making it a contemporary occurrence. Despite the inclusion of the date - 1977 - the scene, nevertheless, is not bound to a defined timespan, and is timeless, being a past, a present or a future event. This is equally true of his "Last Supper 1978" (ill.14). Phil du Plessis writes (1): "In ou Afrika het die tyd, soos in ander argaistiese beskawings, 'n sieklike aard, gekoppel aan die kringlope van die natuur. Dit is in direkte teenstelling met die twintigste-eeuse Westerlingse liniere historiese beskouing van die tyd." In Muafangejo's "Vision of Eden", the figures are neither contemporary, historic or individualised, but rather, schematic. The historic event of 'Creation' is made contemporary or perhaps even an event yet to occur, again endowed with a sense of timelessness.

"In the work of Rakgoathe, time is irrelevant, depicting neither past, present or future, no beginning and no end, man, life and the cosmos, are together conceived as one large and mystic circular continuum, an endless rhythm and an unceasing succession of birth, death and rebirth...." (2). Since Rakgoathe's philosophy has to do with the cyclic continuum of all things, of creation, of life and death and recreation, and not with the past or eternity to come, chronology is ignored. The result is that one is not aware of any specific point in time being communicated in his work. Whereas Mbatha uses 'motifs' or objects to signify specific tenses, e.g. motor cars (contemporary), 'the last supper' (past) and 'the eternal worship of God in Heaven' (future), Rakgoathe does not. Instead, he uses characteristics or figures which reflect no time at all and yet also all time.

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1. Du Plessis, Phil: 'Hedendaagse Swart Kuns - 'n Genealogiese Skets'.
S.A. National Gallery Bulletin. March 1983. pg. 3.
 2. De Jager, E.J: 'Man and Cosmos: The Visual Cosmology of Dan Rakgoathe.'
Fort Hare Papers. Vol 7. No 2. 1980.
pg. 102.

6.5. Design and the decorative aspect.

As we noted earlier, (in chap.1) a strong feeling for design and decoration are common characteristics in the art of primitive societies, and in African art, no less. This is readily identifiable in beadwork, basketry, and very especially, in the decoration of Ndebele houses as seen in the Transvaal. Apart from this apparently being a common tendency in traditional African art, this sympathy for design in Contemporary African Art, is also attributed to the influence of Islam.

The decorative quality in art is a difficult characteristic to pin-point and to reduce to singular features, since it is the accumulation of a variety of aspects which contribute to the decorative quality of a work. As an example, rhythmic repetition of forms and objects or motifs is an important aspect of design and decoration, in that it maintains the flow of the eye over the entire composition, creating an overall unity, as well as contributing to the illusion of rhythm. The attention paid to the empty spaces between objects also contributes to the overall decorative surface of a work.

6.5.1. Two-dimensionality.

One of the intrinsic elements of effective design is that of two-dimensionality, which lends itself to economic line and form and a shallow space, e.g. Muafangejo's "A Good Shepherd" (ill.5). Two-dimensional design is also well suited to the limitations of black and white linocut printing.

The works of Mbatha and Muafangejo are essentially two-dimensional, making use of economic line, flat, simple forms, with Mbatha stressing vertical and horizontal lines, especially noticeable in works like "Peter" (ill.61) and "The Birth of Jesus" (ill.60). It is interesting that despite the two-dimensionality of these artists' work there is a definite illusion of three-dimensional space and form in the objects of these works, even though the space may be shallow and the illusion of form, minimal, e.g. in "Preparation of the Flood" (ill.65). Sometimes the surface is broken into different pattern densities, which overlap to give the suggestion or an illusion of depth. This is particularly evident in John Muafangejo's "Good

Shepherd" (ill.5), "The love is approaching..." (ill.16), "The Border" (ill.21), "The ancient people..." (ill.23) and "Love" (ill.24), and is illustrated equally as clearly in Mbatha's "Invitation" (ill.54), "He went to Jerusalem"(ill.59), "Israelites crossing the Red Sea" (ill.58) and "Christ appears to the people" (ill.62). However, aerial and linear perspective, in the true sense, is absent.

A substantial proportion of Rakgaothe's works unlike those of Mbatha and Muafangejo, are not limited to two-dimensional space. However, this does not imply that, since his works are three dimensional, there is no sense of design in Rakgaothe's work, for his "Rain Queen" (ill.29) and "Litany" (ill.34), to mention only two works, have a profound sense of design. In the former, the entire picturespace is permeated with the gentle flowing rhythm of bead-like marks symbolising the plentiful flow of blessings in the form of rain, given by the Rain Queen. The different density of surface pattern in her attire adds to the decorative design. Also, the stressed frontality of the figure with her arms holding up the rain clouds contributes to the decorative strength of the composition. In the latter, the clothes of the figure with out-stretched arms are made up of geometric type designs, the ground comprises a granular, gravel-like quality, whilst the sky seems to be vibrating with energy, the feeling of which is communicated through a design of repeated curvilinear lines. However, the philosophy which he attempts to communicate, namely that of the mysterious unity and immensity of the cosmos and everything contained therein, is a far more predominant aspect of his work than the sense of design. It calls for the use of three-dimensional space and perspective, and proportion, rather than two dimensionality, to portray this immensity, e.g.in "Funcludisi" (ill.33) and "Death Messengers" (ill.37). The works that are two-dimensional and decorative, do communicate the sense of space effectively, e.g. in "The mystery of Space" (ill.31).

6.5.2. Rhythm.

Rhythm is a very important aspect of African culture, as it has a variety of manifestations in everyday life. It is realised in music and dance, in folktales and rituals as well as in the African's whole concept of the forces of nature and being which follows 'a rhythmic cycle'. Rhythmic repetition in music is significant in that it is believed that the more an idea is repeated the more concrete and real it becomes. Franz Boaz goes into in-depth detail

on the aspects of rhythm in primitive art forms in his book Primitive Art (1), and he insists that rhythm cannot be merely restricted to a technical explanation but that rhythm is one of the fundamental aesthetic traits. This rhythm also has its interpretation in the visual arts, with similar vitality, e.g. in "A Good Shepherd" (ill.5) and "Orange Farm" (ill.7). In Rakgoathe's 'cosmoscapes', one also encounters this rhythmic quality, which is used here to symbolise the perpetual, repetitive rhythm of the cosmos. The illusion of rhythm is achieved through repeating forms, as in "Orange Farm", or by repeating lines and decorative patterns as in the backgrounds of Rakgoathe's "Rain Queen", and in Mbatha's "Invitation", "Peter" and "Israelites crossing the Red Sea". These rhythmic patterns are an integral part of the overall decorative character of these works.

6.5.3. negative/positive opposition and space-filling.

The characteristics of negative/positive opposition and decorative space-filling are interdependent.

In Contemporary African Art one finds that the artist often includes a fair amount of apparently 'irrelevant' details and information in his compositions. What is more, these 'trivia' are given the same attention and value as the major objects or events (as we noted in Chap. 6.1.) In other compositions the negative space surrounding the objects are treated in the same way. In traditional sculpture, to give an example, the 'empty' spaces, between the body and arms, for instance, are as important in determining the overall form of the sculpture, as the positive form itself. The attention paid to the negative space, as well as the positive form, gives the sculpture an overall unity. The form does not exist merely as an entity in itself, but is intimately intergrated with the space surrounding it, and is incomplete without it.

In pictorial art, this device is also utilised, and is also an important aspect of the inherent balance in traditional and Contemporary African Art. Again, neither negative nor positive is neglected. In several of Muafangejo's

1. Boaz, Frank: Primitive Art. pg. 317.

works, e.g. "Oniipa Press" (ill.13), the forms which are repeated, are alternately white and black, which (apart from conveying the artist's personal political opinions) also introduces the aspect of the opposition of negative and positive shapes. In "Vision of Eden" (ill.8.), "Etosha Pan Wild Life" (ill.17) and "Preparation for the Flood" (ill.2), and Rakgoathe's "Funcludizi" (ill.33), there is a marked play between positive and negative shapes. In (ill.8) and (ill.17), the artist 'fits' the forms of plants and animals together as though they were parts of a puzzle, and it is firstly the overall unity or oneness of the composition that one notices. Only upon close and careful scrutiny, do all the shapes become identifiable. In Rakgoathe's (ill.37), the heavily encrusted, jewel-like decorative detail is as important a part of the whole as the figures in the composition, which again are not immediately noticeable. As in the paintings of Pierre Bonnard (1867 - 1947), one continually discovers fresh exciting little details in these works. The treatment of positive and negative shapes has to do partly with the African concept of the unity of all things.

Another tendency is to fill the 'empty' spaces with decorative detail, e.g. in Muafangejo's "Lonely Man...." (ill. 11), "Birth of Christ" (ill.12), "The Love is approaching...." (ill.16), "The Border" (ill.21), "Angola or Kunene Republic" (ill.22) and "Love" (ill.24). Rakgoathe fills the negative spaces in his compositions with decorative detail and in his case, this treatment of positive and negative spaces has to do, in part, with the African concept of the unity of all things. Mbatha uses the device, also, e.g. in "Invitation" (ill.54) and in (ills. 60,62 and 63). He fills the spaces with simple repetitive lines, or as in (ill.61), he uses plant forms as a space-filler.

The concept of space-filling is also partly attributable to the African's perception of space. It is content which defines space, in the same way that realised events constitute time. Just as the present time embraces all conceivable reality, so, that which is tangible, visible and concrete is what gives space and form their meaning, and what makes them conceivable and real. Abstract beings, places or ideas are not easy to comprehend or to explain, and for this reason, the spirits, for instance are given concrete realisation in the form of sculptures, fetishes and masks. For the African, 'concrete' reality is the expression of his experience and his security in the present.

6.6. 'Christian influence or psychological affinity?'

Phil du Plessis wrote: (1) "Ek gebruik die woord Bisantyns omdat studente by Rorkes Drift natuurlik vertrouwd gemaak word met vroeer Christelike kuns...." In this article, du Plessis attributes the absence of chronology, the proportional emphasis given to important figures in compositions, and the simultaneous depiction within a single composition, of several events which take place at different times, to a Byzantine influence. However, although Rorkes Drift students might well be familiar with early Christian art, and probably received some influence from it, the abovementioned characteristics are not foreign to traditional African art. In the first place, the absence of chronology can be linked to the cyclic concept of time, which is common to African thinking (as we have already discussed in Chap.6.4.). This assumption of du Plessis, though probably unintentionally so, is in fact a contradiction of the observation which he made in the same article, regarding the difference between the 'Western' linear concept of time, and the 'cyclic' time concept common to most archaic civilizations. As we have also already discussed, the simultaneous depiction of several events with one composition which is an important contributing factor to the narrative element in these pictorial art forms, is not at all remote from the African expression. The device of portraying important figures proportionately larger than the less important one's, is not a foreign concept in African Art either. In fact, it is found in various forms of traditional African tribal art, e.g. the wooden relief friezes made by the Zulu, and the bronze plaques made by the Benin people, as in (ill.53).

Esmé Berman suggests that the influence is Romanesque (2), and also in another context she points out that the influence is that of Medieval Swedish and Carolingian. However, we have noted that these 'periods' in art have in common that they were referred to as 'Primitive' because of their undeveloped compositional and pictorial devices. Since African art and Pre-Renaissance share a number of characteristics, e.g. narrative approach, decorative space-filling, disproportion, simplified conventions in portraying objects,

1. du Plessis, Phil: 'Hedendaagse Swart Kuns - 'n Genealogiese Skets'.
S.A. National Gallery Bulletin. pg. 3.
2. Berman, Esmé: Art and Artists of South Africa. pg.193.

and linear definition of forms, it is not always possible to state exactly which source of influence is applicable in each case.

Since a number of these characteristics occur in art forms that were not subject to any Christian influence, I would tend to agree with Berman's suggestion of a 'psychological' affinity between the two traditions. Both of these expressions, i.e. African and pre-Renaissance, "...can be described as Primitive by nature of their pictorial devices." (1)

One point upon which I cannot fully agree with Berman, is that she attributes the device of 'decorative space-filling between images' to a source remote from the 'indigenous tradition', in this case, a Romanesque influence. Firstly, the use of decorative motifs and details to fill in space between images 'is' an indigenous tradition in African art in that it has been a trait which has been prevalent in African Art since the time of the Islamic domination of the Africans. The aspect of space-filling is also inseparable from 'design', a common characteristic in the art of all primitive societies. What is more, within the African ontological framework, the space which an object occupies is regarded as being as important as the object itself. The artist thus gives equal value and attention to the object as to its surrounds.

1. Berman, Esmé : Art and Artists of South Africa. pg. 193.

7.

CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS.

The Christian elements found in Contemporary African art are not merely incidental, but as we already have noted, they have come about as a result of the influence of the Christian church and its teachings. E.J. de Jager regards the occurrence of Christian and Biblical themes as a minor division in Contemporary African art.(1) Whilst this might be true when seen within the context of the entire spectrum of Contemporary African art, one should not lose sight of the significance of this category, and of the fact that it embraces a considerable body of work, expressive of the responses of a number of artists from both the mission art schools and the townships.

Although the three artists being considered have all originally studied at Rorkes Drift, they all display a great measure of individuality and variety. The works of Dan Rakgoathe, who is also a philosopher, are deeply mystical, and whilst they display images which seem synonymous with Christianity, are really only symbolic derivatives of, and do not adhere strictly to Biblical principles, (e.g. images derived from the Biblical concept of the Trinity, and Crucifixion). Azariah Mbatha, on the other hand, depicts biblical stories and themes as they are related in Scripture. The striking feature of these works is not the communication of a personal philosophy, but the individualistic interpretation of these stories, and the way in which he makes them relevant to his own world and experience. John Muafangejo has been attributed the description of being an 'expressionist', by art critic, Januszczak, of the Guardian (2) who writes: "Peering into the grooves cut and scraped in Muafangejo's linocuts, you see a similar world to the one gouged out of wood by the great German expressionist masters of the woodcut, such as Heckel, Kirschner and Schmidt-Rottluff." In style, there is indeed a similarity, especially in the harshness and boldness of the forms.

Whilst one of my aims is to establish which apparently 'Christian' elements are in fact also concepts which occur in traditional primitive society, it is

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1. de Jager, E.J: Contemporary African Art in South Africa. pg. 22.
 2. Fischer, Jean: "Muafangejo 'world class print maker'. Backstage. "Biography". 23 June 1983.

also necessary that a distinction be drawn between the influence of 'Christianity' on Contemporary African Art, and the influence of 'Christian Art' on the same.

An analysis of the 'Christian' influence presents us with the effects of Christian and Biblical teachings on the artists' lives and, consequently, their work. Since the artists at Rorkes Drift live within an ecclesiastic, mission environment, it follows that the teachings received there would infiltrate their lives and affect their world-view. By the same token, the influence would find expression in their creativity. These expressions we find, fall into four major categories:

- a) expressions of personal beliefs, and involvement in the Church and the Christian life,
- b) individualised interpretations of Biblical stories,
- c) biblical themes, concepts and values, and
- d) symbols and sacraments associated with Christianity and the Church.

There is also the influence of 'Christian art' which must be considered. Esmé Berman (1) draws our attention to the fact that Rorkes Drift students are familiar with Medieval Swedish and Carolingian art, as taught them by their instructors. This influence is realized chiefly in the area of compositional devices, e.g. narrative, effigy, two-dimensionality and the inclusion of the written word in the composition. Whilst Carolingian art and that which is discussed in this paper have a repertoire of Biblical themes in common, the latter is not bound to the rules and canons of proportion and composition of archetype which governed the former, though African art does make use of some of these devices. Although we are dealing mainly with Rorkes Drift students' work, we must look briefly at the occurrence of the 'cross' in the art of township schools. e.g. Louis Maqhubela's "Peter's Denial" (ill.49) and Enoch Tshabalala's "Crucifixion" (ill.66).

7.1. The symbol of the 'cross'.

The subject of the Cross and of the 'Crucifixion of Christ' has been one of the central themes in Christian art since the middle-ages, an example of which

1. Berman, Esmé: Art and Artists of South Africa. pg. 244.

is the 'Crucifixion' by Cimabue (1230-1302), as well as Benedetto Antelami's 'Deposition' (1178) and the cross on the Crown of the Holy Roman Empire (962 AD), and then more recently, Salvador Dali's "Crucifixion", and Osagie Osifo's "Crucifixion" (ill.52) of 1961, to mention but two. In the field of architecture, the groundplan of many churches and cathedrals were based on the cross, (either Latin or Greek cross). The symbol of the cross has also been found in regions untouched by Christianity, and in these cases the cross has no connection with the aspect of Christian truth which centres around the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but instead it becomes a non-religious symbol. However, one can say with a fair amount of certainty that the presence of the crucifix in the art of Contemporary African artists in South Africa, is attributed to a purely Christian influence.

7.1.1. the 'cross' as subject and 'motif'.

In the work of Muafangejo and Mbatha, the concepts of the crucifixion and the cross maintain the scriptural sense and meaning, and are used in this connection, in Mbatha's "Invitation" (ill.54) and Muafangejo's "Church Service" (ill.26), and "Windhoek people pray for peace...." (ill.19). In (ill.54), the cross is placed within the same vignette containing a composition depicting the Last Supper, which in itself anticipates the Crucifixion of Christ. Muafangejo's etching entitled "Church Service" displays a strong identification with the figure of Christ and the cross. Phil du Plessis writes: "Die priester het dieselfde houding as die Christus en die tropisme is so sterk dat mens deur ekstrapolasie die drie-eenheid kan voltooi deur dit tot by die skilder of toeskouer deur te voer." (1) The concept of the trinity will be discussed in a later chapter.

Dan Rakgoathe does not use the crucified figure in portraying the Biblical truths and principles surrounding it, but rather uses it as a symbol, derived from the Biblical source as a motif by means of which he attempts to communicate his philosophy, as in "Unfolding Man" (ill.30), "Mystery of Space" (ill.31) and "Funcludizi" (ill.33). In (ill.33) the composition is dominated by a figure which hangs, suspended, in a posture resembling that of the

1. du Plessis, Phil: 'Hedendaagse Swart Kuns - 'n Genealogiese Skets'
S.A. National Gallery Bulletin. March 1983. pg. 3.

crucified 'Christ'. It is set against a 'cosmoscape' background which resembles a web, composed of concentric circles and radiating rays. De Jager describes it as follows:(1) "It is almost as if this figure emerges from cosmic space signifying not only the holistic totality and unity of the cosmos but especially man's dependence on the cosmos as a source of life, and his being as an inseparable part thereof." This is a symbol of man as the centre of the universe or cosmos, the measure of all things, in a way like da Vinci's "Vitruvius Man". The person of Christ as the pivotal point in the biblical understanding of the Christian faith, has been substituted here with 'man' as the centre of the universe and of all being. The cross is also a symbol of new life (in the Christian faith) and, again by extrapolation, this concept of new life has found expression in "Unfolding Man" (ill.30).

7.2. the 'Mother and Child' symbol.

The symbol of the "Madonna and Child" is one of the earliest themes to appear in Christian Art, e.g. the icons of the Greek orthodox world. Douglas Frazer suggested, in his book, 'Primitive Art', that the typical mother and child figure, for example that found amongst Bakongo sculpture, is a copy of the 'Madonna of Humility'.(2) I do not know that it is a copy as such, but it is indeed a direct influence of the concept. The 'Mother and Child' symbol also appears in Contemporary African Art in South Africa, in 'Township Art', e.g. "Mother and Child" by M.Ntuli (3), as well as in mission art-school work. Dan Rakgoathe has utilised the symbolism in "Rain Queen" (ill.29) to convey the concept of the 'life-supporting role of the female principle in the cosmos'. De Jager suggests that the figure symbolises the 'fertility' queen as found in all cultures. (4) In this illustration, as well as in (ill.35) we are confronted by a female figure which dominates the composition, and in the former, a small human face "peers from the womb in the process of birth and new life"(5), whilst in the latter the figure of a small child is watched

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1. de Jager, E.J: 'Man and Cosmos: The Visual Cosmology of Dan Rakgoathe.' Fort Hare Papers. Vol 7. No 2. 1980. pg. 104.
 2. Frazer, Douglas: Primitive Art. pg. 56-59.
 3. see de Jager: Contemporary African Art in South Africa, plate 57.
 4. de Jager, E.J: ibid. pg. 122.
 5. de Jager, E.J: ibid. loc cit.

over protectively, by the adult 'mother' figure. The figure of the child is placed in such a way that it almost becomes part of the 'mother' figure. This expression of a close affinity between the female womb and the newly-born can also be connected with the genitalia being made to resemble either the human face or a beast-like form, as in "Rain Queen" (ill.29) and (ill.35) untitled, and "Mystery of Space" (ill.31) and (ill.39), respectively. In the Fort Hare Papers of 1980 (1), de Jager draws our attention to the resemblance between the forms of the so-called 'celestial manifestations' within Rakgoathe's cosmoscapes and the forms of the human organisms such as the uterus, the umbilical cord and the human eye. In "Funcludizi" (ill.33), the composition itself has uterine qualities, and the delicate tracery and design resemble the cells in human organisms.

7.3. The concept of the 'priest' or 'mediator'.

In (ill.33), to quote de Jager, "... we find a figure with outstretched arms as if in the act of some kind of benediction. He is obviously taking the lead in whatever is taking place, thus fulfilling the role of officiate in the ritual."(2) ("Funcludizi" is the enactment of an ancient ritual) (3). The concept of Christ as an Intercessor, a priest and an officiate for God's people, has been transferred to the realm of Man in the form of priest, in some denominations. He becomes the mediator between man and God. In other denominations, the role of mediator is reserved solely for the person of Jesus Christ, and He is the "mediator of the new covenant" (Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24). Similarly, in traditional African religion, there is an officiate who conducts religious ceremonies, be he or she a witch-doctor or chief. This similarity finds expression in "Church Service" (ill.26) and in "Funcludizi" (ill.33). In the former, the priest appears as an echo or a repetition of the figure of Christ, the mediator, on a cross behind him, whilst the priest in the latter plays the part of an officiate or a intercessor between the community and the gods.

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1. de Jager, E.J: 'Man and Cosmos: The Visual Cosmology of Dan Rakgoathe.' Fort Hare Papers. Vol 7. No 2. 1980. pg. 98.
 2. de Jager, E.J: *ibid.* pg. 114.
 3. de Jager, E.J: *loc cit.*

7.4. The concept of the 'trinity'.

The quality, attribute or perfection which describes the character of the Godhead, in the Christian Faith, namely the 'tripersonality' of God, as communicated by the Holy Trinity, is another concept which Rakgoathe has derived from the scriptures and has adapted to suit his own cosmology, e.g. in (ill.32) "Cosmic Trinity". In the Christian concept of the 'Trinity', this 'tri-unity' between the three persons of the Godhead, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is understood to be the most perfect, eternal and absolute unity that exists. Here, in "Cosmic Trinity" (ill.32), a group of three ghostly black figures are closely bound together by a central 'sun' symbol (the sun being the giver of life force). The three figures represent the three basic cosmic forces, birth, death and awareness, and are inseparable, hence the 'trinity'.

Earlier, in Chap.7.1.1., Phil du Plessis suggested that the crucified Christ figure together with that of the priest and the spectator could constitute a 'trinity' in (ill.26). This concept is also implied in "Jesus for Christians...." (ill.1), with the top figure representing 'God, whilst the bottom figure (which, incidentally, is not separate from the top figure) represents Christ, crucified. When taken together with the spectator, this does complete the 'trinity'. This is essentially a 'Christian' influence having no counterpart in traditional religion and society.

7.5. Biblical Stories.

Throughout the history of representational art, Christian and Biblical themes have been a source of creative inspiration for artists, and it seems that they have always invested in these pictorial representations, characteristics which make them easily and immediately identifiable. This is by no means less evident in Contemporary African Art, for here we are presented with a great number and variety of biblical stories, e.g. Mbatha's "Peter", "Revelations", "Christ appears to the people", "Birth of Jesus" and "Adam and other stories, and Muafangejo's "As the serpent leers....", "Preparation for the Flood" and "Joseph's story in Egypt", and Maqhubela's "Peter's Denial" (ill.49). These works, by virtue of their subject matter, could easily be didactic, but these artists have managed to overcome the threat of this problem by means of their

highly personalised interpretations of these stories. The influence in the portrayal of biblical stories, in content, that is, is clearly Christian, whilst the effects of 'Christian art' is seen only in compositional features, which have already been partially discussed in chapter 6.1.

