

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A ‘NATIONAL’ GALLERY
WHEN THE NOTIONS OF ‘NATION’ TRANSFORM RADICALLY?**

**An analysis of the Iziko South African National Gallery’s practices and policies
In historical contexts**

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Abstract

While much has been written on the European display of non-western art and artefact collected from their colonies in Africa, less has been documented about the European settler arts institutions, like the South African National Gallery (SANG), whose distant location away from the imperial centre initially presented particular challenges. In South Africa, since colonialism, these challenges have been expanded by settler nationalisms, a racially oppressive regime, a liberation movement, and a relatively peaceful transition to a democracy.

In its form and its function, the SANG has reflected the redefined nationalisms that accompanied these historical moments. In light of the global history of national galleries and more recent theoretical discussions about cultural institutions, this study probes the complex layering of histories evidenced in collection and exhibition practices at the SANG in its historical contexts.

Historically South African galleries have reflected colonial and later apartheid ideologies. With the transition to a democratic society in 1994, the ‘new’ South Africa ushered in a radically redefined national identity. If national collections reflect the nations to which they belong, this study questions the SANG’s ability in reflecting successive redefinitions of South African nationhood, and its adaptability in meeting shifting social and political requirements. By examining shifts in collections and display practices and policies, in the SANG’s historical contexts, this paper ultimately asks the question: What does it mean to be a ‘national’ gallery when the notions of ‘nation’ transform radically?

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Introduction

The question: “What does it mean to be a ‘national’ gallery?” elicits no single answer. The title of ‘National Gallery’ does not automatically designate the role of collecting and exhibiting only, or primarily, the nation’s art. Indeed, many national galleries and museums prioritize international art and thus aim to be encyclopaedic, offering a global art history. Where a national gallery does aim to prioritize the ‘nation’, it may do so by tracing the nation’s history through its art – even if its history, and its definitions of ‘nation’, may be matters of contention. A third possibility is that such a gallery might try to represent the ‘nation’ proportionally – adopting a policy of buying and exhibiting art in proportion to the nation’s various constituencies.

Characteristic of South Africa’s history of radical social, cultural and political transformations, the South African National Gallery (SANG), at different points in its past, has to a greater or lesser extent, tacitly implemented one or the other of the aforementioned strategies. The outcome is a complex composite of distinct and sometimes contrasting directions. This study attempts to reveal how the SANG’s answer to the question *What does it mean to be a ‘national’ gallery?* – as manifested in its policies and practices – has differed historically and shifted in response to the transforming social, cultural and political environments and requirements.

The central competencies of public art galleries are conservation, acquisition, exhibition, education, research and publication. Thus this study examines how, evidenced by these competencies, the SANG’s perception of its own function has been reimagined in accordance with successive redefinitions of South African nationhood. This study illustrates the SANG’s varying functions as a public art institution, and investigates rhetoric and discourses involved in the support or subversion of those various functions.

If national collections mirror the nations to which they belong, when the imagined South African nation changed, so did the responsibilities of the SANG. Prompted by the political transition to democracy in the 1990s, the ‘New’ South Africa was seen to offer a radically different conception of the country’s nationhood. Yet it was not delivered on a clean slate. Primarily this study examines the repositioning of the SANG in the periods directly before, during and directly after

South Africa's radical transformation from apartheid to democracy. References to a broader history of the Gallery provide context and draw a parallel with previous constitutional, social and political watersheds of South African history. Within this context, I shall consider the cultural, social and political activities that reflected and influenced those moments. Initially the relationship between the state and what became the SANG was impacted by factors relating to a colonial environment. With the political context shifting to Union in 1910 the nature of the relationship changed. It changed again with the introduction of apartheid in 1948 when the SANG accommodated a shift toward an exclusive Nationalist ideology. By looking at this history, I hope to provide a more nuanced interpretation of the most recent repositioning. The SANG's contributions to the nation-building and cultural reconstruction of the 1990s – with watchwords of social cohesion, reconciliation, and transformation – are thus contextualized in relation to previous configurations.

A great deal has been written on the European display of non-western art and artefacts collected from their colonies in Africa, but far less has been documented about the European settler institutions, like the SANG, whose decentred status away from the mother country presented specific challenges. For the SANG, since its colonial genesis, these challenges of self-definition have been expanded by a complex history of settler nationalism, racial oppression, a liberation movement and an electoral democracy. Annie Coombes (2003:7) has argued that the political and social legacies of this complex layering of history produces a context whereby “the effects of each of these historical conditions jostle against one another to produce significant tensions during periods of reconstruction.” South Africa’s radical transformation to a democracy in 1994 presented a redefined national consciousness and thus repositioned the responsibilities of its ‘national’ gallery. This dissertation examines this repositioning, and its tensions and contestations, as made manifest by the shifts in the Gallery’s practices and policies.

Marilyn Martin, director at the SANG directly before, during and after the nation’s transition to democracy, suggested that any discussion about art and culture in South Africa “is incomplete without reference to the relationship between art and politics” (Martin, 1996a:10). In acknowledgement of Martin’s conviction, this study is a social art historical analysis of the SANG and its surrounding context. This study thus encompasses the social, cultural and political

environment that has historically influenced the SANG, including changing governments and their sponsorship of art, the promotion of distinct definitions of South African art, and the re-articulations of South African nationhood. The SANG remains responsible for constructing and contributing to an official national culture. Yet neither the conception of a national culture, nor the Gallery's role as cultural keystone, has remained static, but rather has transformed (accordingly) with a shifting social and political climate.

This study is not a biography of the SANG and therefore does not provide a complete history. Rather it is a close reading of how the SANG has adapted to different versions of South African nationhood. The study begins by providing historical context. The subsequent chapters repeat this history, but with each historical reassessment a distinct focus is established and explored. With each repetition the same periods are reviewed and the same events and individual figures are encountered, but distinct and central ideas are engaged. This has enabled a multi-dimensional approach to the SANG's history. This is an analysis of a history, and an analysis of the rhetoric employed in the construction and subsequent interpretation of that history.

In painting, 'pentimento' describes the traces of an earlier image hidden beneath subsequent images. The term thus refers to the changes made by a painter in the process of painting, whereby the previous images are usually hidden behind subsequent layers of paint. The development of new images conceals the prior images; however, under x-ray examination the invisible is made visible, and the varying developments of the painter's images are revealed. This project can be likened to the x-ray examination that reveals pentimento. Passing through different time periods, analysing different forms and functions, this project traces the layers of development at the SANG hitherto obscured by subsequent conception. In acknowledging historical contexts this study aims to locate more recent developments in relation to their precedents, and in so doing aims to locate the patterns that emerge.

Race has been a defining factor in South African history and it has had a profound impact on the practices and policies of the SANG. Much has been written about how public collections adapted to the radical transformation of South African society that accompanied the transition to democracy in the early 1990s. However, this paper, while considering the work of Sabine

Marschall (1999; 2001), Elizabeth Rankin (1995), Jillian Carman (1988) and others, provides a more specific analysis of the SANG as a ‘national’ institution, and utilizes hindsight to furnish further considerations of the successes and failures of the transformational projects of the 1990s, a project that was only just beginning to take root when these art historians contributed their analyses.

This study is divided into three parts. Part One offers an historical overview of the Gallery with considerations for the broader political, social, and cultural environment, and the consistent national reorientation thereof. The first chapter, The National Gallery in the Context of a Constantly Redefined ‘Nation’, thus begins in early history and ends at the present time. This chapter charts transformations from the Cape Colony to the Union of South Africa, to the emerging nationalism of the 1940s that ultimately culminated in apartheid, and the transition to a democratic ‘new’ South Africa and the period that directly followed.

Part Two presents a more specific analysis of how these social repositionings were evidenced in SANG policies and practices. The second chapter, Articulating Nationhood: SANG Policies in Context, considers how shifts in the Gallery’s policies have reflected shifting ideologies. These considerations ultimately question the nature and motivation behind these shifts, and the disparities between the ideal and the reality, what is proposed and what is the outcome. The third chapter, Describing the Stories of South African Art: SANG Collection Practices in Context, presents an analysis of collection practices, an investigation of how additions to the permanent collection have supported or subverted the ‘national narrative’, and a description of how reappraisals of the collection provide an indication of the SANG’s reorientation. This analysis of collection practices questions the mechanisms with which the SANG’s collection embodies the canonical stories of South African art, how the story is told and retold, how the story has been modified, and what omissions, accidental or deliberate, are made in its retelling. The fourth chapter, Performing Nation: SANG Exhibitions Practices Post-1994 in context, presents an analysis of exhibition practices as the public demonstration of the SANG’s perceived function, and considers how the SANG has staged performances of South African nationhood and identity, and how these have been engaged in public discourse.

Part Three interprets and reflects on how the SANG's function and form has corresponded with South Africa's shifting historical contexts. The fifth and last chapter, Reflecting on the Question: "What Does it Mean to be a 'National' Gallery?", provides an extended conclusion that critically considers the central questions that recur in this paper. Engaging the contradictions, complexities, and nuances, this chapter presents a discussion of the challenges that face the SANG (and which thus pose a new set of questions). Following this concluding chapter is a Postscript, which describes developments at the SANG too soon before the study's completion to offer a more meaningful engagement.

i. Research Questions

By examining the SANG's practices and policies, within its broader contexts, one can better understand how political and social transformations have affected archives, imagined and real, of South African visual and material culture. Furthermore, by probing the 'display of transformation' in the Gallery's historical contexts, this study aims to facilitate a more complex reading of the Gallery forms and functions, situating current practices as more than a mere contemporary phenomenon. What the SANG represents, and how it represents it, has adapted and transformed, via mimesis or osmosis, in relation to its shifting environment. In examining shifts in acquisition and exhibition-making practices and policies at the SANG in historical contexts, the following questions have steered the research in this study, and are engaged in the final chapter:

What does it mean to be a 'National Gallery' in the South African context, and how have the shifting responses to this question reflected the shifting definitions of South African nationhood? With imperatives of being 'representative' of the redefined nationhood, has the SANG risked misrepresenting or misinterpreting the respective period? How successful has the SANG been in this regard?

ii. Literature Review

Primary research material

Three broad categories of primary research material are used in this study. Firstly, there is the material produced by the institution, the SANG and later its parent organisation (Iziko Museums of South Africa), which includes annual reports, board minutes, policy documents, gallery newsletters, the permanent collection itself (and additions to it), exhibition catalogues, and the exhibitions themselves. Secondly, there are the policy documents and reports produced by South African governments that have directly influenced the Gallery. Thirdly, there is material produced outside the SANG that refers to it or to its context. These include news media and journal entries. Of the academics and art historians who have particularly informed the South African focus of this study, I am indebted to Annie Coombes, Jillian Carman, Sabine Marschall and Elizabeth Rankin.

This study has considered only English language media. It must be stated that much Afrikaans language material, produced by the institution and in news media, is inaccessible because of my English unilingualism. Furthermore, this study has mainly engaged only research material in the public domain, and no private interviews have been conducted. In addition to the research material that refers directly to the SANG and the South African milieu, this study is informed by an existing body of literature with the primary focus on museums and art galleries. Contributors to this body of knowledge have defined and redefined the way art historians see, read and understand museums and art galleries. The study is located within this art historical and academic context. Given the divergent nature of contemporary museum studies, it is necessary to position my own study within this discourse, and to briefly introduce some of these ideas.

‘Narrating Nation’

Aligned to the writing of Homi Bhabha (1990) and Benedict Anderson (1991), this study considers nationalisms as “always imagined,” always a construction, and always the subject of reconstruction (Bhabha, 1990:291-322). Anderson (1991:6) suggested that nations themselves are

distinguished not by authenticity, but by the “style in which they are imagined.” The links between communities and ‘nations’ are constructed and not found, to understand them is to analyse the manner in which they are constructed, and how their meanings and styles have changed with time (Anderson, 1991). The ‘imagined community’ of nationhood is then a social construct. Bhabha (1990:292) has described nationhood as a form of living, one “more complex than ‘community’; more symbolic than ‘society’; more mythological than ideology; less homogenous than hegemony; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications.” With the assertion that nationalisms are always imagined, and thus always being imagined, Bhabha (1990:1) defined nationalism as self-generative, describing how their discourses are perpetually producing the “idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress.” For Bhabha (1991), to study the nation through its narrative then means drawing attention to the rhetoric of its language. This study is thus not only an analysis of the narrative, but also the manner in which it is narrated.

Towards a critical re-reading of museums

In the 1980s and 1990s a new and increasingly critical discourse regarding museums and art galleries gained momentum and distanced itself from previous conventions. This new approach to art history broadened the scopes of analysis. Sociologist Nick Prior (2002:3) has described how this new approach began to scrutinize the “intricate social, political and historical relations that structure and are structured by the museum.” Art museums were now subject to interrogations that included aesthetic and material value, the construction of the canon, racial and gender representation, ethnicity, questions of colonialism, the politics of representation, and more than anything, the representation of power (Tropp, 2003). Referring to the contributions made by art and social historians like Tony Bennett (1995), Douglas Crimp (1993), Carol Duncan (1995), Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (1992), Ivan Karp and Steven Levine (1991), Andrew McClellan (1994; 2003; 2008), and Susan Pearce (1994), the new approach to art history and its archives meant that museums were no longer considered “neutral storehouses,” but rather mechanisms employed in the “formation of powerful ideologies, categories and identities” which perpetuated “dominant national myths … providing cultural cement for socio-political order” (Prior, 2003:4). Hooper-Greenhill (1992:189), for instance, defined the modern public art museum as a “disciplinary

apparatus,” with the function of a national gallery being to “reform the population” and “to civilize the mass of people.”

Mechanisms of power: performing the narratives of nationhood

Museums, according to Timothy Mitchell, are stages for the representation of national history, national progress, and thus the nationalisms themselves. As a site dedicated to the perpetual accumulation of objects, the museum “preserves the past, promises a clear path for the future, narrates history and defines the present” (Mitchell, 2000:14). Corinne Kratz and Ivan Karp argue that museums are not merely physical spaces, but are a “social technology” and a “set of museological processes through which such statements and claims [about identity, history, place, and value] are represented, embodied and debated” – they have the potential to be “global theatres of real consequence” (Kratz & Karp, 2006:4). As ‘social technologies’ museums and galleries have the power to contribute to the development of their societies, to be platforms for performances of nationhood that are subsequently emulated by their visitors. Andrew McClellan has suggested that in the early nineteenth century, after the success of the Louvre in Paris (the royal ‘princely’ collection which became a public museum following the French revolution), Europe’s newly formed nation-states “shaped their cultural identity around their national patrimony” which was “embodied in historical artefacts and works of art openly displayed in public museums” (McClellan, 2008:20). Since the Louvre opened to the public in 1793, public art museums have been reproduced, adapted, and transformed on a global scale. By the end of the nineteenth century art museums had spread from Europe to North and South America, Asia, Australia and Southern Africa. According to McClellan (2008), most capital and major cities in the ‘advanced world’ and its colonies, would establish a public art museum of its own.

Early Victorian museums encouraged the interests of an upwardly mobile citizenry. By defining the nature of leisure spaces and the character of culture, art galleries inculcated the constructed images of national tradition (Taylor, 1994:9). According to McClellan (2003:7), museums shaped their publics and thus the Victorian museum was “an engine of social and economic progress” and a contributor to “national cohesion.” Halfway through the nineteenth century, art critic and later Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University, John Ruskin (1857:10) suggested that the

National Gallery in London should show “the story of art,” a story that would encourage viewers to enter the space of national history: “[The works] should be . . . thoroughly characteristic and expressive of the habits of a nation; because it appears to me that one of the main uses of Art at present is not so much as Art, but as teaching us the feelings of nation.” In addition, according to art historian Colin Trodd (1994:41), Ruskin declared that the National Gallery in London should “recognize in painting the symbolic language by which communities communicate in history by expressions of cultural identity.” Ruskin thus saw the utility of a public art gallery, as a pedagogical space for the education of national history and cultural identity.

The widespread rise of the nation-state in early nineteenth century Europe is now understood to have given “clarity and concrete form to the museum project” (Prior, 2002:37). McClellan (1994:91) suggested that the “museum age” corresponds directly with this emergence of nationalisms. For Prior (2002:38), museums were understood to have indexed the cultural interests of the nation-state, but as spaces for education and emulation, they also “mobilized these interests” and provided a cultural stage where “official ideologies were made and remade.” Therefore museums not only reflected the societies to which they belonged but also contributed to their on-going formation. Citizens could emulate the ‘culture’ presented in their museums and galleries. As models to which society could conform, galleries and museums inculcated the official narratives, and inherent values, of the nation-state. Thus Carol Duncan defined the museum as a space for the ritual enactment of citizenship. According to Duncan (1991:101), museums are “identity-defining” spaces where nationalisms are staged, and (1995:1-2) where the visitors are encouraged to “enact a performance of some kind.” In this sense, Duncan (1995:19) suggested that the museum “made manifest the public it claimed to serve.”

Public art museums, as a result of this relatively new body of knowledge, are understood as spaces where political legitimations are constructed and performed (Trodd, 2003:18). Anderson (1991:163) suggested that the museum and the “museumizing imagination” are both “profoundly political.” Museums give continuity to the imagined community by providing an iconography for nation, which is reproducible and digestible. Museums are political because they stage the performance of nationhood and transmit dominant ideologies, but what of the various groups

that comprise these nations: how do they read and interpret that iconography, and how do different readings (de)construct that national imaginary?

Recovering complexities

Many of these accounts, in fact, deny art museums the capacity for complexity and agency. Trodd (2003:17) has argued that these theorists have given no sense of how the “relationship between aesthetic experience and social utility does not always validate and guarantee the ideological interests and legitimations of specific groups.” The premise for these accounts is that museums are a state technology, used as stage for the cultural performance of nationhood. Trodd (2003:20) suggested that the cultural script for this performance is authored by a social elite who “associate their sectional desires with general or communal needs.” Yet members of the ‘social elite’ are often independent of the state, and hold views divergent from the political and cultural hegemony of the day. The personal desires, tastes, and values of individual patrons, benefactors, or museum directors are reflected in the art museum, and these do not necessarily conform to the ‘official’ national narrative. Furthermore, Trodd (2003:21) argued, this idea that museums are a space for the inculcation of state imposed ideologies, and ‘master narratives’, implies a failure to register that the state itself is an “amalgam of often competing and contradictory forces.” For Trodd (2003:21), overly simplistic and uncritical interpretations of museums have produced a “bleakly deterministic and functionalist account of the development of cultural and social policy.” Analysis of art museums has thus been overly reductionist, and thereby complex webs of processes have too often been reduced to a simple question of functionality (Trodd, 2003).

Continuing along a similar trajectory that champions complexity and nuance, McClellan (2008:13-14) suggested that museums have essentially always been “dedicated to building a better society” but argues that the visions of what constitutes the ‘better society’ are always shifting. The imagined ideal is constantly being reimagined, and as a result museum priorities and practices are dynamic and “subject to debate and modifications as social needs change.” Art museums, according to McClellan (2008:13-14), “owe their survival and success” to their ability to produce and promote revised ideals as determined by shifting needs.

As a critical museological project this study considers the South African cultural, historical and political contexts within which the SANG operates, as these contexts shape the Gallery's ideals, practices, and policies. By resisting a reductionist interpretation in favour of complexity and nuance, this project aims to provide a reflective analysis of the SANG while remaining sympathetic to its shifting historical contexts. Although, while much of this body of literature refers to the museum as a 'technology' or 'apparatus' that inconspicuously involves social reform, ideals which seem to have mostly been abandoned in the twenty-first century, the SANG was, and continues to be, unabashedly articulate in the understanding of this position. This position is perhaps most publicly explicit in the present. The SANG's contemporary understanding of its function is unequivocal, as a public art gallery its purpose it to contribute to the 'transformation' of South African society.

iii. Abbreviations

ACTAG – Arts and Culture Task Group

ANC – African National Congress

ASAI – Africa South Art Initiative

AWB – *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging*

CCMA – Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration

CREATE – Commission for Reconstruction and Transformation for the Arts and Culture

DAC – Department of Arts and Culture

DACST – Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology

JAG – Johannesburg Art Gallery

MUSA – Museums for South Africa: Intersectoral Investigation for National Policy

NP – National Party

SAAA – South African Association of Arts

SAFAA – South African Fine Arts Association

SAMA – South African Museum Association

SAMAB – South African Museum Association Bulletin

SANG – South African National Gallery

SAP – South African Party

UCT – University of Cape Town

UN – United Nations

PART 1

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL GALLERY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONSISTENT TRANSFORMATION

Chapter One

The National Gallery in the Context of a Constantly Redefined ‘Nation’

In the first half of the twentieth century a young South African nationhood was being imagined, and the formation of an Art Gallery in South Africa was part of that imagining. In the South African National Gallery’s (SANG) early history South African artists of European ancestry were not well represented in the Gallery’s permanent collection. When political power started shifting towards a nationalist orientation, particularly with a new political dispensation in 1948, the collection practices at the SANG adapted accordingly, and rigorously began to acquire the work of white South African artists. Towards the end of the twentieth century, again reflecting watershed political and social transformation, South African nationhood was again dramatically re-imagined, again collection practices at the SANG adapted accordingly. This chapter examines how the grammar of difference has complicated the tasks of narrating a common and therefore consistent image of nationhood, and sets the scene for a more nuanced reading of policies and practises in the chapter that follow.

