

It's About Art

Welcome to It's About Art!

Introducing you to *your* collection.

See you at walkabouts re-opening soon,

Koulla Xinisteris
Curator



Business As Usual: Chief Albert Luthuli looking out of his spaza-shop window in Groutville soon after being told that he had won the Nobel Peace Prize

1960

Photograph
1/2039.5 x 28cm

RANJITH KALLY (1925 –2017)

While working at *Drum* magazine from 1956 – 1965 and again from 1968 – 1985, Ranjith Kally produced some of his most brilliant photographs of the people involved in the South African liberation movement. Of everyone he photographed, Kally said that the leader who made the greatest impression on him was Chief Albert Luthuli, who received the 1960 *Nobel Peace Prize* for his efforts to secure political freedom from apartheid for South Africa. 'Of all the people I've photographed, Chief Luthuli has been the highlight of my career. He was such a jovial, humble person and would pose in any way that you asked of him,' said Kally. This photograph captures Luthuli staring out of the window of his spaza shop after receiving the news that he had won the Prize. Luthuli lived in Groutville, a peri-urban settlement and former 19th-century mission reserve among the sugar cane hills south of KwaDukuza, on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. With its lack of arable land, mass restrictions and rampant migrant labour due to lack of other employment opportunities available in the area, Groutville was a microcosm of the greater context and complexities that most black South Africans faced under apartheid. The hardships that people experienced there, forced Luthuli to look at the broader context of South Africa, and he realised that the plight of the African was a national problem, not only confined to the people of Groutville. This image was featured as part of the exhibition *Life and Times of Chief Albert Luthuli*, which ran from February to June 2007 at the Luthuli Museum in Groutville, which was officially opened in August 2004. Today, the Museum includes the original 1927 home of Chief Luthuli that is situated on 3233 Nokukhanya Luthuli Street.



Sonny Pillay & Miriam Makeba: The glamour couple of the 50s soon before their respective departures abroad to seek fame
1959

Photograph
1/2039.5 x 28cm

'Sonny' was the nickname of Shunna Pillay who was one of South Africa's foremost ballad crooners during the 1950s, and with whom legendary South African songstress Miriam Makeba was briefly romantically involved. 'Widely considered the nation's equivalent to Frank Sinatra, Pillay headlined the popular Alf Herbert's "African Jazz and Variety" shows that performed across southern Africa,' reads the biographical text that accompanied the release of Pillay's novel, *Shadow People* (STE Publishers, 2006). Although their romance lasted for only a few short months, Pillay and Makeba stayed friends during the years of exile that were to follow and remained close until her death in 2008. This photograph captures a moment of intimacy and shared musicality between the two young lovers. It was taken by Ranjith Kally in 1959, the year that Pillay left South Africa in the hope of freeing himself from apartheid's constraints and enjoying success abroad. The following year, Makeba was denied re-entry into South Africa, and, subsequently, lived in exile for three decades. Pillay still performed after leaving South Africa – later even going into acting – but never recovered the acclaim he achieved in the Fifties and, over time, popular memory of him faded. The publication of his novel, *Shadow People* in 2006 marked his reentry into popular culture. It sheds light on the experiences of South Africa's Indian performers attempting to break into the mainstream music world.

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1925 in Isipingo, south of Durban, Ranjith Kally spent 15 years working in a shoe factory, while freelancing as a photographer on weekends covering social events for *The Leader* newspaper. He then went on to work as a photographer for *The Golden City Post* and *Drum*, documenting urban life in the Fifties and Sixties, and some of the key people and events involved in South Africa's struggle towards democracy. In 1967, he was admitted to the *Royal Photographic Society*. His subjects range from two white men drinking in a local shebeen in Cato Manor, an area that was classified 'non-white' under apartheid; to the death-defying stunt riders Tommy Chetty and Umbarani Naidoo riding the infamous Wall of Death, to golfer Sewsunker 'Papwa' Sewgolam drinking tea out of a flask in his car due to the 'whites-only' policy at the clubhouse. Although his work stretches over a period of six decades, his debut solo only took place at the Goodman Gallery in 2004, by which time Kally was already a 79-year-old veteran photographer. All the Kally images in the SABC Art Collection were purchased from that watershed solo. Between 2004 and 2007, Riason Naidoo curated several exhibitions of photographs by Kally, which took place in Johannesburg and Durban, and travelled to Mali, Austria, Spain and France.

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Get in touch

Walkabouts will start up again soon

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