Although these works are typically 'African' in expression, and even in characterisation, the subject matter is derived directly from the Biblical source. Even the account of the creation in Muafangejo's "Vision of Eden" is not based on the traditional African 'Creation myths', but on the biblical account thereof.

7.6. Biblical themes or 'motifs'.

There are various themes or 'motifs' in Scripture which do not feature, as such, in Traditional African religion, such as angels and the concept of the 'Good Shepherd'. However, they do occur in the works of various African artists. The angel also occurs in Mbatha's (ill.63) and in Muafangejo's "As the serpent leers...." (ill.10). Muafangejo also utilises the 'shepherd' concept as described in (John 10:11, Hebrews 13:20 and Psalm 23:1), in his "A Good Shepherd" (ill.5). These characteristics are attributed to a clearly 'Christian' influence.

7.7. The 'halo' or 'aura'.

The 'halo' or 'aura', whilst having no basis in scripture, is traditionally associated with spirituality, divinity or deity, in Christian circles and in the religions of other cultures. The portrayal of 'deities' or 'religious' figures having halo's surrounding their heads, to distinguish them from other figures, must surely be attributed to 'Christian art' in this case. In Medieval art one finds deities 'wearing' halo's signifying their 'divinity' or 'purity', which has its origins in pagan beliefs.

Muafangejo uses the halo in his "Birth of Christ in 1977" (ill.12) and in "Last Supper, 1978" (ill.14), and it can be seen in the figures of Christ in Mbatha's "Birth of Jesus" (ill.60) and "Christ appears to the people" (ill.62).

7.8. Christian symbols and their counterparts in traditional African religions.

There are a variety of signs and concepts co-existent with Christian religion, which also have a counterpart in primitive cultures and religions, and which are expressed in the art of various Contemporary African artists.

7.8.1. cattle.

One such symbol is that of the 'ox' or 'cow'. There is a connection between the religious significance of cattle in African culture and its occurrence in African art as exemplified by Muafangejo's (ills. 8,12 and 21), and in Mbatha's (ills. 54 and 65). Apart from it being an image which is distinctly of Africa in these works (African oxen), they also have specific meaning. They are a sign of wealth, or at least material well-being. John Muafangejo is part of a large and fairly wealthy family, and his father owned many cattle. Cattle also play an important part in traditional African marriage rites (lobola). The religious significance varies slightly from tribe to tribe, e.g. the Herero (Namibia) believe that cattle originated from the 'tree of life', the place where all forms of life emanate from. The Dinka people believe that both cattle and children belong to God, that they are gifts from God to men, and that all cattle are destined for sacrifice. In the scriptures the calf also takes on the characteristic of being a sacrificial element (Genesis 18:7). It is also, on occasion, an item of idolatry (Exodus 32:15 and 1Kings 12:32).

7.8.2. the snake.

One of the universal archetypal symbols, according to Carl Jung, is the snake, and is regarded by him as a symbol of the earth and of fertility. In African culture, the snake is seen as evil or as ominous, as well as being the incarnation of the spirits or the living-dead. In the biblical context, the snake represents sloth, evil, temptation, depravity and a personification of Satan himself. In Muafangejo's "As the serpent leers...." (ill.10) and "Vision of Eden" (ill.8), the snake is used as an integral part of the story or account being related. In the former, the snake is that one representing Satan tempting Eve, whilst the snake in the latter is both the representation of the

presence of the evil one right at the genesis of earthly life and of one of the creatures of the great creation.

7.8.3. mythical trees and the 'tree of life'.

Mythical trees feature in African religion in various forms. The Herero (Namibia) speak of the 'tree of life' from which all life emanates. There is also the belief that God forbade men to eat of a certain tree. Man, in disobedience, ate from the tree, and as a result, death entered the worldly realm. This, of course, has a similar counterpart in Christianity (with the major difference being that in the biblical understanding, the disobedience of man resulted not only in the introduction of death to mankind and the world, but also resulted in Man's Fall from the state of Grace to one of Total Depravity).

In the Bible, the tree also has other connotations, being a bearer of good fruit (Luke 6:43, Matthew 4:4 and 12:33), a source of life and knowledge (Rev: 2:7 and 2:14) and a symbol of curse (Galatians 3:13) and the cross on which Christ died (Acts 13:29).

The tree also occurs repeatedly in Muafangejo's work. In "As the serpent leers....", the influence is, quite emphatically that of the Biblical account of the Fall of Man, the tree, in this case, being that of the 'Knowledge of Good and Evil'. In "The love is approaching" and "Love" the tree takes on a varied and multiple symbolism. In both, Muafangejo seems to be puzzling with moral values, and the tree could therefore be connected with the between the knowledge and evil. However, the tree also takes on decorative and an erotic quality, especially in "The love is approaching...." (ill.16) where the tree is almost animate as it writhes and foliates between the two figures and across the picture-plane. Within the context of the story in "Sad and Happy people" (ill.25), the tree appears to symbolise the 'life' source, which has bestowed it's blessing upon the sad people who were berieved of a child, by giving them a new child!

7.8.4. the 'sun' symbol.

In traditional African society, the sun is a symbol of the omniscience, the

omnipresence and the light of God. The Baluba liken the eternal nature of God to the apparent everlasting existence of the sun, referring to Him as "He of many Suns", whilst the Galla believe the Sun to be the eye of God. It must be stressed that the sun is not considered to be God, as in American Indian religions, but at best only symbolises some of the attributes and perfections of God, for example, His power, His providence, His everlasting endurance, His omniscience, His purity and the fact that He is devoid of any darkness.

Dan Rakgoathe makes extensive use of the sun symbol in his work. He regards the sun as the male principle in creation, being the carrier, giver and sustainer of life, whilst the moon is the female principle, which, in its mystic marriage to and union with the Sun (ill.45) aids in the procreation, the perpetuation and the sustenance of the universe.

Apart from the sun representing the eye of God, the symbol of a single eye as found in Egyptian Art is used in Muafangejo's "Cathedral Church of St. George" (ill.3) and "Anglican Seminary, Blown up" (ill.4). It is not possible to establish what source of influence comes into play here. It might have simply arisen out of the concept of God being omniscient.

7.8.5. Bird images.

When one considers the occurrence of birds and bird-images in the scriptures, one recalls images of a 'bird of peace' (dove), the 'Holy Spirit' (descending on Christ in the form of a dove, the analogy of mounting up on the wings of an eagle, as well as the image of a 'bearer' of Good news'. In African culture, the bird usually has a totemic significance, but of this I have no clear knowledge. Birds occur in several of Mbatha's works and in those of John Muafangejo. Rakgoathe uses the image of the owl. e.g. in "Funcludizi" (ill.33) and "Full-moon Meeting" (ill.43). In Muafangejo's "Preparation for the Flood" the birds represent those that entered the ark. In the works of these three artists, one finds the images of various types of birds. These, however, are not presented in a symbolic abstracted form, but actually represent a specific type of bird. The birds are localised and have characteristic features, e.g. particular types of beaks, feather and body markings. Some examples are the 'cock' in Mbatha's "Peter", 'doves', 'cuckoos' and 'toppies' in Muafangejo's

"Preparation for the flood", and the aforementioned 'owls' in Rakgoathe's compositions, e.g. (ill.33 and 43).

7.9. Prayer.

The concept of prayer is universal, and is a characteristic which inseparable from any form of worship. It is almost a natural response of every human being, especially in times of crisis, to cry out in petition to a greater being or power. "Litany" (ill.34) and "Praying" (ill.44) as the titles suggest, deal with prayers of supplication. E.J. de Jager (1) suggests that the two figures in "Litany" symbolise the Apollonian and the Dionysian responses which humans have in times of crises, the one being in a pose of resignation and surrender, whilst the other is emotionally upset, waving, crying, and petitioning the heavens.

1. de Jager, E.J: 'Man and Cosmos: The Visual Cosmology of Dan Rakgoathe.'
Fort Hare Papers. Vol 7. No 2. 1980. pg. 120.

I have taken a comparative look at the status of the African artist in Traditional and Contemporary African society in South Africa, and considered the different functions of art in these societies, as well as the varying motivating factors behind the creation of these artworks, in both contexts. I have discussed the works of three Contemporary African artists, all of whose works express distinctly individual interpretations of the 'Christian' influence and that of 'Christian Art'. I have attempted to establish as clearly as possible, whether the influences are either that of 'Christianity' or of 'Christian Art'. I have also sought to identify those formal elements which are common to traditional African art and which are used by Contemporary African artists.

In conclusion, I would like to mention just one more important aspect regarding contemporary African art. Though African art in South Africa has a very short history, (being a Twentieth Century innovation) it is dynamic and differentiated, like it's many counterpart artforms. Traditional African artforms developed in relative isolation in the past, and as a result of having been untouched by any new stimuli and motivations, it displayed numerous inherent weaknesses and deficiencies. However, with the reciprocal influences brought about by the meeting of 'Western' and African cultures, the African artist now has broader prospects for creative development and improvement. African art is dynamic in that it is expressive of vitality and motive force, and is open to growth and stimulus. African art is differentiated in that it varies according to circumstance, (being ontologically and existentially orientated) and it takes on different expressions and forms in a process of continual change, growth and development, showing great capacity for adaptation.

Whilst artists like Rakgoathe, Mbatha and Muafangejo display the influences of Christianity in their works in some way or another, these expressions are not necessarily soundly based on the scriptural truth, but are in most cases merely derivatives of Biblical principles. In fact, it is 'man' that is central to their works, and they relate almost entirely in terms of the human being. I would then, at best, describe it as an 'African Humanism' which is blended with hints of 'Christian' motifs or symbolism.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

1. John Muafangejo - "Jesus for Christians...." (1981) - linocut - 33cm x 35,5cm.
2. John Muafangejo - "Preparation for the Flood" (1979) - linocut.
3. John Muafangejo - "Cathedral Church of St. George Windhoek" (1981) - linocut.
4. John Muafangejo - "Anglican Seminary Blown Up" (1981) - linocut.
5. John Muafangejo - "A Good Shepherd" - linocut.
6. John Muafangejo - "Holy Communion" (1974) - etching and aquatint - 25,5cm x 30,5cm.
7. John Muafangejo - "Orange Farm" (1974) - linocut - 45cm x 52cm.
8. John Muafangejo - "Vision of Eden" (1968) - linocut - 62cm x 53cm.
9. John Muafangejo - "Kuanjama Wedding" (1973) - linocut - 51,3cm x 30cm.
10. John Muafangejo - "As the serpent leers...." (1973) - linocut - 34cm x 46,5cm.
11. John Muafangejo - "Lonely Man" (1974) - linocut - 48cm x 45,5cm.
12. John Muafangejo - "Birth of Christ, 1977" - linocut.
13. John Muafangejo - "Oniipa Press" (1981) - linocut.
14. John Muafangejo - "Last Supper" (1978) - linocut.
15. John Muafangejo - "Moses holded the ten commodedments" (1969) - etching - 38,5cm x 27,5cm.
16. John Muafangejo - "The love is approaching...." (1974) - linocut - 39cm x 39,5cm.
17. John Muafangejo - "Etosha Pan Wild Life" - (1982) - linocut.
18. John Muafangejo - "Joseph's story in Egypt" (1982) - linocut.
19. John Muafangejo - "Windhoek people pray for peace and love in 1977" - linocut.
20. John Muafangejo - "7th Bishop of Damaraland" (1972) - linocut.
21. John Muafangejo - "The Border" (1974) - linocut - 45,5cm x 68cm.
22. John Muafangejo - "Angola or Kunene Republic." - linocut.
23. John Muafangejo - "The ancient people" (1973) - linocut - 51,5cm x 33.5cm.

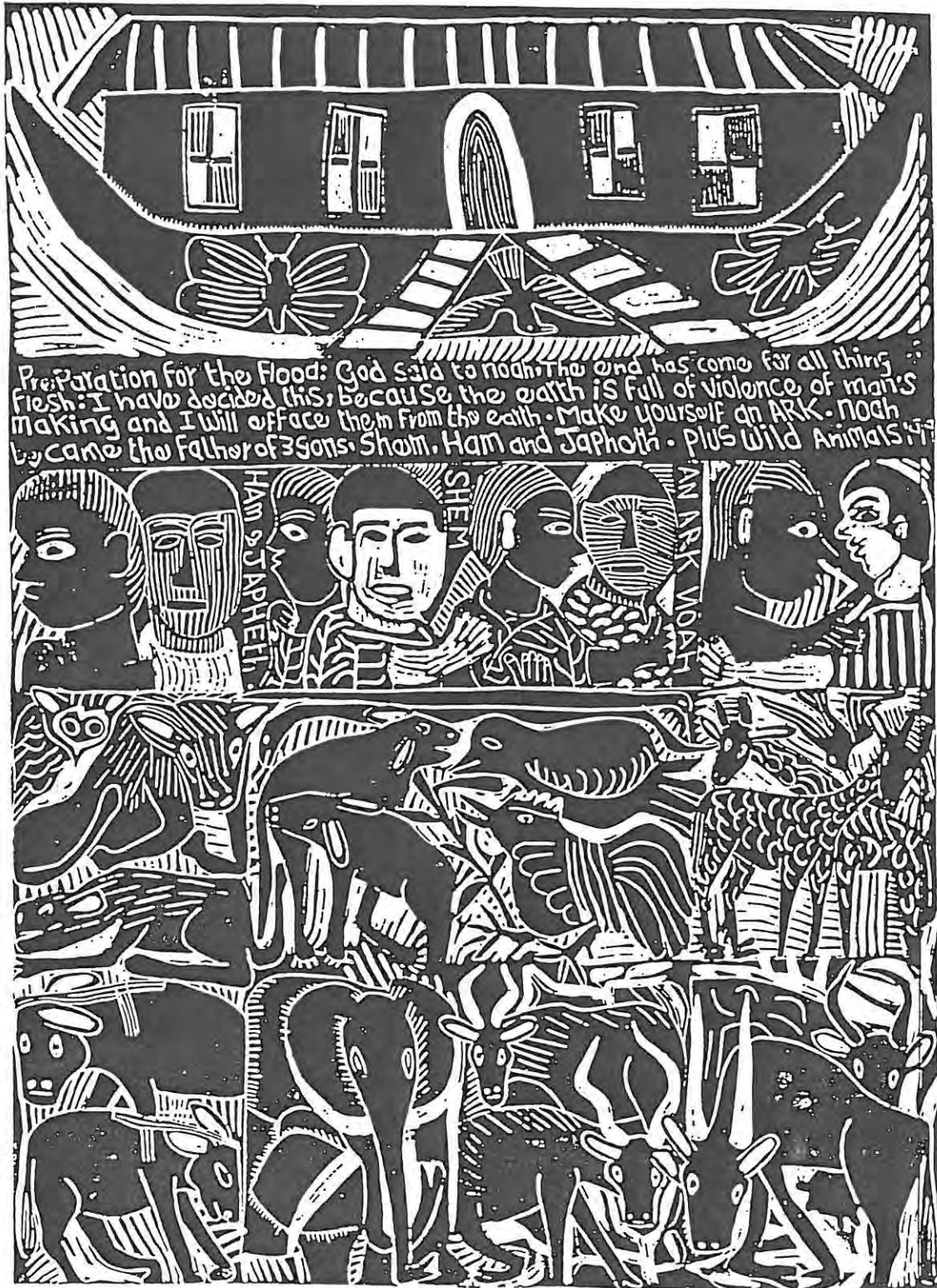
24. John Muafangejo - "Love." (1972) - linocut - 33cm x 34cm.
25. John Muafangejo - "Sad and Happy People." (1971) - linocut - 51,5cm x 33.5cm.
26. John Muafangejo - "Church Service." - etching - 46,5cm x 31cm.
27. Artist unknown - Painting on cave wall at Mbafu, representing Don Henrique, first Congolese bishop, consecrated in 1518. height. 13 inches.
28. Ben Enwonwu - Engravings on the doors of the chapel of the Apostolic Delegation - Lagos (1965).
29. Dan Rakgoathe - "Rain Queen" (1973) - linocut - 38cm x 26cm.
30. Dan Rakgoathe - "Unfolding Man" (1972) - linocut - 30cm x 30cm.
31. Dan Rakgoathe - "Mystery of Space" (1975) - linocut - 55cm x 46cm.
32. Dan Rakgoathe - "Cosmic Trinity" (1974) - linocut - 37cm x 36cm.
33. Dan Rakgoathe - "Funcludizi" (1975) - linocut - 68cm x 46cm.
34. Dan Rakgoathe - "Litany" (1972) - linocut - 31cm x 31cm.
35. Dan Rakgoathe - Untitled - linocut.
36. Dan Rakgoathe - "Solar Rapture" (1973) - linocut - 26,5cm x 51cm.
37. Dan Rakgoathe - "Death Messengers" (1970) - linocut - 40cm x 34cm.
38. Dan Rakgoathe - Untitled - linocut.
39. Dan Rakgoathe - "Lunar Fantasy" (1973) - linocut - 31,25cm x 44cm.
40. Dan Rakgoathe - Untitled - linocut.
41. Dan Rakgoathe - "Manifestations of Duality" (1974) - linocut - 48cm x 48cm.
42. Dan Rakgoathe - Untitled - linocut.
43. Dan Rakgoathe - "Fullmoon Meeting" - etching and aquatint - 22,25cm x 15cm.
44. Dan Rakgoathe - "Praying" - linocut.
45. Dan Rakgoathe - "Moonbride and Sun Bridegroom" (1973) - linocut - 40cm x 63.3cm.
46. Dan Rakgoathe - Untitled - linocut.
47. C. Nxamalo - "The Shembe Story" - linocut - 62cm x 40.5cm.



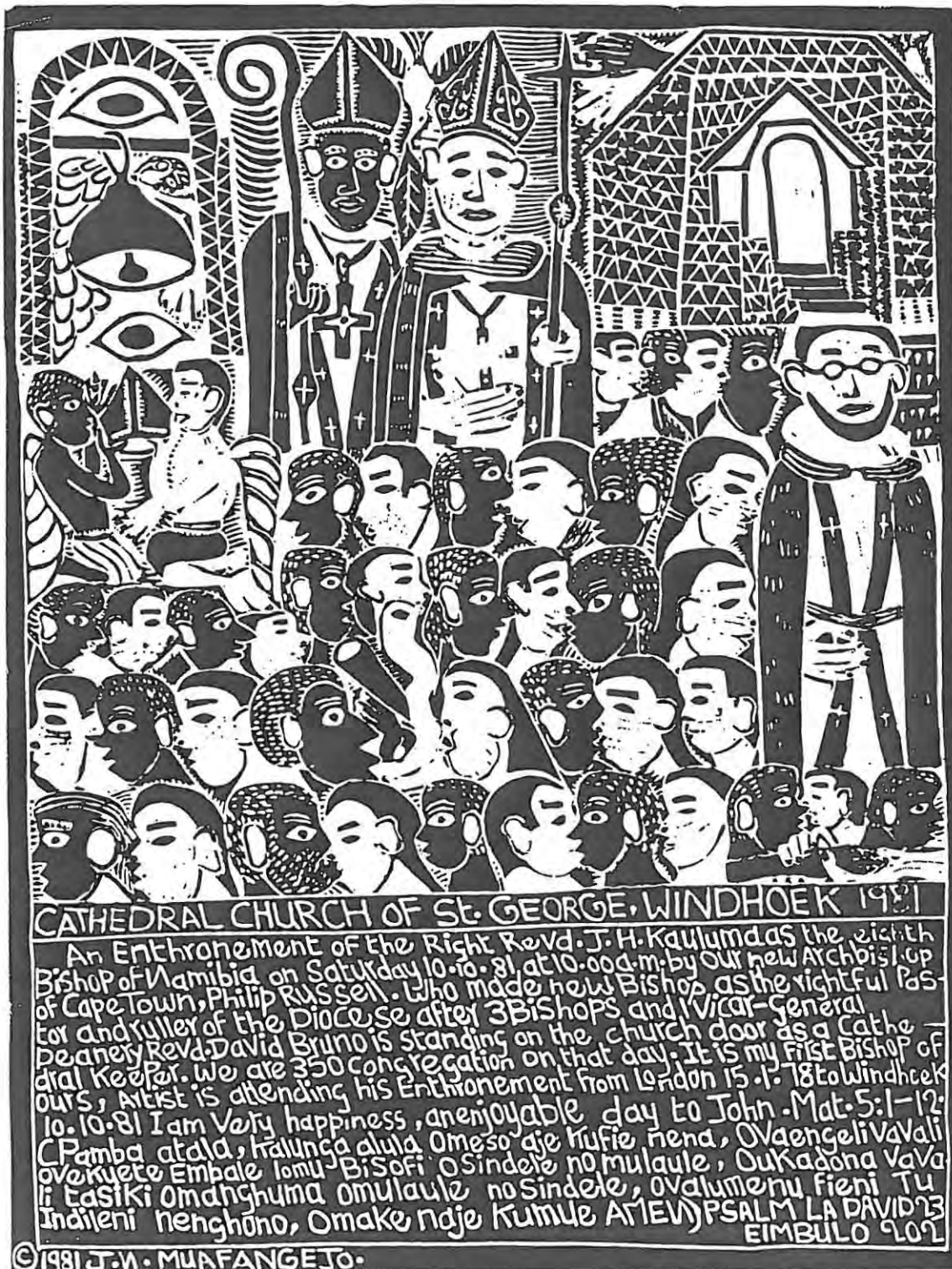
48. Albert Ndlovu - "Israelites crossing the Red Sea" - linocut.
49. Louis Maqhubela - "Peter's Denial" - Chalk drawing.
50. Page from the Utrecht Psalter, c. A.D. 832 - pen and ink.
51. Ancestral figure in the form of a squatting mother holding a child - Bakongo - height. 30,7cm.
52. Osagie Osifo - "Crucifixion" (1961) - Carving for the Catholic Chapel, University of Ibadan - wood.
53. Benin Bronze reliefs - height 49,2cm x 36,2cm.
54. Azariah Mbatha - "Invitation" (1966) - linocut - 48cm x 28cm.
55. Azariah Mbatha - "Revelations" (1965) - linocut.
56. Azariah Mbatha - "The torturing of St. John" - linocut - 20,3cm x 26,7 cm.
57. Azariah Mbatha - "The coming of Christ and John the Baptist" (1966) - linocut - 30cm x 45cm.
58. Azariah Mbatha - "Israelites crossing the Red Sea" - linocut.
59. Azariah Mbatha - "He went to Jerusalem" (1965) - linocut - 30cm x 45cm.
60. Azariah Mbatha - "Birth of Jesus" - linocut - 32,8cm x 56,5cm.
61. Azariah Mbatha - "Peter" - linocut - 38cm x 67cm.
62. Azariah Mbatha - "Christ appears to the People" (1964) - linocut - 32cm x 55.5cm.
63. Azariah Mbatha - Untitled - linocut - 25.5cm x 30,3cm.
64. Azariah Mbatha - "Adam and other stories" - linocut - 50cm x 72cm.
65. Azariah Mbatha - "Preparation for the Flood" - linocut.
66. Enoch Tsabalala - "Crucifixion" (1971) - ink - 48cm x 36cm.
67. J. Florentino - "Burial of Christ" (detail) - sculpture.
68. G. Fernandez - "Pieta" (detail) - 1616 - sculpture in wood.



1. MUAFANGEJO Jesus for Christians....
linocut.



2. MUAFANGEJO. Preparation for the flood. linocut.



3. MUA FANGEJO. Cathedral Church of St. George. linocut.



ANGLICAN SEMINARY BLOWN UP: The Seminary blown up by Bombing by Master no body. This building was destroyed by un Known People on Thursday 18-6-1981 at 1.a.m. It is near the border of Namibia and Angola. This destruction is the 2nd of St.Mary's buildings those were same about like that one.