1.1. ‘An Art Gallery for South Africa’ in the Cape Colony, 1871

The South African Fine Arts Association (SAFAA) was formed on 21 April 1871 by local ‘art lovers’ in order to address a perceived cultural vacuum, and was the foremost proponent in the founding of an art gallery in colonial Cape Town.¹ Consisting largely of artistically and culturally-inclined amateurs, the association was later described as a “dilettante society bent on the encouragement of Art” (Kendall, 1941:11). However, as an indication of its assumed importance, the first general meeting was chaired by the British Colonial Administrator, Sir Richard Southey and its first president was ‘His Excellency’ Sir Henry Barkly, the then Governor of the Cape Colony. The first objective of the SAFAA was the establishment of a permanent art

¹ Notably, art historian Esmé Berman regards the commencement of these exhibitions as the moment from which the history of painting in South Africa first began (Berman, 1993:xviii).

gallery, and “thus was laid the foundation for [a] national collection of works of art” (Fairbairn, 1910:551).

The emergence of the SAFAA prompted the bequest of 45 pictures by the wealthy benefactor and art patron Sir Thomas Butterworth Bayley (Langham-Carter, 1972:3). While Bayley is cited as the ‘true originator’ of the Gallery’s founding collection (Langham-Carter), the Association is acknowledged as responsible for the idea’s initial conception² (Fairbairn, 1910:550). Abraham de Smidt, the Surveyor-General of the Cape between 1872 and 1889, a trustee of the SAFAA, an artist, and a close friend of Bayley, first introduced the idea in an essay *An Art Gallery for South Africa* (1871). De Smidt (1871:240) felt that an art gallery was “an indispensable part of a liberal education.” The primary aim of the South African Art Gallery would be the “promotion of Fine Arts at the Cape of Good Hope” (Roworth, 1910:8-10). Initially the ‘Gallery’ was temporarily housed in the South African Library. In 1873 the SAFAA purchased the building of the ‘Tot Nut van het Algemeen’, a Dutch-language school in New Street (now Queen Victoria Street). A section of the building was converted into the Gallery, which was officially opened by Sir Henry Barkley on 21 April 1875. Under Act 20 of the 1895 Cape Parliament, the *South African Art Gallery Act*, both the art collection and its building were appropriated by the Government in “trust for the people of the Cape Colony” (Kendall, 1941:16). Soon thereafter the Government used the site for the construction of the new Supreme Court.³ The Gallery initially moved back to the South African Library in 1897 before moving more permanently to the South African Museum in 1900. As a government responsibility, the South African Art Gallery inauspiciously occupied two rooms at the back of the museum for over thirty years:

² In fact, Cape Town’s first publicly accessible art collection was founded over a century prior to the foundation of the SAFAA. Housed in Sexton’s House in Adderley Street, this collection consisted of only 32 paintings, which had been bequeathed to the Dutch Reformed Church by Joachim Nicolaas von Dessin on his death in 1761. However, it was only in 1871, with the formation of SAFAA, that the prospect of a publicly owned collection, on permanent display in its own purpose-built building, first emerged. In 1883 the Dessian Collection was placed under the custody of the SAFAA and eventually became part of the permanent collection of the SANG. (Langham-Carter, 1972:3)

³ Currently the Cape Town High Court.

Here, and up the staircase, were crowded together a portion of the collection – with pictures of all sorts indiscriminately mixed up with plaster casts. Only a few of the exhibits could be seen properly, whilst many others had to be packed away behind the scenes in grim darkness. Surely no other city in the British Empire of the importance of Cape Town could have been so neglected in the manner of an Art Gallery!⁴ (Kendall, 1941:16)

1.2. The Construction of a Gallery in the Context of Union, 1910

In the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War (1880-1902), the South African social and political contexts shifted radically with the proclamation of Union in 1910. The Provinces of South Africa, previously ruled by either the British or Afrikaner Republics, were now governed by a sovereign, ‘unified’ parliament located in Cape Town. The first decade of the twentieth century became a period of reconstruction for the young state, and the ‘new South Africa’, as the period was referred to directly after this transition, sought to ameliorate the relationships between its two primary settler identities after the war. Plans were underway to help forge a more ‘inclusive’ nation, and Cape Town’s own heritage projects oversaw the construction of key memorials that would serve as symbolic tributes to the city’s settler heritage (Bickford Smith *et al.*, 1999:76). This shared white-only ‘settler heritage’ had the potential to act as a bridge between Briton and Afrikaner, and is exemplary of the ideologically designed ‘South Africanism’: a white South African nationalism “espoused by the architects of Union” (Dubow, 2002:76-95). South Africa was not unique in this regard, at the turn of the twentieth century the emergence of nationalist rhetoric and agendas was prevalent.⁵ The new ‘South Africanism’ was a form of white South

⁴ That the Gallery housed ‘plaster casts’ of classical statuary has often been evoked as evidence of despair. However, this was in fact characteristic of museums in young nations. Art historian David Carrier (2006: 9) considers how, in 1900, American museums also collected plaster casts of European masterpieces. In fact, the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh “still has a large room of such copies” and the nearby University of Pittsburgh “houses copies of Renaissance paintings.”

⁵ For further reading, see Eddy and Schreuder *The Rise of Colonial Nationalism. Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa first assert their Nationalities, 1880-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988).

African patriotism.⁶ This broad settler nationalism would ultimately dissolve in favour of “more exclusivist claims of Afrikaner ethnic nationalism” early in the twentieth century (Dubow, 2002:76-95).

Ownership of European art maintained an imagined settler nationalism, provided a source of civic pride, and signified South Africa’s place “among civilized nations” (Dubow, 1997:53-85). Art historian Elizabeth Rankin argues that South Africa’s first art galleries were modelled on the European archetype. Although more modest in their scale, the architecture of South African galleries reflected colonial legacies “in their historicising European architectural style” (Rankin, 1995:57-58).⁷ In this regard, Lord Selborne (1910:59), the British High Commissioner to South Africa in 1910, posed his question: “Where is our national gallery, our museum? Where is the replica of those institutions which are to be found in all the old cities of the world?”

An excellent example of how this new national imperative was reflected and developed in art is the Max Michaelis gift (1913) of Dutch and Flemish Old Masters. According Jan Smuts, the politician and future Prime Minister, the collection would remind the ‘Dutch’ population of the Union of the “glories of their past civilisation in the days when they first colonised South Africa, and, by the representation of the art in which the Dutch and English first met in spirit, symbolic

⁶ Writing in *The State* in 1911, Cape politician Sir J.H. Meiring Beck described to the new nationalism as a form of “nation-making.” Meiring Beck (1911:367) suggested that the merger of the different white races into one South African race was the only possible conclusion for the country, and that “a pure South Africanism, and South Africanism only, will be in the long run our inevitable destiny here.” In order to build this new South African nationhood, Meiring Beck (1911:373) suggested that individuals should cultivate pride in their own history and their own ancestry, but that they should see “each other’s history as a common heritage.” The purpose of ‘South Africanism’ was thus to foster a national identity aligned to common and shared interests. Meiring Beck (370-373) suggested that in “building up South African character,” let “give our children a chance to stimulate their higher life . . . by teaching them the value of Art and Literature,” and above all “strive to make our art and literature South African.” This idea of unity in a common European ancestry would ultimately find form in the idea of ‘Founder Countries’, which was developed into policy at the SANG in the 1950s, and is discussed in the following chapter.

⁷ The Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) was the first building in South Africa to be constructed with the sole purpose of housing an art collection. It was designed by the esteemed British architect Sir Edwin Luytens, and according to Rankin (1995: 57-58) “clearly epitomized the cultural agenda of the time in its imperial neo-classical design.”

of a new Union” (Smuts in Bodkin, 1934:29). In the context of Union, and in the spirit of ‘nation making’ and ‘reconciliation’, the gift was “widely publicised as a means of promoting a united sense of nationalism for English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans” (Stevenson, 1997:33). However, as Michael Stevenson has identified, upon reception the Afrikaans sectors of the Cape community questioned the sincerity of the gift. As remarked by members of the Afrikaans press, the catalogue was not available in Dutch, all painting labels were in English, and the keeper of the collection was English-speaking⁸ (Stevenson, 1997:35).

In 1913, at the same time that the Michaelis gift was given to the ‘people of South Africa’, and after tireless campaigning from the SAFAA, the Union Government allocated funds for plans to be drawn by the Department Public Works. In 1914 the foundations for the new gallery building were underway. However, because of the Great War (1914-1918), construction was halted and resumed only in 1924. In a letter to the editor of the *Cape Argus* in 1926, under the heading *Union’s New Art Gallery*, Lady Phillips⁹, whose own Cape Dutch homestead, Vergelegen was then

⁸ In addition to this was a question of the gift’s quality. Before the collection travelled to South Africa it was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in London in May 1913. Respected critic Sir Claude Phillips asserted that the collection was “of very unequal merit, and as a whole, by no means qualified to gladden the hearts of serious students of Netherlandish masters” (Phillips, C in Stevenson, 1997:36-37). Aside from one masterpiece, and a number of ‘fine’ paintings, “the collection included a number of indifferent works, some of which were very poor quality indeed” (1997:36-37). Phillips also questioned the attributions of some of the pictures, and by extension Sir Hugh Lane’s integrity as a dealer (a painting attributed to Rembrandt was later returned to Lane, who had assembled the collection on behalf of Michaelis). Lady Florence Phillips, in response to some of the criticisms, admitted to the press: “The original collection was never considered by Sir Hugh Lane to be in the front rank. The price given for the whole collection was not as much as is given sometimes for one masterpiece . . . It is unfortunate that this question of looking a gift horse in the mouth has arisen” (Phillips, F in Stevenson, 1997:40). For a detailed reflection on the Max Michaelis Gift Collection, see Michael Stevenson’s *History of the Collection* (1997).

⁹ Lady Florence Phillips, the socialite wife of the Randlord Sir Lionel Phillips and patroness of the arts, is cited as being responsible for the initial conception of the JAG, and thus “fundamentally important to its founding” (Carman, 59-60). Artist, writer, and “life time president of the Friends of the Johannesburg Art Gallery,” Thelma Gutsche described Lady Phillips’ goals as “[establishing] in Johannesburg a home of such grace and style that it would both prosper Lionel’s aims and instill an uplifting influence on the resident barbarians” (Gutsche, 1966:95). This, Carman interpreted, meant that Phillips would “import and impose a foreign set of cultural values in the interests of improving both the social position of herself and her husband and the lives of South Africans in general” (Carman, 2006:63). For a full history of Lady Phillips and the

being restored, referred to the imminent creation of the new gallery in the ‘Cape Dutch style’ (“Union’s New Art Gallery”, 1926:n.p). Art and architectural historian Hans Fransen (1978:20-21) similarly described the inspiration for the Gallery’s building as being “the white-washed, flat-roofed 18th century Table Valley architecture.”

In considering the architectural aspects of the hybridised new South African nationalism, Nicholas Coetzer (2013:19-21) has suggested that government buildings in this period were designed in a Cape Dutch revival style¹⁰, which was becoming a “de facto South African *national style*” as an “icon of a common European culture.” The Gallery’s architectural style shared a resemblance to other displays of government in Cape Town, and its location on Government Avenue, in close proximity to the other “cultural symbols of an ordered civic society” of Parliament, the St. Georges Cathedral, the South African Museum and the South African Library, testified to its national significance (Tietze & Botha, 2014:1180). In the light of Coetzer’s hypothesis, the construction of the Gallery’s current premises can be considered part of the nation-building project of the first ‘new’ South Africa. The Gallery was officially opened on 3 November 1930 by ‘His Excellency’ the Earl of Athlone, the Governor-General of the Union of South Africa, in the presence of a “large and distinguished gathering” (Kendall, 1941:18), and was heralded in local newspapers as South Africa’s ‘Royal Academy’ (“South Africa’s Royal Academy”, 1930). After the Government’s *State-aided Institution Act* of 1931 (Union of South

Randlords’ approach to art and culture, and further reading on the JAG, see Jillian Carman’s *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine: Florence Phillips and the Making of the Johannesburg Art Gallery* (2006).

¹⁰ The Randlord-sponsored *The State*, a magazine that was designed as political propaganda, is replete with profiles of Cape homesteads thus actively promoting the ‘Cape Dutch Style’. Initially sponsored by Sir Abe Bailey, and later by Sir Lionel Phillips, *The State* was edited by Phillip Kerr of ‘Milner’s Kindergarten’ and it was an official organ of the ‘Closer Union Societies’ (*The State*, 1909). Sponsored by individuals implicated in the Jameson Raid, *The State* promoted Union, ‘South Africanism’, and reconciliation between the ‘two distinct races’, all of which ultimately for political influence and capital gain. The Randlords were accustomed to controlling information in this way. As a means of acquiring sympathetic and favourable reporting, and counteracting criticism of the mining industry, by Union in 1910 the Randlords and their mine-houses already owned many newspapers and magazines. The list, compiled by Carman, included The Star, The Transvaal Leader, The Rand Daily Mail, and the Sunday Post (amongst others). According to Carman, this “abuse of the press” had already been condemned as early as 1901 (Carman, 2006:273).

Africa, 1932), the name ‘South African National Gallery’ was officially gazetted in 1932.¹¹ With this subtle shift in title the Gallery’s constituency widened and its responsibilities grew.

However, by the time the Gallery took national status much of its early collections consisted of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British art. This is likely for two reasons. Firstly, as a symptom of the colony’s relationship with its ‘mother country’ the “exemplars of good art were deemed to be from Europe and especially Britain, with which British-origin settlers closely identified” (Carman, 2011:23). When the Gallery did make purchases in its early years, the task for acquiring art was entrusted to Professor George Clausen, among others.¹² Writing in 1910, Edward Roworth described Clausen as a “distinguished English painter . . . of the Royal Academy,” whose “ripe judgment” and “unerring taste” would guarantee acquisitions that were “entirely representative of what is most vital, beautiful and permanent in Modern Art” (Roworth, 1910:9). While reflecting on this early history in 1979, Pat Kaplan (1979:59) suggested that the collection “has its roots in our British predecessors, who attempted to emulate and collect objects pertaining to a distinct European culture.”

Secondly, the SANG’s early collections were largely the result of the munificence of patrons, most of whom had strong allegiances to Britain. Many of these early patrons were the Randlords¹³, the

¹¹ Notably, although the Government Gazette (Union of South Africa, 1932) states that the institution “formerly known as the South African Art Gallery . . . should be known as the South African National Gallery,” it was being referred as the South African *national* gallery as early as 1910 (Roworth, 1910).

¹² In 1910 Roworth, a president of the SAFAA and a future director of the SANG itself, publicly pledged his support for Clausen, adding that “it has been proved by dearly-bought experience that a better result is achieved in the collection of pictures for a gallery when it is left to the trained intelligence of one man rather than to the dismal or disastrous compromises of a committee” (Roworth, 1910:9). As described further in the chapter, this stance would later land Roworth in quite some trouble.

Other buyers included Abraham de Smidt, a founding member of the SAFAA, who had emigrated to Britain in the 1890s (Tietze & Botha, 2014:1186).

¹³ ‘Randlord’ is a portmanteau suggesting lordship over the Witwatersrand. The moniker referred to the (mostly mining) magnates who accumulated their vast fortunes on the Witwatersrand goldfields and Kimberley diamond fields, predominantly from the 1870s up until the Great War. Randlord patrons of the SANG included Sir Edmund Davis, Sir Abe

upwardly mobile mine owners who had made great fortunes in South Africa and for whom art was used for “validating their aspirations and overcoming the perceived limitations of their backgrounds” (Stevenson, 2002:35). The gesture of this type of benefaction was a form of legitimising authority and wealth, and their patronage intended to reify their aspirations and to reaffirm their British identities.

As the criteria for civilisation were constructed in the motherland, South African artists lacked the “appropriate pedigree to guarantee their status” and thus colonial rule “marginalised not only indigenous culture, but also, ironically, the culture of the colonists” (Rankin, 1995:58). This perceived British bias meant that, although a ‘national’ gallery, white South African artists were rarely represented in the SANG’s early collections. The opinion in the early twentieth century was that South Africa “had not yet given birth to a great painter” (Carman, 1988:204). When the SANG did host annual exhibitions of contemporary South African art the reviews were severe. One critic describes leaving the exhibition and suffering “a feeling of humiliation at the poverty of achievement displayed in the so-called ‘national’ works of art” (Lewis, 1933:13). In a newspaper article “What is wrong with the Cape Town Art Gallery” (1939), one critic argued that this criticism was justified, and entirely the fault of the director. In the early history of the SANG it was customary for the head of the Michaelis School of Fine Art¹⁴ to simultaneously function as an *ex officio* director of the Gallery. According to the critic (1939:11), the director John Wheatley was using the SANG to promote the art of his students. Furthermore, the annual exhibitions of “so-called contemporary South African art” had developed into a “positive scandal” (1939:26).

Bailey, Sir Alfred Beit, and Lady Michaelis (the wife of Sir Max Michaelis). For further reading see Stevenson *Old Masters and Aspirations: the Randlords, Art and South Africa* (1997).

¹⁴ After his gift of Dutch and Flemish art to the ‘people of South Africa’ Max Michaelis was still without baronetcy. Stevenson (1997:41) has suggested this was because of his German heritage in the context of anti-German sentiment following the Great War. Lady Phillips, who was aware of Michaelis’ “lingering desire for a title,” suggested he endow a School of Art to the University of Cape Town. In 1920 Michaelis endowed a ‘Chair of Art’ bearing his name with a gift of £20 000. Stevenson (1997:41) has considered how this, and “a small contribution to Smuts’ party funds,” paved the way to Michaelis receiving a knighthood in 1924. This inaugural Chair of Art at the Michaelis School was filled by the British Artist John Wheatley, who became the SANG’s first honorary director.

The critic argued that the “misrepresentative” exhibitions had been deliberately boycotted by professional South African artists, who objected to their works being placed alongside those of students. This scandal was subject to a “conspiracy of silence,” and although “criticized and condemned” by certain Afrikaans newspapers, other newspapers were less forthcoming because their critics were either SANG trustees, lecturers at Michaelis, or both.¹⁵ Upon scrutinizing the catalogues for these annual exhibitions, the critic considered the “conspicuous absence” of prominent South African artists, amongst the “comparatively unknown names” of Michaelis students, lecturers, and some SANG Trustees.¹⁶

In 1972 the incumbent director, Matthys Bokhorst, described how in 1930, there were only 30 South African paintings and sculptures “amidst all the hundreds of art works which the gallery already owned” (Bokhorst, 1972a:n.p). Kaplan’s reflection in 1979 described how the Gallery “functioned as an outpost of British colonialism, emulating European taste both in building construction and collection” (Kaplan, 1979:57). In the context of emerging Afrikaner nationalism, considering the existing tensions between Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans, this British bias, perceived or real, soon became an issue of contention.

1.3. Emerging Nationalism and a Shifting Political Landscape, 1924

Throughout the early 1920s the National Party (NP), led by J.B.M. Hertzog, did much to strengthen cultural and political power for Afrikaners. In the 1924 general election the NP formed a coalition with the Labour Party and defeated Smuts’ South African Party (SAP). The foundation for the coalition was the combined support of the Afrikaner farmers, who resented

¹⁵ In “What is wrong with the Cape Town Art Gallery?” (1939:26), the critic suggested that “Professor Roworth of the Michaelis School and a trustee of the National Gallery, alternates with Mr Melvin Summers, art-lecturer at the same school” were both Cape art-critics. Similarly for *Die Burger*, the critic (1939:26) suggested it was “muzzled because its art critic is also a Trustee!”

¹⁶ The art critic noted (1939:26): “tis true those of Edward Roworth and Melvin Summers do regularly appear.”

the privileging of British industrialists under Smuts' administration, and the white miners, who wanted to ensure segregated labour policies that would prevent white jobs being challenged by cheaper black migrant labour, which the English industrialists, especially the mine owners who offered financial support to Smuts, were committed to employing. The political context of this period manifested in another testing time for English and Afrikaans constituencies, with tensions only increasing over the next two decades (Coombes, 2003:280-281).

Although the SANG and the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) both shared unequivocally British beginnings¹⁷, cultural identity was beginning to transform in accordance with the country's political movements. Initially the shift was seen most clearly in geographic centres with larger Afrikaner communities (Rankin, 1995). In particular, the JAG needed to represent both portions of its white settler populations in order to receive municipal funding from the Johannesburg City Council¹⁸, and therefore steadily incorporated works by Afrikaner artists into its collections.¹⁹ Yet for the SANG, within a largely English-speaking city, and supported by a handful of benefactors with social and cultural allegiances to Britain, there was perhaps less impetus for cultural transformation.

When the SANG's current building was opened in 1930 by the Earl of Athlone and his wife Princess Alice, the exhibition chosen to celebrate its inauguration was a loan collection of British

¹⁷ The JAG's building was designed by the British architect Sir Edwin Luytens, its early collections were curated by the Irish collector Sir Hugh Lane, and the project itself was funded by Anglophilic Randlords.

