

ART FELT

A Journey of Rediscovering Art and Inspiring Others

Monique Koning's vibrant images of women, flowers, and landscapes attract local and international clients, and her Cape Town studio hums with colour, canvases, and inspiration. But the road to an artistic career has been long and hard, and it has taken decades for her to find her way back to her creative passion.

Pnina Fenster joined Monique for an enlightening Q&A session, delving into the intricacies of her remarkable life's journey.

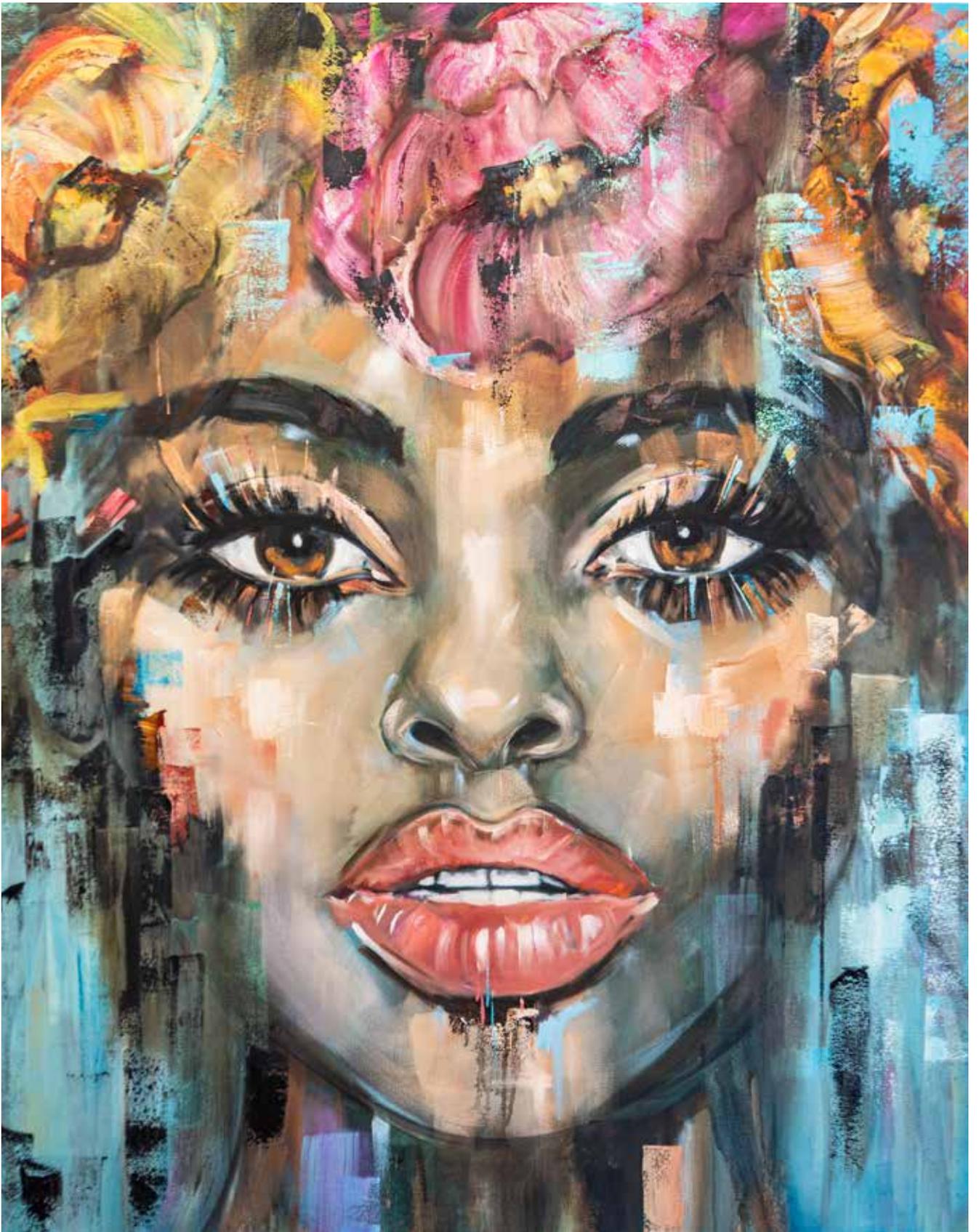
WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND?

I grew up in Port Elizabeth, one of four children born to Dutch immigrants - a hardworking housewife mother and a father who was a talented builder and property developer. My childhood was happy, and I was a dreamy, romantically minded, and a studious achiever. Art was my great love, and when I matriculated with outstanding marks for my paintings and drawings and won a bursary to study further, life promised excitement and creativity. Then tragedy struck my family: my parents decided to move back to Holland after I matriculated, and just a month later, my nine-year-old brother was killed by a car. The pain and bewilderment

were devastating, and I was so angry with God that even my art seemed futile. Instead of studying, I chose a carefree gipsy life, travelling between Port Elizabeth and the Netherlands, working in boutiques and restaurants. I was 24 when I experienced another unexpected turn in the road: pregnancy. Suddenly, I was a single mother, raising my little girl with what little I earned in a part-time job at a cosmetic counter. My dreams faded as I closed myself off from any hopes of becoming an artist. I was blessed to have another daughter and a son in the following years, but a turbulent relationship shattered my sense of self.

HOW DID YOU GET BACK TO ART?

I finally realised that I needed to escape the emotional abyss, and after an acrimonious divorce, I moved to Cape Town, determined to create a new life for my three children and myself. I







worked in a call centre and then as a rental agent, barely making a living. Then, in December 2013, I was blessed with a turning point. A benefactor loaned me funds for canvases and paint, and for the first time in a decade, I was able to focus on my talent. As I began my first real artwork in years, my submerged passion emerged like a long-dormant volcano. God had given me a talent, and I would put it to good use at last. I signed that first portrait with a variation on my name – Mo Nique – and promised myself that I would persist as an artist.

HOW DID YOU BEGIN TO SELL YOUR ART?

As if by magic, I sold my first painting – a portrait of Nelson Mandela – to a client from my rental agent days. I wasn't confident enough to approach galleries, so I posted images on Facebook, designed a website, and networked as much as possible. Whatever I earned went to living costs for my family and the investment in canvas and paint, but my heart and soul went into everything I created, and I was grateful for every sale. 'Keep going' became my motto

as I rediscovered my strength, passion, and freedom. Ten years later, I have a lovely, sunny studio with beautiful views of Table Mountain and the city, and my paintings have gone all over the world, with representation at Atelier Louis in Belgium and at two Cape Town galleries, ArtTrader and You & I.

WHAT MAKES YOUR WORK SPECIAL?

People often comment on the soul and emotion in my work. The women I paint have powerful eyes, and the images of flowers and landscapes are positive and passionate. My next dream is to get into galleries in Europe and the US, and I won't stop until I'm famous! Most importantly, I want to inspire women who are dealing with trauma to claim back their lives and shine their talent in the world.

For more information, visit www.moniquepaintings.com. 

*by **pnina fenster**
/photography by **ryan abbott***