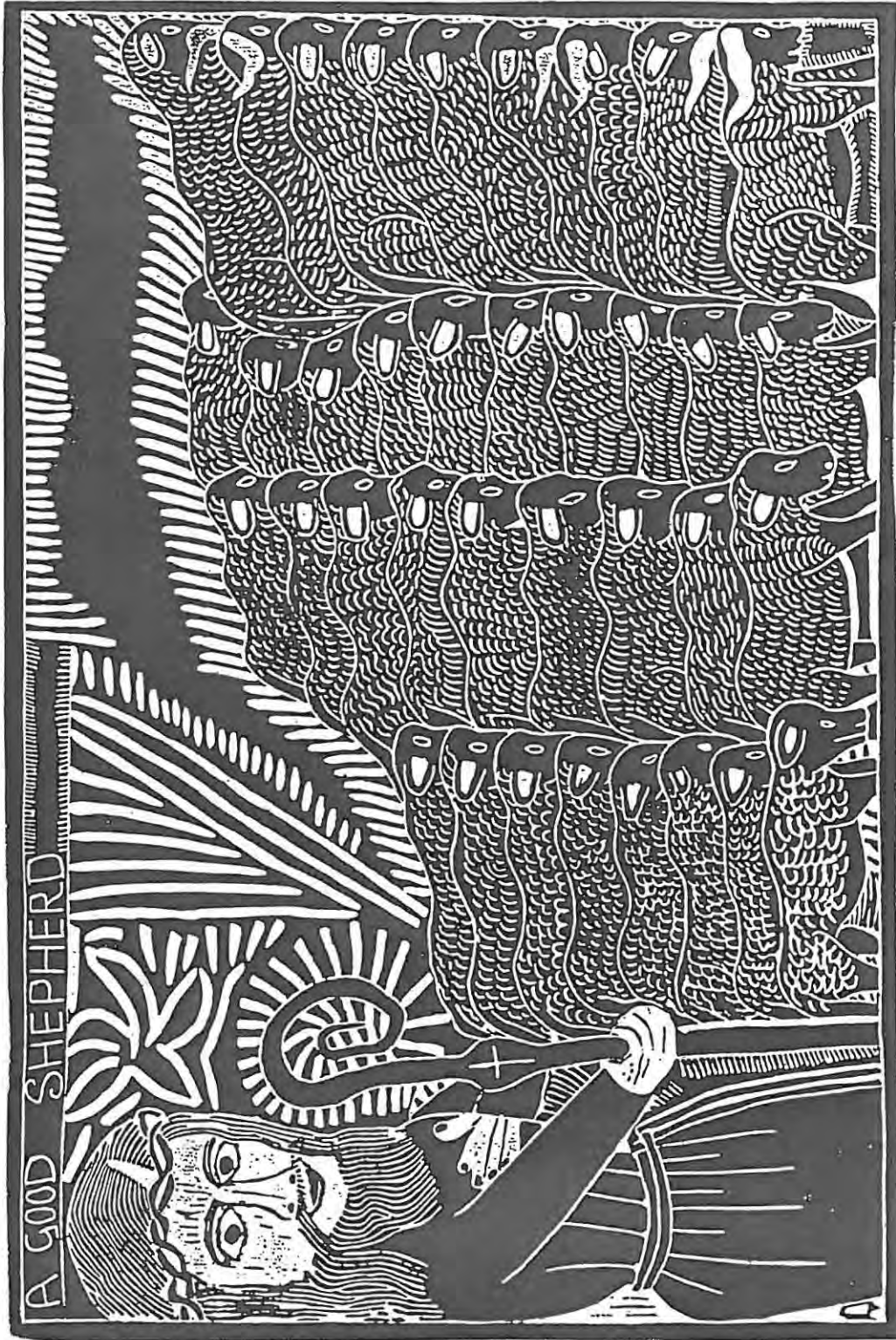
(1) House of Archdeacon in 1975 (2) House of Priest, Engineering for lite house and Carpenter work Shop in 1979. The Eighth Bishop Rt. J.H. Kaluluma was preaching in Sadsness together with his Archdeacon Revd. P.H. Shilongo for the destroyed houses of Odibo MISSION. Bishop will be Rebuild them one day but we are Anglican Christians, let us thing when we will got some helpful to our Bishop beause it is not new thing. It is Old action which was going slow by slowly. If we are truly Christian faithy, we must give 10% of OUR Properties to Bishop when he will ready for Rebuild the three defarents builds Please. AS WHAT ANGLICAN NAMIBIA ARTIST FULFIL LIKE AMEN. JOHN 7:37-45.

COMUBISOFI WOTU OKU
 audifa holuhodi uhene Molomile ei Vakuetu OVaholike tupasukeni Ose
 Si Pamba okue Lilongkida Omolomanjhauno etu. Ohele ei jauapalala
 Kalunga. Esil osili osikolo SaVamue Velihonga no Vapita Most Marys Odibo
 Ei sko longhenda la Pamba Kalunga Otatale no neni kuvo omutenja no
 ufiku. Epulo, lanche Kunje oleli ile Elombuelo Kunje jandjeni sa Omaongalo a
 ese andja Modibo ku Bishofi wongseleka jai Vigilikana okukufela oku tu
 ngulula omatungilo Odibo Ose si ojo ina je nseleka adise Mowambo Sandja
 komufaneki wongseleka.

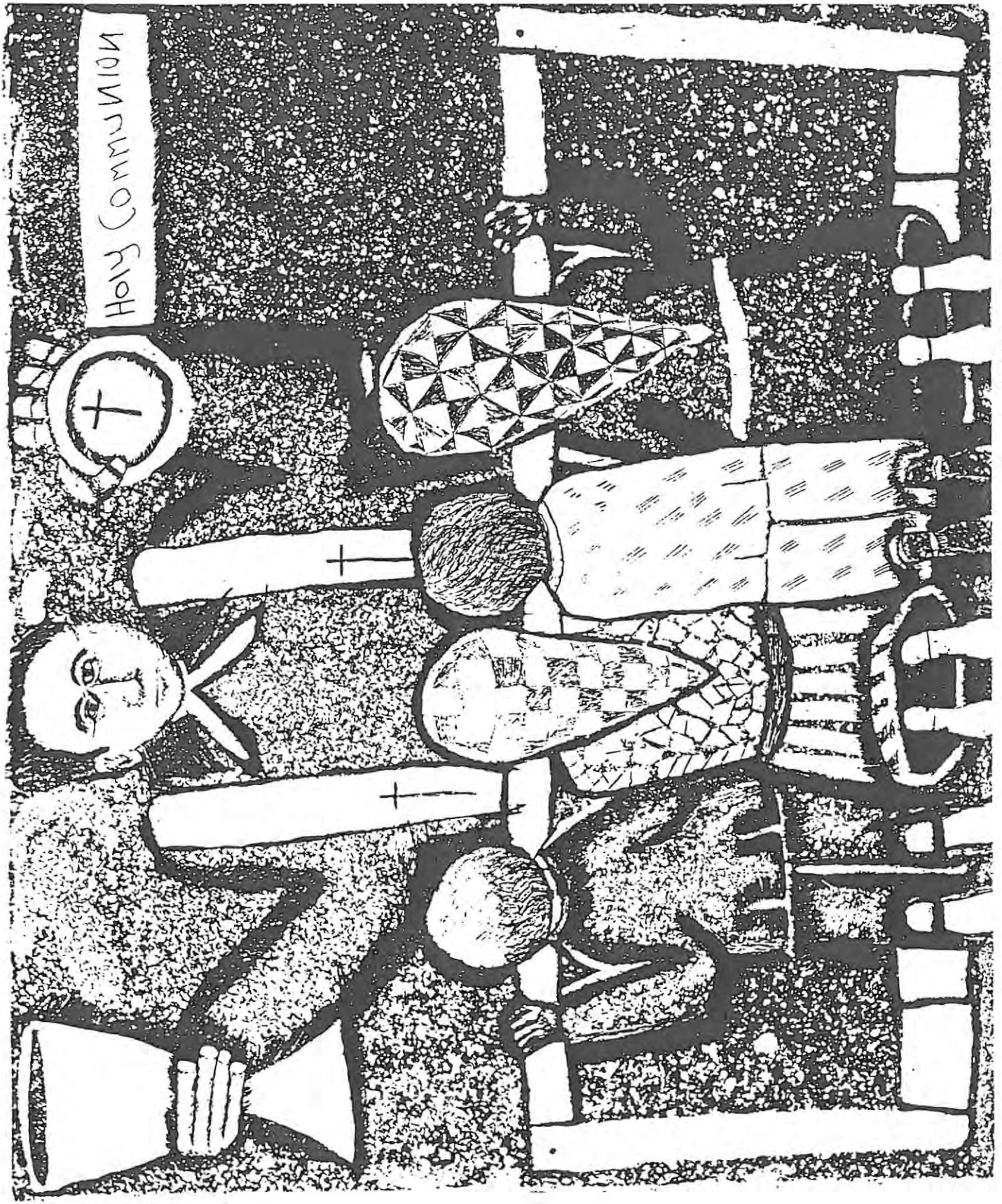
©1981 J.N. MUAFANGEJO.

(Eimbulu 112)

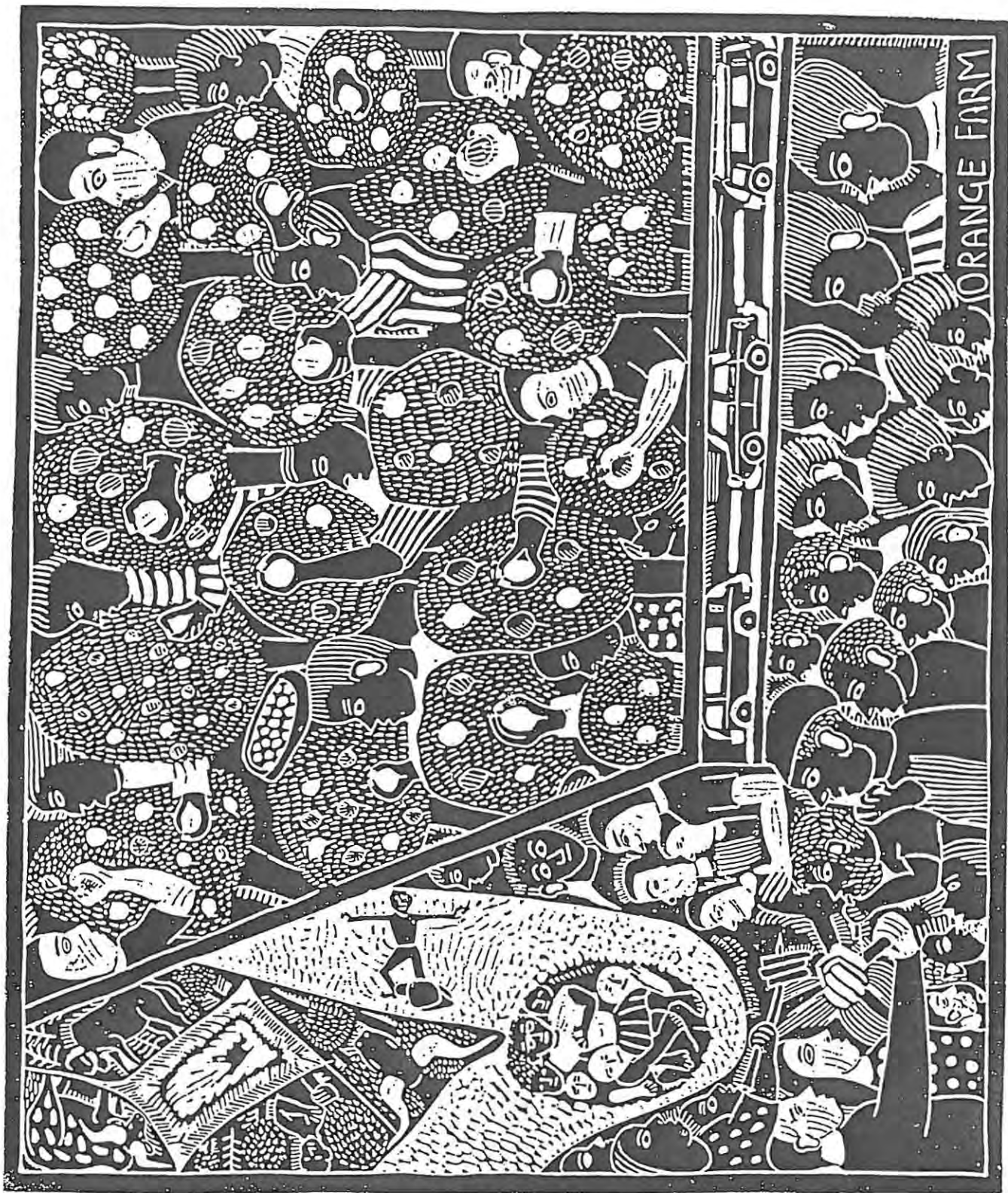
4. MUAFANGEJO. Anglican Seminary Blown Up. linocut.



5. MUFANGEJO. A Good Shepherd. Linocut.



6. MUAFANGEJO. Holy Communion. etching.

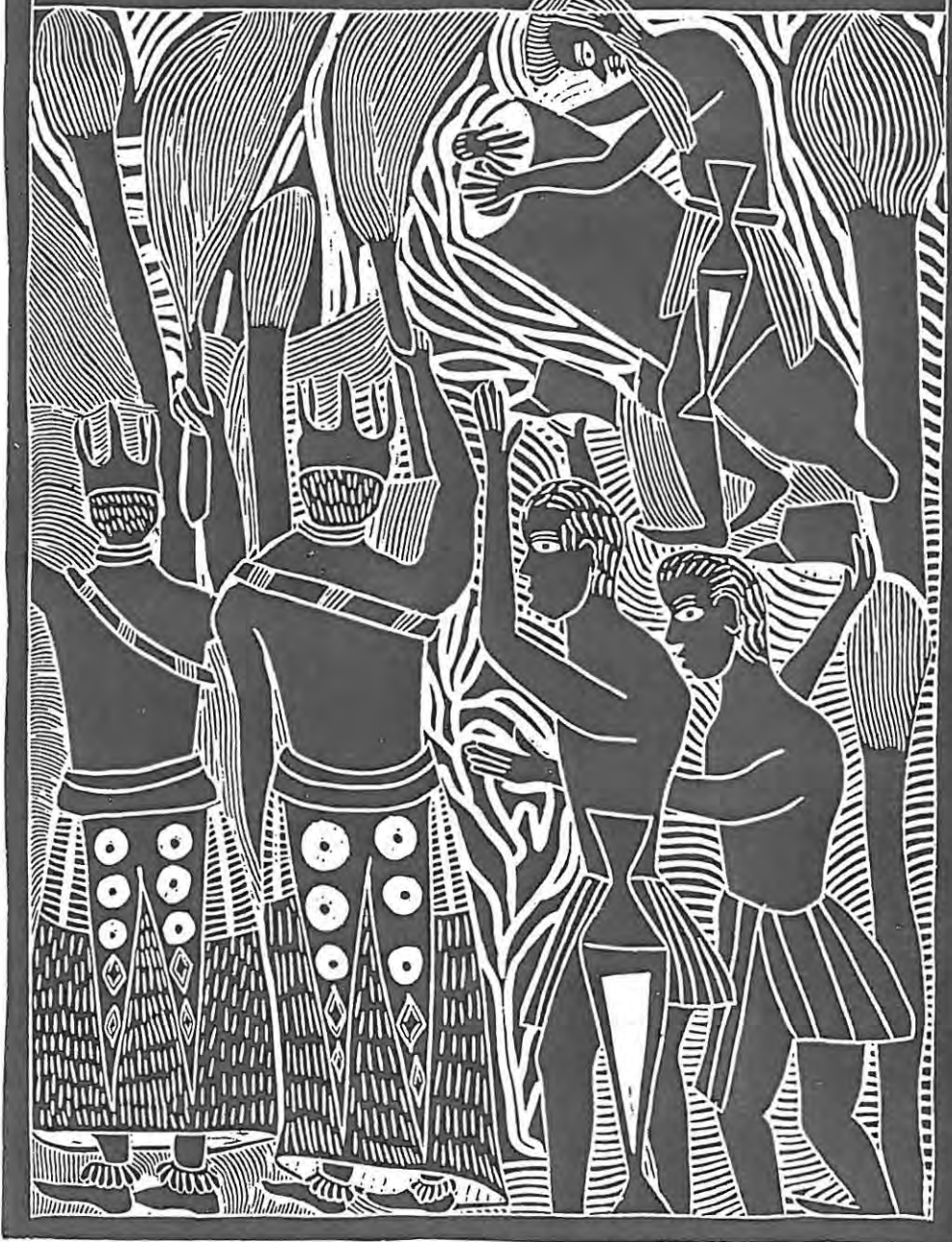


7. MUAFANGEJO. Orange Farm. Linocut.

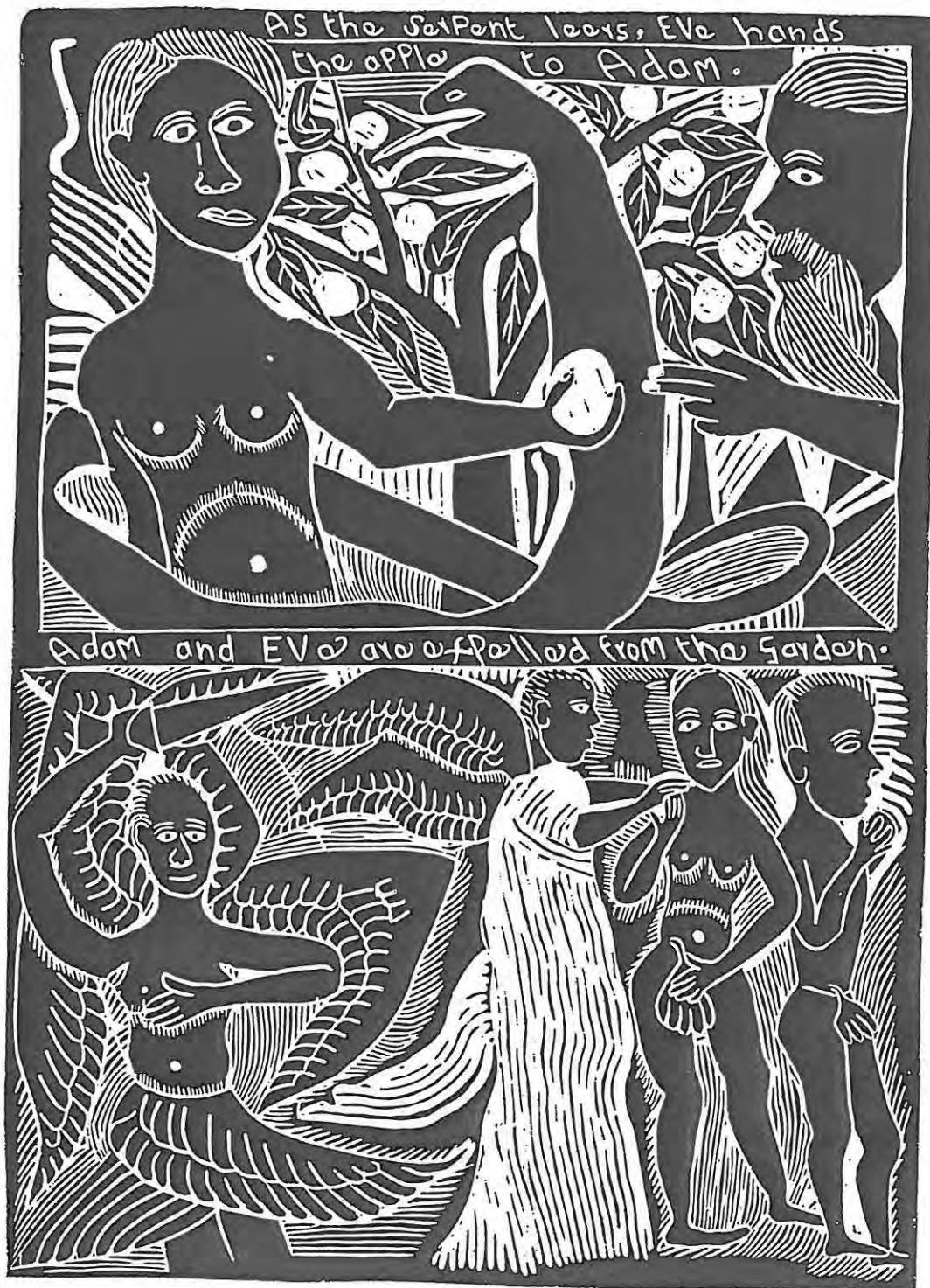


8. MUA FANGEJO. Vision of Eden. linocut.

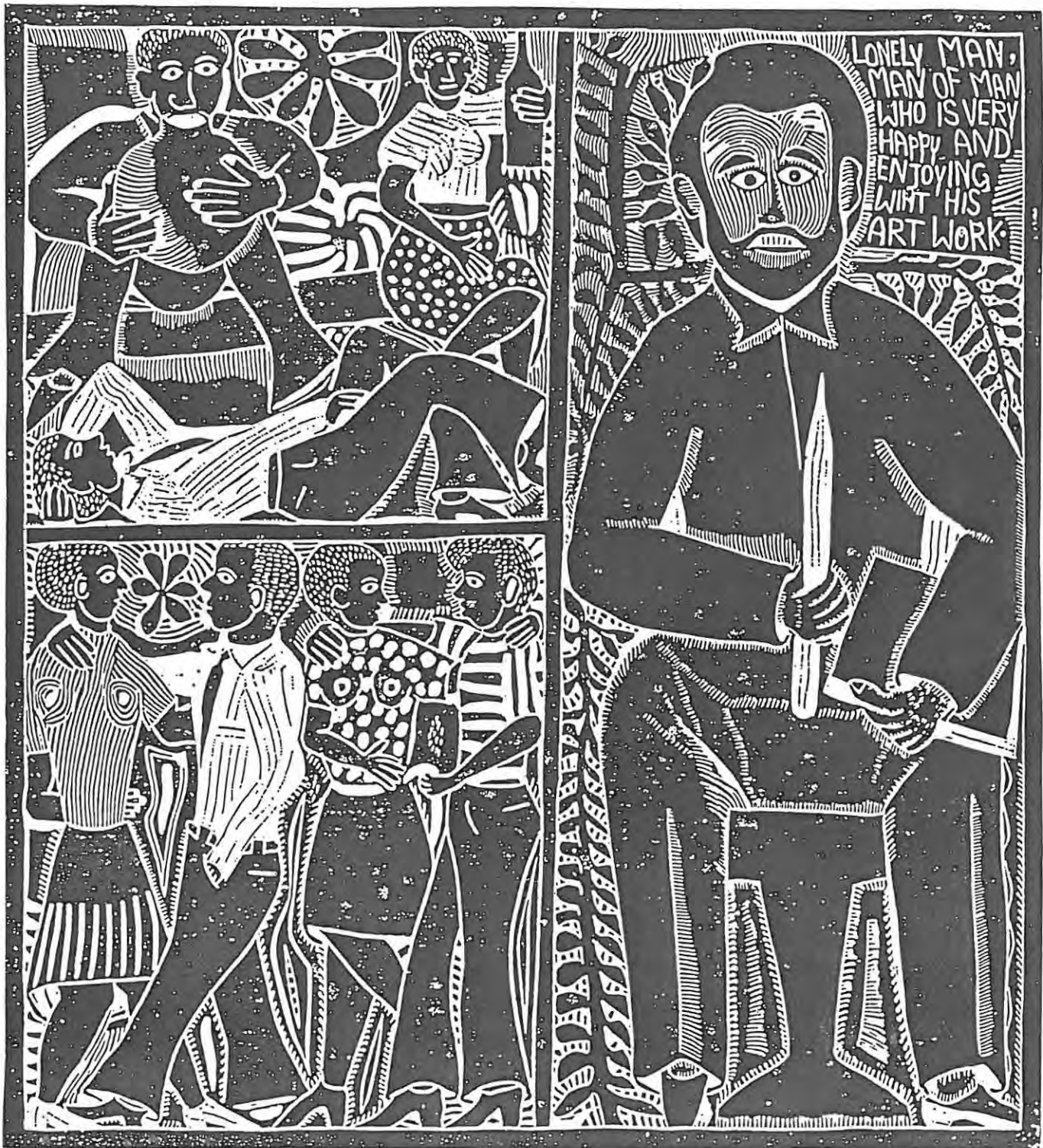
A Kuanjama wedding. The two brides hold a fan made of hairy part of horses tail while they dance. They wear the tanned hides and blots with decorated ivories. The two bridegrooms hold their hats while watching their brides dancing and waving their fans. The well training men play the drums while the dancing goes on.