¹⁸ The JAG's controlling body realised that in order to obtain increased funds from the City Council, the gallery needed to adjust their policy to make themselves more relevant to the Afrikaner communities living in the Transvaal. When the gallery first opened in 1910 the collection was devoid of any works of art representing Boer leaders, but in that same year it started acquiring portraits of von Brandis, Louis Botha and Jan Smuts. Soon after sculptures and busts of Jan van Riebeeck, Jan Smuts, Louis Botha, J.H. de la Rey and C.R de Wet also started entering the collection (Carman, 1988:206).

¹⁹ According to Jillian Carman, 'South African art' was not the only requirement, and many from the Afrikaans community wanted a Dutch collection too. It was seen as essential "for the rising generation of the new nation to be inspired by pictures of their Dutch forebears, for art treasures of the Union not to be unbalanced" (Carman, 1988:205). This is of course reminiscent of discussion around the Max Michaelis gift of Dutch 'Old Masters'.

Victorian art. Professor John Wheatley, the Gallery's first honorary director, was an artist who had been educated at the Slade School in London, and who was "steeped in the atmosphere of well-organised galleries and schools in England and elsewhere" (Kendall, 1941:18). Through acts of munificence, much British and European art was bequeathed to the SANG in the first half of the twentieth century; so much so, that the Sir Edmund and Lady Davis, and Sir Abe Bailey bequests reinforced perceptions that the SANG favoured the British over the Afrikaner communities of South African society and "emphasised SANG's promotion of British culture" (Carman, 2011:37). Carman noted:

Whereas such a bias had not seemed problematic twenty-five years earlier when the Johannesburg Art Gallery collection first opened, it had now become a political issue, with the chair of the SANG board J.J. Smith reminding the audience at the opening of the Davis gift in July 1935 that South Africa was "a nation composed of two peoples famous in the realms of art", one of them being linked to "the Dutch masters of the 17th century." In other words, the British sector was not the only one with claims to great art. (Carman, 2011:37)

When the Gallery expanded the collection of South African art it was the result of benefaction. Alfred De Pass, who had already donated French and British works in the 1920s, donated a number of works by South African artists, including Irma Stern, Pieter Wenning, Hugo Naudé, Jean Welz, amongst others.²⁰ De Pass' donations helped furnish the Gallery's collection of early South African modernism now central to the South African art historical canon. According to Carman (2011:37), these gifts were a retort to the criticisms "that there were too many British artists in the collection and not enough South Africans." Initially the Gallery reflected the values, affiliations and aspirations of its early patrons, the early directors, and even its buyers like Professor George Clausen. When it began to face criticism, it was not because it had abandoned or departed from its fundamental objectives, but rather because it had not. What was being

²⁰ De Pass' donations of South African art also included contemporary works by Freida Lock, Ruth Prowse, Anton van Wouw and Wolf Kibel.

required and expected of the Gallery had shifted, in tune with a redefined South African nationhood.

1.4. Edward Roworth and the Stratford Report, 1947

In 1940 the British-born Edward Roworth became the honorary director at the SANG. As an artist and an academic, he was simultaneously President of the SAFAA, the Head of the Michaelis School of Fine Art, and *ex officio* the director of the Gallery,. Much to the ire of emerging Afrikaner nationalist sentiment, Roworth and the Chair of the Gallery's Board of Trustees, Cecil Sibbett²¹, advocated for art's potential in educating the public's taste while firmly positioning the gallery within a conservative British-imperial praxis (Roworth, 1946; Sibbett, 1947). Ultimately, Roworth's tenure at the Gallery became significant because of two critical issues. First, his conservative views on modern art divided Cape Town's art-loving public and generated much debate in local art discourse. Second, Roworth instigated sales from the permanent collection causing public outrage and a parliamentary enquiry.

In understanding Roworth's position on modern art and the 'purge' of the permanent collection, it is important to acknowledge that the period before and during the Second World War (1939–45) was a time when art was increasingly being used for political means in Europe.²² And while many Afrikaners opposed South Africa's entry into the War, Cape Town's English-speaking communities saw the support for the Allied Forces as a positive reinforcement of their British Imperial ties. The decision to enter the war and fight alongside Britain split the coalition government and accentuated division between English and Afrikaner constituencies. Nevertheless, Roworth used political rhetoric, akin to the type used in Nazi Germany, to

²¹ Sibbett was part of Cape Town's social elite; he was a successful businessman and actively participated in Cape Town's civic life. Sibbett had political affiliations to Britain and was a former political secretary to Cecil John Rhodes (1947:18).

²² For further reading see Adams *Art of the Third Reich* (1992) and Ades (ed.) *Art and Power: Europe under the Dictators 1930 – 1945* (1995).

denounce new developments in modern art as ‘degenerate’²³, and simultaneously to praise British art and British arts institutions (“Prof. Roworth attacks Modern art: work of Michaelis school praised”, 1940).²⁴

Roworth had in fact been advocating for a ‘purge’ of the permanent collection since at least 1910. In a short profile of the Gallery, Roworth (1910:9) suggested that some works in the collection should be “removed from the walls and consigned to oblivion.” However it was not until he was directing the institution in the 1940s that he had the power to do so. Between 1944 and 1947 Roworth instigated sales from the Gallery’s permanent collection of works that he considered unworthy.²⁵ According to Anna Tietze (2010:168), this was part of Roworth’s desire to “sweep away the artistic detritus of the past.” In doing so, South Africa “lost some of its first publicly owned paintings, and, in the process, an irreplaceable visual archive” (Carman, 2011:21). According to Carman (2011:21), of the 140 works sold, approximately 40 were by South Africans, including “artists who are key to the Western-tradition of South African art.” Paintings by South

²³ Roworth had held this opinion since at least 1910. In the *Cape Times Annual*, Roworth described a “stimulating book upon art” by Max Nordau, the highly controversial author of the highly controversial book *Degeneration* (1892). Roworth spoke admirably of Nordau’s theories of a ‘social mission of art’ and agreed with Nordau’s theories of ‘art for art’s sake’. Roworth agreed with Nordau’s opinion that art “practiced purely for the belief and satisfaction of the artist” was in fact “that of the cave man of the quaternary period.” (Nordau, 1907:2)

²⁴ In a newspaper article, “Prof. Roworth attacks Modern art: work of Michaelis school praised” (1940), Roworth outlined his aspirations to create a national school of painting at Michaelis, one reminiscent of the Royal Academy in London.

²⁵ In 1944 Roworth persuaded the SANG’s Board of Trustees to allow him to sell works that he considered unworthy. In addition to this, in 1945, 1946 and 1947 Roworth instigated unrecorded sales without the trustees’ knowledge or consent. One was even made to himself (Carman, 2011:21). Following the sales, in response to public pressure, the gallery scrambled to recover some of these lost paintings. The trustees approached the dealer responsible for the sale of the largest group in 1947, suitably named Mr Krook, who resold the works back to the gallery at a profit. The Gallery was able to retrieve only 25 of the 141 pictures. Anna Tietze details how, after recovering costs of £5 681, the Gallery incurred a net loss of £4 481. This, of course, does not account for the 116 unrecovered paintings (Tietze, 2010:174). This farce forced the Gallery into a financial crisis, which was then exacerbated by the City Council of Cape Town, who, in response to the maladministration, temporarily suspended its grant-in-aid to the Gallery for the year 1947-1948.

African²⁶ artists Gregoire Boonzaier, Gwelo Goodman, Jan Juta, Frans Oerder, and Jan Volschenk among others were sold. In 1972 SANG director Matthys Bokhorst (1972b:9-10) bemoaned:

Not only many minor works and doubtful attributions to masters thus left the Gallery, but also a large number of works of real historic or artistic value, amongst them some twenty from the nucleus bequeathed by T.B.C. Bayley.

The ‘purge’ of paintings was met with public outrage and on 29 April 1947 the debate entered Parliament. It was agreed that the sale of the 140 works from the Gallery’s permanent collection was scandalous. The debates that ensued questioned the management of the Gallery and its apparent British affinities, and importantly raised broader questions into the Gallery’s ‘function’. According to MP W.D. Brink, the SANG was in fact not a ‘National Gallery’ but rather an ‘Imperial Gallery’, where only a few works by South African artists were hung and the bias was “very strongly British” (Brink, 1947). The overriding scandal, Brink declared, was that the core purpose of the sale was as a clearance, to provide the requisite space needed for the incoming Bailey Bequest, art “imported from abroad and which does not have any appeal at all to South Africans.” Three rooms were being set aside for the Bailey Bequest, while South African works were being removed or sold (Brink, 1947). Brink argued that the Gallery’s strategy was of “studious de-nationalisation” with objectives of “promoting Anglicisation” (Brink, 1947). Parliament tabled that an urgent and extensive government commission of enquiry be undertaken to investigate the sales, and to assess the general running of the Gallery.

As discussed extensively in the following chapter, the consequence of the enquiry was the *Stratford Report* (Report of the Commission Appointed in Connection with the S.A. Art Gallery, Cape Town [Stratford Report], 1947), which effectively mandated that the Gallery accommodate the shifting notions of South African identity in its collections and exhibition practices. The

²⁶ I use this term rather broadly to refer to artists working in South Africa. Robert ‘Gwelo’ Goodman was born in England, Frans Oerder and Jan Juta were both born in the Netherlands, but all three were practicing in South Africa when their works were acquired or donated to the SANG.

primary inadequacy, it stated, had been “a lack of a clearly defined policy with respect to the functions and aims of the Gallery” (Stratford Report, 1947:4-5). Among other proposals, the report recommended that the Gallery “combine under one roof the functions of more than one gallery of the European model” as opposed to modelling itself solely upon, for instance, the “National Gallery London and the Tate” (Stratford Report, 1947:5-6).

Soon after the *Stratford Report*, the *Cape Argus* published an abridged version of the essay *Against the Cult of the Ugly* (1947) by Cecil Sibbett, the Chairman of the SANG’s Board of Trustees. Sibbett’s text was initially printed as a pamphlet and circulated among members of parliament and other ‘prominent persons’. Written in defence of Roworth and the Gallery, Sibbett claimed that a Modernist ‘cult of the ugly’ was sweeping through the ‘civilised world’, corrupting all cultural forms in its wake. Sibbett claimed that culture was being debased and corrupted, and as such defended the Gallery as an institution that preserved virtues of tradition amidst the scourge of modernism and, while promoting the Bailey Bequest, urged ‘sane men’ to:

Visit art galleries and see what the Great Masters of art have done, and thus cultivate your taste. In the National Gallery in Cape Town, there will soon be the Bailey collection. It contains some of the most beautiful pictures ever painted, as well as a huge collection of delightful sporting prints. This collection will probably make it the finest south of the Equator. (Sibbett, 1947:n.p)

At a time when South Africa was beginning to assert an independent and patriotic national identity, more powerfully than ever before, the fervent support for the Bailey collection, despite its relative lack of highly valuable ‘Old Masters’, only emphasised the perceived privileging of ‘British Art’ at the SANG.

1.5. The Bailey Bequest, 1947

Sir Abe Bailey was born in the Cape to British parents but was educated in Britain. He returned to South Africa thereafter, ultimately becoming a politician, businessman, and media baron. Bailey was the protégé of Cecil John Rhodes, a man succinctly described as a “mine magnate,

politician, and imperialist” (Simons & Simons, 1969:31). In 1908 when Bailey was profiled by a caricature in *Vanity Fair*, the caption read “Rhodes the Second” (Matthew & Mellini, 1982:141). As further testament to his devotion to Rhodes, Bailey named his first-born Cecil and his second-born John.²⁷ Cecil was his daughter.

A profile in 1895 described how Bailey invariably spoke of England as ‘home’ (de Rothschild, 1895). In 1896 Bailey was arrested and sentenced to three years imprisonment for his complicity in the Jameson Raid²⁸, and paid a large fine for his release. He was involved, on the side of Britain, in the resultant Second Anglo-Boer War.²⁹ As reflected in his art collections, Bailey was clearly British in his artistic taste. His collection of British sporting scenes – pictures of horses, fox-hunting and pheasant shooting – embodied the interests of a millionaire mining-magnate with a desire to emulate the British aristocracy, and to reveal the social mobility his self-made wealth provided him (Tietze, 2001:2). On permanent loan to the Gallery, the bequest is undoubtedly the most valuable collection in the SANG’s possession. The Abe Bailey Collection comprises nearly 400 paintings, drawings, watercolours and prints, with portraits by major British artists of the time³⁰, and represents one of the largest collections of ‘British sporting scenes’ in the world. The conditions for the bequest were outlined in Bailey’s will:

²⁷ Notably, John Bailey’s second name was ‘Milner’, presumably after Lord Milner, another champion of imperialism.

²⁸ The Jameson Raid was the Randlord-funded failed revolt of Paul Kruger’s Transvaal Republic by the Reform Committee, of which Bailey was a member.

²⁹ Bailey served as a Chief Intelligence Officer during a War that was later described as “a classic example of imperialist aggression prompted by capitalist greed” (Simons and Simons, 1969: 63). Leander Starr Jameson, who lends his name to the ‘Jameson Raid’ and to Abe Bailey’s third child (Mittie Mary ‘Starr’ Bailey), succeeded Rhodes as director of British South Africa Company and De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd., and whose companies’ mercenaries attempted the revolt that inspired the war in the first place. According to one of his obituaries, Bailey served as Jameson’s lieutenant during the Raid (The Glasgow Herald, 1947:7).

³⁰ Artists in the collection include Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, George Stubbs and J.M.W. Turner, among many others.

I give the whole of my collection of pictures, prints and engravings at 38 Bryanston Square, London, to be held upon trust for the South African people, to be kept as one collection in the New Art Gallery, Cape Town, and exhibited as a whole under the name of ‘The Abe Bailey Collection’. If the New Art Gallery cannot accept the collection as a whole my trustees shall give the said collection in whole or in part on loan to any gallery or galleries in South Africa, including, if divided, the said New Art Gallery.³¹ (Bailey in Waterson, 1941:71)

Frank Waterson, the High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa in London, described how as receivers of this gift, South Africans “will have the privilege of enjoying, in perpetuity, a collection of English Art which was chosen with great care by a man who had a natural flair for good things” (Waterson, 1941:71). However not all South Africans considered it a privilege, or derived joy from this collection of English Art. In fact, soon after the bequest was first exhibited, some members of the press were displeased. the art critic for *The Argus*, for instance, described how:

Once again, as I walked round the National Gallery, I wondered why all visitors to the art gallery should find it necessary to look so very downcast. Their gloom was, I think, due to the same reason as my own – namely that racehorses as a subject for painting become rather tedious after the first fifty pictures. (Anderson, 1947:n.p)

In an article in the *Cape Times*: “City Art Centre’s Denounced as ‘British Victorian Institutions’” (1948:n.p), following the arrival of the Bailey bequest, South African artist Jean Welz criticised both the Michaelis School of Fine Art and the “so-called” National Gallery for being “British

³¹ According to Tietze (2011:167), in 1942 the Bailey Trust asked SANG director Edward Roworth whether or not the Gallery desired the entire collection, considering the collection's size, the ‘suitability’ of the sporting pictures, and Bailey’s ambitious wish for permanent display. Initially Roworth (in Tietze, 2011:170) considered the sporting section of Bailey’s collection as “the most vital and interesting work executed in England in the early nineteenth century,” and thus Roworth opted to accept the collection as a whole.

Victorian institutions.” After describing how highly he regarded British culture and its contribution to South Africa, Welz (1948:n.p) asserted: “the time has arrived when our own art should be independent and forceful.” By the end of the nineteenth century the museum movement had spread from Europe to North and South America, Asia, Australia and Southern Africa. Museums and public art galleries became the accoutrements of the modern state. Most major cities, including in the colonies, could claim their modernity by the existence of their museum (McClellan, 2008). But by the mid-century, enveloped by a nationhood in the process of untethering the umbilical relationship to its ‘mother country’, the demand on the SANG was that it begin to integrate local artists and contribute to the construction of a South African canon.

1.6. Apartheid and The International Exhibition of South African Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, 1948

In 1948 D.F Malan mobilised political victory for the NP with the promise of reinvigorated segregation and increasingly racialised policies under the slogan *apartheid* (Coombes, 2003:281). It was a period defined by scaremongering³², institutionalised racism, and the propagandistic constructions of nation. Moreover, it was a time of increased government involvement in cultural institutions. One of the clearest instances of direct government involvement in the arts was the international *Exhibition of South African Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture* of 1948.³³

³² Only a Nationalist victory, Malan warned in the run-up to the 1948 elections, would “save the whites from the coloured blood, the black peril and the red menace” (Simons and Simons, 1969: 589).

³³ As a project of international public relations, the exhibition travelled to the National Gallery in Washington, the Tate Gallery in London, and venues in Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Ottawa. The exhibition was an expression of the nation’s aspirations and achievements. Moreover it was a diplomatic gesture of goodwill from the new political dispensation. As read by South Africa’s High Commissioner in London, Malan’s message at the Tate opening was that:

Goodwill between nations, as between individuals, is only possible when they know each other and especially when they understand and appreciate each other’s cultural and social aspirations and achievements . . . It is my fervent hope and that of my colleagues that this exhibition will . . . prove to be a silent ambassador for goodwill and better understanding.” (“South African Art in London”, 1948:n.p)

Government-sponsored, and administered by the South African Association of Arts³⁴ (SAAA), the exhibition was prepared immediately after Malan's government took power and presented a 'new vision' of South African art history. Demonstrating and prompting a national settler identity through South African visual arts, the exhibition made manifest an ideological repositioning that brought the SANG into the context of a redefined, nationalist South Africa. Coombes (2003:26) argues that an invention of this period was "a coherent Afrikaner identity where none actually existed." Referring to the 1948 exhibition in this context, the Chairman of Tate's Board of Trustees at the time, Jasper Ridley (1948:5), wrote: "Until recently South African Art can scarcely be said to have had a continuous history, and the contemporary movement which is its most vital manifestation has developed during the present century." However, the narrative of this young individualising national identity was still very closely linked to a European heritage. Writing in the exhibition catalogue, South African politician and diplomat Charles te Water, who was Chairman of the SAAA between 1941 and 1947, spoke of the "enduring struggle of the white races against the harshness of the environment and the philistinism of the indigenous people" (te Water, 1948:5). Te Water (1948:5) proclaimed that white South Africans' common European ancestry would allow them to tame the wilderness through industry and thus reap the country's bounty. Art was a product of European civilisation and civilisation was "*Europa se antwoord op Afrika se roepstem*" (Europe's answer to Africa's call). The exhibition and its catalogue attempted to promote a South African identity that was ideologically tied to its 'European origins' and that aimed to "establish closer bonds of understanding with its founder civilisations" (te Water, 1948:5). The *Exhibition of South African Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture* sketched the ideological and intellectual precedent for the Gallery's incoming director John Paris. It framed South African art within a redefined nationalist agenda, all the while emphasizing the diversity of styles in relation to European influences and cultural ancestry.

³⁴ In 1945 the South African Fine Arts Association (SAFAA) developed into a national body called the South African Association of Arts (SAAA). The SAAA absorbed already existing art societies throughout the country (Associations of Visual Arts).

1.7. John Paris and the ‘Truly National’ Gallery, 1949

As a result of the *Stratford Report*, Roworth resigned as honorary director and was replaced by John Paris. For the first time the Gallery was managed professionally by individuals with museum experience.³⁵ Paris’ plans included a library, a permanent study room and the introduction of a lecture series. This period saw a modernisation of the building and of the practices that took place within it. A subsequent director of the SANG, Matthys Bokhorst, wrote of this period:

For some ten years, the two-masted ship sailed on a stable course and with remarkable success. This period will first of all be remembered because of the outstanding loan collections which were obtained for considerable periods. (Bokhorst, 1972b:10)

The period following the *Stratford Report* represented a dramatic transformation of the Gallery. The SANG would now become responsible for writing contemporary artists into a South African canon, which was a critical break from past institutional practices. Soon Paris started giving precedence to South African painting and sculpture in order to “fill the serious gaps in the historical sequence” (SANG, 1951:4), and to highlight the influence of South Africa’s ‘founder nations’. According to a newspaper article, “Weeding out at art gallery: new director to make changes” (1949:n.p), Paris’ primary objective was to make the Gallery ‘truly national’.³⁶ Writing on the SANG in 1969, Fransen (1978:21) outlined the development:

For the first few decades of its existence, the National Gallery aimed at collecting and displaying art from the mother countries, and from Britain in particular. But

³⁵ John Paris had previous museum experience at the Liverpool Walker Art Gallery. Dr. J.W. von Moltke, the assistant director, joined the Gallery in 1951 from the Schleswig-Holstein Landesmuseum in Germany (Bokhorst, 1972:10).

³⁶ Paris also organised travelling exhibitions that toured the country and thus made the Gallery more national in its scope. These travelling exhibitions would focus specifically on South African art (“New Director’s Plans for the Gallery, 1949: :n.p; “Art Exhibitions to tour Union: No inferior work will be sent”, 1950:n.p).

it has long become policy to give equal emphasis to South African art . . . so that local schools can be seen in relation to the older schools which influenced its development.

