

PREFACE TEXT BY HOMI K. BHABHA
SNAKE AND LYRE

"Is it foolishness, obstinacy, foolhardiness, or is it crass perversity to continue to carve a delicate bone piece for hours and hours, for months on end, knowing that it could break into pieces at anytime? Pitika Ntuli

Bones withstand the weather like other natural bodies that remain standing in the midst of turmoil and trauma. Tree-trunks, flower stems; coral. These bones, Pitika, like the age-rings of great trees, carry the marks of love and movement, although they are timeless.

Human flesh leaves its imprints on culture: persons and portraits humanize the geography of ages and liven the art-gallery with faces that turned towards viewers, making eye-contact, appearing face-to face, looking back at the past, look forward into the future.

The flesh of animals leave their imprint on nature: The feathers of birds, the fur of tigers, the skin of elephants, the horns of cows, the coats of dogs and cats, all these are signs of the surface of life that gives the animal world its names and natures.

But bones are, at once, the embedded structures of life --- human or animal --- and yet, when flesh turns to dust, they remain as ghosts of what was once alive, and has now calcified into the *unstill*ghost of a disembodied body marked by emergent signs of another-life, a life to come.

Like trees that are felled, or animals that die, wrestled to the ground in violence, or laid to rest in ritual and worship, bones never lose their soaring verticality as they reach beyond one death to face another life. The spirit of bones is always in motion, tracking the movement of life, which is why shamans and priestesses, soothsayers and magicians "read" the bones, "throw" the bones, and from those acts of artistry, magic and belief, derive the enigma of lives already born, and the fate of the as-yet-unborn.

Bones outlast fleshly life; they are the survivors that feed the earth.

As an artist you release the spirit and the story that has rested deep in the bones, and you make the silence of bones – which have no fleshy parts like eyes, mouths, tongues --- speak and sing. This is why *Serpents Ribs 5* is both a snake and a lyre.

Homi Bhabha