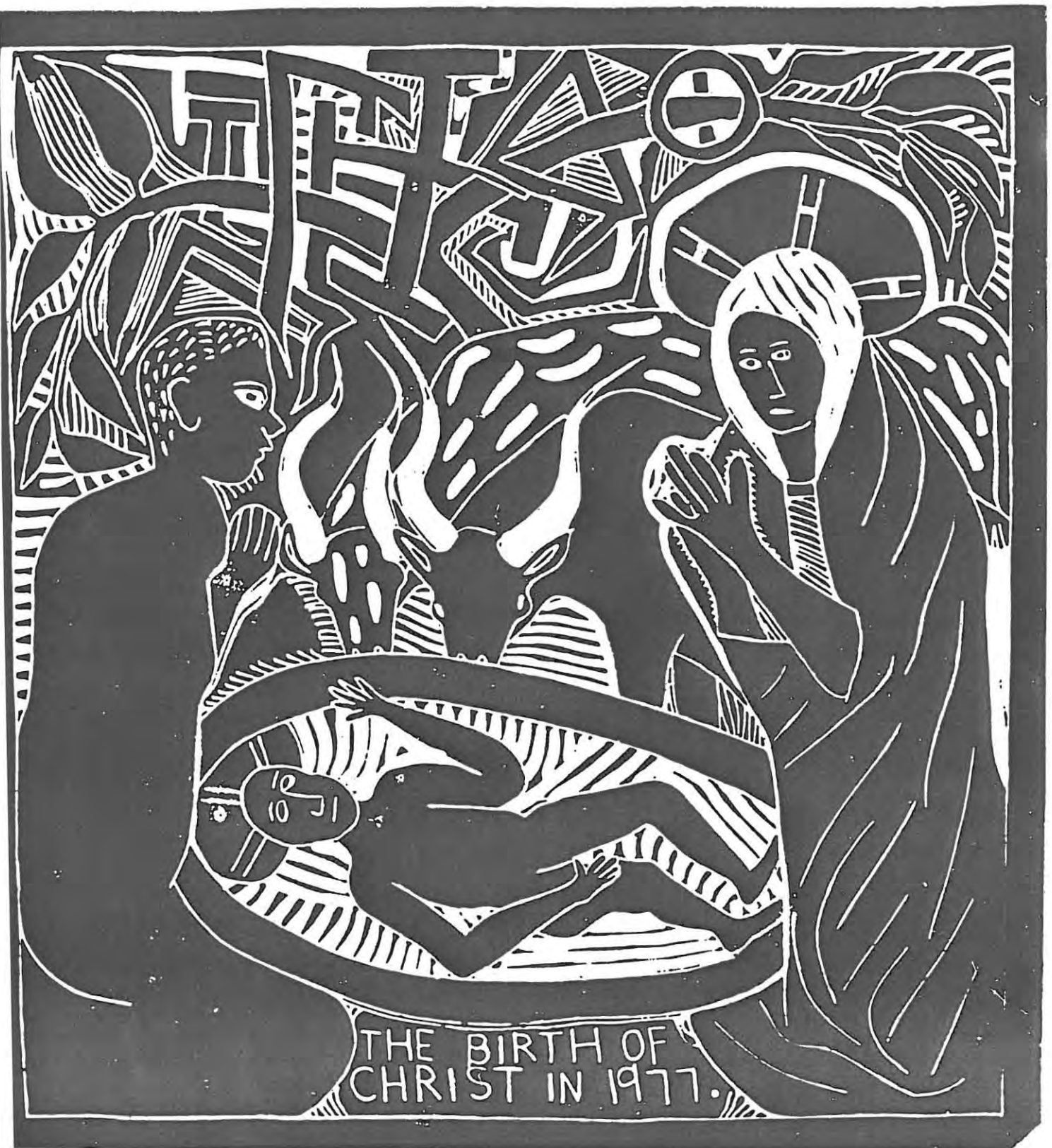
9. MUAFANGEJO. Kuanjama Wedding. linocut.



10, MUAFANGEJO. As the serpent leers linocut.

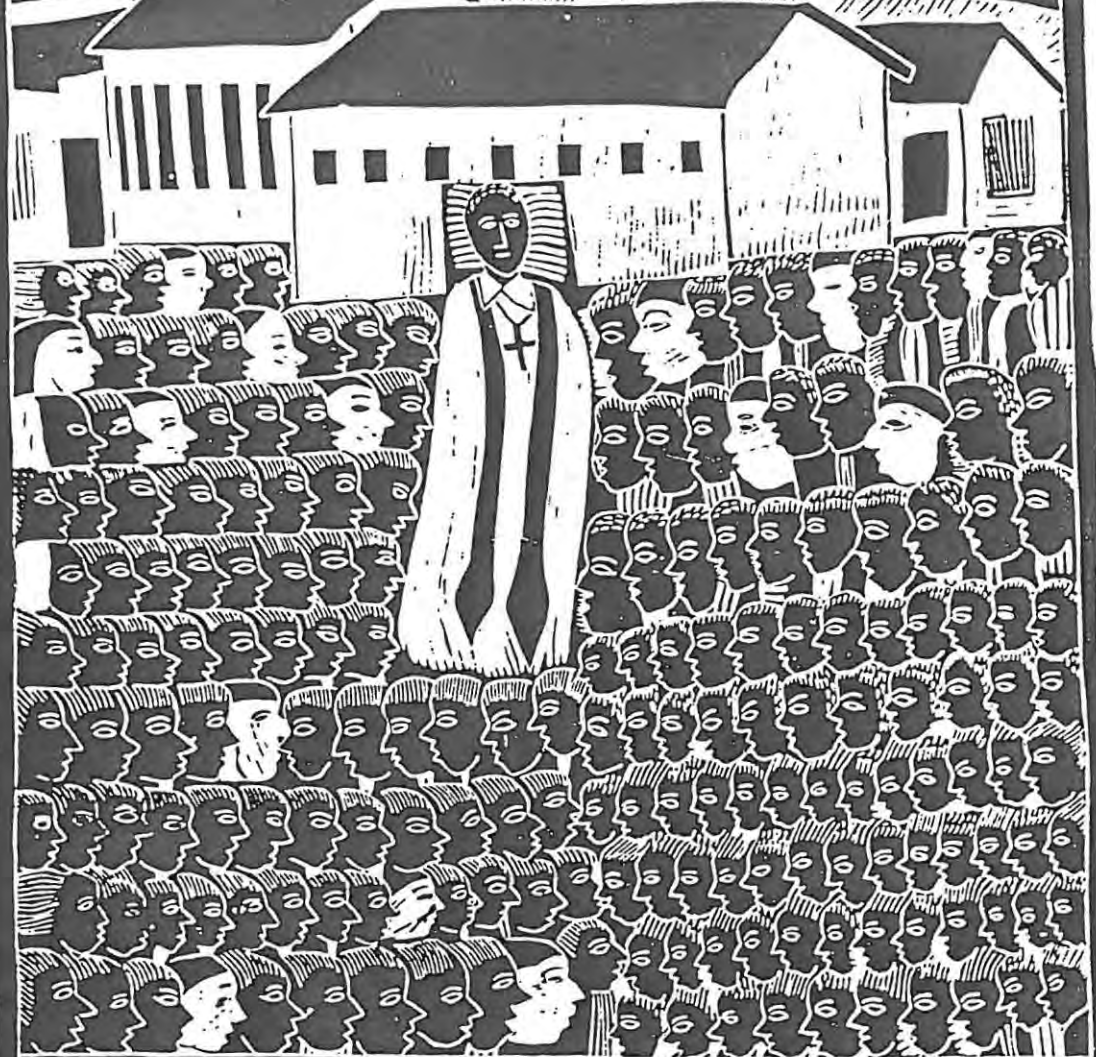


11. MUAFANGEJO. Lonely Man.... linocut.



12. MUAFANGEJO. The Birth of Christ. linocut.

Oniipa New Printing Press and Book Depot on 11 May 1975. The old printing press and Book Depot was burnt down on 11 May 1975 by Master



no body. He Master nobody bombing it during the night on same day. Why Master nobody was willing to burn up the old printing press? Just to destroy every things in it like printing machines books and building in order to be no more printing matters to seen by Ovambo people. We Ovambo people believe in God who is King of Kings and greatest of all on earth and also in heaven. One who burnt up the printing press did like Judas Iscariot betrayed our Lord Jesus for R3 without asking himself what will happen to him in future! What was his aim to do that? Did he gain anything from destroying it?

The new ones were built in modest building and new expensive printing presses more than the old ones. The service was opening by Bishop L. Auala together with his clergy at 9-45. When African Bishop was preaching the Sermon his face was so bright and shining telling us that he was very glad and praised God when people made the collection to build the new printing press. There were 10,000 people. Wonderful choirs came from all parts of Ovamboland churches. On that day there were so many people from all parts S.W.A. and out side countries except the Anglican church Bishop R. Wood. The young Anglican artist was very ashamed of himself here without his Bishop. Why am I evencing this picture? Is to tell my Bishop what was happening here. God is light of us all and in him there is no darkness at all.

13. MUFANGEJO. Oniipa Press. linocut.



14. MUFANGEJO. The Last Supper. linocut.

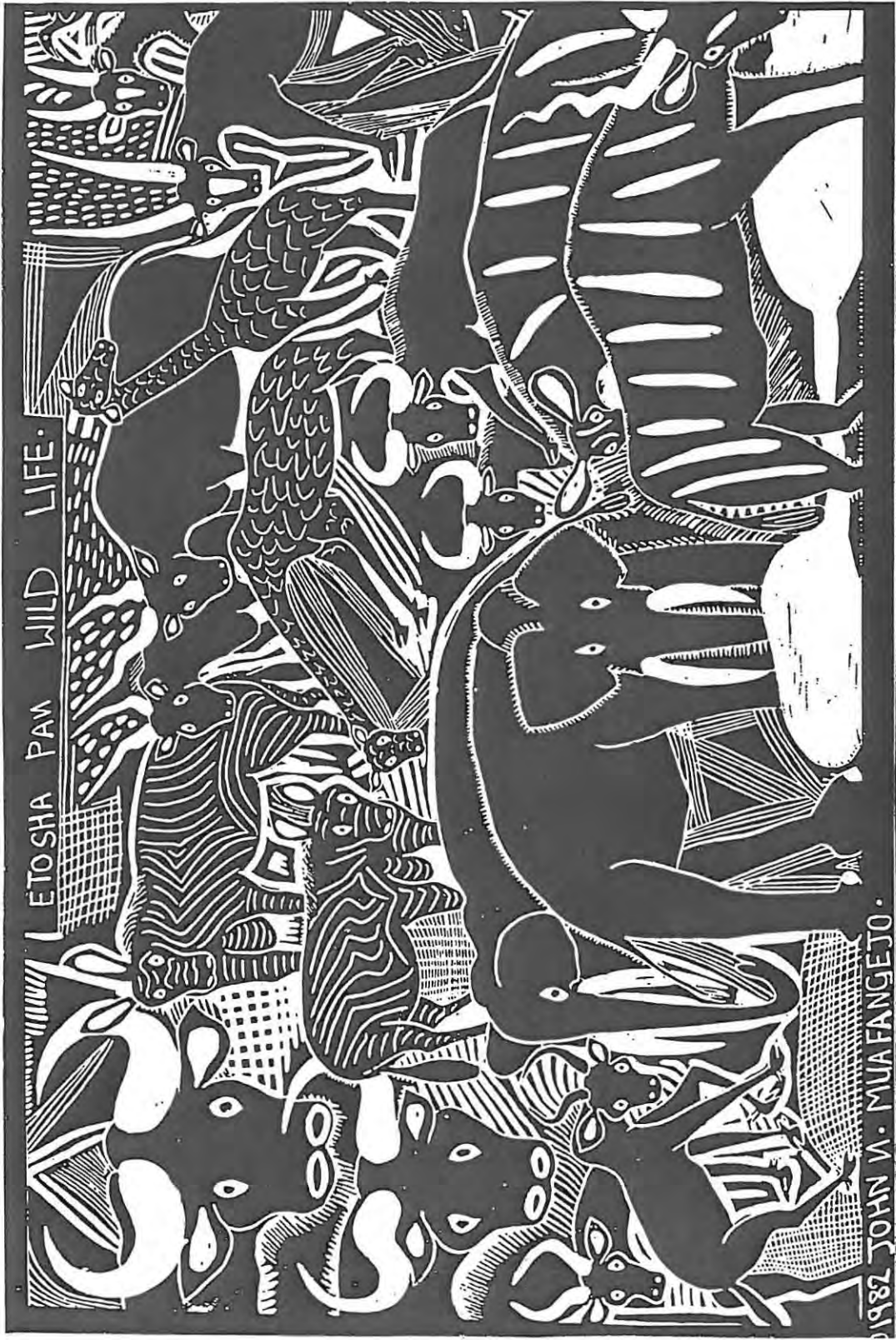


15. MUAFANGEJO. Moses. etching and aquatint.

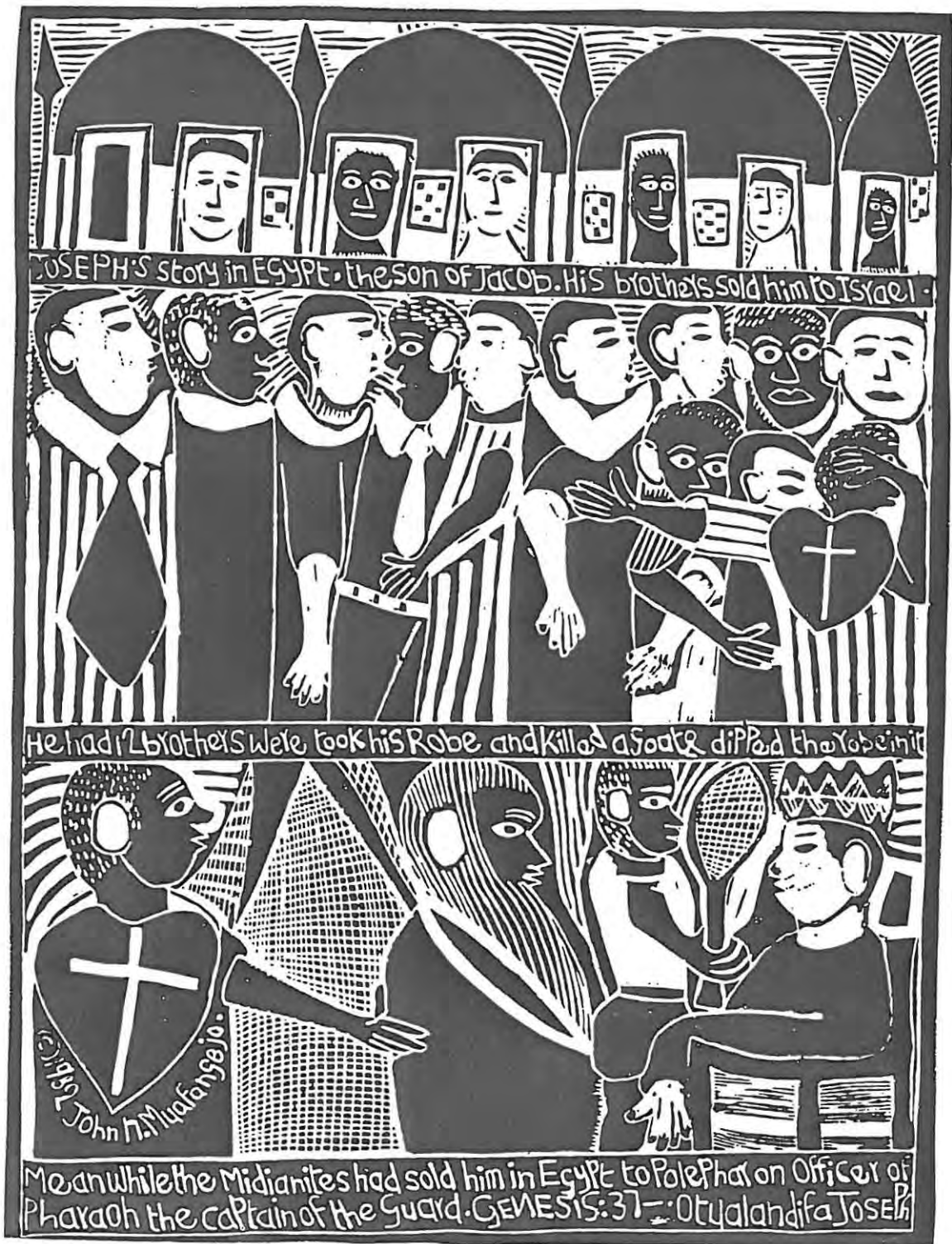
THE LOVE IS APPROACHING But too much of any thing is very dangerous.



16. MUAFANGEJO. The love is approaching.... linocut.



17. MUA FANGEJO, Etosha Pan Wild Life. Linocut.

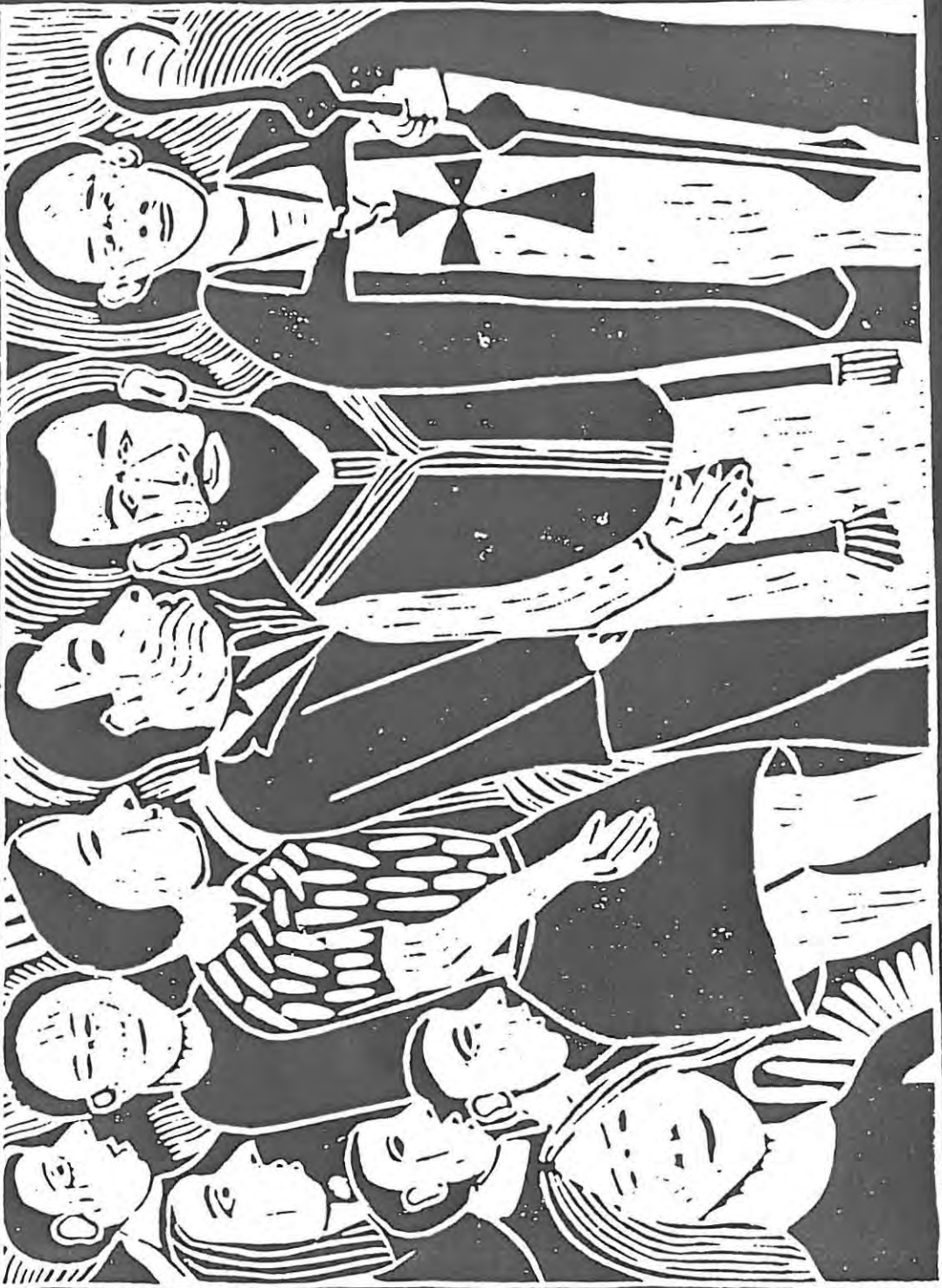


18. MUAFANGEJO. Joseph's Story in Egypt. linocut.

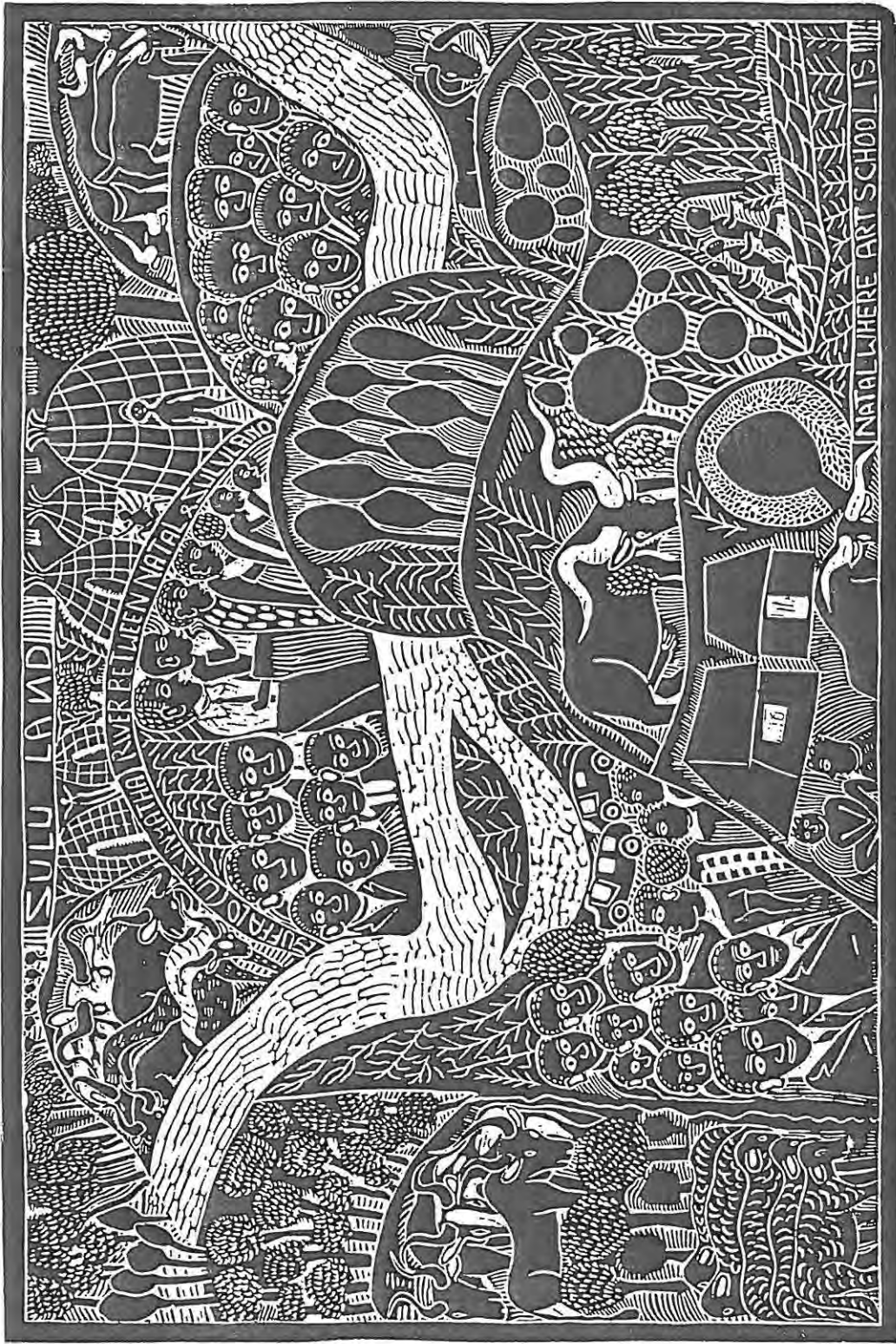


19. MUAFANGEJO. Windhoek people pray.... linocut.

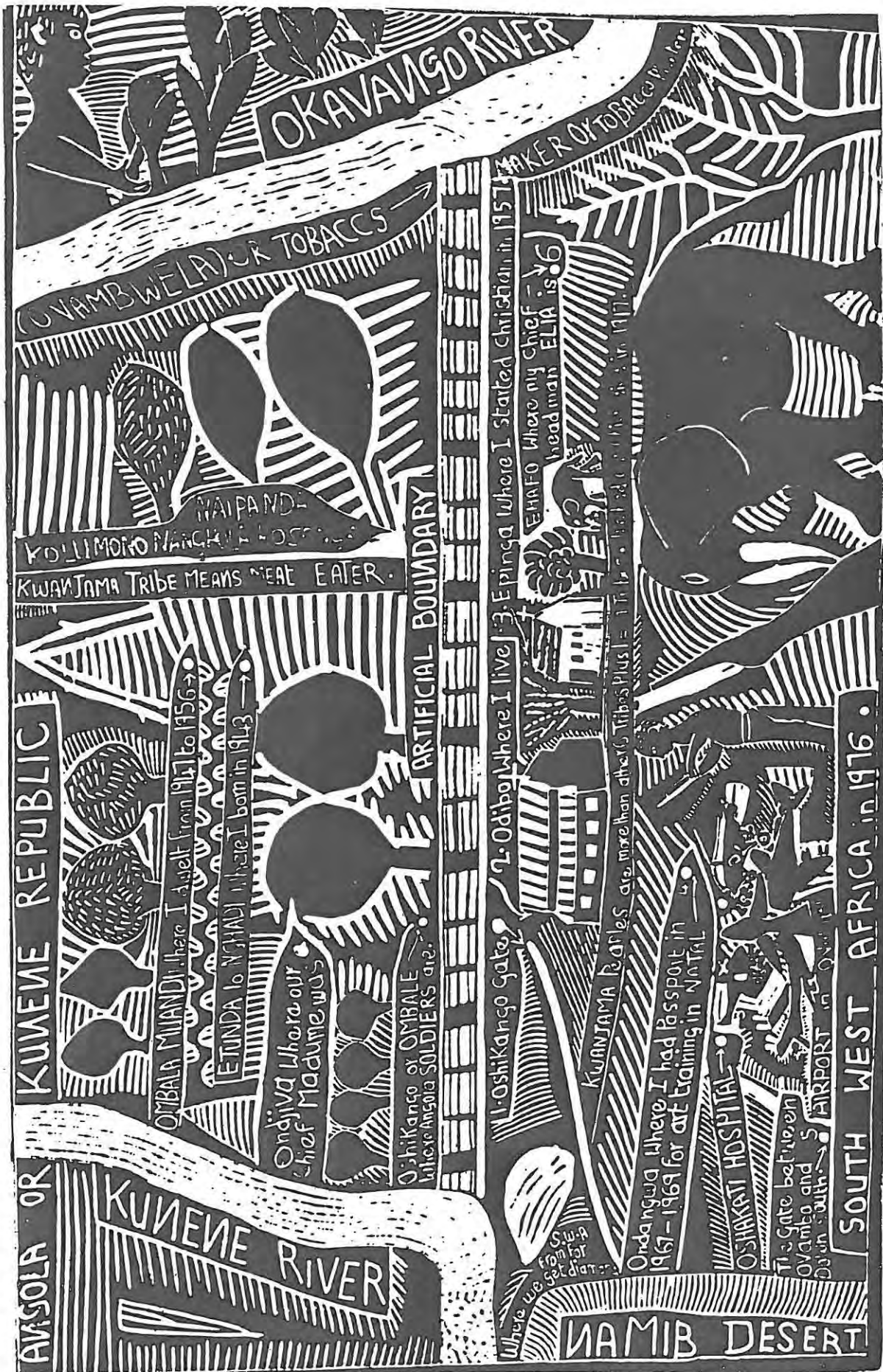
7th Bishop of Damaraland Rt. Rev. Colin Winter, who has been
ordered to leave S.W.A. without reason way with Rev. S. Hays
Mr. D. d'Beur, Miss. T. Halberstedt and his wife with 5 children
in 1972. The Church sad people staying without Bishop.