1.8. The New Republic of South Africa, 1961

In 1961 South Africa severed its ties with Britain and the Commonwealth and became an independent nation: the Republic of South Africa. As if “underwriting the nationalism of the New Republic”, Rankin (1994:29) has suggested that at this point, more than ever before, colonial dominance in culture was being dismantled or replaced. Agreeing with Rankin, one of the outcomes of independence, according to Andrew Crampton (2003:231), was that “interest in domestically produced art flourished.” A SANG Annual Report for the period 1962-63 considered the collection and display of South African art as the “the primary purpose of the Gallery” (SANG, 1963:5-7).

This interest, however, did not extend to black South African artists, who, although recognised in commercial, private and some university galleries, were mostly ignored by the public institutions that shape, construct and legitimise canons of art. The context of a complex South African history meant that black artists “were only rarely perceived as part of the standard corpus of South African art and their work was little represented in art museums” (Rankin, 1994:29). The JAG was the first South African public art museum to acquire work by a black South African artist when it purchased Gerard Sekoto’s *Yellow Houses: a Street in Sophia Town* (1939) in 1940. Even though Sekoto included in the *Exhibition of South African Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture*, as the only black artist³⁷, *Yellow Houses: a Street in Sophia Town* would remain the only painting by a black artist in a public collection until the 1960s. The SANG only acquired its

³⁷ A written overview of the exhibition, referring to Sekoto, describes the inclusion of “one native African Bantu artist” (Washington National Gallery of Art).

first work by a black artist, also Sekoto³⁸, in 1964 with the purchase of *Street Scene* (Rankin, 1994:29). Despite public collections having begun to acquire work by black artists more steadily in the 1960s, Rankin argues that the process of their incorporation was very slow. Using the SANG as an example, Rankin (1995:60) describes how the 1970 catalogue of *South African Painting and Sculpture* includes “only six paintings and sculptures by black artists out of 160 South African works purchased throughout the decade of the 1960s.” Although incorporation may have been slow, it was certainly unmistakable, and in 1972 Bokhorst described how in the previous decade “an ever-growing number of works by contemporary African artists [were] added to the collection” (Bokhorst 1972b:12).

As for the Gallery’s audiences, unlike theatres and cinemas, the SANG imposed “no racial discrimination as far as admission of visitors” (Bokhorst, 1972b:12).³⁹ Although the broader political and social environment no doubt functioned as a barrier to entry. In this regard, Steve Dubin (2009:5) considered how most South African museums did not need to prohibit access of black South Africans, because few black South Africans “had the relevant information, interest, leisure time, or cultural capital” to facilitate entry. Reflecting on this ‘right of admission’, artist Peter Clarke (2003) maintained:

I think it was taken for granted that if you were non-white you had no business going into certain buildings, and so: people who were not white did not go into certain buildings.

Artist David Koloane (1996:54) held a similar position and described how the apartheid government “employed culture as a tool of racial discrimination” and “deliberately attempted to foster illiteracy not only in education but [also] in the creative spheres”. In 1972 Bokhorst

³⁸ Sekoto was also the first black artist acquired into the collections of the William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberley (1962) and the Pretoria Art Museum (1964) (Rankin, 1995:68).

³⁹ Ironically, the fact that there was no policy that excluded entrance based on race, actually became a “strong mitigating factor” when “trying to draw exhibitions from overseas” (Bokhorst, 1972b:12).

suggested that there had actually been “large developments in the non-white domain,” and asserted that 23% of the SANG’s visitors were non-white, and furthermore, that “the time is not far off when the non-white artists will be represented by an equal percentage” (Bokhorst, 1972a:n.p). If one considers the context of apartheid and the imperative for separate development, one can regard this statement as progressive, and importantly, as being unaligned to the official narrative of the apartheid regime.

1.9. Raymund van Niekerk and the Resistance to Apartheid Cultural Policies, 1976

In 1976 Raymund van Niekerk was appointed as the first South African-born director of the SANG. However his nationality was irrelevant as he was a proud internationalist. According to Chris Barron (2005:16), despite some of the SANG’s Board of Trustees being “little more than government stooges,”⁴⁰ van Niekerk carefully managed a period beset by immense challenges, namely the philistinism of the apartheid government and the intensifying United Nations-imposed cultural boycott of South Africa. Van Niekerk despised the nationalist agenda imposed on the Gallery, challenged governmental authority, and derided the NP’s cultural agenda (Proud, undated). In return, when van Niekerk approached the then Minister of National Education for government assistance to renovate the dilapidated Gallery, F.W. de Klerk famously suggested that van Niekerk raise the funds by selling off paintings from the permanent collection (Wells, 1989:5).

Despite these challenges, van Niekerk revitalised contemporary South African art by introducing the Cape Town Triennales. Within the context of the cultural boycott, he also emphasised the importance of the National Gallery owning works by international artists. However, because of the unenviable and untenable funding situation, which has never really been alleviated, this position became increasingly difficult to maintain. Importantly, under van Niekerk’s directorship the Gallery began acquiring a genre of socially active art, termed ‘Resistance Art’, that spoke

⁴⁰ Under van Niekerk’s directorship, at least one member of Acquisitions Committee had been a prominent government censor. This is discussed in note 118.

directly to the apartheid regime of the time. Approaching the late 1980s, an end to apartheid and the possibility of a new multi-racial South Africa was being anticipated and discussed. Intense debate was taking place in different spectrums of South African society, including artists and cultural practitioners, about the role of culture in the ‘new’ South Africa.

1.10. Preparing Ourselves for Freedom, 1989

In 1989 Albie Sachs (1990:19) recognised that a new nation was “struggling to give birth to itself.” His contribution to this dilemma was *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and ANC Constitutional Guidelines*, a seminar paper which he presented to an in-house African National Congress (ANC) conference in exile in Lusaka. The paper was described as having “rocked the mainframe of South African resistance culture” (Bester, 2004:24).⁴¹ Sachs, a prominent ANC member, questioned whether or not the ANC possessed a “sufficient cultural imagination” or the “artistic and cultural vision” needed to correspond with the emergence of the new South African nation (Sachs, 1990:20-21). Questioning the ANC’s understanding of the ‘role of culture’ in the proposed ‘new’ South Africa, Sachs’ often-quoted first proposal was that “[ANC] members should be banned from saying that culture is a weapon of the struggle,” asserting that the term was “devoid of real content” and “wrong and potentially harmful” (Sachs, 1990:19-20). Sachs wanted to prompt a more critical approach to art making, art criticism, and cultural work. Devoid of didactic, moral and utilitarian functions, Sachs was effectively promoting ‘art for art’s sake’, and proposing that the ANC, the then government in waiting, allow autonomy in the arts and encourage artistic practices and platforms devoid of political interference. For this reason, Neville Dubow, while Chair of the SANG’s acquisitions committee, praised Sachs’ position. However, Dubow (1990:37) also revealed his scepticism: “I profoundly hope that what you are saying is heard and understood, not least by the Cultural Desk of your own organisation.”

⁴¹ Rory Bester, reflecting on Sachs’ seminal essay more than decade later in a SANG exhibition catalogue, suggested that “at the time it bordered on blasphemy” and “reignited the chasm between aesthetics and politics in art” (Bester, 2004:24). An anthology of responses to *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* was published in de Kok and Press (eds.) *Spring is rebellious: Arguments about cultural freedom* (1990).

According to Dubow, many young “democratically minded” artists, who had been able to withstand pressures from the apartheid state and its “hitherto relentless drive towards ideological conformity,” had “considerably greater misgivings about the prescriptions and prohibitions that they perceive emanating from the Cultural Desk of the ANC” (Dubow, 1990:37).

1.11. When the Notions of ‘Nation’ Transform Radically

South Africa in the 1980s was defined by political and social instability. The international community intensified trade sanctions against South Africa, and the country witnessed worsening violent protests and various ‘states of emergency’.⁴² The country was reaching a tipping point; it was on the threshold of a ‘new era’ (Welsh, 2009). The 1990s, on the other hand, was the period of ‘transition’. Nelson Mandela was released from prison on 11 February 1990 and apartheid was dismantled in the negotiations that followed. South Africa’s first democratic elections were held on 27 April 1994. Soon thereafter the country was equipped with a new national flag and new national anthem.⁴³ The ‘transition’ was not merely to a new political dispensation; it was a transition to an entirely new conception of South African nationhood. The nation had been re-imagined once again.

Anticipating radical social and political transformation, museums and public art galleries, the SANG included, were modifying their policies and their practices. Furthermore, South Africa’s principal museological journal, *The South African Museum Association Bulletin* (SAMAB), was beginning to host “intense debate concerning the future of South Africa’s museums under majority democratic rule” (Crampton, 2003:225). Central to the debates was the recognition of

⁴² For further reading, see Welsh *The Turbulent Eighties* (pp167 – 208) in *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (2009).

⁴³ Before Union, the colonies in South Africa bore the Union Jack as their official national flag. After 1910, the Union of South Africa adopted a variation of the Union Jack that included South Africa’s coat of arms. After Hertzog’s pro-Afrikaner government claimed power, a new national flag was proposed and was adopted in 1928. Similarly with the national anthem, *God Save the King/Queen* was initially the sole national anthem. From 1936 until 1957 it was sung alongside the Afrikaans poem *Die Stem van Suid-Afrika*, and after independence *Die Stem* became the sole anthem. In 1994 the national flag and anthem were both updated to reflect the re-imagined South African nationhood.

the divisive roles that museums played, unwittingly or not, in apartheid South Africa, and the challenges of re-articulating their roles in a post-apartheid South Africa. In addition to debates in South Africa's museum community, the sector itself underwent reviews and investigations. This culminated in the ANC government's policy document the *White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage* (Department of Art, Culture, Science and Technology [DACST], 1996). This policy document codified the new government's position on arts and culture and repositioned public cultural institutions within the nation-building project of the 1990s. Nation-building, according to the *White Paper* (1996:18-19):

Shall foster a sense of pride and knowledge of South African culture, heritage and the arts. Shall further encourage mutual respect and tolerance and intercultural exchange between the various cultures and forms of art to facilitate the emergence of a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity.

'Heritage Day' is the South African public holiday that falls on 24 September and that celebrates cultural heritage and diversity. On Heritage Day in 1997, President Mandela inaugurated the Robben Island Museum, the site where he had been incarcerated for 18 of his 27 years as a political prisoner. Mandela chose this auspicious occasion to deliver a scathing critique of the country's museums. According to Dubin, Mandela characterised South African institutions as "disgraceful to the majority of its citizens," and alleged that 97% of their displays "reflected colonialist and Apartheid points of view" (Dubin, 2009:2). In 1999 the then Minister of Arts and Culture Ben Ngubane stated that South African museums had "negated and distorted the history and culture of the majority of South Africans, [but] all now agree that they have to change and must play a role in the process of nation-building" (Ngubane in Crampton, 2003:219).

The transition to democracy was a paradigm shift and prompted a redefined conception of South African nationhood. As such it was described by Njabulo Ndebele (1998:20) as the "emergence of a new national consciousness." The new image of South Africa was the multi-cultural 'rainbow nation', with its mantras of 'unity in diversity', 'inclusivity' and 'reconciliation'. Thus in 1997, Marilyn Martin (1997:20-21), the SANG director during the transition, described how:

Things have changed rapidly – the days of the numerical majority functioning as a cultural minority are over, and different structures are being put in place or are emerging. We are now in a position to locate ourselves and our country within Africa, and this will be one of the major challenges facing the SANG in the next decade.

The ‘new’ South Africa heralded the revision of South African art history, and according to Sabine Marschall, this had a profound impact on black artists. In the realm of art, revision involved the reconstruction of ‘lost’ histories, modifications to exhibition and acquisition policies, and the reassessment of art-historical curricula and academic research (Marschall, 1999). In reflecting the dramatic transformation of the social and political environment, the underlying assumptions of South African art were ostensibly shifting.

As a ‘national’ gallery, the SANG’s role in reflecting ‘the nation’ was emphasised. The Gallery would acknowledge and promote a broader definition of South Africa visual culture. It would participate in the writing and re-writing of the new South African art history. It would ‘fill the critical gaps’ in the permanent collection by acquiring the work of black artists who had been unrecognised previously. It would rectify the imbalances generated by a history of colonialism, imperialism, and Apartheid. In so doing, the Gallery would use art “to address the historical problem of cultural difference in South Africa” (Martin, 2001:9-10). These were the ideals but the budgets were less optimistic.

The dilemma of such redress questioned how one could make up for historical inequities without perpetuating the same racial or cultural discriminations that originated them, and how to adhere to ideological and utilitarian prescriptions without losing focus on the art itself. Issues of compensatory and inverted racism are frequently posed in a post-apartheid society. The SANG was faced with this problem quite directly in 1992 when artist Beezy Bailey, grandson of Abe Bailey, invented his alter ego – a black woman named Joyce Ntobe.⁴⁴ Bailey submitted works to

⁴⁴ Another white artist, Wayne Barker, performed a very similar ruse in Johannesburg. Barker submitted work to a drawing competition under his own name, and separately submitted an ‘afrocentric’ work under the name Andrew Moeletse.

the Cape Town Triennale simultaneously under his own name and separately under his alter ego. Bailey's works were rejected while Ntobe's works were acquired. According to Bailey, this caused a "heated controversy about the inverted racism of art-world institutions" (Bailey, undated). At the time Martin explained that the works were judged principally on aesthetic criteria. Ntobe's linocuts were considered excellent; Bailey's paintings were not. Furthermore, Bailey's work was already represented in the SANG permanent collection, whereas 'Ntobe' was not (Loppert, 1993).

Two decades later Beezy Bailey condemned the SANG once again. On this occasion it was regarding his grandfather's bequest. The Abe Bailey Collection, on permanent loan to the SANG with the stipulation that it should always be on display, in part or in whole. Beezy Bailey (Bailey in Pollak, 2012:8) alleged that the SANG was displaying too little of the bequest:

I and some trustees of the Bailey Bequest believe that the SANG have not honoured the legal agreement, and in view of this the Trust is considering taking the bequest away from the SANG. We are also debating the possibility of retaining only the most valuable paintings, and selling off the residue. The proceeds would accrue to the Sir Abe Bailey Trust.

Riason Naidoo, the incumbent director, stated that the Bailey Bequest "wasn't really showcasing an aspect of South African culture" (Naidoo in Smith, 2010). In his retort, art critic Lloyd Pollak declared that "Naidoo's comment displays a very limited and partial understanding of 'South African culture'. The colonial past is part of our history, part of our heritage, and, most decisively, part of our culture" (Pollak, 2012:9). Debates regarding Abe Bailey's bequest ask pertinent questions about the purpose of a national gallery in a post-colonial and simultaneously globalised context, and it is a debate that is explored in the third chapter on SANG collection practices.

Barker's work was rejected and Moeletse's work was accepted. One might feel that Barker and Bailey's attempts to expose affirmative action in the art world did little more than unmask their own fears in the face of radical societal transformation. However, as discussed in chapter three, white artists still seem to have comprised the majority of the SANG's acquisitions in the 1990s and 2000s, and thus Bailey's insinuations would likely be disproved under empirical study.

Curator of Historical Painting and Sculpture Hayden Proud has suggested that the flaw in our notion of a national gallery is the “absence of a commonly-held coherent sense of ‘nation’,” and that in its contemporary understanding the gallery is “redolent of another era’s imperialist rhetoric and definition of art” (Proud, undated:38). If, as Proud (undated:38) suggests, “the concept of such an institution is a colonial implant,” the SANG might be regarded as a foreign concept struggling to find a post-colonial purpose. The newsletter, *Museum at a Glance* (2013), reveals this apparent identity crisis:

While it may seem like quite an imposing building, with its stark white façade, towering Greek pillars, and massive doors opening out onto the Company’s Gardens – the interior of the Iziko South African National Gallery is as warm and familiar as a Xhosa mud hut. (Iziko, 2013)

While anticipating a post-apartheid South Africa in 1990, curator David Elliott (1990:7) suggested that one question was being asked ubiquitously: “What role has culture to play in the new society?” This study considers how this question was posed and how it was answered, by the SANG, in three distinct periods of South African history. By probing rhetoric and form, policy and practice, this study considers how the SANG has, in colonial, apartheid, and democratic contexts, adapted to its transforming environment. This chapter provides the requisite historical foundation from which to engage analyses in the chapters that follow. The subsequent chapters offer a closer consideration of this history, through the analytical frames of policy, collection practices, and exhibition practices. While the same broad history is repeated, the nature of that history is reassessed, and with each chapter a distinct focus is established and explored.

PART 2

COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Chapter Two

Articulating Nationhood: SANG Policies in Context

McClellan (2008:13-14) has argued that public art and cultural institutions “have always been dedicated to building a better society,” but that the vision of what constitutes that ideal society is always shifting. As a result, a national gallery’s priorities are not written in stone but rather adapt to transforming social requirements. In fact, McClellan (2008:14) concludes, art museums owe their very “survival and success” to this ability – to adapt in tune with society’s shifting ideals and values. Since the conception of an ‘Art Gallery for South Africa’ in 1871, the SANG has endured seemingly constant radical political and social transformation. Beginning with its colonial founding, separated from its ‘mother land’, the challenges of self-definition have been expanded by a complex history of settler nationalism, racial oppression, a liberation movement, and an electoral democracy. These shifting hegemonies have been reflected in practice and policy, whereby distinct notions of nation have been imagined and established, reflected and performed, inside and outside the Gallery’s walls.⁴⁵

The SANG’s policy documents have outlined the ideological and theoretical developments that have then determined collection and exhibition practices. Yet these policies have been predetermined by context. The contexts of inconsistent notions of nation, severe financial strain, government pressure, and the individual values of its directors and governing bodies, have historically been definitive factors in the development of SANG policy. As described in the previous chapter, Roworth’s purge of the SANG permanent collection caused a public outcry. The sales were ostensibly to provide gallery space for Randlord Sir Abe Bailey’s large collection of British paintings, watercolours and prints. Notably the Randlords offered financial support to the NP’s political opposition leader Smuts, who opened the exhibition in March 1947. In the context of emerging Afrikaner nationalism and pre-existing anti-imperial sentiment, the SANG became a political issue directly before the 1948 elections. The ensuing parliamentary debates questioned

⁴⁵ Quite literally on the Gallery’s walls, in 1994 the SANG commissioned Ndebele painters to create murals on the Gallery’s façade alongside the *Igugu IamaNdebele: Pride of the Ndebele* (1994-95) exhibition (van Vuuren, 2001:90).

the function of the Gallery as well as its management. The Department of the Interior appointed James Stratford, a former Chief Justice of South Africa, to undertake the investigation. The outcome of the inquiry was the *Stratford Report*, which stated that the “most outstanding weaknesses of past administration has been the lack of a clearly defined policy with respect to the functions and aims of the Gallery” (Stratford Report, 1947:5). The first drafting of formal policy at the SANG originated in the wake of the *Stratford Report*.

Stratford (1947:4-5) stated quite sympathetically that it was “evidently lack of funds as much as any other consideration which prompted the sale.” As such the Gallery’s ability to perform its function was restricted by its inadequate financial position. Another consideration, however, was the lack of available space, which by the mid-century was already becoming untenable (Tietze, 2010:4). One MP claimed that this, not the lack of funds, was the core purpose of the sale, as a clearance to provide the requisite space needed for the inbound Abe Bailey Collection (Brink, 1947). The other important consideration involved the personal values and preferences of the director. In a profile of the Gallery in 1910, the director of the SANG during the sales Edward Roworth referred to the “mass of inferior paintings” and described how “there are many canvases bequeathed in years gone by to the unfortunate trustees, which could with advantage be removed from the walls and consigned to oblivion” (Roworth, 1910:9).

2.1. The Stratford Report and the Drafting of Formal Policy

The *Stratford Report* effectively mandated that the Gallery accommodate the shifting notions of South African nationhood in its collections and exhibition practices, and therefore focus more actively on South African art. For instance, under the heading *Functions and Aims of the Gallery*, the Report recommended a ‘representative’ collection of South African artists as being the principal aim of the Gallery:

First and foremost the Gallery should contain representative examples of the work of South African artists so that visitors may readily study the growth and development of artistic talent and expression in this country . . . Some progress

has already been made but the South African collection cannot be described as really representative at present. (Stratford Report, 1947:5)

At the time of the enquiry, the Gallery's Lieberman Room⁴⁶, of which the original purpose was to hang works by South African artists, was not fulfilling its requirement. According to the Report, only one-third of the wall space was occupied by South African works, with the remainder showing miscellaneous paintings of different schools and periods. Stratford (1947:5) recommended that it be restored to its original purpose "of housing only the works of South African artists." Stratford also called for a more professional approach to the management of the Gallery and recommended that a fulltime director be appointed, someone with experience and training in gallery management. Consistent with the Report's nationalist undertone, Stratford (1947:9) determined that it was "obviously preferable that the Director of the National Gallery should be South African bred in the traditions of this country and acquainted with both the official languages."

In keeping with Stratford's recommendation, a South African candidate, P.A. Hendriks was selected by the Board and approved by the Minister of Education. However Hendriks, the director of the JAG at the time, withdrew his application after inspecting the permanent collection and reviewing the Gallery's finances (SANG, 1948:n.p). According to the Board of Trustees minute book:

[Mr Hendriks] had pointed out that in view of the financial basis on which the Gallery is run at present it would be extremely difficult to turn the Gallery into an institution of truly national importance. He pointed out that years of work would await the new Director and that only when generously supported financially would the gallery become an institution worthy of its name. (SANG, 1948:1-2)

⁴⁶Named after the Cape Town Mayor Hyman Lieberman whose estate paid for the room's construction. The Lieberman Room is a large hall at the centre of the Gallery and was built to exhibit exclusively South African art.

