



Simphiwe Rholoma

# Recycling, upcycling and reusing

## Simphiwe Rholoma

October 2021

Text: Tanya Zack, Kirsten Harrison, Melanie Samson

Photographs: Mark Lewis

Design: Willemijn Schellekens

### Creating and decorating

Simphiwe Rholoma is feeling ill today. He is lying on his trolley outside his shack at Metro Centre, an informal settlement beside Wits University in Johannesburg. The flowers on his purple floral shirt pick up the red sails of the ship painting that decorates the side panel of his shack. Simphiwe is a recycler, a reuser and an up-cycler. He finds and reuses things. Sculptures and pictures surround his home. He also collects materials for Brixton artist Tamzyn Botha. Her inclusive art classes - which often rely on found objects and materials - have included sessions with street children and with reclaimers. Sometimes he finds loose items he can sell - dolls or bags or clothing.

### Past work - funeral parlour

Simphiwe was born in Mthanzane, East London in 1979. 'Before this work I was working with dead bodies,' he says. He worked at a funeral parlour, washing bodies in preparation for burial. He's seen some awful things, but says he got used to working with the bodies. 'No one's gonna help us if we are scared' he says. What haunts him is the number of unknown people they buried. Bodies that no one claimed.

### Following the Pikitup routes

When he lost his job and couldn't find other work, he started recycling. 'At that time there was no struggle to do recycling' he says. There were fewer reclaimers and little competition on the streets. The municipality

was not really involved. Except that Simphiwe's daily routine was dictated by the days on which residents put their bins on the curbside for collection by Pikitup. It still is.

### Simphiwe's daily routine is

Monday	Parkhurst
Tuesday	Brixton
Wednesday	Parktown/ Mayfair
Thursday	Northcliff
Friday	Emmarentia

### Managing income through pacing sales

Like others living at Metro Centre, he sorts his goods there. There are bags and sorting areas beyond the huddle of shacks. He sells his sorted materials on Saturdays. But during the week he sells smaller quantities of aluminium cans to buy food.

Simphiwe can make around R700 a week, selling about 30kg PET, 80kg Polyprop, 50kg plastics, 200kg boxes, 10kg aluminium cans, 200kg white paper and 50kg HD. These are enormous loads. He pulls a train of six trolleys that he connects for the journey to the recycling yard down the hill in Newtown.