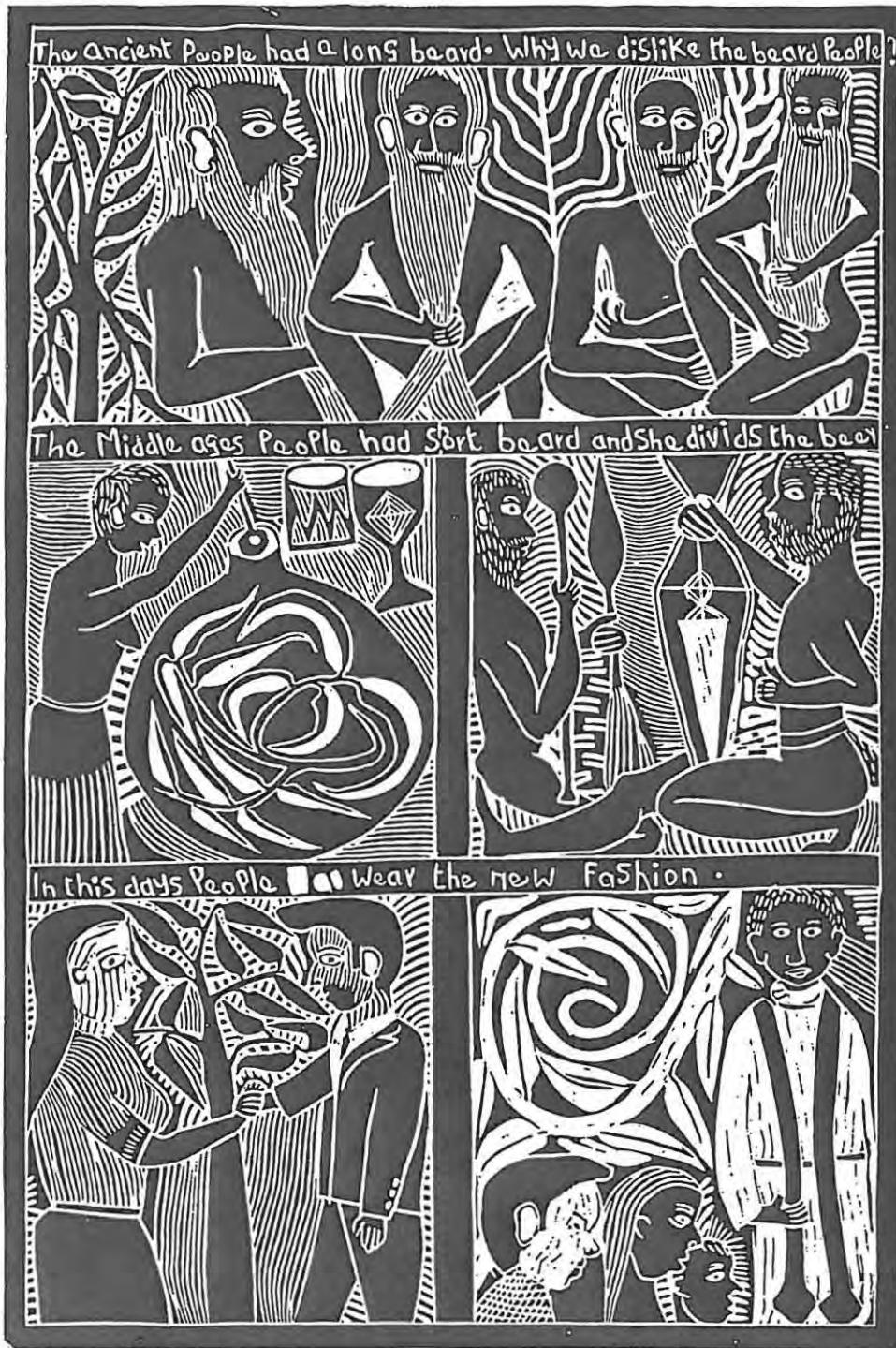
20. MUA FANGEJO, 7th Bishop of Damaraland. Linocut.



21. MUAFANGEJO. The Border. Linocut.



22. MUA FANGEJO. Angola or Kunene Republic. Inocut.



23. MUAFANGEJO. The ancient people.... linocut.

Two young man, lady Love each
other. The Jealousy lady is
crying for gentleman try to
force the Love. It is impossible.



24. MUAFANGEJO. Love. linocut.

THE SAD PEOPLE ACCORDING TO THEIR CHILD IS DEAD.

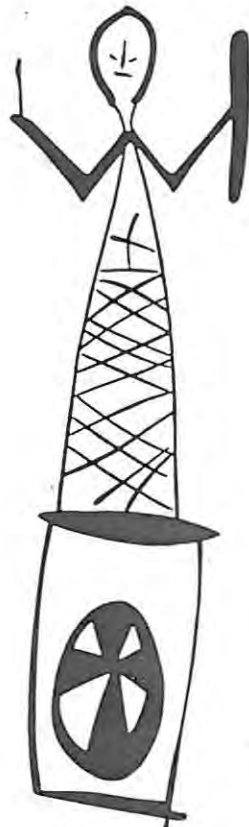


THEY ARE VERY HAPPY ACCORDING TO HAVE A NEW BABY IN STEAD.





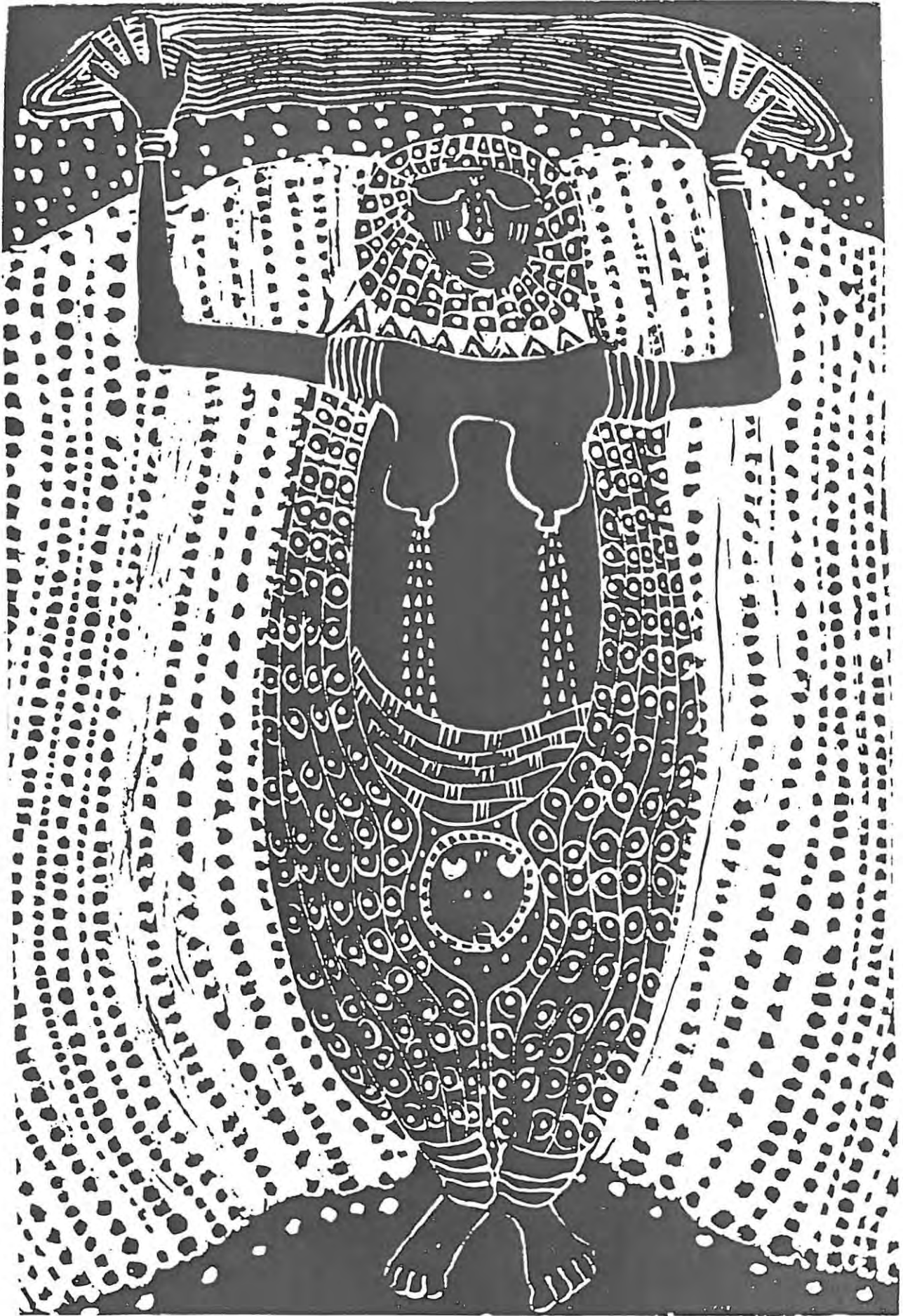
26. MUAFANGEJO. Church Service.
etching and aquatint.



27. Artist unknown. Painting on
cave wall at Mbafu -
representing Don Henrique,
first Congolese bishop,
consecrated in 1518.
height. 32,5cm.



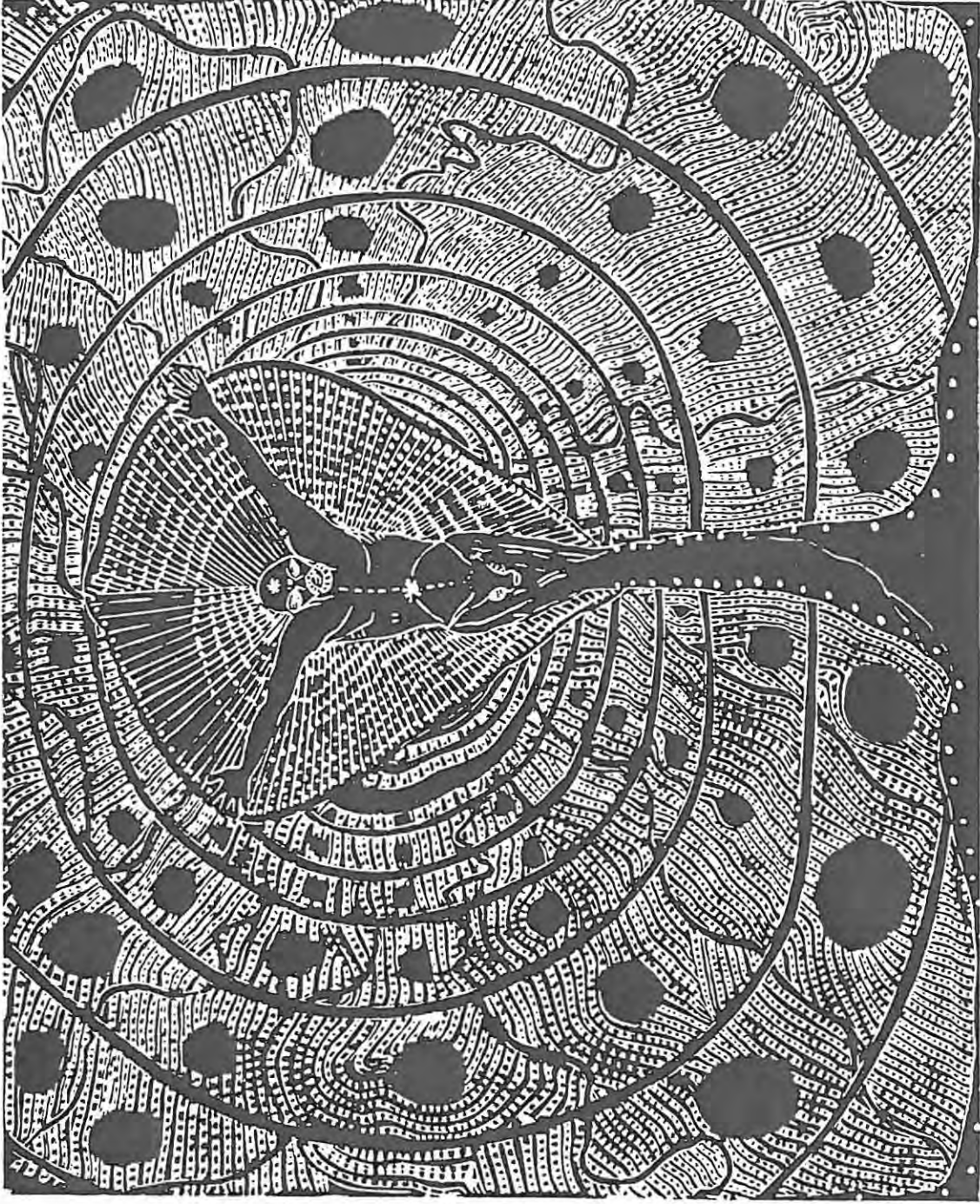
28. BEN ENWONU. Engraving on doors of the Chapel of the Apostolic Delegation, Lagos. 1965.



29. RAKGOATHE. Rain Queen. linocut.



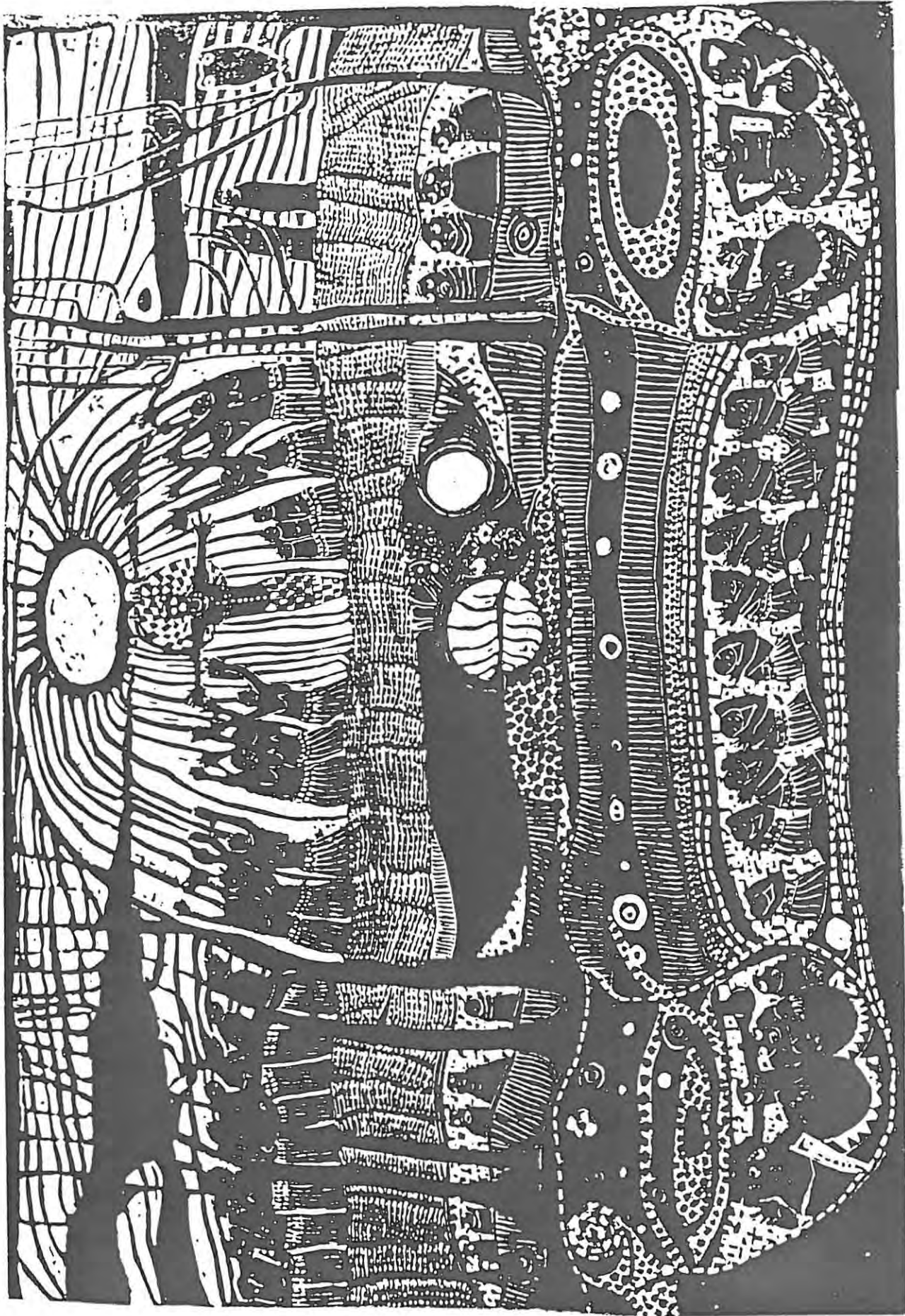
30. RAKGOATHE. Unfolding Man. linocut.



31. RAKGOATHE. Mystery of Space. Linocut.



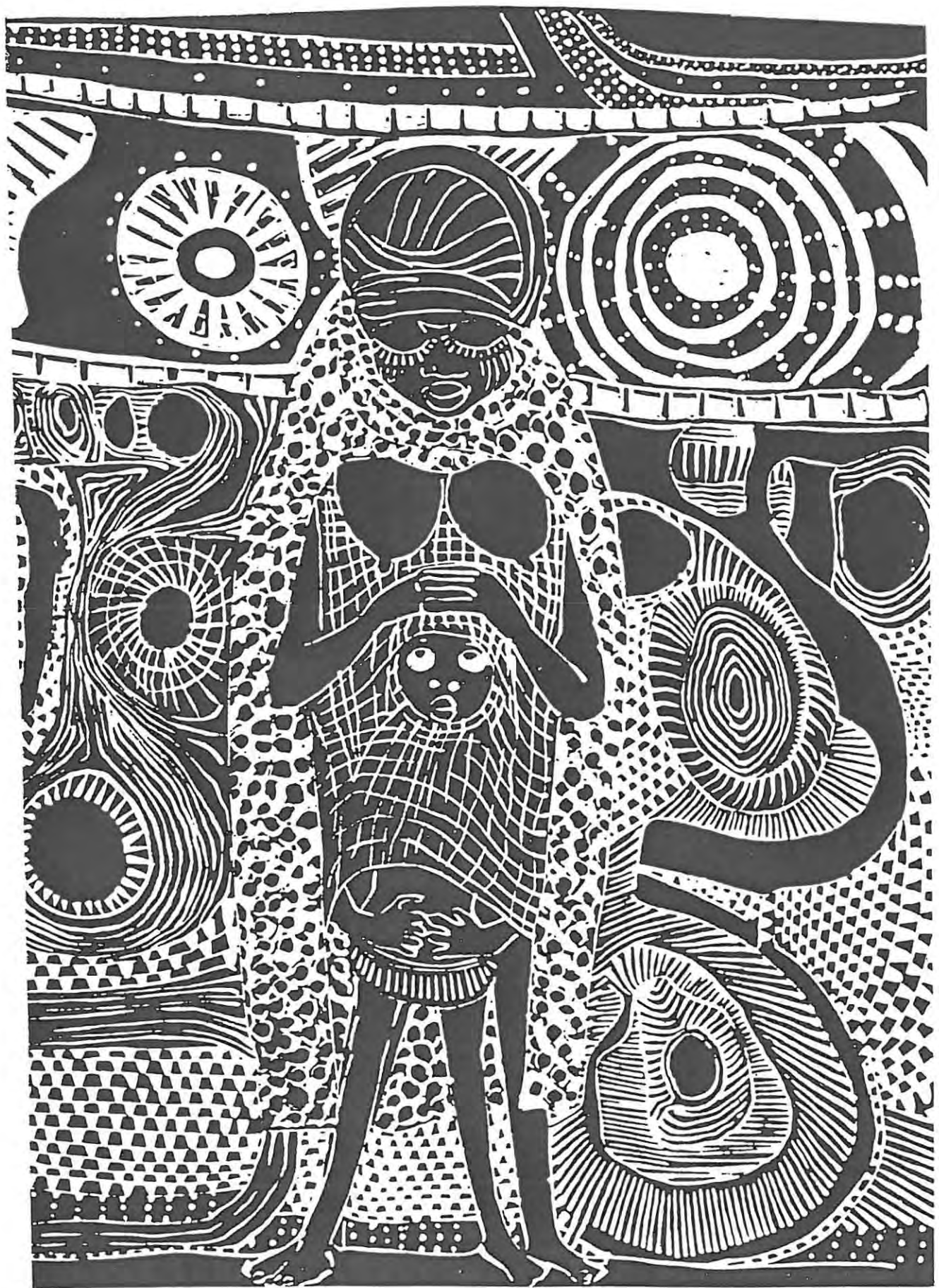
32. RAKGOATHE. Cosmic Trinity. linocut.