The Board's second choice, John Paris from the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, was appointed director of the SANG. With Paris as director an *Interim Memorandum of Function and Policy* was presented to the Board of Trustees on 25 May 1949, which articulated the function of the Gallery. The memorandum claimed that as the "the principal art museum in the country" the SANG would soon become "a driving force in the nation's cultural affairs" (Paris in Allen, 1950:n.p). In an interview published in the *Cape Times*, Paris emphasised that as a national gallery "the obvious basis is South African art itself." Paris' plan was to illustrate the 'development' and 'story' of South African art, in order to make it "truly national" (Paris, 1949a:n.p). The subsequent *Interim Memorandum* was presented to the Board on 25 September 1950. Implementing the recommendations outlined in the Stratford Report, it proposed a systematic policy for the acquisition of South African art:

It is submitted that the intention should be to represent the history of Art in South Africa of all styles and periods by the most adequate examples obtainable so that the National Gallery may become the chief institution in the Union in which South African Art may be studied by public, students and historians. (SANG, 1950:1)

Paris (1949a:n.p) described how a permanent exhibition of South African art would form the "pivot of the whole gallery." The Gallery would aim to become a centre for the study of art, especially art which had "particular bearing on the life and culture of South Africa past, present and future." Though what is perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the *Interim Memorandum* of 1949 was perhaps Paris' intention to re-contextualise indigenous historical art in a fine art context. This, Paris considered, would create a national gallery that was uniquely South African. This repositioning is articulated under the heading *Internal Arrangements*:

It is suggested that a permanent collection be formed and displayed in the Atrium of originals of Prehistoric and Bushman rock paintings and engravings, together with suitable copies and tracings, supplemented by photographic material, so that the Gallery may become the world centre for the study of this universally important section of art history. (SANG, 1949:n.p)

Paris planned to exhibit the proposed collection in the atrium of the gallery, which until then had housed plaster casts of Greek statuary. In a newspaper article, “Bushman Art for National Gallery” (1949), Paris acknowledged the great importance of a collection of this kind to the history of art. He claimed that these paintings were uniquely South African and that the collection could give the SANG international prominence. The *Policy Memorandum* of 1950 encouraged this idea, and suggested that the Gallery should establish a collection under the designation *Pre-Historic and Native Arts⁴⁷ Indigenous*:

Examples chosen for high aesthetic quality rather than for Ethnological interest should be acquired for an introductory section prefatory to the South African Exhibition rooms . . . The point to be made here is that many primitive and pre-historic *objets d'art* have very great and universally recognised aesthetic merit and are very important to the study of contemporary art. It is pointed out also that in an art museum the line of demarcation between fine art and Ethnology should not be drawn too narrow. (SANG, 1950:1)

Despite Paris’ proposal, as well as the ambitions he had expressed in the press and outlined in two policy memoranda, the project was not realised under his directorship.⁴⁸

The primary focus under Paris’ directorship was the development of (white) South African art. By virtue of inadequate financial support, the divergent ideologies of previous directors, obsolete notions of ‘nation’, and the lack of clearly defined policy, the Gallery had previously under-acquired South African art. These omissions were now apparent, and as such the SANG needed to “fill the serious gaps in the historical sequence” (SANG, 1951:4). The other central component

⁴⁷ Amended at a Board meeting on 31 August 1951, the words ‘Native Arts’ were struck out and ‘Indigenous’ was handwritten as a substitute.

⁴⁸ In 1962, following Paris’ departure, the Gallery mounted an exhibition of Rock Paintings and Engravings. It was the “major exhibition of the period under review” and occupied 7 rooms at the Gallery (SANG, 1963).

of early policy at the SANG was the concept of ‘Founder Nations’. Maintaining good relations between the English- and Afrikaans-speaking South African remained a national imperative, and the concept of ‘Founder Nations’ was an element of nationalist ideology that maintained that South Africa was founded by white settlers of European origin, and that this common ancestry created unity among them. When applied to South African art, these nations comprised England, France, Germany, Holland, and Italy (SANG, 1956:3). By 1955 the policy of the Gallery was to prioritise the nation, and the illustration of its development, as a criterion for display. The influence of art from ‘Founder Nations’ was to be explicitly linked to white South African artists. Within this context of cultural nationalism, works by J.H. Pierneef, Pieter Wenning, Frans Oerder, and Gregoire Boonzaier were associated with Dutch art of the nineteenth-century; Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser, and Pranas Domšaitis with German Expressionism; Edward Roworth, Neville Lewis, Gwelo Goodman, and Rupert Shepard with English art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and Maud Sumner, Maurice van Essche, and Bettie Cilliers-Barnard with the Continental modern schools (Honikman, 1958). The works of these artists saw increasing prominence in the SANG’s permanent collection, and when displayed were contextualised by the works of the ‘Founder Nations’ from which they were seen to derive their influence.

Under Paris’ stewardship the decade of the 1950s was seen as a “golden period” for the SANG (Tietze, 2010:6). By implementing Stratford’s recommendations, Paris was able to professionalise the running of the Gallery, he implemented a lecture programme, attracted important exhibitions of Old Masters and European art on loan⁴⁹, and actively promoted contemporary South African art.

However in the early 1960s Paris eventually lost the confidence of the Board. Much evidence suggests that Ruth Prowse, a South African artist, Trustee of the Gallery, and representative of the SAAA, was instrumental in his eventual dismissal. In a letter circulated amongst the Board of Trustees in 1955, Prowse expressed her dissatisfaction with his leadership: she accused Paris of

⁴⁹ Most notably the Lycett Green Collection, the Sir Alfred Beit Collection, the Hughes Collection, and the Robinson Collection.

showing too little of the Lycett Green loan collection⁵⁰, which she believed was the reason for the loan eventually being removed: “He did this without consulting the board. He hung only 12 out of the 110 pictures of the collection that the Government and the Board had accepted with gratitude, on loan, for the people of South Africa” (Prowse, 1955:n.p). Prowse also described how she felt a “growing uneasiness about other matters.” The other matters included Paris’ linguistic deficiencies: “in the advertised terms of the appointment of a Director, it was stipulated that he should become proficient in Afrikaans by the end of two years” – which clearly Paris had not accomplished.⁵¹ In this same letter, Prowse (1955:n.p) also accused Paris of showing neglect of the South African Art collection: “he has now had more than sufficient time and opportunity to come to a better general understanding of our country’s art.” Prowse subsequently requested an inquiry into his administration.

In response to Prowse’s indictment, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees A.H. Honikman sought legal opinion. According to the Deputy State Attorney, “Miss Prowse’s statement or complaint contains no real evidence of misconduct” (SANG, 1955:1-2). However the State Attorney did state in conclusion:

It was apparently a condition of Mr. Paris’ appointment that within a time he should become bilingual and that this period has been extended. It is possible that this condition either has not or will not be fulfilled and this might afford grounds for terminating his services. (SANG, 1955:1-2)

⁵⁰ According to the minute book for April 1956, Lycett Green, himself a member of the Board of the Trustees, asserted that he had held “the Board, not the Director, responsible” for the loss of the collection.” (SANG, 1956:4)

⁵¹ In fact, in the Board of Trustees meeting for May 1956, Lycett Green proposed that the director take and pass an examination in Afrikaans. His proposal was not seconded, perhaps because at this stage Paris still held the confidence of the Chair, A.H. Honikman. (SANG, 1956:8)

It was subsequently proposed that the Board turn down Prowse's request for a Government inquiry, which was seconded and carried (SANG, 1955:5). The accusations appeared as a persecution, perhaps even a personal vendetta. Bokhorst (1972a:n.p) thus suggested it was "troubles and differences of opinion of a personal nature that led to the departure of John Paris." What transpired between 1955 and 1962 is unclear, but needless to say, when the position for director was advertised in 1962, the same condition was included: that the applicant "be required to have, or to acquire within two years from the assumption of duties, a good knowledge of both official languages, English and Afrikaans" ("South African National Gallery", 1962:n.p).

Soon after Paris' dismissal, the SANG's assistant director also resigned. J.W. von Moltke, who occupied his position since 1951, expressed criticisms of his own. In *State Grant Too Small*, published in the *Cape Times*, von Moltke motivated his departure by stating "the State did not provide enough for proper research in visual arts" ("State Grant Too Small", 1962:n.p). Nonetheless, von Moltke (1962:n.p) claimed that the country had great possibilities for the visual arts, and suggested that South Africa was "on the threshold of a new era."

Although the imagined white settler nationalism, 'South Africanism', had become a national imperative much earlier, the Gallery only started representing South African artists systematically after the *Stratford Report* mandated it do so in 1947. Policy documents written after this report articulated the new focus of South Africa's national gallery as being South Africa's national art. Thus the SANG would become 'truly national' and as such would illustrate the story of South African art. By the mid-century the collection was insufficient in this regard (SANG, 1950:1). Only certain South African schools were represented, and these "often with minor works" (SANG, 1950:1). After the repositioning, these omissions were now prominent. In the collection and display of South African art, the Gallery would become an active agent in the construction of a South African canon. In this regard, as Paris considered in an interview in 1950, the "purpose" of the SANG was "not to develop a painting industry but to foster a South African art" (Paris in Allen, 1950:n.p). Considering that the Gallery had been adopted into the political arena directly before the 1948 general elections, the new policies thrust the SANG into the new nation-building project of the mid-century. The SANG would become a symbol of culture in the young state.

2.2. Under the Slogan ‘Apartheid’

By the early 1950s the country was a social and political cauldron. Emerging Afrikaner nationalism had reached a climax in 1948 with a new political and ideological dispensation. Characterised by Malan’s implementation of apartheid, on which he claimed the election victory, a reinvigorated system of racially discriminatory and segregationist policies were implemented.⁵² It was a period where the ideological development of South African society was influenced by, among others, the State’s affinity for propaganda. National galleries are fundamentally tethered to their contexts, and the societal shift towards an overwhelmingly nationalist imperative can be considered highly influential in the development of policies, and the redefinition of ‘function’, hitherto discussed.

As an indication that art and art institutions were considered part of the state’s ideological mission, in 1951 apartheid was imposed on arts institutions quite directly.⁵³ The apartheid Government, via the Department of Education, attempted to impose its racially segregationist policies on the SAAA (and all its branches and affiliated bodies). The Department was offering its grant of £1000 on the assurance that “no mixed audience of Europeans and non-Europeans will be permitted to attend any exhibition, function, etc.,” given by the SAAA or any of its associated bodies (“Arts Body’s Reply on State Grant”, 1951:n.p). The SAAA head office’s response to Government was one of non-compliance. It was unable to commit to apartheid at all exhibitions held by its branches, because each branch was independent, although “some in fact have applied Apartheid all along” (“Arts Society replies on apartheid”, 1951:n.p). The State’s response was vehement and the Minister of Education, Mr J.H. Viljoen, stated that:

⁵² Jan Smuts, the Prime Minister before the elections and Malan’s main political opponent, was in favour of relaxing influx controls and creating a black urban middle class. This was typified by Smuts’ support of the Fagan Commission in 1946, that investigated Native Laws and that opposed increased segregation.

⁵³ Notably, a similar imposition was made in 1983 when the Government divided museums into racially segregated ‘White Own Affairs’ and ‘General Affairs’. The SANG was able to avoid the ‘white only’ classification but was financially penalised.

In the future the Government would not, under any circumstances, grant financial aid to the South African Association of Arts unless it enforced strict Apartheid at all times in all its exhibition halls and at all functions . . . We are adamant on our Apartheid policy and unless an organization adheres to it, there will be no subsidy from the state, not a penny. (Viljoen, in “Strict Art ‘Apartheid’ Ruled”, 1952:n.p)

Eventually the Ministry accepted the SAAA’s contention, that the nationally circulated exhibitions and lectures “were inevitably held in galleries and halls which were already governed by local regulations” and which were “autonomous in the conduct of their internal affairs” (“Strict Art ‘Apartheid’ Ruled”, 1952:n.p). The SAAA was able to retain the grant-in-aid, on the condition that the funds were devoted for the sole purpose of head-office administration.

In this context, when reviewing applications for the positions of director and assistant director in 1962, following the departures of Paris and von Moltke, the SANG Board considered none of the candidates acceptable.⁵⁴ The Dutch Curator of the Michaelis Collection, Professor Matthys Bokhorst, who was not an applicant, was approached and hired as a part-time director with the position made permanent the following year (“Bokhorst Director of Art Gallery”, 1963). Bokhorst, who had previously been director of the ‘Department of Dutch Cultural History’ at the University of Pretoria, was 62 years old at the time of his appointment. It should be noted that the advertisement for the position stated that no candidate over the age of 55 would be considered (“South African National Gallery”, 1962).

During Bokhorst’s directorship the bias toward constructing a representative South African collection continued. Considering that the country had left the British Commonwealth to become a Republic in 1961, there was a prevailing nationalist agenda in the social and cultural spheres. Yet, despite the increasingly race-based policies of the apartheid Government, black

⁵⁴ Notably Neville Dubow, who would later Chair the SANG’s Acquisitions Committee, was an applicant, but it was “unanimously agreed that he was not entirely suitable to be appointed permanently” (SANG, 1962:n.p).

South African artists were seeing growing interest from commercial, private and some university galleries. A little later, this list included the SANG. In the mid-1960s, after much campaigning from Bokhorst and the Board, the Gallery's grant-in-aid was increased drastically, and the Gallery was able to broaden its scope. As detailed in the following chapter, this involved collecting black South African artists working in western modes, but also historical African Art:

The last decade has seen an ever growing number of works by contemporary African artists added to the collection. A few years ago, the Board of Trustees accepted the consequences thereof, by giving the green light for collecting traditional African Sculpture, which in the past, had almost solely been the domain of ethnographical museums. (Bokhorst, 1972b:12)

The process of incorporating black artists might have been slow and insufficient, but by mid-1960 it was certainly evident. In a review of the *South African Art To-day* exhibition at the SANG in 1964, Neville Dubow contemplated the next generation of South African artists – those “who are going to dictate the mainstream of South African art in the next decade or so” (Dubow, 1964:n.p). A lingering question concludes his review: “does the essentially humanist approach of the leading African sculptor, Sydney Kumalo, stand any chance under the new dispensation?” (Dubow, 1964:n.p). Two years later, reviewing an exhibition of recent acquisitions, Dubow complimented the SANG as it “provide[d] welcome evidence of its lively policy in building up its South African collection” (Dubow, 1966:n.p). More importantly the review referred to a young Dumile Feni, “one of the most talented of a number of Johannesburg-based African artists.” Dubow (1966:n.p) considered how these artists were ‘plugging a gap’ in South African art, representing “that category of work that speaks for and of the majority of this country’s citizens.” Thus paradoxically, given the political and ideological climate of racial marginalisation in the 1960s⁵⁵, the SANG began to recognise and include black South African artists in the national

⁵⁵ Of course, racial discrimination in South Africa began long before the 1960s, indeed also before Apartheid policies were introduced in 1948. However, in the late 1950s and 1960s much of the legislation was reaching an ideological apex. These included the *Immorality Act* (1957) that prohibited sex between races; the *Promotion of Bantu Self-government Act* (1959) that promoted ‘separate development’; the *Extension of University Education Act* (1959) that sought to limit non-white

collection for the first time, and thus started to write black artists into the ‘story of South African art’.

Professor Bokhorst retired in 1973 and was succeeded by another Dutch-born director, C.J. du Ry van Beest Holle. For a second time, the appointment of non-South African director followed the withdrawal of the preferred South African applicant, in this case the director of the Pretoria Art Museum Albert Werth (“Gallery Director Appointed”, 1973). Du Ry van Beest Holle’s directorship was fleeting and he resigned in 1975 to take a position at the University of Cape Town (UCT). The assistant director, Hans Fransen, also Dutch, acted as director until the appointment of the South African-born Dr Raymund van Niekerk in 1976. Nearly three decades after Stratford’s (1947:9) recommendation, that the director be a South African “bred in the traditions of this country,” a South African director had finally been found, albeit one oriented firmly towards Europe.

2.3. “Forget about a Monet for the National Gallery”

Dr Raymund van Niekerk studied dentistry at the University of Witwatersrand before moving to London to practise his profession. In London van Niekerk developed a passion for art history, and he was accepted into the Courtauld Institute of Art, where he studied seventeenth-century French painting under Anthony Blunt.⁵⁶ When he returned to South Africa he was appointed Head of the Department of Fine Art at the University of Natal in 1971. Van Niekerk was an internationalist. Thus, in 1980, when broadcasting his disapproval of the insufficient funds granted to the gallery, he declared that the public could “forget about a Monet for the National

enrollment in universities; and amongst many others, the *Unlawful Organisations Act* (1960) that banned political organisations like the ANC.

⁵⁶ Anthony Blunt was a distinguished Art Historian and was the director of the Courtauld Institute at the University of London. Notable students influenced by Blunt, who ultimately became Gallery directors, include the Tate Gallery’s Sir Allan Bowness and Sir Nicholas Serota. Notably, in 1979 Blunt was exposed as having been a Soviet spy during the Second World War and was stripped of his titles.

Gallery” (van Niekerk in de Villiers, 1980:6). A few months later van Niekerk delivered his concise *Policy of the S.A. National Gallery as Determined by its Board of Trustees* (1980):

The basic philosophy is that art from the European founder countries, Africa and South Africa, should be represented in the Gallery. This means that Netherlandish, British, French and German art of all periods should be acquired as well as traditional art from Africa. The policy is also aimed at acquiring important examples of 20th century Western art for their collection.⁵⁷ (SANG, 1980:n.p)

However, by this stage, the Gallery was facing a financial crisis. Van Niekerk accepted that even though the policies were in place, they could not be implemented with the funds made available to the Gallery at the time. In addition, no significant additions had been made to the modern Western or older European collections for many years (SANG, 1980). In van Niekerk’s view, the fact that the Gallery did not possess “important contemporary works by the leading modern British, French, German or American artists” was a profound disadvantage to the people of South Africa (SANG, 1980:n.p). As a result of the cultural boycott of South Africa the Gallery was deprived of exhibitions from abroad.⁵⁸ Van Niekerk felt that, in order to avoid parochialism, the Gallery needed to acquire works by contemporary international artists for its permanent collection (van Niekerk, 1980). In 1981, frustrated by inadequate funding, in his view inhibiting the SANG from fulfilling its role, van Niekerk again approached the press to broadcast his views (van Niekerk, 1981). In April 1983 the State heeded his call and increased the annual acquisition

⁵⁷ The Annual Report for 1977-78 asserted that South African art “always receives preference in the acquisition policy.” However, when international art was sought, the fact that it emanated “from our artistic mother countries” seemed to be an advantageous factor (SANG, 1978:17).

⁵⁸ In December 1980, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed a resolution titled *Cultural, Academic and other boycotts of South Africa* (1980). Noting that the Apartheid regime used cultural, academic, sports and other contacts to promote its “propaganda,” the UN requested that all States “take steps to prevent all cultural, academic, sports, and other exchanges with the racist regime of South Africa”; urged “all academic and cultural institutions to terminate all links with South Africa” and encouraged “anti-apartheid and solidarity movements in their campaigns for cultural, academic and sports boycotts of South Africa” (UN General Assembly Resolution, 1980:2).

grant, and with this increase in financial capacity, van Niekerk was able to implement his policy of 1980. The Gallery started to acquire works by a generation of contemporary American and European artists, and was able to organise important exhibitions of contemporary South African art (Korber, 1983:1).

According to Patricia Davison (1998:150), when the apartheid government's racially segregated Tricameral Parliament attempted to divide museums into 'White Own Affairs' and 'General Affairs' in 1983, "the argument that museums were neutral became untenable." Nevertheless, van Niekerk and the SAAA were able to avoid the white only classification, and the SANG's admission policy remained non-discriminatory. However, according to Proud (2006:14), "this raised official ire" and government retribution took a financial form. The SANG's access to 'special funds' were denied, while they remained available to conforming institutions

With increased economic sanctions and a struggling currency⁵⁹, it was becoming exceedingly difficult for the SANG to purchase works from abroad. Despite the acquisition budget receiving the first increase in over a decade, only a year before in 1983, the Gallery's lack of sufficient funding was still van Niekerk's paramount concern. Disillusioned, van Niekerk stated: "As the National Gallery, we are meant to be the country's showpiece. But we are so restricted by lack of space and funds that we can't really live up to that claim" ("Gallery, museum in cash crisis", 1984:n.p). Van Niekerk retired from his position in 1989, directly before the Gallery reformed its policies and practices.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ A situation exacerbated by President P.W. Botha's 'crossing the Rubicon' speech in 1985. The speech was hyped as an introduction to reform and previews were leaked to the press in this regard. However, Botha baulked at the last moment, and instead "launched into a tirade against his favourite enemies – foreign interference in local affairs, the communist conspiracy and the media" (van Heerden, 2006). All that remained from the original speech was that "South Africa had crossed the Rubicon of political reform" (van Heerden, 2006). For Botha, South Africa had crossed the line in the opposite direction. The global reaction to Botha's speech sent the Rand plummeting to unprecedented lows.

