

Painting in the service of anti-apartheid

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Little known outside Africa, the work of a Mozambican artist is helping to sell products in Britain of an anti-apartheid co-operative

A new postcard will help to make the work of Mozambique's foremost contemporary artist, Malangatana Valente Ngwenya, better known beyond Africa.

Featured on the postcard is *O Poco Sagrado* (The Sacred Well), a large, richly-coloured work in acrylics which draws on Mozambican folk culture and mythology to express contemporary themes of order and confusion, optimism and danger.

The postcard, launched recently by AA Enterprises, a workers' co-operative set up to support the British Anti-Apartheid Movement by marketing anti-apartheid merchandise, is in colour and a set comprises one reproduction of the entire painting and three details, with an explanatory leaflet attached.

The sacred well is a watery zone controlled by the gods. According to legend, people can only gain access to it by overcoming obstacles and

threats in the shape of half-human, half-animal monsters.

The picture was painted in 1985, 10 years after Mozambique gained its independence and at a time when the country was passing through a particularly difficult period of attack by the South African-funded Mozambique National Resistance (MNR).

Ngwenya was born in 1936 and had a typical rural upbringing in colonial Mozambique. He began to paint seriously in the late 1950s but was later imprisoned by the Portuguese secret police, PIDE, for his opposition to the colonial regime.

Since Mozambique's independence, Ngwenya has been deeply involved in developing a new and independent national culture. In 1983 he was awarded Mozambique's highest civilian order, the Nachingwea Medal.

Ngwenya plans to visit Britain later this year to launch a full exhibition of his work