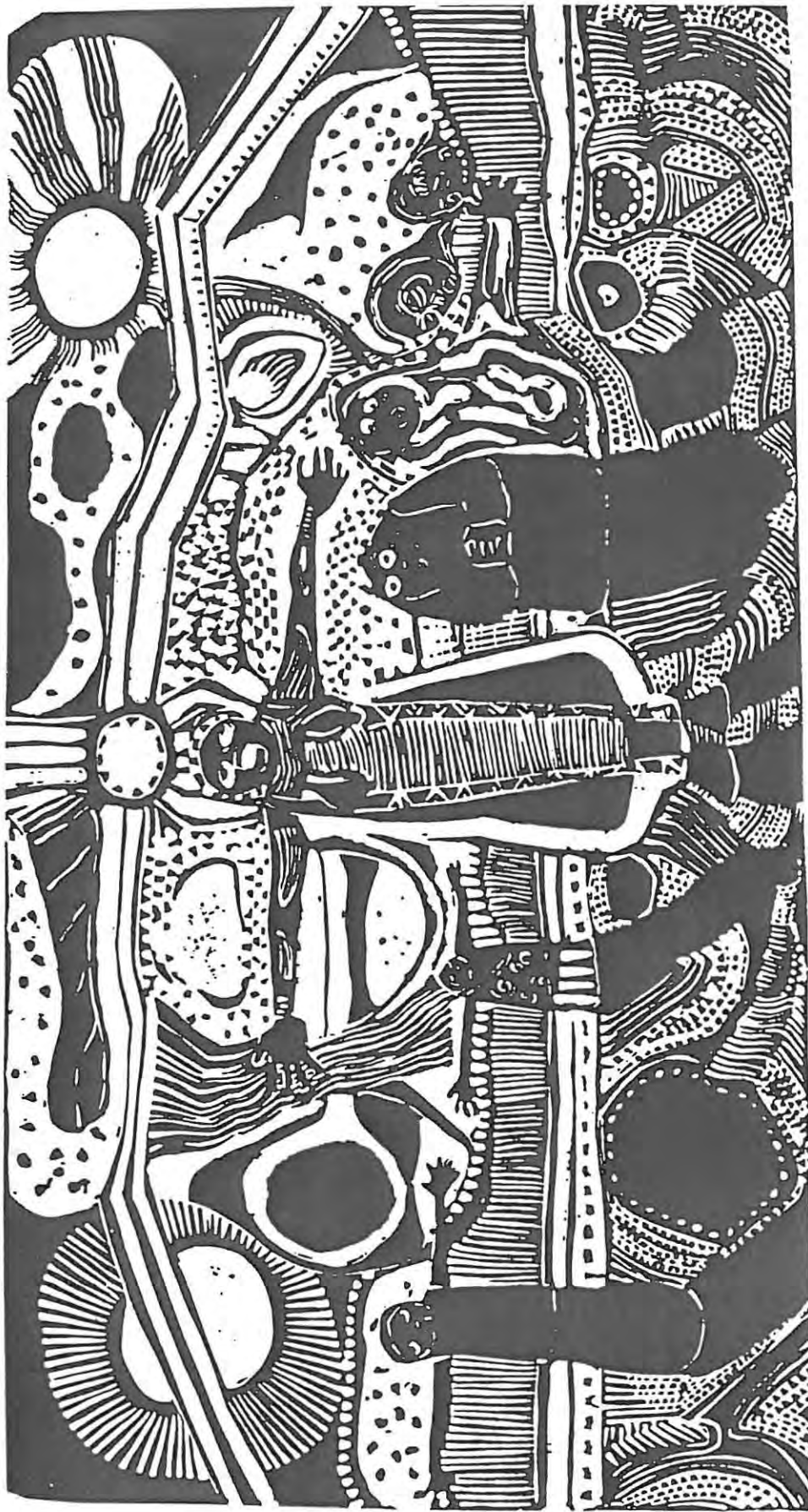
33. RAKGOATHE. Funcludizi. linocut.



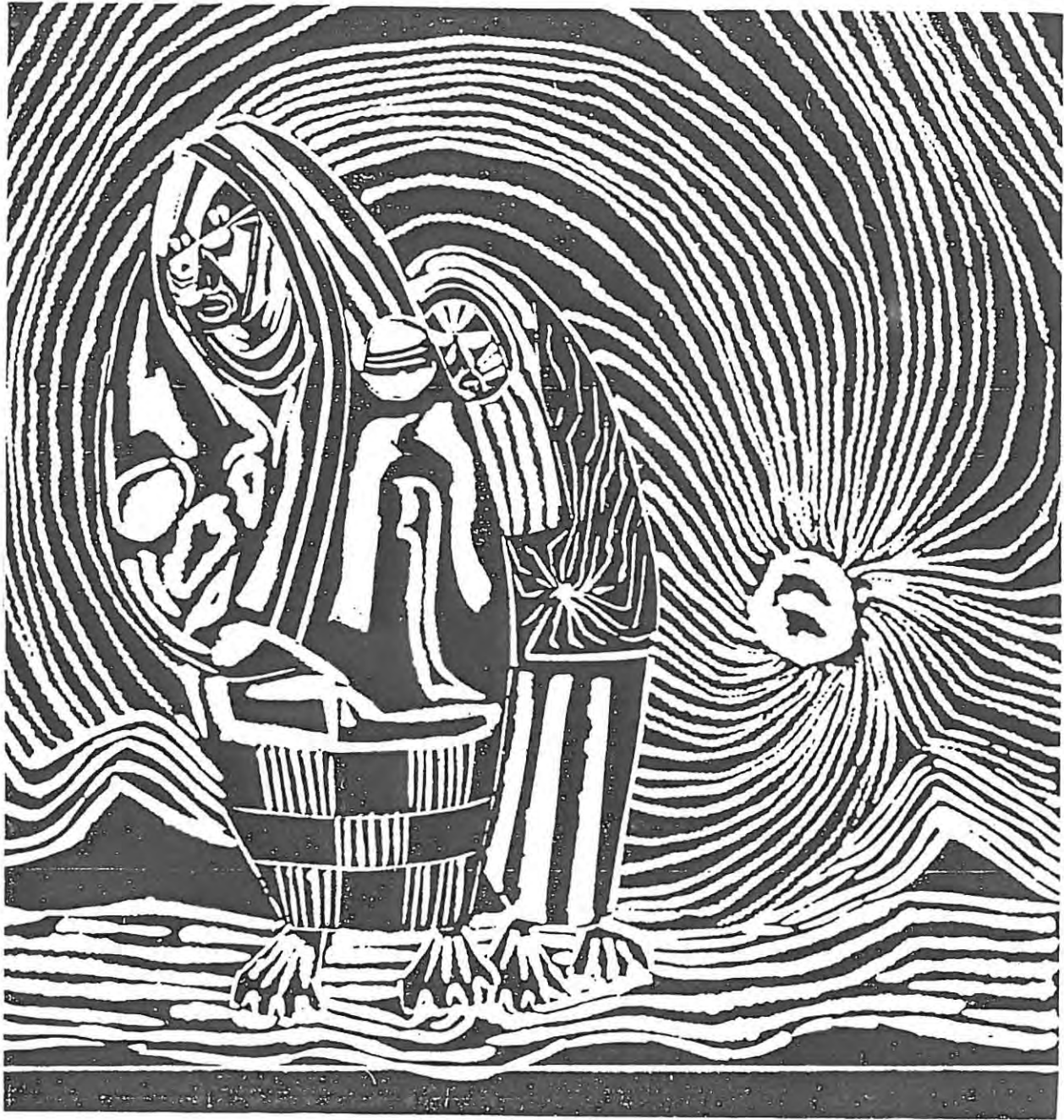
34. RAKGOATHE. Litany. linocut.



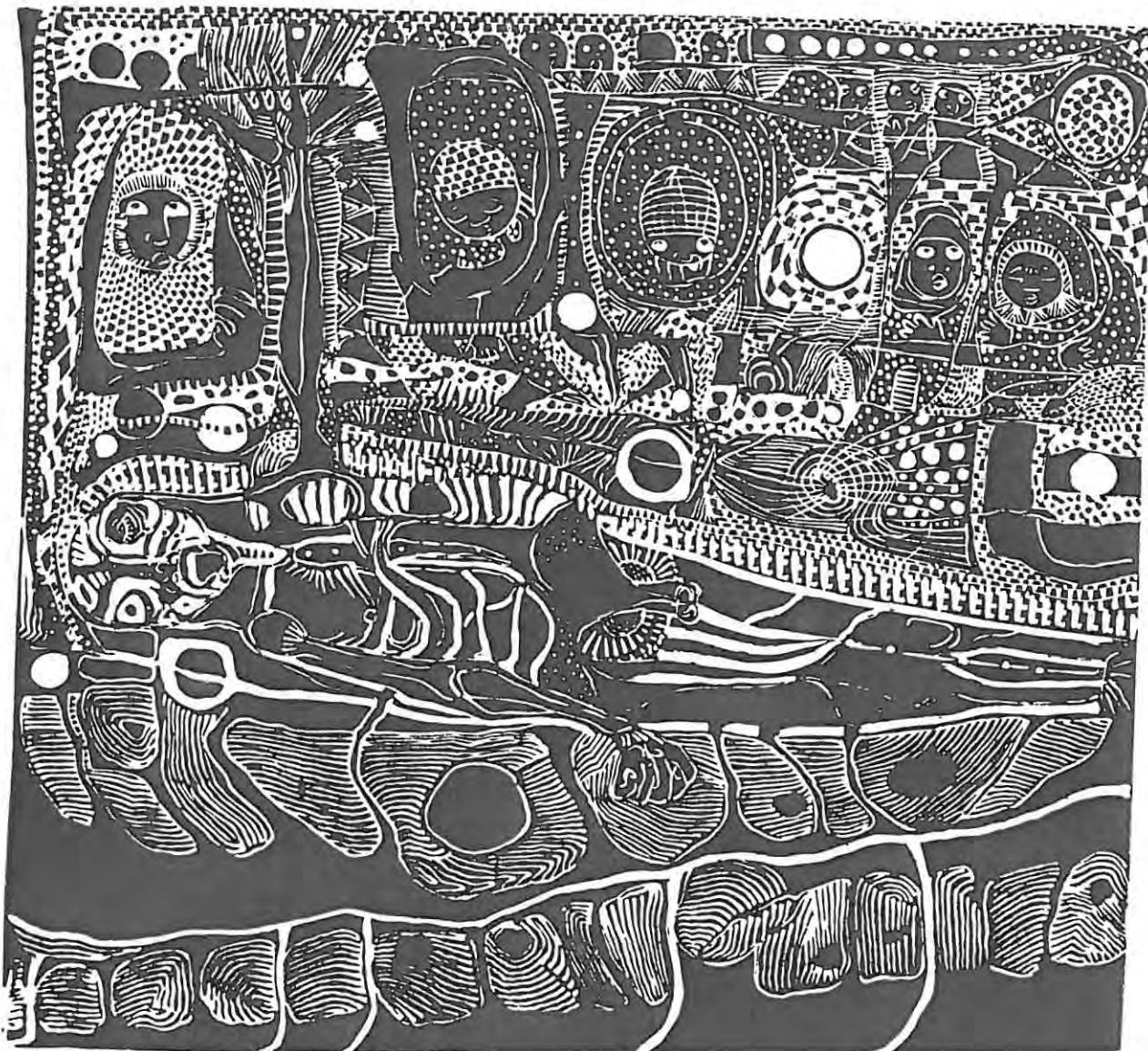
35. RAKGOATHE. Untitled. linocut.



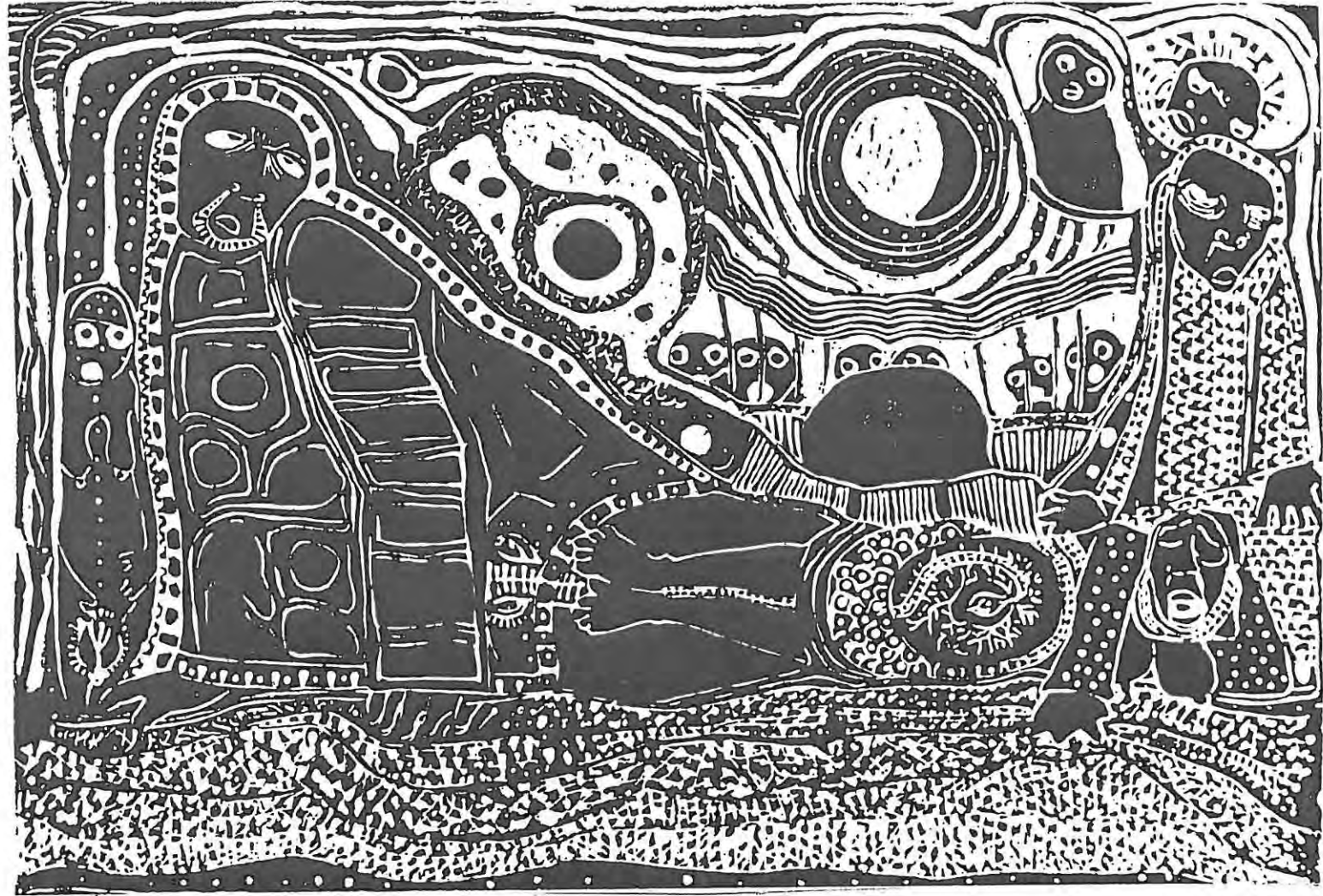
36. RAKGOATHE. 'Solar Rapture. Linocut.



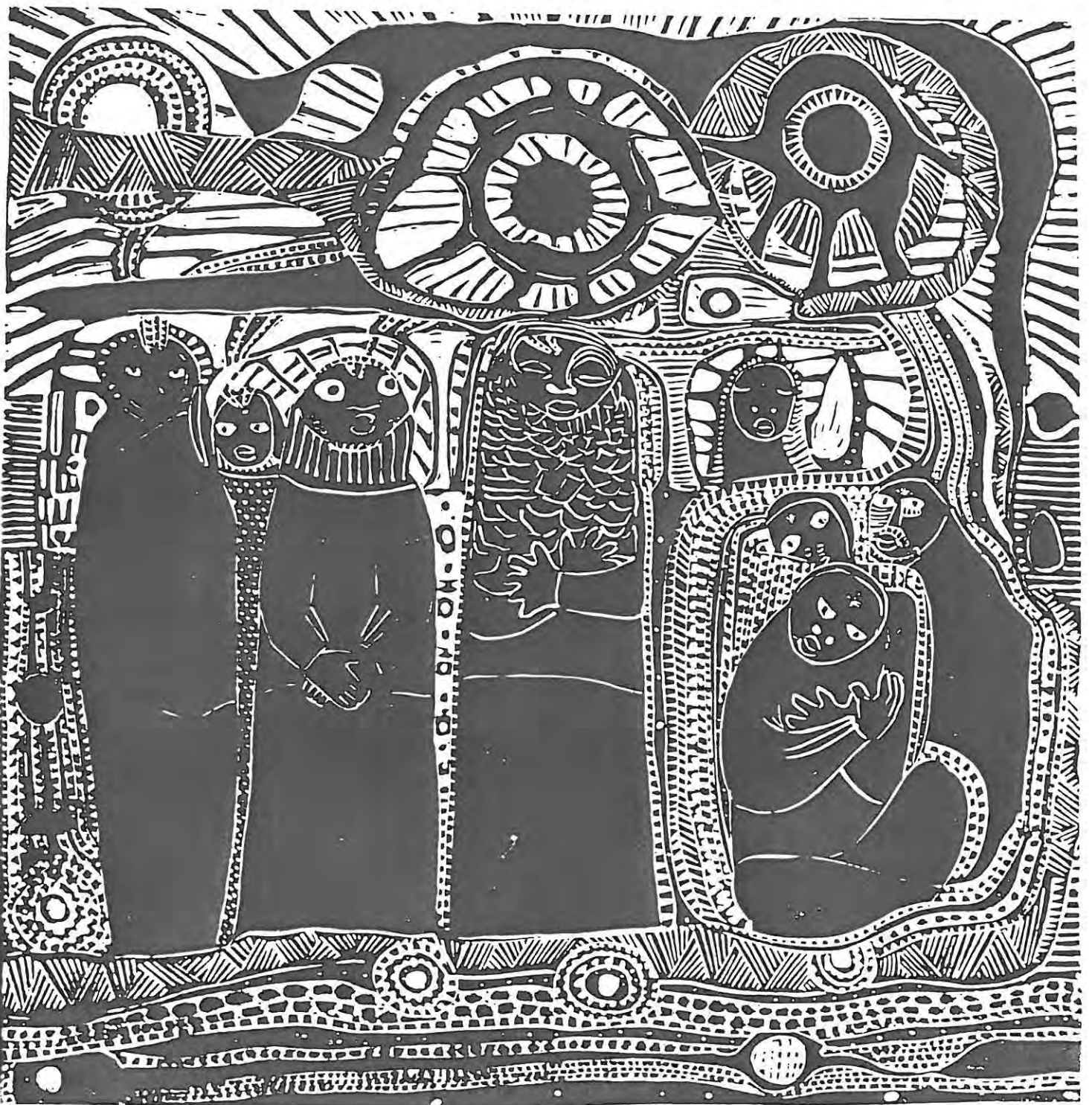
37. RAKGOATHE. Death Messengers. linocut.



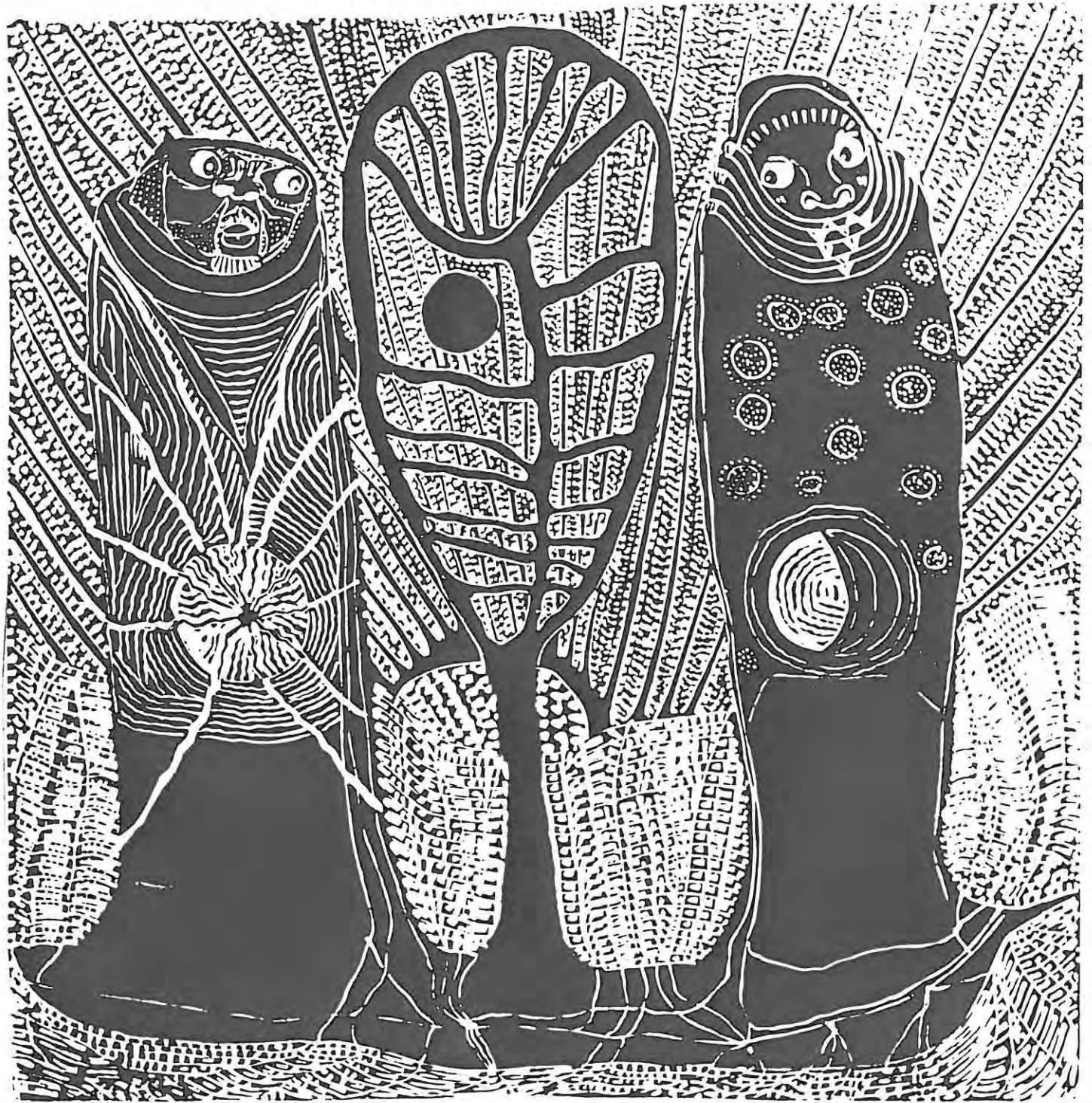
38. RAKGOATHE. Untitled. linocut.