⁶⁰ According to Proud, van Niekerk took early retirement, as he was unwilling to sacrifice his integrity for what he anticipated would be a compromise of artistic value in the 'new' South Africa (Proud, 2014 – private correspondence). Notably, Joe Dolby, Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Gallery between 1980 and 2012, rejected Proud's view. According to Dolby (2015), van Niekerk felt that he lacked the requisite knowledge of contemporary South African art needed to lead

2.4. Museums in a Changing and Divided Society

Following the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976, where a peaceful protest by school children was met with police gunfire, the 1980s were characterised by the most intense civic and student unrest the country had ever witnessed, with resistance to apartheid growing steadily. As described by Sue Williamson (1989:8): “Soweto was aflame. The furious sparks set the rest of the country alight; hundreds died, thousands fled. In the space of a few months, things in South Africa had been changed forever.” It was becoming evident that the country was reaching a crisis point. Anticipating this watershed social and political transformation, museums and galleries, the SANG included, were beginning to modify their policies and practices accordingly. One of the earliest of its kind was a conference at UCT titled *State of Art in South Africa*, chaired by Neville Dubow. At this conference, acclaimed writer and activist Nadine Gordimer (1979:4) called for a “frank appraisal of the institutions and policies of the white communities that affect the arts in South Africa.” However, it was only some time later, at the 51st South African Museums Association (SAMA) conference in 1987, themed *Museums in a Changing and Divided Society*, that the following resolution was taken: “South African museums sincerely strive to be seen to belong to all South Africans irrespective of colour, creed or gender” (SAMA, 1987).

At the same time, the South African museological journal SAMAB was hosting debate about what the new roles for museums might be in a democratic South Africa. In a contribution in 1987, former director of the Natal Museum, Dr Brian Stuckenbergh (1987:294) poignantly posed the question: “Does the sum total of our efforts … have any relevance to, or degree of acceptance for, black South Africans?” The rhetoric of transformation in this period was ubiquitous. Museums and galleries began to pledge their commitment vocally to the new nation-building imperative, and to re-establish their roles as sites for the education thereof. The function of museums and galleries in the ‘new’ South Africa would be as “instruments of reconciliation . . .

the Gallery into the 1990s, and that he was unsuitable for the close engagements with the relevant stakeholders, which needed to take place. Dolby stated that “citing these factors [van Niekerk] stated that Ms Martin was eminently qualified to be the new Director” (Dolby, 2015 – Examiner’s Report).

[and] social cohesion" (Stuckenberg, 1987:297). David Owen (1988:149), from the Albany Museum in Grahamstown, suggested that the new role for cultural institutions should be to "promote greater understanding among the different groups in southern Africa, and . . . peace and harmony by demonstrating the very real similarities in experience rather than the differences." In this regard, while director of the JAG, Christopher Till's contribution to SAMAB went directly to the crux of the debate. Till (1989:215) wanted fellow curators and museologists to recognise that:

Museums have an important part to play in the present turbulent history of our country, and the acknowledgement of the need to adjust our thinking and approach to accommodate past neglects and present expectations must, through necessity, be tempered by the practicalities of achieving the ideal we seek – that is, to be seen to be relevant and indispensable within the fabric of society.

The 'ideal' sought by cultural institutions in the 1990s was to be considered relevant and indispensable to the emerging new South African society. Modifying form and function was a means to achieving that ideal. Where previously the SANG's policies reflected predominantly white South African nationalisms, the debates in SAMAB re-positioned South African museums within a reconciliatory and inclusive nation-building role. As such, South African galleries and museums believed there was a potential to reconstitute their relevance by demonstrating their ability to produce, display, and thus imagine, the new South African identity, and thereby contribute to the new nation-building project. This was a prerequisite to their survival. In this regard Martin (1993:n.p) optimistically proclaimed in 1993: "We are privileged to be part of the transformation of South African society . . . culture has never been higher on the agenda." However, as chronicled in the Gallery's newsletter *Bonani*, its financial position steadily worsened throughout the 1990s.

2.5. The Art Museum for the Nation

Amid the debates surrounding the relevance and roles of museums in the forthcoming 'new' South Africa, and a month before Mandela was released from prison, Martin was appointed

director of the Gallery in January 1990. Martin was a prominent member of the South African art world. As an academic she had lectured history of art and architecture at the Department of Architecture at the University of Witwatersrand, contributed to the formulation of arts policies in the 1980s, served on many boards and editorial committees, commissioned South Africa's entry to the VII Valparaiso Biennial in Chile (somewhat controversially⁶¹), and was experienced in arts administration having served as the National President of the SAAA.

⁶¹ In defiance of the cultural boycott, which was endorsed by many artists in South Africa, in 1985 Martin (as Vice-President of the SAAA) commissioned South Africa's entry for the VII Valparaiso Biennial in Chile, and served on the panel of judges for the biennial itself. Colin Richards detailed the cause for controversy as being based on the following facts: "That Chile [was] ruled by an undemocratic military dictatorship perceived by some to be cruelly repressive"; "that the South African Apartheid regime actively cultivate[d] relations with that government and vice versa"; and "that this exhibition [was] implicated in that relationship" (Richards, 2010). In the subsequent Valparaiso Biennial in 1987, following public outcry a public statement was released, Richards suggests as damage control, "to both personal reputations and the credibility of the SAAA." Signed by the artists involved: "We reject politically oppressive systems wherever they occur" (1987:3). Richards, however, found this difficult to accept, and asked how one could hold this position: "while actively and wittingly collaborating with the producers and agents of such systems?" The cultural collaboration, according to Richards, was, in fact, part of a broader political programme with Chile, which also involved the military: "it is in the context of the military that the relationship between the two states has been most openly and enthusiastically engaged. Even here culture is not ignored" (Richards). A reference to the fact that, on at least two occasions, South Africa had celebrated 'Chilean National Day' at Fort Klapperkop in Pretoria (Richards, 2010).

In 1985 Martin also opened a photographic exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum titled *The Face of Chile*. The exhibition, of Chilean photography, included a picture of ESMARALDA, a Chilean Navy vessel that had visited South Africa in 1981. While anchored off the shore of Valparaiso the navy vessel was used as a centre for detention, and a chamber for torture, for Chilean political prisoners. According an Amnesty International description of these atrocities: "at times the brutality reached animalistic levels" (Amnesty International, 1976:207). In a review of *The Face of Chile* exhibition, Martin (1986:65) described her hope: "that these photographs will shorten the geographical distance between Chile and South Africa. We have in art a truly universal language." Considering that five years later, in 1990, Martin presented her new vision for the SANG, this anecdote is perhaps indicative of the adaptability to shifting perspectives that accompanied the transition to democracy. People in positions of power and authority found themselves having to protect their institutions by rapidly reassessing past positions, policies, and practices.

For further analysis of the controversy regarding South Africa's participation in the Valparaiso Biennial in Chile, refer to Richards' comprehensive *Feeding the Hand that Bites: South African Art & the Valparaiso Biennial of 1987* (2010).

Soon after Martin's appointment as director, the SANG's collection and exhibition policies were radically overhauled. These new policy documents articulated the Gallery's repositioning and thus pledged contribution to the nation-building project of the 1990s. According to the new mission statement, *The Art Museum for the Nation*, the Gallery would strive "to accommodate this diversity in its functions and activities while recognizing and supporting the possibility of building a national culture" (SANG, 1991:6).⁶² In the *Draft Policy* (1990), echoing a statement by John Paris 40 years prior, this new approach was considered the outline for making the SANG "truly the gallery for the nation" (Martin, 1990:6). Martin submitted the *Policy Manual* to the SANG's Board of Trustees in February 1991 and it was accepted in May. The document outlined the Gallery's new position as follows:

Our objective is to plan and to establish specific strategies so that the SANG of the future will not merely be a projection of its past, but will be in tune with and reflect the changing environment in which it functions. This includes reassessment and redefinition of its role in society and of existing policies and practices. (SANG, 1991:7)

Martin (1990:7) suggested that "until recently" Eurocentric value systems had prevailed in South Africa. According to the *Policy Manual*, while displays of art previously initiated by the SANG had been "excellent", they had reflected a Eurocentric bias and Africa had been consigned to minor exhibitions (SANG, 1991:7). The Gallery's transformational objectives would aim to redress this imbalance:

⁶² Contemporary South African art is often characterised by its 'diversity'. Yet this seems to have been the case historically too. In 1910 when the idea of a South Africanism in art and literature was being promoted, it would be a "cosmopolitan hotchpotch" created by combinations of heritage and culture "existing probably nowhere else" (Meiring Beck, 1910:367). Similarly half a century later in 1965, the Chairman of the Board A.H Honikman considered how:

Diverse influences over the centuries have given South Africa an art heritage that is rich. Characteristic qualities, which will be of immense interest to the world of art are becoming manifest. Every opportunity must be given to develop those qualities, not for the sake of Art alone, but in the interests of the cultural development of the S.A Nation. (Honikman, 1965:9)

Through our exhibition programme we must participate in the rewriting of art history in South Africa, and curate exhibitions which will give a balanced and representative view of art activities in this country – past and present. (SANG, 1991:7)

Although Bokhorst, and Paris, had argued the case for a department of Historical African Art much earlier, Martin suggested that “somehow it was neglected in the succeeding decades” (Martin, 1991:7). As a result, the Gallery would “seriously and actively” redress this situation: “While it is agreed in principle that we shall collect the traditional art of South Africa, objects from other parts of the continent will be considered if and when they become available” (Martin, 1991:7). Reflecting on the SANG’s position some time later, Martin declared:

The beadwork, the baskets, the textiles, the headdresses . . . have exactly the same status as the paintings and the sculptures. I’m not interested in the so-called ‘fine art’ categories because they are not our categories. They’re European categories and we shifted from all that to be inclusive. (Martin in Goodnow, 2006:171)

As defined in the *Policy Manual* (1991:7): “an acquisition and exhibition policy of inclusivity rather than exclusivity should be pursued.” Initially the SANG’s collections of ‘African art’, beadwork, baskets and headdresses, were administered by the curator of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture, and thus one of the major tasks was establishing a department for the ‘African’ art collection. In 1993 the post of Curator of African Art was created and Carol Kaufmann was appointed to the position. In 2013, reflecting on this period, Kaufmann described the excitement after Nelson Mandela’s release, and the subsequent “scramble to redress grave cultural omissions” (Kaufmann in Pather, 2013).

Also central to the *Policy Manual* (1991:7) was education, and the SANG's function as an educational institution.⁶³ The policy for addressing imbalances in South African educational systems would be two-fold. Firstly, the Gallery would prioritise education programmes directed towards Xhosa-speaking students and teachers.⁶⁴ Secondly, the Gallery would facilitate "art educational activities." Overall, as stated in the *Policy Manual* (1991:8), the Gallery would provide "formal, non-formal and informal teaching programmes." Essential to this approach, and to draw in broader audiences, the *Policy Manual* removed all admission fees. Illustrating how it perceived its purpose as a publicly funded museum, the *Policy Manual* (1991:8) considered free access to the SANG as being as integral a component to South African academic, educational and cultural sectors, as free access to libraries and basic education.

Martin's role as director in the transition involved striking the balance between transforming the gallery and retaining its traditional support base, which at times was a difficult pursuit. In 1997 Martin (1997:18) described the "unease, disapproval and controversy with which the first manifestations of the new directions were greeted." The *Recent Acquisitions* (1991) and *Affinities* (1991) exhibitions were early manifestations of the new directions in acquisition and exhibition policies and practices. A public debate that accompanied the exhibition was characterised by criticism, from "traditional stakeholders of the SANG and some artists" (Martin, 1997:25). According to Martin, criticism was directed at the "changes in acquisition policy and the acquisition of beadwork and politically powerful works,"⁶⁵ and was fuelled by the misconception

⁶³ Notably, in 1991 the SANG was still under the aegis of the governmental Department of National Education.

⁶⁴ In the *Draft Policy* (1990:7) Martin considered how: "Traditional African art is not created to be isolated in a building or put in a display case... African art is not necessarily familiar or comprehensible to modern urban black people. The possibilities for educational programmes in this regard are vast and challenging, particularly at a time when the crisis in black education has to be faced" (Martin, 1990:7).

⁶⁵ In 1993 Sachs wrote a letter to the editor of *Bonani*, the then recently established SANG newsletter. Sachs claimed that, "for those people who are worried that the SA National Gallery is being subverted, the position is worse than they thought," and proceeded to give insight into the Herbert Meyerowitz crafted-panels that are fitted around some of the doors in the Gallery. Carved in the early 1930s, one of the panels depicts ships docked in the Cape Town harbour, with one of the ships named 'HM Umsebenzi'. According to Sachs, "At the time *The Umsebenzi (The Worker)* was a revolutionary newspaper directed principally at dockworkers and other members of the black working class" (Sachs, 1993:n.p). Jack and Ray Simons

that the “historical collections would be neglected” (Martin in Cook, 2009:170). Notably, one of the first policy changes after Martin’s appointment is found near the end of the *Policy Manual* (1991:12) under the sub-heading *Alienation and Disposal of Objects and Collections*: “While taking cognizance of the rules governing the disposal of collections as formulated by the South African Museum Association, the SANG does not practise de-accession or disposal of objects.” In the process of revising policy it was decided “to regard the collections as a whole as inalienable” and thus to neither de-accession or dispose of artworks in the collection (SANG, 1997:39).⁶⁶ Reflecting on these policy changes in 2008, Martin suggested that “regardless if they were seen as relics of colonial domination,” the first responsibility was to “safeguard” the collection. In light of a history whereby sales, or the proposals for sales, were made for the wrong reasons, soon after being appointed, Martin prioritised worked on new legislation “[and now] it’s virtually impossible to deaccession something” (Martin in Cook, 2009:168).

The SANG *Policy Manual* of 1991 not only articulated an ideological shift at the Gallery, but also signalled a shift in professional practice. While van Niekerk’s policy document of 1980 was a short text, referring only to what was ‘represented’ and what was ‘acquired’, the succeeding *Policy*

(1969:427) describe how *The Umsebenzi* was in fact, from April 1930, the new name for the South African Communist Party newspaper, and soon became “a powerful political force among Africans and Coloureds.” Apparently the Meyerowitz ‘political joke’ was widely applauded in the Leftist circles to which he belonged. Extending the analogy Sachs concluded, “For many it must seem that their worst fears are being realised and the revolutionary ship has at last anchored in what was once considered the safest of harbours” (Sachs, 1993:n.p). Sachs was suggesting that the ‘revolutionary ship’ had, in fact, been anchored there all along.

⁶⁶ The *Stratford Report* suggested that the sales in the 1940s were motivated by financial insufficiency, and affirmed that this should never be a determining factor in the disposal of art. The report did, however, suggest that works deemed “inappropriate for inclusion in the collection” should first be disposed with by loan or gift to other institutions. Stratford stated unequivocally: “I do not think the idea of sales should altogether be excluded” (*Stratford Report*, 1947:6-7). According to the Report (1947:6-7), the Board rejected this, and rather recommended that “in future sales of works of art should be entirely prohibited.” However, they agreed that ‘redundant’ pictures of quality could be sent to other institutions as loan collections and gifts. Although, in a Governmental report published in 1962, the right of exchange and alienation was “noted with approval” (Republic of South Africa, 1962).

Manual of 1991 modernised the Gallery's approach altogether, in accordance with international museum practices.⁶⁷

2.6. The White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage and the 'Southern Flagship' Institution

In addition to debates in South Africa's museum community, and the subsequent revision of SANG policy, the sector itself underwent review and investigation, and broader governmental cultural policies were being developed. Starting as the Commission on Museums, Monuments and Heraldry (CMMH) in 1991, the ANC's *Commission for Reconstruction and Transformation for the Arts and Culture* (CREATE) was published in 1993 and aimed "to engage the state, develop future policy and push for the democratisation of the country's cultural institutions" (Odendaal, 1995:19). In 1992, after campaigning from SAMA, the *Museums for South Africa: Intersectoral Investigation for National Policy* (MUSA) was established. The ANC dismissed MUSA as an attempt by the prevailing museum establishment to retain their power and control, and when the MUSA report was completed in 1994, it was declared "consultatively flawed," "unrepresentative," and "an attempt to maintain the status quo . . . at national cultural institutions whose directors had dominated MUSA" (Odendaal, 1995:19). Ultimately SAMA and the ANC agreed that MUSA was inadequate, and all investigation material was handed over to the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) for further investigation (Odendaal, 1995:19-20). The result of which would become the Department of Art, Culture, Science and Technology's (DACST) *White Paper on Art, Culture and Heritage* (1996). Writing in the Gallery newsletter *Bonani* in 1995, Martin (1995:1) considered ACTAG and the proposals for a "new dispensation for museums, and a single, unifying policy." Martin (1995:1) stated:

The concepts of nationhood, national consciousness and of a national culture are integral to the new South Africa. One of the most important ways of contradicting

⁶⁷ The manual included a comprehensive outline for all functions of the gallery (Collecting, Curatorship, Research, Communication, Promotion of Museology, and Administration; and Budgetary and Financial Control), the structural organisation (relationship with the State, and the terms of reference for the Board of Trustees), and amongst others, an outline for Institutional Ethics and Procedures (SANG, 1991).

the fragmentation of people and culture created by the Apartheid regime, and of nurturing and fostering the rainbow nation – which allows for *sameness* and for *difference* – is through a national art museum and other cultural institutions with national status.

In the 1990s, the SANG was the self-proclaimed pivot to the reconstruction of South African society:

We believe that we are doing more than passively holding up a mirror to society, that we inform, construct, change and direct the narrative – aesthetically, culturally, historically, politically – through our acquisitions and exhibitions, that we invigorate art practice and that the national art museum is integral to refiguring and reinventing South African art and identity. (Martin, 1997:18)

However, who was subject of this inculcation? The perception is that the audience was still mostly white. The director and the curators were still white. If there has been a failure to attract ‘diverse’ audiences and simultaneously ‘diverse’ curators and researchers, how successful has this ‘social technology’ actually been? Was this merely a form of posturing to achieve an ideal: to reconstitute relevance and thus to retain funding?

By their definitions, national collections reflect the nations to which they belong, and so as the idea of the South African nation changed, so did the responsibilities of its national gallery. In this sense the SANG *Policy Manual* of 1991 pre-empted the mandatory Government policy that followed.⁶⁸ After the country’s first democratic elections in 1994, with Mandela’s ANC the new political dispensation, the Government introduced the *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* into policy in 1996. The DACST’s *White Paper* outlined the new government’s position on arts

⁶⁸ The SANG policy of 1991 was characterised by the active shift in collections and exhibition policies towards inclusivity and pluralism, and away from Eurocentrism. Similarly the *White Paper* ensured that museums, previously focused on a narrow definition of art, acknowledge broader modes of artistic production.

and culture.⁶⁹ Now by edict, public cultural institutions would reflect the reimagined nation, and thus contribute to the nation-building project of the 1990s:

The ministry will ensure that public institutions such as museums, which have previously focused attention almost exclusively on a narrow definition of the visual arts take cognisance of our craft and design heritage and acknowledge this in their acquisition and education policies. (DACST, 1996:24)

The *White Paper* (DACST, 1996:13) asserted that the arts, culture and heritage sectors had a vital role to play in the development, nation building and sustainability of South Africa's emerging democracy. More specifically, arts and culture would "play a healing role through promoting reconciliation" and "encourage mutual respect and tolerance and intercultural exchange between the various cultures and forms of art to facilitate the emergence of a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity." Considering that apartheid ideologies were grounded in ideas of racial difference⁷⁰, the new centralised policies hinged on a unity in 'diversity'. The policy (DACST, 1996:18-19) was guided by, among others, the following operational principles:

Redress: shall ensure the correction of historical and existing imbalances through development, education, training and affirmative action with regard to race, gender, rural and urban considerations.

Nation-building: Shall foster a sense of pride and knowledge of South African culture, heritage and the arts. Shall further encourage mutual respect and tolerance and intercultural exchange between the various cultures and forms of art to facilitate the emergence of a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity.

⁶⁹ Perhaps Neville Dubow's skepticism regarding Albie Sachs' *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* was justified. It appears the ANC's cultural desk did not heed to Sachs' call against determinist claims for culture.

⁷⁰ Artist Andrew Verster, in his contribution to the *State of Art in South Africa* conference at UCT in 1979, considered 'separateness' as "the rationale behind all Nationalist thinking, the motivation for every law" (Verster, 1979:22).

Diversity: Shall ensure the recognition of aesthetic pluralism and a diversity of artistic forms, within a multicultural context.

The *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* required institutions to be more self-sustaining, and as a result funding was reduced for many galleries and museums. It was indeed a testing time for the museum sector and survival seemed to be the priority. In 1999, following the promulgation of the Cultural Institutions Act in 1998, the SANG was one of the 15 Cape Town museums merged into the overarching Southern Flagship Institution.⁷¹ Linked administratively, the museums, in 2001 named Iziko⁷² Museums of Cape Town, and in 2012 renamed again, Iziko Museums of South Africa, were “charged with the tasks of ‘transformation’ and ‘nation-building’” (Goodnow, 2006:166-7). According to the 2004 Iziko (2004:9; 11; 13) Annual Report, ‘Strategic Objective 1’ for Iziko was to “drive the transformation process according to national guidelines,” ‘Strategic Objective 2’ was to achieve “service excellence,” and ‘Strategic Objective 3’ was to “build, care for, and interpret the collections of Iziko.” In 2013 the Chairman of the Iziko Council Ciraj Rassool (2013:8) elaborated:

The merger of previously separate heritage institutions . . . was intended to be a catalyst to drive change; undo entrenched, divisive and discriminatory policies; and bring together these museums and diverse collections of art, social and natural history to form a powerful flagship able to serve the South African nation and our new democracy.

⁷¹ Clearly the irony of naming the organisation, with a declared function of transformation and redress, after British Royal Navy sailing jargon, was lost on the DACST.

⁷² *Iziko* is an isiXhosa word meaning ‘a hearth’. According to the Iziko website, since a hearth in a typical ‘African’ home is typically a central space: “Iziko symbolizes both a hub of cultural activity, and a central place for gathering together South Africa’s diverse heritage” (Iziko, 2014).

2.7. More Inclusive, More Critical, More Diverse, and More ‘Representative’

In 2009 Martin retired from her position as director of Art Collections at Iziko and was succeeded by Riason Naidoo. Naidoo offered rhetoric akin to that of Martin two decades prior. In accordance with Iziko’s strategic objectives, Naidoo saw a ‘new vision’ for the Iziko SANG, albeit without a shift in policy, with objectives to be:

More inclusive in the audiences we appeal to, more critical in the selection of our exhibitions and in the work we acquire, more diverse in the composition and views of the people that make up our committees, and more representative of a multicultural society in Africa. (Naidoo, 2010:n.p)

However, considering that under Naidoo’s tenure as director the Iziko SANG was beset by immense constraints, and appeared unable to attract donations or patronage in any meaningful form, how would it implement its own policies and achieve its own objectives?

The most recent radical shift in state rhetoric has been towards the multi-cultural ‘rainbow nation’, a nationhood where ‘unity in diversity’ was considered imperative. These various socio-political transformations have been reflected in changes to the Gallery’s various policy documents. If policies articulate in theory how the Gallery perceives its function, then the implementation of those policies gives form to that function. The following two chapters look specifically at collection and exhibition practices, in an attempt to examine how the Gallery’s shifting polices were implemented in Gallery practices, and the resultant effects on the Gallery’s form.

What is understood thus far is that with each new broad socio-political dispensation, a new conception of South African nationhood was established, and so a new objective was developed for the Iziko SANG. The Gallery has reflected the mercurial notions of nation since its founding. As a colony, the imagined nation was still that of the mother country. With incipient South African nationalism, the young state comprised a union of the two primary settler identities. After 1948, with increasing maturity, this nationalism started to claim an identity and once it had

matured sufficiently, it divorced itself from its parent state, and declared independence in 1961. This nationalising imperative was mandated in Gallery policy. In the mid century, for the first time, the SANG began writing, promoting, and validating the story of South African art. When Paris was appointed director of the SANG, and was implementing recommendations made in the *Stratford Report*, he recognised that the inherited art history, and the composition of the permanent collection, reflected a divergent notion of nation. Omissions in the story, artists not collected by the SANG, promptly constituted ‘critical gaps’. In the mid-century it was understood that the gaps needed to be filled in order to show the development and tell the full story of South African Art (SANG, 1968). In the early 1990s, when Martin was appointed as director of the SANG, she similarly recognised that the inherited art history was unsuited to the new notion of South African nation, and that redress was imperative. A much broader, more inclusive, and yet still state-sanctioned nationalism was developing, and it was similarly clear that there were ‘critical gaps’ in the collection that needed to be filled in order to tell the full story, or now the *untold* story, of South African Art.

Prior (2002:38) suggests that museums not only indexed the cultural interests of the nation-state, but also “mobilized these interests” and provided a culture where “official ideologies were made and remade.” Historically the SANG’s articulation of values and ideals have reflected shifting cultural interest. Considering Prior’s argument, the SANG also functioned to construct these interests, and national identities. This has been ultimately political, thus perhaps also ultimately flawed. This ideal of constructing and reconstructing official ideologies prevails in Iziko SANG policy. In this regard, Colin Richards (2010:19) considered the following:

A national gallery and its collections are active agents and powerful forces in the production of a national culture. In this sense the institution reproduces a legacy not structurally at odds with the ‘official’ culture of either the past Apartheid State, nor indeed the colonial institutions which preceded it.

In each period of dramatic social transformation, the Gallery has understood its function as being generative, not merely reflective, of a South African culture. Despite this function itself being questionable, the SANG’s ability and performance in this regard is also moot. Under Iziko, and since

Martin retired in 2009, the Gallery has twice raised its admission fees, the unquestionable result of which is exclusion, undermining objectives for ‘inclusivity’, and entrenching negative perceptions of elitism.

Chapter Three

Describing the Stories of South African Art: SANG Collection Practices In Context

Throughout its history, the SANG has reflected the shifting definitions of South African nationhood in its policies, and, in turn, in its collection practices. Initially the permanent collection reflected the early history of the SANG within its Cape Colonial context, and thus predominantly comprised British late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century art. South African artists were largely unacknowledged in the Gallery's early collections. When political power shifted towards an exclusively nationalist orientation in 1948, the SANG adapted accordingly and rigorously began acquiring the work of white South African artists. Half a century later, again reflecting watershed political and social transformation, the image of South African nationhood was dramatically re-imagined, profoundly influencing the inclusion of black South African artists in public collections.

There is a discernible similarity in the rhetoric occasioning the Gallery's adaptations to respective epochal moments in South African history. After a socio-political prompt in the mid-century, the formerly neglected white South African artists were written into the official canons of South African art. As validated by the SANG's permanent collection, again in the 1990s, again after socio-political prompt, a previously subaltern notion of art was suddenly deemed integral to the official canon. With each occasion, the SANG's ostensive imperative was to be more 'representative' and to 'fill the gaps'. With each occasion, South African nationhood was redefined and previously excluded groups were included. This chapter will consider how the modifications to SANG's policies, mirroring redefinitions of South African nationhood, were implemented in the Gallery's collection practices, and will thus examine the subsequent impact on the composition of the SANG's permanent collection.

The legacies of colonialism and apartheid are engrained in the compositions of South African public collections. These collections and the art historical narratives they portray have mutually influential relationships as they both shape and are shaped by each other. Importantly, they also

both shape and are shaped by the dominant values of their societies. Initially the nation was not a nation at all, but rather a British colony. The South African Art Gallery gravitated firmly towards Britain, and collected predominantly British art.⁷³ In the mid-century, policies and practices at the SANG adapted to the nation's nationalizing imperative by including white South African artists in their collections and displays. However, black South Africans, who had always been largely excluded from participating in a white controlled South African society, were still unrepresented. When the NP introduced statutory apartheid this exclusion was systematised in racially discriminatory legislation. In the early 1990s, with apartheid being dismantled and the promise of a new non-racial South African society on the horizon, indeed a new political dispensation, the imagined nation transformed once more. Reflecting this, initially to reconstitute relevance and later by edict, art museums became increasingly committed to collecting and displaying previously neglected black artists, and under-acknowledged black visual and material culture. Institutions had wittingly or unwittingly reflected ideological values in support of the 'old' South Africa. Now at odds with the destined 'new' South Africa, galleries and museums needed to transform urgently. Although many galleries had already acquired art by black South Africans prior to the new political dispensation in 1994 (the SANG for instance had started purchasing works by black artists three decades prior), there was a great imbalance that needed redress.

In an analysis of the SANG's collection practices it is necessary to consider the Gallery's role in relation to existing art historical theories. The contemporary approach to cultural history maintains that art museums are social mechanisms, employed for their ability to imagine, construct and validate powerful ideologies and identities. According to Prior (2002:4), galleries and museums have the power to promote "dominant national myths" and thus to provide "cultural cement" to strategic projects of socio-political importance. According to McClellan (2003:7), museums shape their publics, and are thus "an engine of social and economic progress"

⁷³ Many of the works entering the collection in its early history were gifts and bequests, and thus the Gallery reflected the individual values and tastes of its Cape Colonial patrons. At least as early as 1910, when the Gallery did make purchases (even though this may have accounted for only a minority of accessioned works), the task for acquiring art was entrusted to, amongst others, Professor George Clausen of the Royal Academy in London (Roworth, 1910:9).

and a contributor to “national cohesion.” In 1910 Edward Roworth (1910:8), the Anglophilic honorary director of the SANG of the 1940s, referred to the “social mission of art” and argued that art “becomes, in fact, a social performance.” Public art museums have not anywhere achieved ideological neutrality, but this fact, according to Rankin (1995:56), has a particular meaning in South Africa, where art galleries and their collections have provided an “all too accurate mirror of South African society.”

However, despite the fundamental shifts in SANG policies accompanying these periods of social transformation, it would be naive to assume that collection practices have simply complied with the dominant national narrative. Many of the collections are the result of benefaction and thus reflect the ideals of the benefactor.⁷⁴ Separately, there are indeed many instances where SANG purchases have actually subverted ‘national narratives’, particularly evident in early collections of black South African art in the 1960s, and in collections of ‘Resistance Art’ in the 1970s and 1980s, both of which under the apartheid regime. Furthermore is the consideration of underfunding, which has almost always influenced the Gallery’s collection practices, and sometimes prevented them altogether.

Referring to an essay published in *The Civil and Military Gazette* titled “Art and Empire” (1910), to illustrate the manner in which the JAG was promoted and established⁷⁵, Carman (1987:28-29)

⁷⁴ Although, benefactions still required the Board’s approval before being assessed into the Gallery’s collection.

⁷⁵ Many of the Randlords, including Abe Bailey, contributed financially to the establishment of the JAG. The following extract is from a letter, written in 1910 by Sir Lionel Phillips to his business associate Sir Julius Wernher while fundraising, and illustrates the Randlords’ socio-political understanding of art, culture, and their patronage of cultural institutions. Perhaps also their moral fibre:

Now that we may look upon the Witwatersrand as more or less of a permanent industry, it is absolutely necessary to cultivate the people’s minds and teach them to regard this country as their home. That certainty is the only way to counteract those tendencies which produce an exaggerated sense of hatred in the minds of the ‘have nots’ against the ‘haves’. If one considers the profit taken out of this country and the comparatively little spent in those voluntary institutions which in other countries . . . contribute to the people’s enlightenment and contentment, one realises how it is that the absentee capitalist is so disliked. Retribution in the shape of exactions will always exceed the amount that would be sufficient as a voluntary contribution! . . .

has described how advocating for colonial galleries in the early twentieth-century was motivated by their potential to “extend the same ideals of enlightenment and, as far as possible, the same standards of taste as the imperial originators.” Considering the imperial impetus behind the Anglo-Boer war, Carman (1987:28-29) concludes: “what anathema this must have been to the average Afrikaner.” The writer of “Art and Empire” may have considered that the opposite was true. Referring to Union as a “union of British and Dutch blood,” the article considered the promotion of art throughout the Empire as a “balm for ancient wounds and misconceptions” and separately as “one of the noblest forms of emulation” (“Art and Empire”, 1910:15-16). As discussed in a chapter one, a similar project was conceived in the Michaelis Gift of Old Masters, which was “widely publicized as a means of promoting a united sense of nationalism for English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans” (Stevenson, 1997:33).

3.1. Social Missions of Art

In the 1990s South African museums and public art galleries were re-establishing their roles. According to Coombes (2004:206) the accompanying dilemma involved determining what the ideal role of a national institution might be: was the new function “to educate for transition and for a new model of nation unity” or was it to “eschew a conciliatory role in favour of exploring the contradictions and tensions of a more dynamic model of history and society?” The ANC government’s official re-imagining was the ‘rainbow nation’, designed to “foster national solidarity while accommodating ethnic diversity” (Coombes, 2004:206-7). As discussed in the previous chapter, while the SANG’s *Policy Manual* (1991) pre-empted this position, in any event by 1996 it had become official Government policy. The *White Paper* thus described how public cultural institutions would “play a healing role through promoting reconciliation” and “encourage mutual respect and tolerance and intercultural exchange between the various cultures and forms of art to facilitate the emergence of a shared cultural identity constituted by diversity”

Comparatively trifling amounts, given with a good will for objects that appeal to the hearts of the people, would be an economy and absolutely in the best interests of the shareholders. (Fraser & Jeeves, 1977:224-5)

(DACST, 1996:13). Ultimately, like Roworth's assertion in 1910, in the 1990s the SANG was the proponent for the new 'social mission in art'.

With Martin as the new director, and with new policies guiding collection and exhibition-making practices, the SANG (along with many other museums in South Africa) was demonstrating its ability to adapt to new conditions. In the 1990s Martin had been very vocal about the SANG's role in the 'new' South Africa. With reference to this, Ingrid de Kok (1998:62-63) noted that "criticism of the pace of such change, or of the opportunistic rewriting of collection policies or other practices, has been outmanoeuvred by successful public re-profiling of the gallery." At a conference in 1996, Martin suggested that since 1990, "every function of the institution has been reassessed and tested against the needs and requirements of a changing South Africa," and with a stronger emphasis on "social and educational responsibilities" the gallery would "no longer cater for a privileged elite" (Martin, 1996:n.p.). The SANG was re-profiled as an institution ostensibly integral to the re-construction of South African society, whereby the function of its collections and exhibitions were to "address the historical problem of cultural difference in South Africa" (Martin, 2001:9-10).

As described in the previous chapter, the SANG's funding predicament was becoming increasingly severe. In this regard, with sustained inadequate funding of South African museums, de Kok accurately predicted that as competition for scarce national and provincial funding intensified, one could expect "various exhibitions and engagements that will speak more or less crudely to the requirements for 'nation building', the concept now guiding many publicly funded cultural institutions" (de Kok, 1998:62-63). Museums and public art galleries would conform to national agendas as a means of attracting and retaining vital and scarce financial resources.

Marschall has described the radical post-apartheid repositioning of South African art history as the transformation "from an elitist, Eurocentric, exclusive art historical discourse to a radically re-defined one" (Marschall, 1999). This re-definition referred to a 'new South African art' and was primarily characterised by the paradigm shift that impacted on the collecting of black South

African artists.⁷⁶ This process involved what Marschall later defined as a ‘strategy of accommodation’, which included ‘filling the gaps’ and thus collecting black artists under-collected in the past, collecting ‘inclusively’ within a broader definition of art, and collecting emerging artists (Marschall, 2001). In so doing, according to Martin (2001:9-10), the SANG would “participate in the writing and rewriting of South African history and art history.”

3.2. Narrating Nation

In the 1990s debates about the roles for cultural institutions positioned museums and public art galleries as a “potential staging post for the re-inscription of public history” (Coombes, 2004:206). The primary concern of which, according to Coombes (2004:206), centred on redressing the “imbalances of hegemonic historical narrative” resulting from a complex South African history. The SANG, as a national institution with assumed art historical authority, gives formal support and validation to the artists they acquire and the artworks they exhibit. With this imperative to institutionalise artists, and modes of artistic production, that had previously been marginalised, the SANG would contribute to a new South African art history.

Cultural production, according to Colin Richards, has the potential to conceal truth, as well as compromise, erase and misrepresent a complex history. Cultural producers and curators, as ‘visual anthropologists’ and public intellectuals, have a responsibility to public history because of the power they hold over its construction. The abuse of that power, Richards declares, is a form

⁷⁶ A pertinent example of the revision of South African art history is found in the juxtaposition of Esmé Berman’s *Story of South African Painting* (1975) with the later edition, *Painting in South Africa* (1993). While the 1975 edition mostly excludes work by black artists, because, according to Berman in her foreword, “the plastic arts had not received widespread attention from the black South African community,” the revised 1993 edition includes a significant number of black artists. In the prologue to the revised edition, Berman considered the previous omission a result of “the very structure of South African society.” Until “quite recently,” Berman suggests, “the public perception and critical evaluation of that expression were governed by traditional Eurocentric canons of professionalism. Thus, public recognition was reserved to those who conformed with the conventional practices of urban exhibition and commissioned projects” (Berman, 1993:xix).

of institutional violence (Richards, 2009).⁷⁷ A process of accumulating and questioning knowledge allows for a reflective understanding of the present, and a critical understanding of the past. However, Richards urges, failure to engage risks of distortion, erasure, and ideological construction, reflects a failure of critical perspective (Richards, 2009).

The ‘national’ collection ostensibly embodies the imagined South African visual-cultural archive, and is thus an embodiment of a South African past. In a conference in 1996, Martin described the SANG permanent collection as the historical reflection of “social, economic and education inequalities, as well as the neglect of and disregard for the art and culture of our continent” (Martin, 1996:n.p). In the 1990s redress meant acquiring works by black South African artists previously omitted from South African canons of art, and separately broadening the very conceptualisation of art applicable to those canons. This broadening sought to destabilise the distinctions between fine art and ethnographic craft, and thus expanded the definitions of South African art production. According to Rankin (1995:56), this process “challenged the codes which informed orthodox canons of art based on a western model.” Black South African visual and cultural production, made outside ‘western model’ modes of art making, was previously housed in historical, or even natural history museums. Of course, this was not particular to South African museums; the European display of non-western art and artefacts collected from their colonies, as “trophies of imperial conquest” in Africa is well documented (Karp, 1991:16). These objects were first collected as curiosities and later appreciated for their ethnological interest. The notion that African cultural production might be equivalent to the aesthetic expressions of western cultures was unacceptable, and instead emphasis was placed on difference. According to Rankin (1995:61): “antitheses were constructed, of primitive as opposed to civilized, of nature versus culture.” In their international *Directory of Museums* (1975), Kenneth Hudson and Ann Nicholls (1975:385) described the museums of South Africa as “the museums of white South Africa,” and noted that:

⁷⁷ Richard’s reference to structural and institutional violence considered how ‘violence’ transcends physicality and enters social and cultural dimensions. Quoting Pierre Bourdieu, Richards thus considered symbolic violence as the kind “exercised on a social agent with his or her complicity” (Richards, 2009:256).

The non-white majority is represented, not in the planning and the organization of museums, but in ethnographical collections and exhibits – the European section of the population is, for some reason, not considered suitable material for ethnography . . . [History] is invariably presented from the point of view of the white man.

Carman (1987:20) has suggested that one cannot re-write the inherited histories of an art gallery because that would involve “deaccessioning an entire collection and starting again” and that it would be “much easier to start a new museum.” Occasionally political, cultural, and social transformations are indeed accompanied by new museums and monuments, but more often existing museums are modified to reflect shifting demands.⁷⁸

Art museums are constantly under development because the societies they reflect are themselves mutable and unpredictable. Art historian Marion Arnold (1986:106) has argued that “cultures are continuously in transition – in a state of evolution and modification” and that this fact is a dominant characteristic of art history itself. Artworks accessioned into the SANG’s permanent collection have embodied the Gallery’s shifting ideals, as articulated in SANG policy documents. The artworks remain there permanently and thus the outcomes of distinct collection practices, reflecting distinct moments in South African history, are layered chronologically one upon the other like the strata of hardened rock.

When the SANG encountered radical societal transformation, first in the late 1940s and more recently in the 1990s, the Gallery was forthright about its role as being active and generative, not merely reactive and reflective. In the contemporary approach to art history, public art museums are spaces for emulation, education, instruction and reformation, guided by official cultural

⁷⁸ As discussed, some of the earliest art museums in South Africa were prompted by the unifying imperative of the early twentieth-century. In 1962, a year after South Africa became a republic, the corner-stone of the Pretoria Art Museum was laid by Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd. The Pretoria Art Museum “focused strongly on South Africa art” and with its modern architectural style, eschewed the colonial neo-classical form, which had previously been favoured for public buildings (Rankin, 1995:58).

agendas. McClellan (2008:13-14) has argued that museums have essentially always been “dedicated to building a better society,” and by this definition, museums are then always active and generative. However, one feels this role has rarely been stated as explicitly – as it has at the SANG. Martin (1997:18) suggested that the SANG was integral to “refiguring and reinventing South African art and identity.” However, the SANG’s role and capacity might have been over-exaggerated in this regard. Nevertheless, the nation-building imperatives of the 1940s and 1990s had given fresh impetus to the SANG. Social transformation became a prompt for change, and any uncertainty about the SANG’s function was replaced by a firm sense of direction and purpose. The gallery needed to reflect and contribute to the transitions, and emphasise its own contributions, in order to remain culturally relevant. Moreover it needed to impress the new political dispensations, as a means to retaining and attracting funding, in order to survive.

The role of the SANG has reflected in its collection practices the multiple redefinitions of South African nationhood. The SANG has collected art in relation to the official national narrative of the day. It has done so largely in support of the dominant values, but sometimes to critically subvert those values. Collection practices have also been influenced by the subjective interests of individual directors, trustees, staff and Board members; the personal tastes of individual benefactors; and more broadly by new theories in international art discourses.