39. RAKGOATHE. Lunar Fantasy. linocut.



40. RAKGOATHE. Untitled. linocut.



41. RAKGOATHE. Manifestations of Duality. linocut.



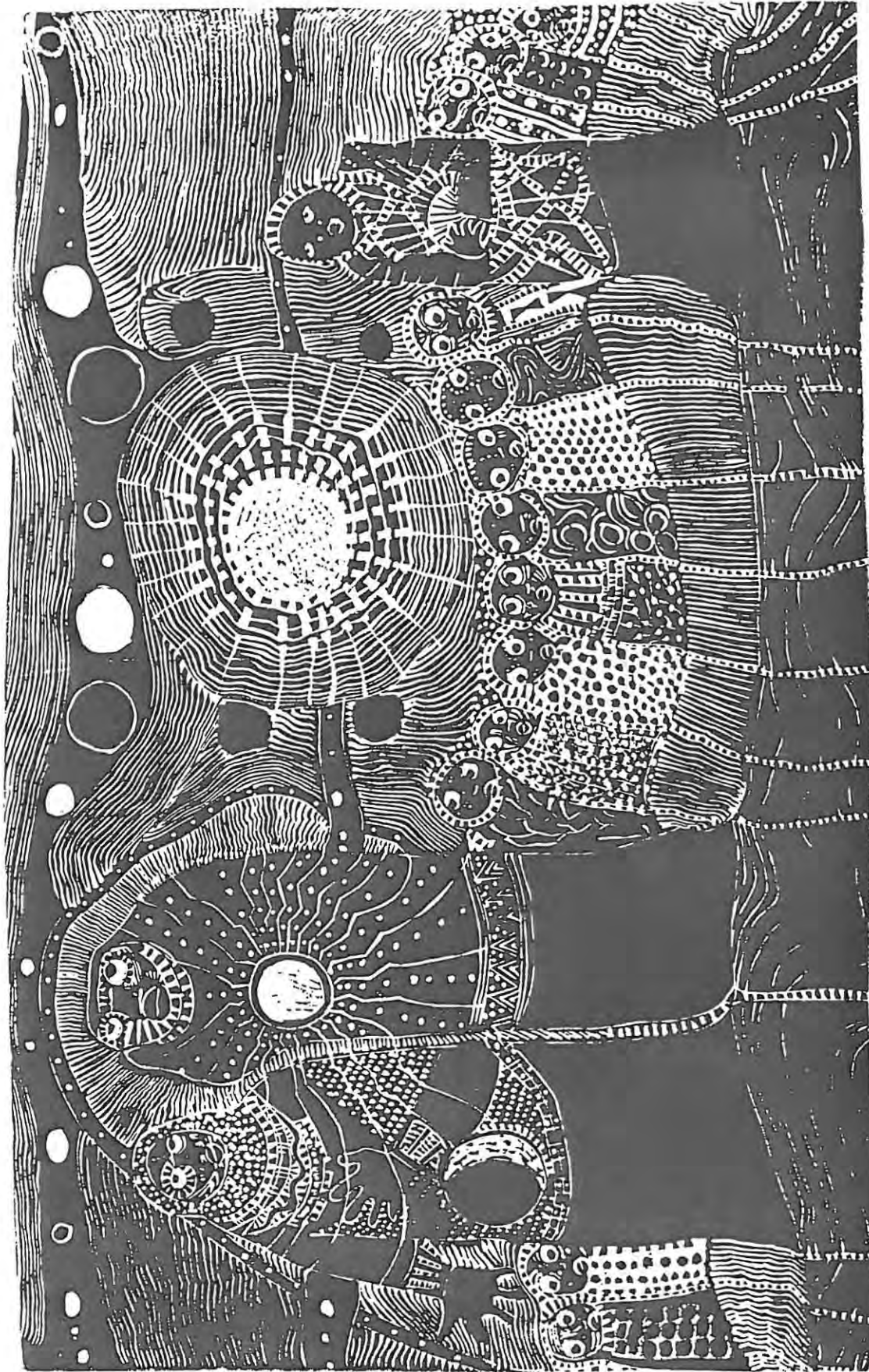
42. RAKGOATHE. Untitled. linocut.



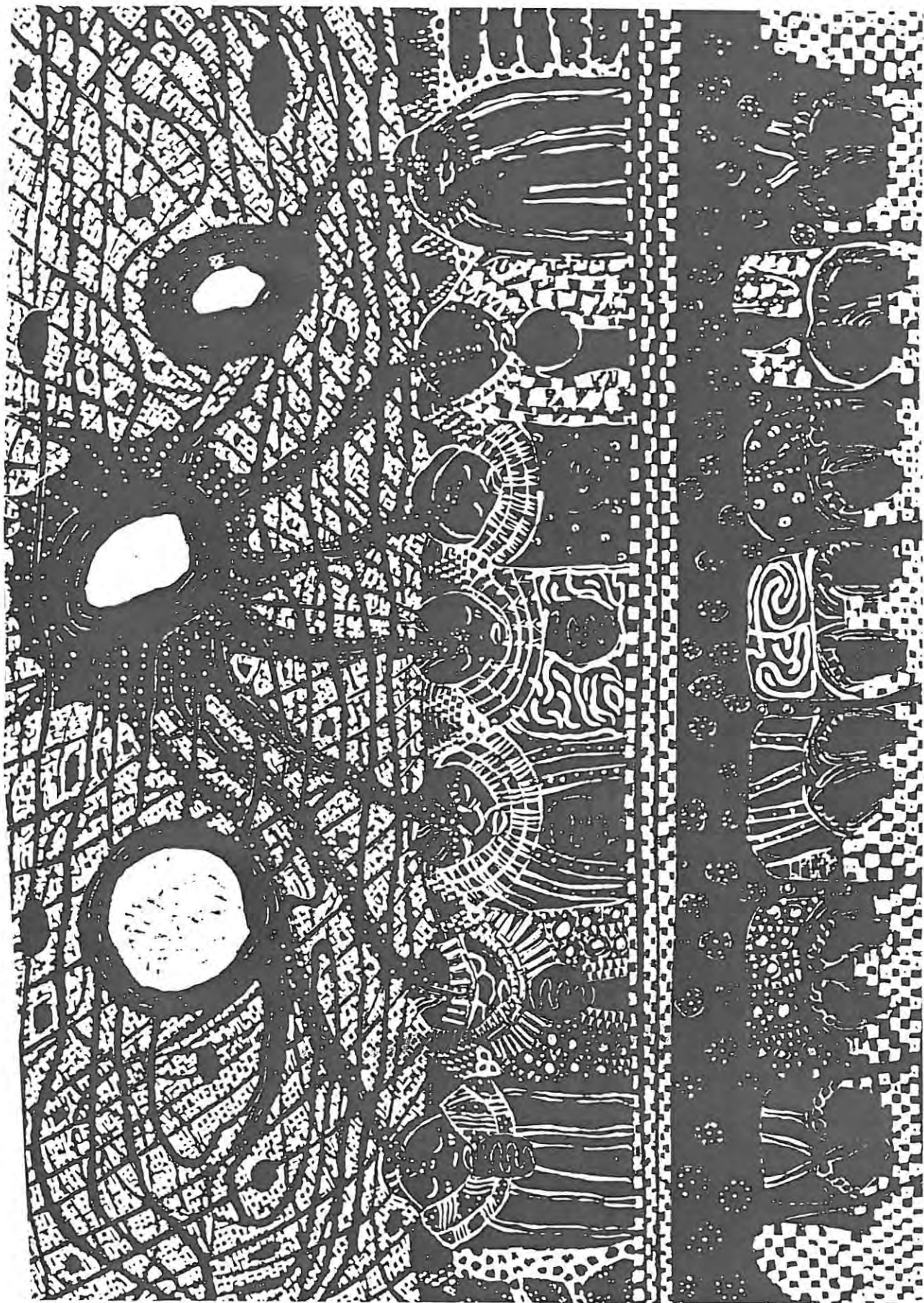
43. RAKGOATHE. Full-moon Meeting. etching and aquatint.



44. RAKGOATHE. Praying. linocut.



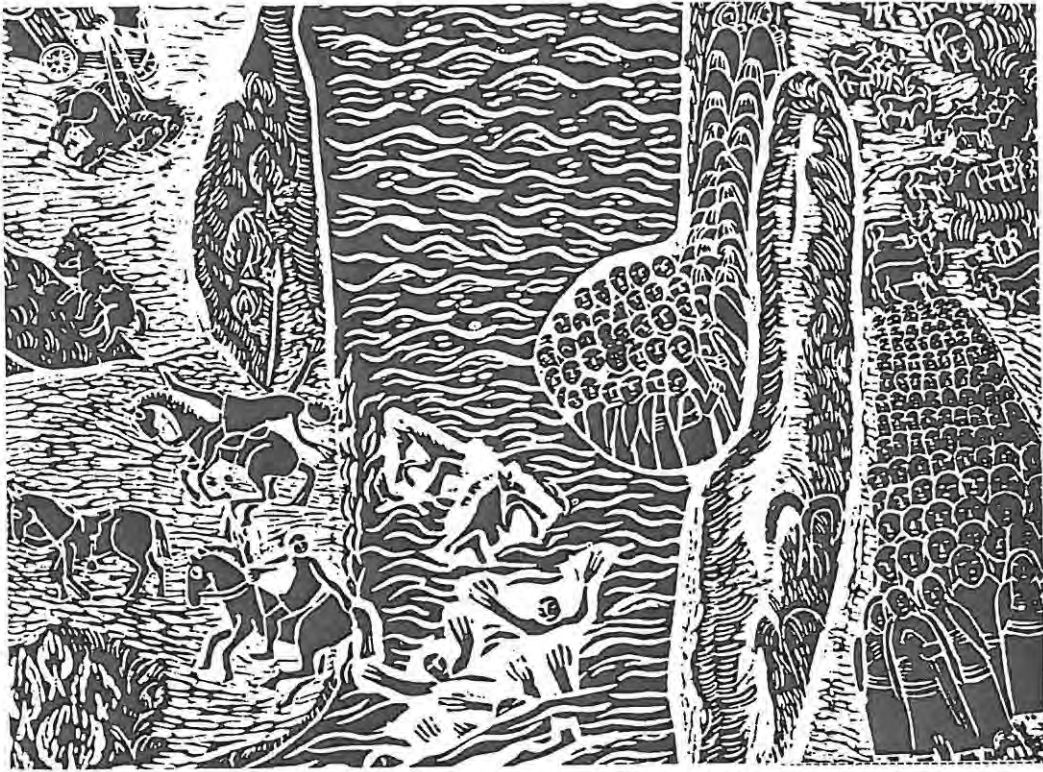
45. RAKGOATHE. Moonbride and Sun Bridegroom. Linocut.



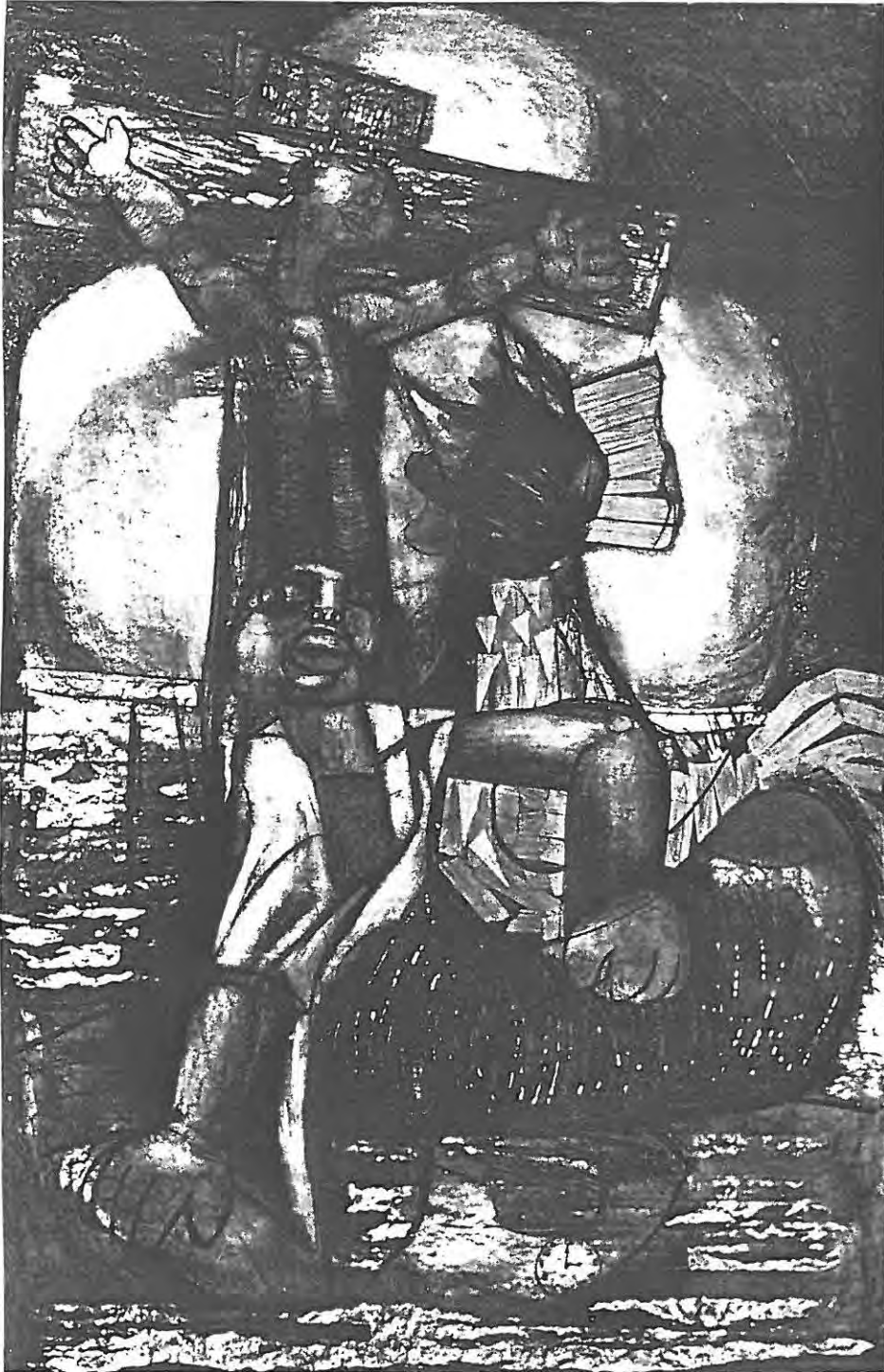
46. RAKGOATHE. Untitled. linocut.



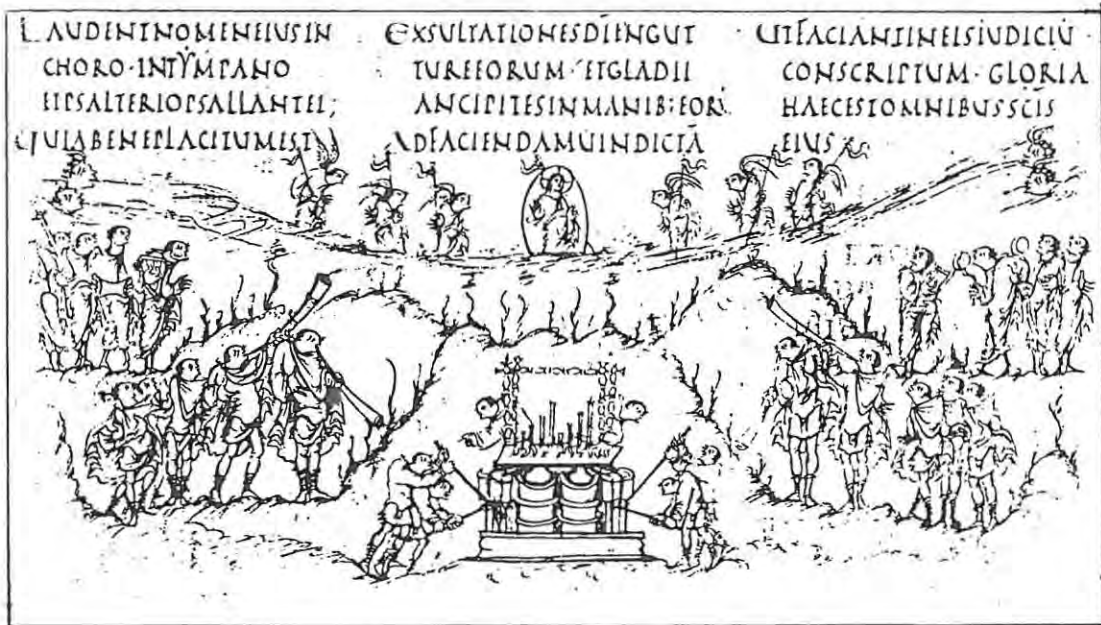
47. C. Nxamalo. The Shembe Story. linocut.



48. NDLOVU. Israelites crossing the Red Sea. linocut.



49. MAQHUBELA. Peter's Denial.
chalk.



50. Page from Utrecht Psalter.
 c. AD 832



51. Ancestral figure in the form of a
 squatting mother holding a child.
 Bakongo. height. 30,7cm.



52. OSAGIE OSIFO. Crucifixion -
(1961) carving for the
Catholic Chapel of the
University of Ibadan.



53. Benin Bronze Plaque.
height. 49,2 x 36,2cm.



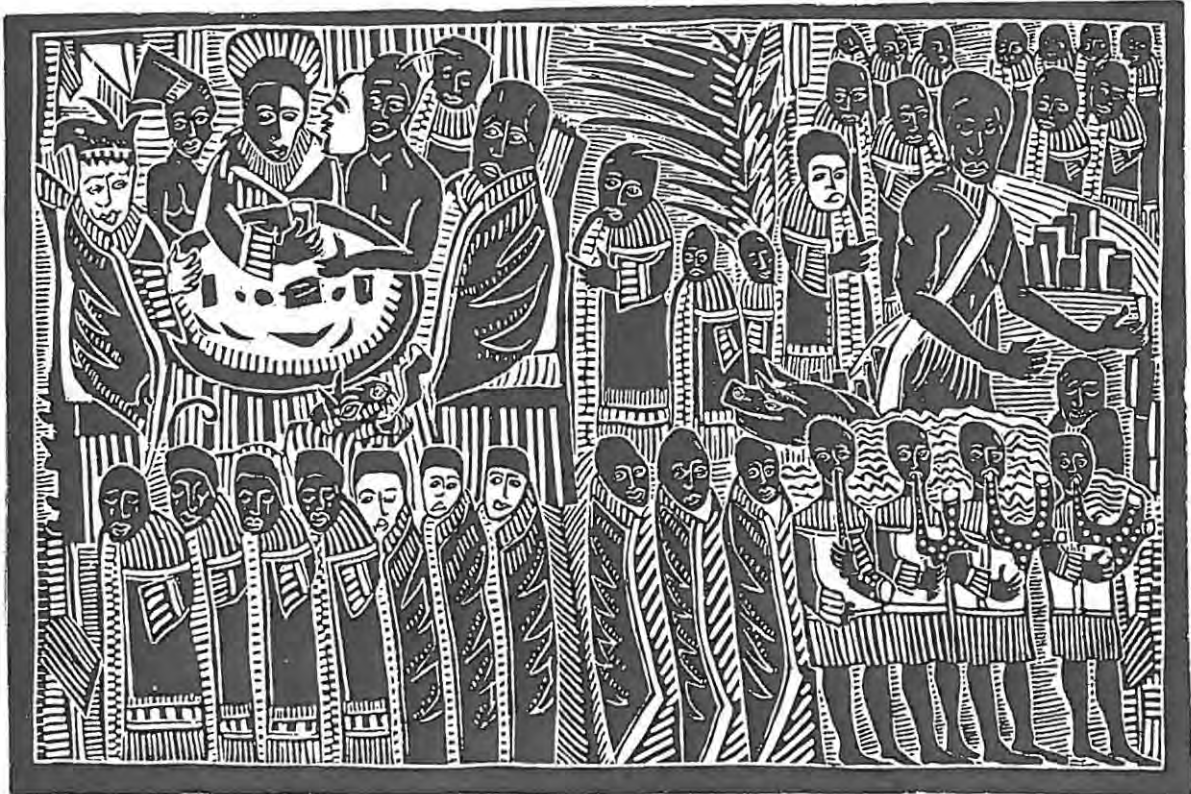
54. MBATHA. Invitation. linocut.



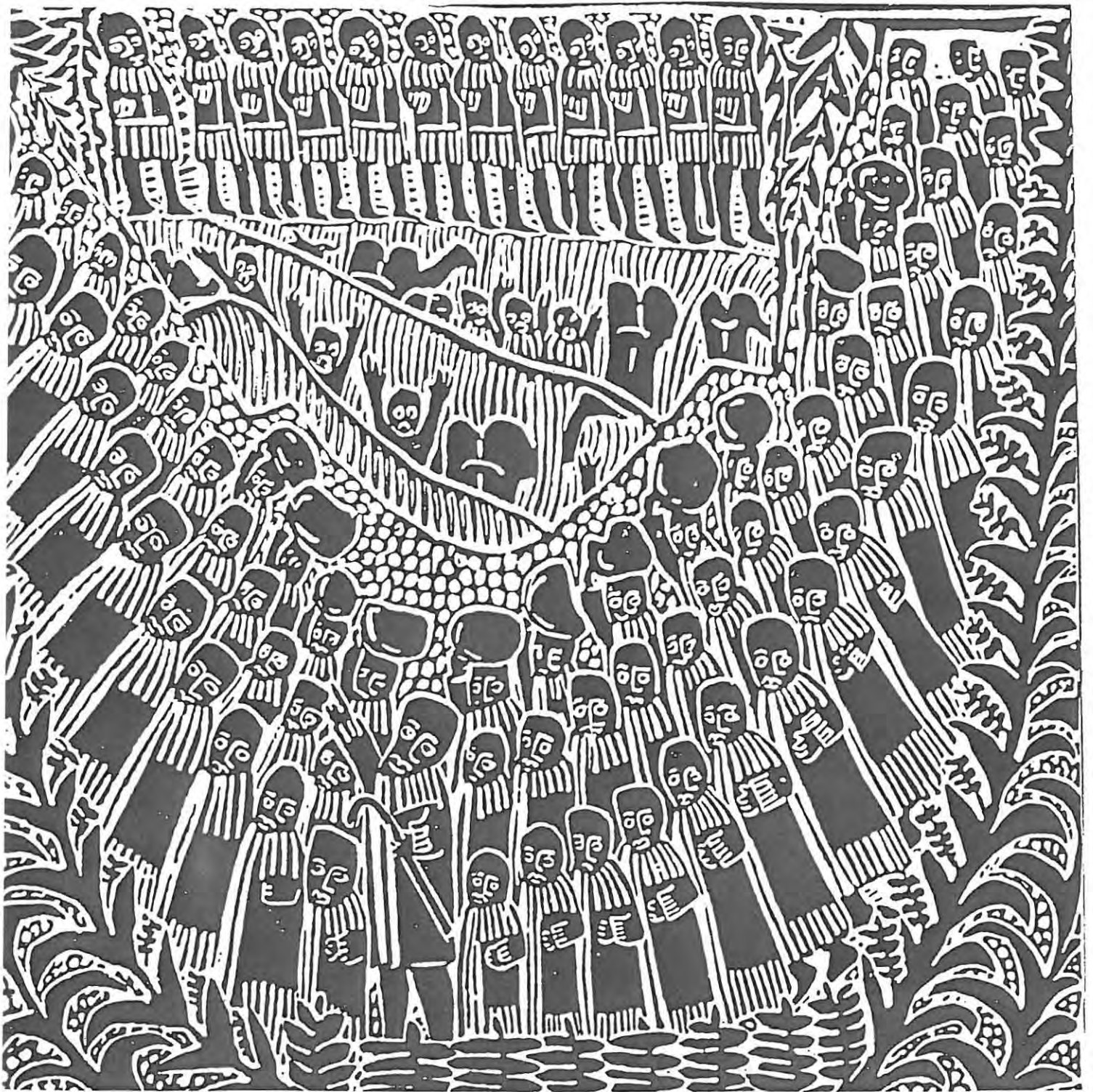
55. MBATHA. Revelations. linocut.



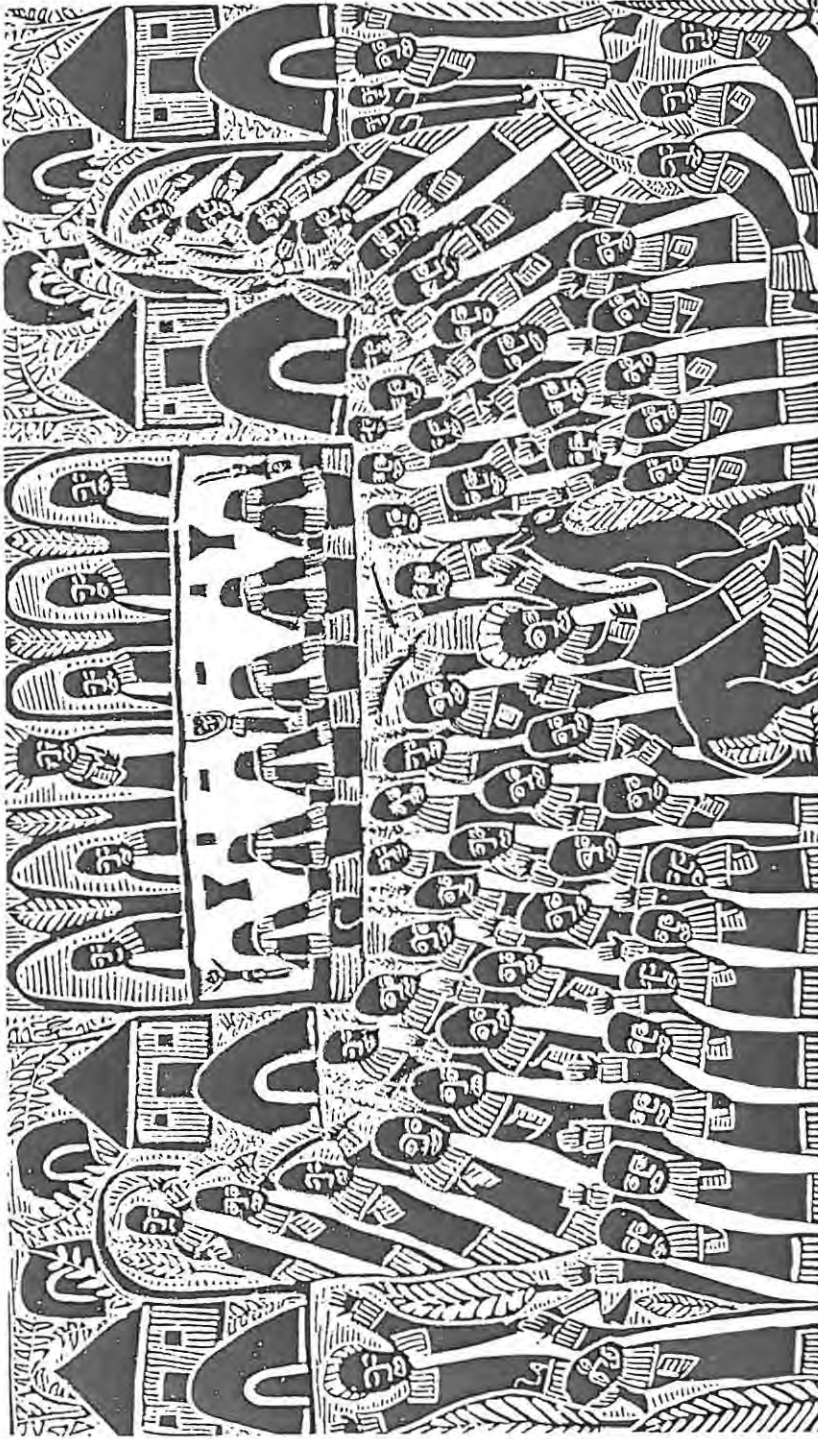
56. MBATHA. The torturing of St. John. linocut.



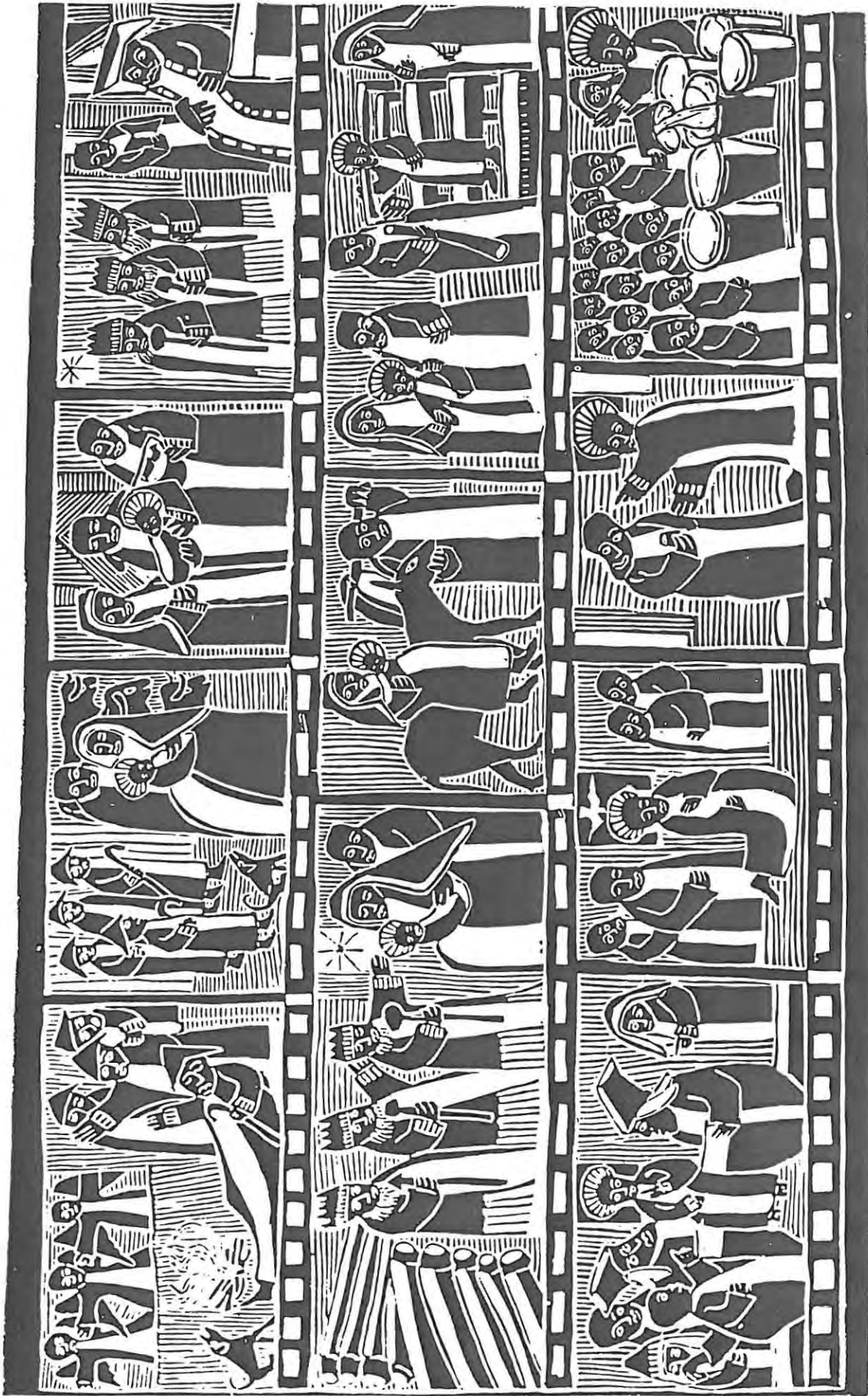
57. MBATHA. The coming of Christ and John the Baptist.
- linocut.



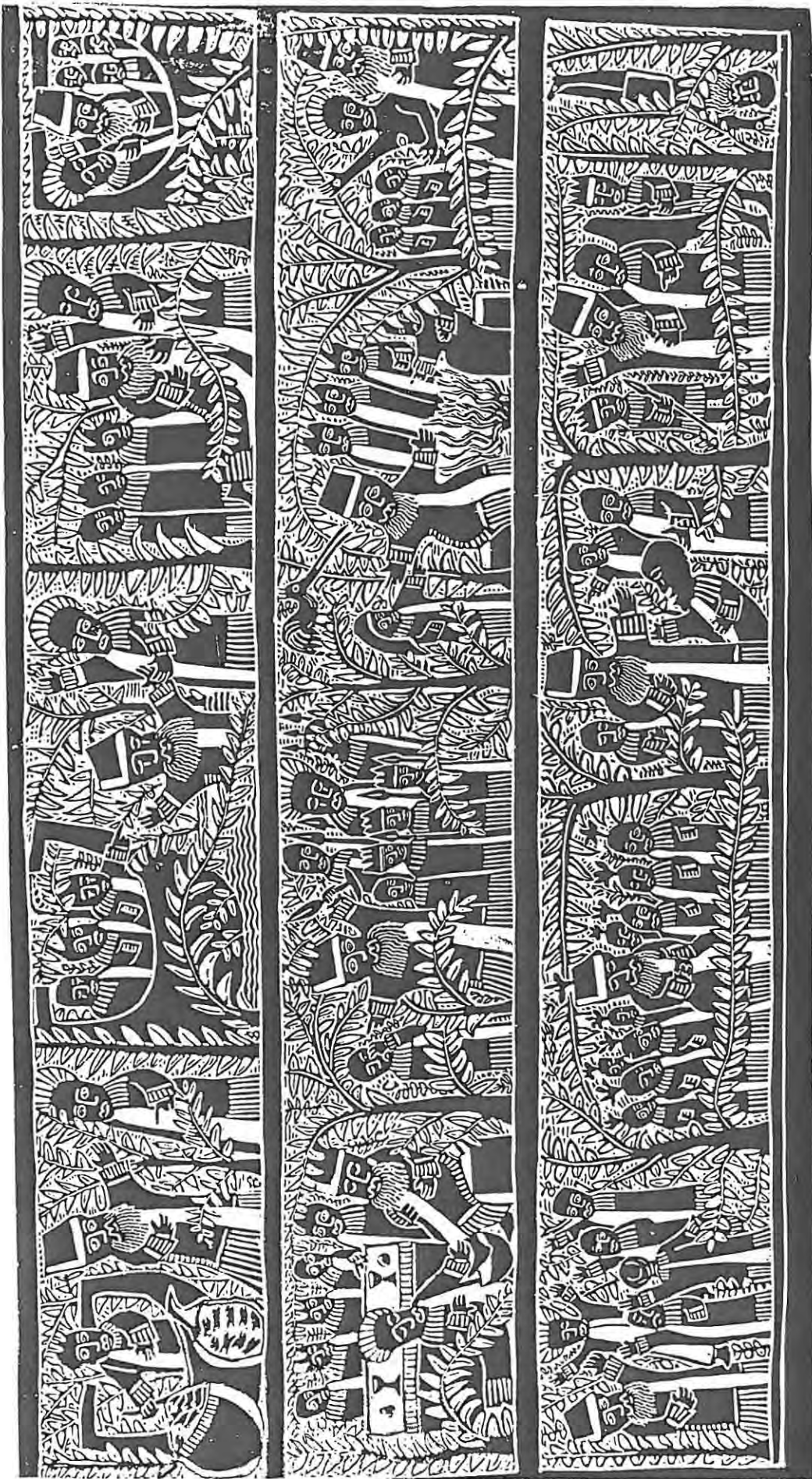
58. MBATHA. Israelites crossing the Red Sea. linocut.



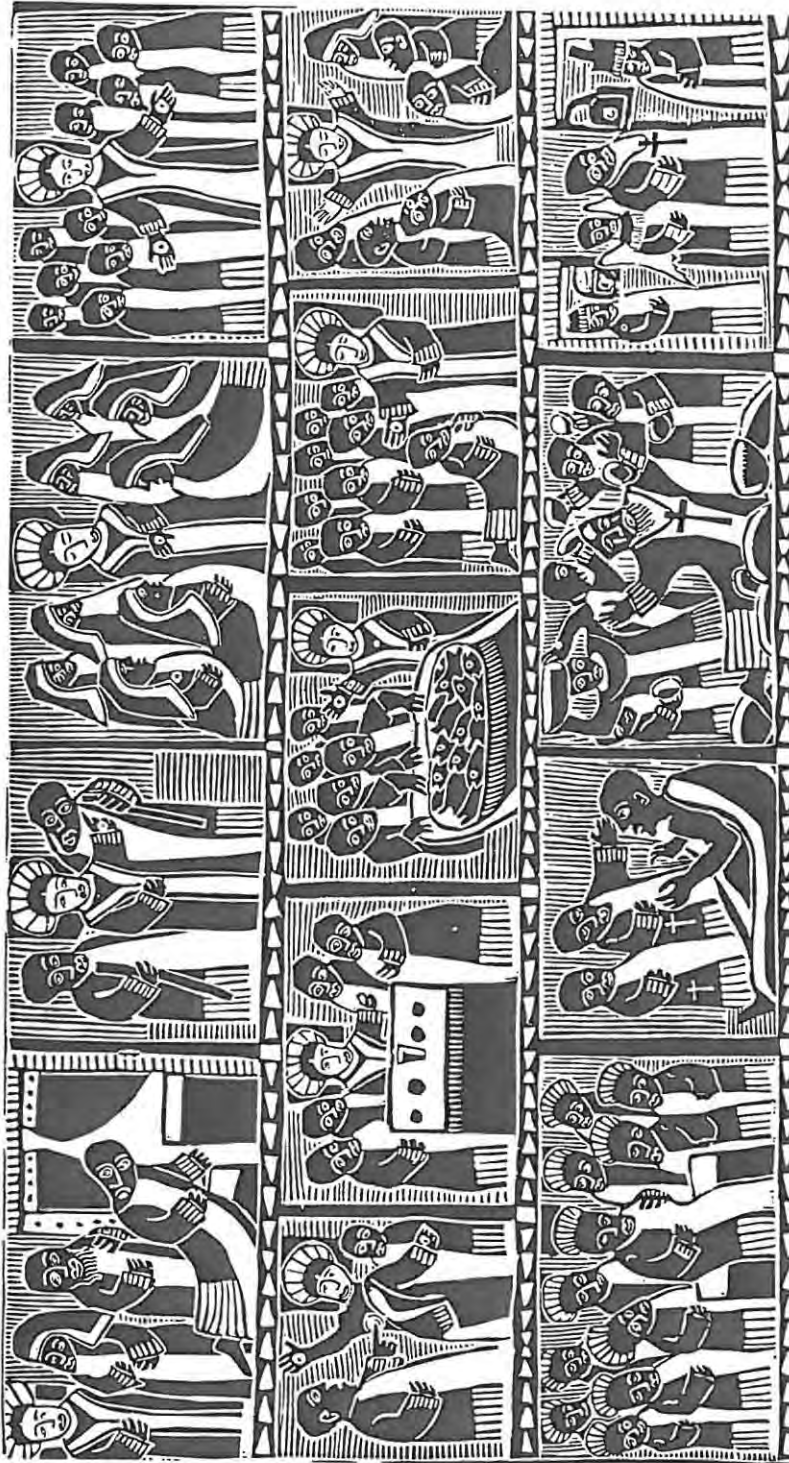
59. MBATHA. He went to Jerusalem. Linocut.



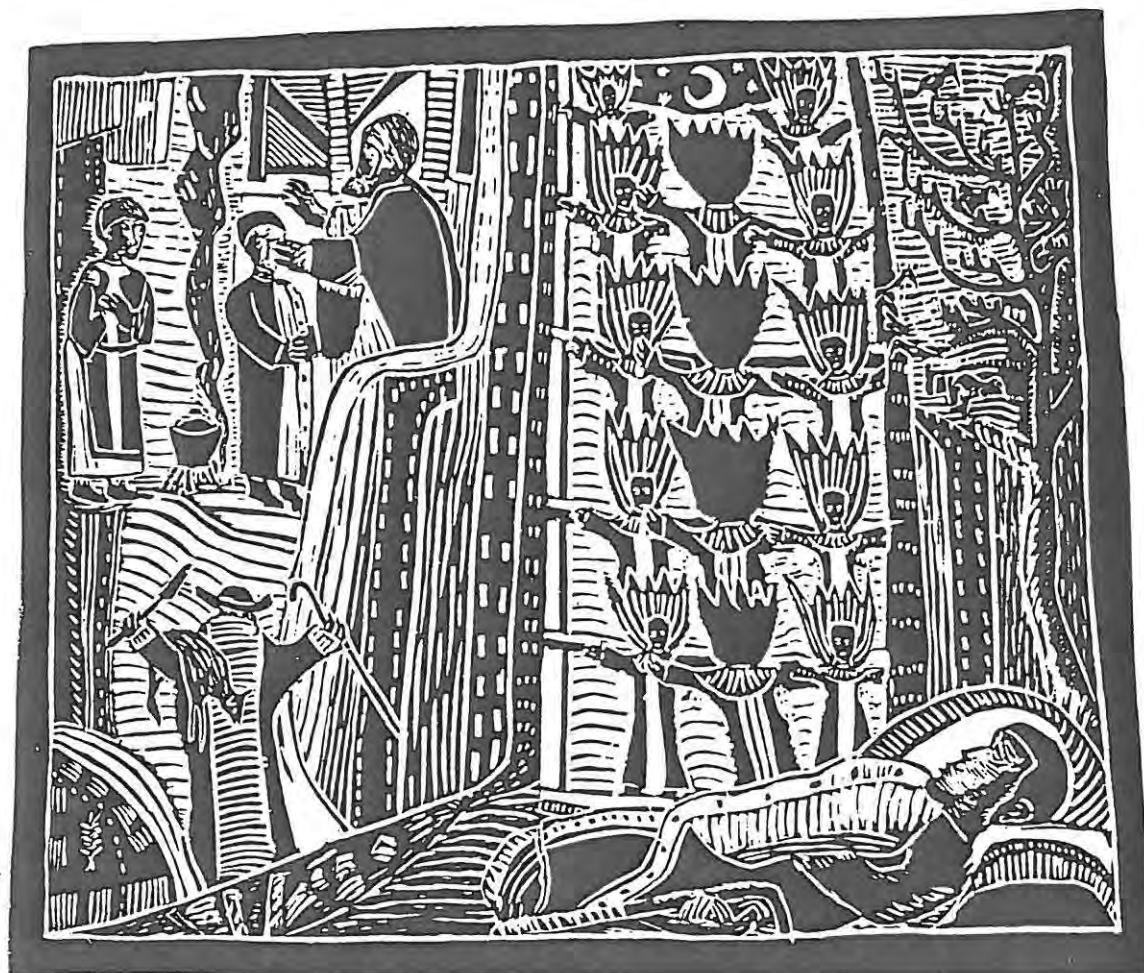
60. MBATHA. Birth of Jesus. linocut.



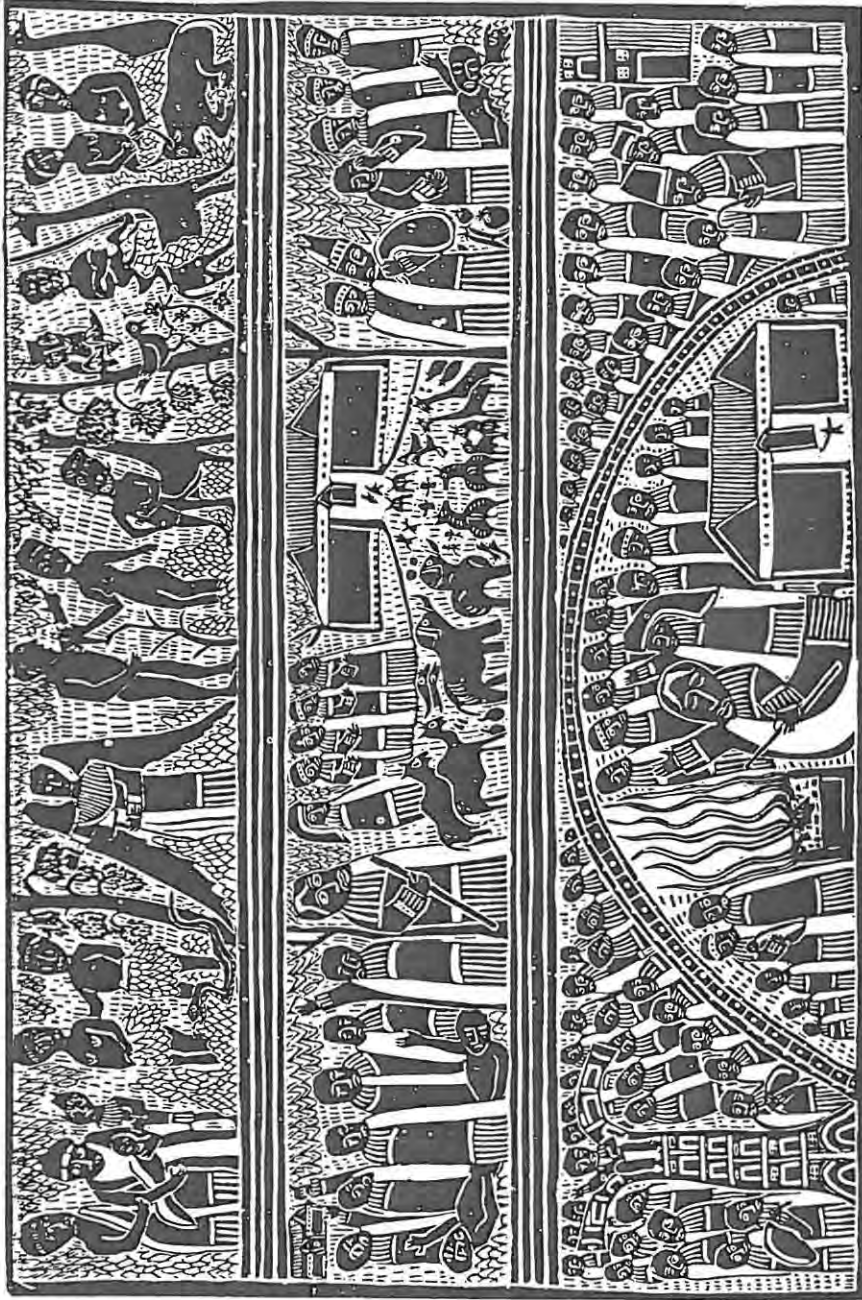
61. MBATHA. Peter. linocut.



62. MBATHA. Christ appears to the people. linocut.



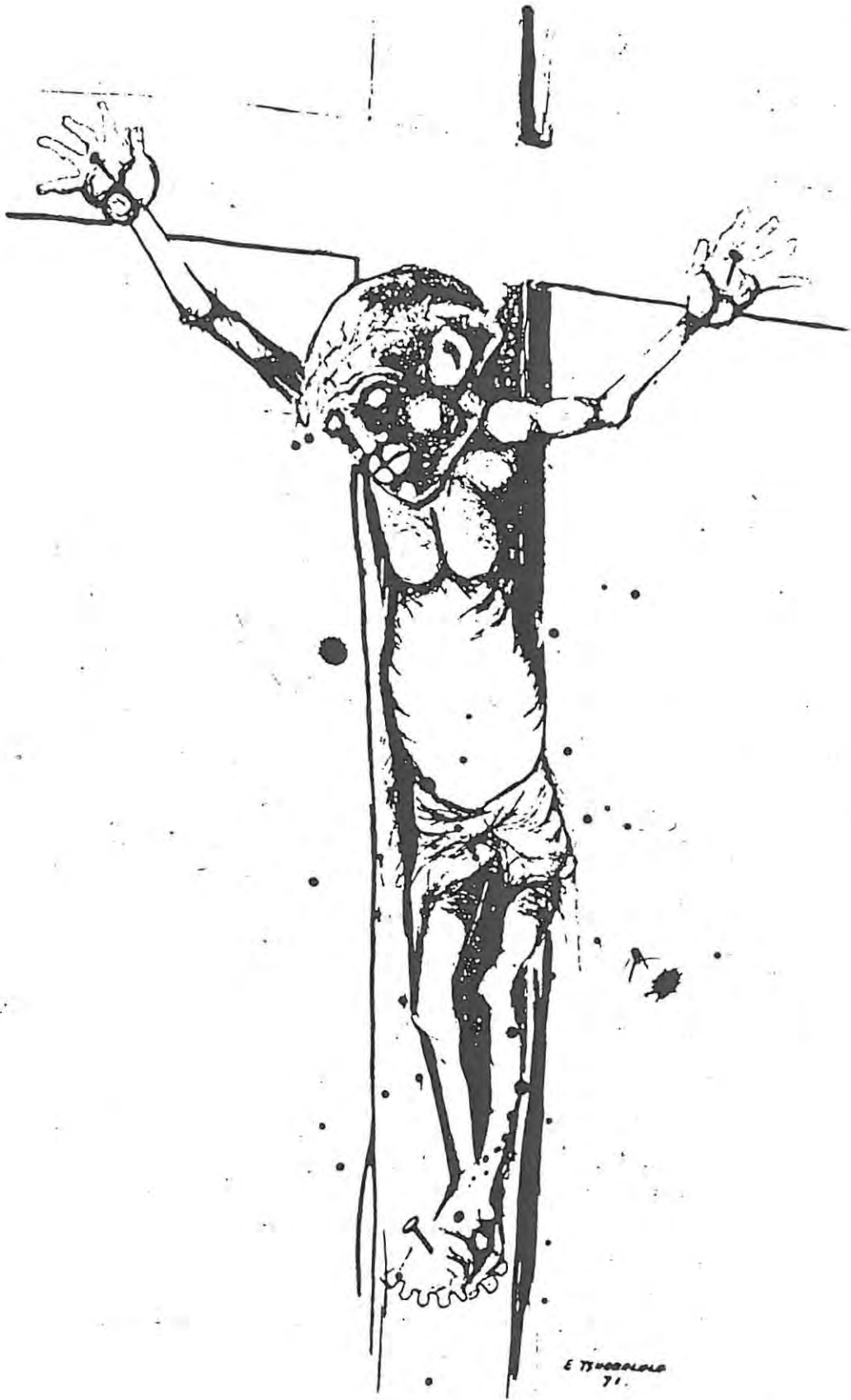
63. MBATHA. Untitled. linocut.



64. MBATHA. Adam and other stories. linocut.



65. MBATHA. Preparation for the Flood. linocut.



66. Tshabalala. Crucifixion. Ink.



67. JACOPO FLORENTINO. Sculpture - Burial of Christ.



68. GREGORIO FERNÁNDEZ: Detail of sculpture - Pietà - 1616.