3.3. Constructing the Narrative: Writing the Story of South African art

In the mid-twentieth century, the *Stratford Report* (1947) considered the permanent collection to be unrepresentative of South Africa’s national art, and recommended that the SANG house representative examples of South African artists (Stratford Report, 1947:5). This realisation, that certain groups were inadequately represented in the collection, and the subsequent imperative for redress, is thus not a recent phenomenon in the history of the SANG. When new notions of national identity are imagined, then defined, they are later claimed in galleries and museums. McClellan has argued that, with the formation of new nation-states, cultural identity was shaped by national patrimony, which was then “embodied in historical artefacts and works of art openly displayed in public museums” (McClellan, 2003:20). In South Africa, when the new notions of

nation were imagined, the cultural production thereof was then integrated into existing collections and displays, and thus the SANG argued for their inclusion in the canon.

The early histories of the SANG and the JAG are similar in this regard. After much campaigning and fund-raising by Lady Florence Phillips and her Randlord coterie, the JAG was established in 1915.⁷⁹ As a reflection of JAG founders' cultural interests, the early collections of British art were predominant. When the JAG was officially opened, unlike the British, Dutch, Belgian, French and Italian artists, "South African artists did not warrant their own section" (Carman, 1987:20). While both the SANG and the JAG are public galleries, the JAG is a municipal gallery and thus deferred to the Johannesburg City Council. The City Council, Carman argued, curtailed funding for the Gallery as it was seen to be irrelevant to the broader Johannesburg community. Soon thereafter the JAG's controlling body realised that it was "appealing primarily to a privileged British-origin section of the community" and as a result the acquisition policy was adjusted and "an effort had to be made to be relevant to . . . the Afrikaans community of Dutch heritage" (Carman 1987:29). Indeed, the South African section was not the only requirement, as "many appear to have wanted an earlier Dutch collection as well" (Carman, 1987:28).⁸⁰ Shifting ideals

⁷⁹ Carman (2006:55) argues that the conception of the JAG was motivated by the Randlords' desire to create a stable civil society, to encourage a "particular type of settler to Johannesburg . . . and to assert the superiority of British culture." Furthermore, it presented an opportunity to enhance, in South Africa and 'back home', the Randlords' "philanthropic standing" which would lead to "greater social acceptance and to knighthoods" (Carman, 2006:55). Stevenson (1997:29) suggests that in the years following the Anglo-Boer war, and after the Randlords' decades-long dominance of South Africa's mineral wealth (which included much political mischief), their image as "ruthless plunderers of the land's resources" was "firmly embedded in the minds of the South African public." This perception was exacerbated by the fact that the Randlords were generally based in (or deferred to) Britain. Carman suggests that the establishment of the JAG would assist the Randlords in "countering the popular criticisms levelled at rapacious capitalists and absentee mine owners." (Carman, 2006:55) For a history of the JAG, please see Jillian Carman's *Uplifting the Colonial Philistine* (2006).

⁸⁰ Notably this imperative was given dramatic form in 1947 when a collection of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings was donated to the JAG. Of course, the timing of the donation coincided with the ascendency of Afrikaner Nationalism, which achieved an unprecedented shift in social, cultural, economic and political power in favour of Afrikaners' ostensibly "of Dutch heritage" (Carman, 1987:28). Perhaps the desire for a collection of Dutch painting was less urgent for the SANG, because of the pre-existing Max Michaelis Collection, and Cape Town's smaller Afrikaner community.

reflected broader societal transformation, and increasing Afrikaner cultural and political power meant it essential “for the rising generation of the new nation to be inspired by pictures of their Dutch forebears” for art collections in the Union of South Africa to not be “unbalanced” (Carman, 1987:28).

Carmen’s (1987) analysis of the JAG’s early collections provides a telling indication of how these ideological shifts were reflected in acquisition practices, and how this ultimately resulted in increasingly ‘South African’ acquisitions. From 1910 to 1929, only six paintings by South African artists were acquired (one via purchase and five via bequest). Throughout the 1930s, eighteen South African paintings were acquired (thirteen via purchase and five via bequest), and throughout the 1940s twenty-three South African paintings were acquired (nineteen via purchase and four via bequest). Carman (1987:30-31) argues that this increase in South African acquisitions also coincides with shifts in the form of directorship, from a keeper who took instructions from “an overseas authority” to an independent professional post. Specifically Carman refers to the appointment of P.A. Hendriks in 1937 as being particularly instrumental (Carman, 1987:32). It was during Hendriks’ directorship that the biggest shifts in the JAG’s acquisition policies and practices occurred. This is epitomised by the fact that eleven of the eighteen South African paintings acquired in the 1930s were done so in the three years following Hendriks’ appointment in 1937. According to Carman (1987:32), Hendriks set a trend whereby the South African collection would become one “of the largest and most representative collections in the JAG,” so much so that, a century after its inception, the works of South African artists now dominate the JAG, occupying its largest exhibition spaces.

Further analysis of the histories of the JAG and the SANG reveal additional and sometimes striking similarities. Members of the Anglo-South African political and economic elite were central to both their foundings. Their early directors and benefactors were Anglophile, and their early collections comprised predominantly British art. In the context of emerging Afrikaner nationalism, perceived ‘British affinities’ were adopted as political issues, and both the JAG and SANG were publicly accused of being pro-British. Both galleries subsequently adapted to their

shifting environments by increasing their holdings of South African modernism.⁸¹ For the JAG, however, this happened sooner, perhaps because of Johannesburg's larger Afrikaner community, but also because of the directorial vision of Hendriks who arrived in 1937. The SANG, on the other hand, was still directed by the 'pro-British' director Edward Roworth. After sales from the permanent collection, a NP parliamentarian accused Roworth of purging South African works to clear space for Randlord Sir Abe Bailey's collection of British art. Roworth resigned soon after the following commission of inquiry, and the resultant *Stratford Report* (1947:5-9) recommended the Gallery "contain representative examples of the work of South African artists" and importantly that it was "obviously preferable that the Director of the National Gallery should be South African bred in the traditions of this country and acquainted with both the official languages."

Presumably because of his success in transforming the composition of the JAG collection, the SANG attempted to appoint Hendriks as director to implement the recommendations outlined in the Stratford Report, and thus fulfil a mandate similar to what he had carried out at JAG. As discussed in the previous chapter, Hendriks ultimately withdrew his application upon inspecting the SANG's permanent collection and familiarising himself with its financial position (SANG, 1948). Despite being British (and not 'bred in the traditions of this country'), John Paris, the Board's second choice, was appointed. Paris was experienced in museum management (the previous honorary directors had been artists and academics), and was able to implement the nationalising recommendations of the *Stratford Report*.

Soon after Paris' appointment, a newspaper article titled "£15 000 Scheme for SA Art: Wider Scope for National Gallery" (1950), considered how the SANG had "launched a scheme for the systematic acquisition by purchases and loan of works of South African art of all styles and periods, including paintings and sculpture by representative living artists" (1950:n.p). This, of

⁸¹ The SANG had in fact been acquiring works by South African artists, however rather indiscriminately the works were mostly those of Wheatley and Roworth's Michaelis students. In a newspaper editorial, one critic suggested that there was a "conspicuous absence of all our painters . . . Pierneef, Nevile Lewis, Pilkington, Kottler, Gregoire Boonzaaier, Gwelo Goodman, Hugo Naude, etc. without whose work no collection of South African artists' work can be said to represent our contemporary art" ("What is wrong with the cape town national art gallery", 1939:26).

course, is notable for three reasons. Firstly, the idea that such an endeavour constituted a ‘wider scope’ indicates the extent to which it broke away from previous conventions. Secondly, it is an early example of conditional funding at the SANG, where money would be granted on the condition that it be used for purchases aligned to broader strategic nationalising objectives. Thirdly, the mention of “representative living artists” meant the SANG would acquire, promote and validate contemporary South African artists. Referring to this period, Tietze has argued that it was an era in which “a white South African pictorial identity had consolidated itself through the development of key genres . . . and the national canonization of selected artist-heroes” (Tietze, 2011:173). Beyond merely consolidating an already existing canon of South African art, the Gallery now understood its role as being formative, and thus part of the canon’s very construction.

In 1971, a decade after South Africa had become a republic in 1961 and two decades after the Gallery started systematically acquiring ‘national art’, the SANG contributed to the Republic Festival celebrations with an exhibition of South African art titled *From Our Own Soil*.⁸² For the first time the complete collection of South African art was exhibited simultaneously at the SANG. Accompanying the exhibition was a foreword by Bokhorst reflecting on the SANG’s early history as a means of contextualizing the present. Bokhorst lamented the SANG’s neglect of South African art in its early years. Using the widest possible definition⁸³ for South African art, Bokhorst (1972a:n.p) described how by 1930 there were still only 30 South African paintings and sculptures “amidst all the hundreds of artworks which the gallery already owned.” Referring to the SANG’s Board of Trustees’ disregard for South African art, Bokhorst (1972a:n.p) asserted:

⁸² Tellingly, the opening of the exhibition was officiated by H.G. Klopper, the founding member and first president of the *Afrikaner Broederbond*, a secret fraternity dedicated to the advancement of Afrikaner cultural, political, and economic interests. Klopper pioneered the Voortrekker reenactment that left Cape Town in 1938. In 1978 he asserted that without the symbolic trek reenactment, “the Nationalist government would never have come to power as early as 1948” (Klopper in Harrison, 1986:10). For further reading on the Afrikaner Broederbond, see Wilkins & Strydom *The Super-Afrikaners: Inside the Afrikaner Broederbond* (1980).

⁸³ Bokhorst (1972a:n.p) stated: “Everything created by South Africans, as well as everything created in South Africa even by non-South Africans.”

The best proof of this is in fact that the Trustees of 1930 were of the opinion that the most suitable exhibition with which to celebrate the inauguration of the new National Gallery of Art was a loan-collection of British Victorian art!

A study by Rankin (1995) refers to the SANG's 1970 catalogue for the earlier exhibition *South African Painting and Sculpture* to evidence this pattern. Using Rankin's (1995:81) figures, of South African artworks added to the permanent collection and included in the exhibition, a graph is illustrated as follows:

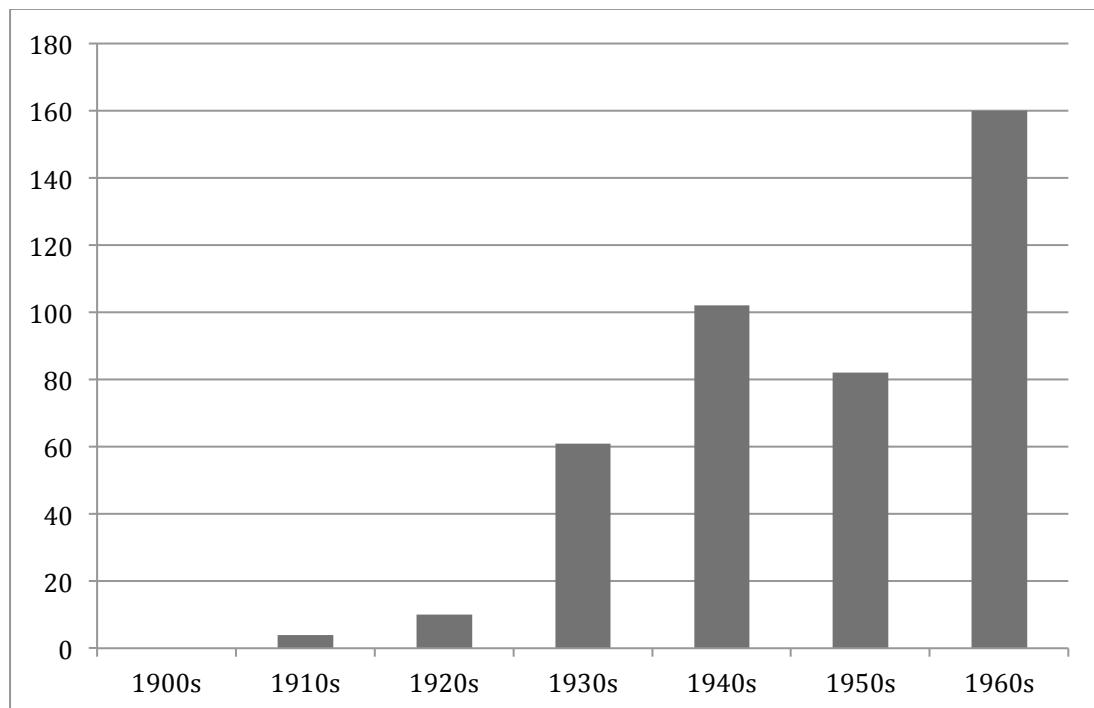


Figure 1: Quantitative analysis of South African artworks included on *South African Painting and Sculpture* (1970), arranged by the date of accession.

With regard to the Gallery's early British honorary directors, Bokhorst thus further lamented their "conservative personal taste in matters pertaining to art," the result of which was that modern art created by South African artists between 1930 and 1948 was mostly ignored. Of the leading South African artists from this period, Bokhorst's listed Maggie Laubser, Irma Stern, Lippy Lipshitz, Hugo Naude and Jocobus Hendrik Pierneef, as having only a single work each in the permanent collection. For other South African artists of importance, John Dronsfield, Cecil

Higgs, Wolf Kibel, Strat Caldecott, Water Battiss and the Everard family, nothing was acquired at all (Bokhorst, 1972a:n.p). A favourite defence, a motif throughout the Gallery's history, was that the purchasing funds were extremely limited. Dismissing this preferred blanket excuse as too simplistic, Bokhorst considered how "in the year 1943 alone no less than eleven sculptures by Mitford-Barberton were bought" (Bokhorst, 1972a:n.p).⁸⁴ Dismissing Roworth, Bokhorst suggested the first step in the right direction was the appointment of Paris as the full-time professional director. Although a "newcomer to South Africa," Paris was able to recognise the "new tendencies in our art and to strive to include them in the Gallery" (Bokhorst, 1972a:n.p). Under Paris, "an average of 60%" of the purchasing budget was being spent on South African art.⁸⁵ Significantly Bokhorst added, "surprisingly enough, no attention was yet given in this period to the growing achievements of South Africa's non-European artists" (Bokhorst, 1972a:n.p).

The JAG had already acquired a work by a black artist in 1940 with the acquisition of Sekoto's *Yellow houses: A street in Sophiatown*. Although isolated (the JAG purchased its second work by a black artist in 1972), Carmen considered it to be one of the most important acquisitions made under Hendriks' tenure as director (Carmen, 1987:207). It was the first work by a black artist accessioned into a South African public art collection, and it remained the only work by a black artist in a South African public art collection until the 1960s.⁸⁶ Rankin argues that, despite a

⁸⁴ Mitford-Barberton studied at the Royal College of Art in London. In 1936 he was appointed lecturer of sculpture at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, where Edward Roworth and John Wheatley were successive Heads. This perhaps explains how the SANG had come to purchase eleven of his sculptures, nine of which were bronze.

⁸⁵ This percentage appears to have been mandatory. In 1963, Bokhorst described how "the Government believe, rightly, that between one-quarter and one third should be spent on South African art" (Bokhorst in "City Sculpture Museum Out-of-doors", 1963:n.p). Similarly Pat Kaplan suggested, in a contribution to the conference: *The State of Art in South African* in 1979, that 60% of the annual purchasing grant was allocated to South African art. However in 1979 this was regarded as a limitation, as it restricted the Gallery from buying more costly art from abroad (Kaplan, 1979: 59-60).

⁸⁶ According to Rankin, the William Humphreys Art Gallery in Kimberley, the King George VI Art Gallery in Pretoria, and the Pretoria Art Museum, all made their first acquisitions by black artists in the first half of the 1960s. The SANG acquired the work of a black artist for the first time in 1964.

number of black artists working in the first half of the twentieth century, recognised in commercial and private art collections, the relative lack of acquisitions by public art museums “demonstrated a profound neglect of their work” (Rankin, 1995:59). Carman (1987:34) agreed: “This is the area in which we realize the most glaring omissions occurred.”

In the mid-1960s, after much campaigning from Bokhorst and his Board of Trustees, the Gallery’s grant-in-aid was increased dramatically.⁸⁷ ⁸⁸ With this increase in funds, coupled with the fresh influence of Bokhorst and his assistant director, Bruce Arnott, the SANG was able to broaden the scope of its collection and exhibition practices. Arnott initiated a series of exhibitions with a thematic focus on the historical traditions of African art, and soon thereafter the SANG started their collection of historical African sculpture (Rankin, 1995:67). Bokhorst acknowledged that these sculptures would previously have been the domain of ethnographic museums, and described, perhaps as a means of legitimizing their acquisition, how the impetus for such change was inspired by a development in international museum practices:

In this respect, the Gallery follows the international trend which the director observed during a study tour in the Americas and Europe, culminating in the incorporation of the whole New York Museum of Primitive Art into the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Bokhorst, 1972b:12)

In addition to the works of ‘historical’ African art, the SANG started collecting works by contemporary black artists, motivating Bokhorst (1972b:12) to then describe how “the last decade has seen an ever growing number of works by contemporary African artists added to the collection.” That same year, in a separate publication, Bokhorst (1972a:n.p) asserted that “non-white groups are more and more represented, on the same basis as the whites, and this is

⁸⁷ In 1964-65 the purchasing grant increased from R600 to R14 000, in 1965-66 it was increased to R18 000, and in 1966-67 it was increased to R26 000 (SANG, 1964:11). This is detailed further in this chapter.

⁸⁸ Bokhorst was also responsible for the founding of the Friends of the South African National Gallery, the supportive organisation that would become especially important in lending their support in periods of insufficient funding (Proud, 2008).

exclusively: quality.” The acquisitions of art by black artists may have been slow, and may have been insufficient, but by mid-1960 they were undeniable. Perhaps even paradoxically, given the political and ideological climate of racial marginalisation in the 1960s, the SANG began to include black South African artists into the national collection for the first time. Black South African artists Gerard Sekoto, Sydney Kumalo, Lucky Sibiya, Lucas Sithole, Michael Zondi, Peter Clarke, Dumile Feni, Louis Maqhubela, Albert Adams, Azaria Mbatha, John Muafangejo, among others, were all entering the SANG’s permanent collection in the 1960s and 1970s. With this recognition and validation, the SANG began writing these artists into the ‘story of South African art’ for the first time. These acquisitions should be regarded as critical, albeit insufficient. Reflecting on this period, Dubow (2006:175) suggested that it was a regret, “that the Acquisition Committee did not do more in this direction, particularly in the form of purchasing more work by black artists.” At the time the committee considered that much of the work was “not for the Gallery,” and now, “the committee finds that it cannot afford the best of the work by these painters and sculptors” (Dubow in Goodnow, 2006:175).

3.4. Reconstructing the Narrative: Rewriting the Story of South African Art

The new aim of the SANG, as a reflection of its renewed function, its ability to adapt, and as an assertion of its relevance in a new South African society, was to “redress imbalances created by our history . . . and to use the context of art to address the historical problem of cultural difference in South Africa” (Martin, 1997:19). Notably the requirements for redress coincided with a worsening financial situation, as well as the “extraordinary vitality and power of the art which began to emerge in South Africa during the 1980s” (Martin, 1997:18). The combination of which resulted in the form of the SANG’s new acquisition policies:

From buying internationally and focusing on established South African artists to an open-ended and pluralistic approach which means, for example, that work originating in rural and other ‘peripheral’ contexts began to be acquired alongside art which is influenced by the Western ‘mainstream’. (Martin, 1997:18)

In a conference paper presented by Marilyn Martin in 1996, titled *Bringing the past into the present – facing and negotiating history, memory, redress and reconciliation at the South African National Gallery*, Martin described the process of redress as having started in 1990, the year that she was appointed. This process of redress, Martin maintained in 1993, would have a profound impact on the perceived nature and composition of the Gallery's collection practices. Martin (1993:19) described how the imperative was to become:

Actively involved in the preservation and presentation of a multiplicity of cultural manifestations and we strive to foster an understanding, among all South Africans, of those parts of our history which have been neglected, which remain unrecorded or unacknowledged, or which have been suppressed.

According to Marschall, in the 1990s there were three distinct strategies for accommodating black artists in South African art museums. Firstly, there was the pluralistic approach. Marschall suggests that the shifting political landscape had introduced the national motto of 'unity in diversity' and that as a result, art collection prioritised 'representativity and inclusiveness' which was accompanied by broadening of the definitions of 'art' (Marschall, 2001:56). Collections of beadworks, baskets, and headdresses were pursued with rigor in the early 1990s, and with reference to this collection, Carol Kaufmann described how "approximately 2000 new acquisitions of specifically African works of art entered the permanent collection between 1990 and 1993" (Kaufmann, 2005:15).⁸⁹ Secondly, there was a revisionist approach, which involved the "reconstruction of lost histories" (Marschall, 1999). For acquisitions, this involved 'filling the gaps' in the permanent collection, omissions now glaring in the context of a revised story of

⁸⁹ This was further exemplified by the comprehensive collection of Ndebele beadwork purchased for the SANG in 1991 by the Department of National Education As testament to their commitment to the new policy directions, the Department bought the collection for R200 000 – at the time this amount was equivalent to 80% of the SANG's acquisitions budget (Martin, 1992).

South African art. The third consideration involved a renewed focus on younger and emerging South African artists, those who would constitute a South African canon of the future.⁹⁰

Looking specifically at how the *Policy Manual* (1991) may have impacted the racial composition of the SANG's permanent collection, a comparative quantitative analysis of acquisitions is illustrative. Contrasting collection practices before and after the change in acquisition policy in 1991 is particularly telling.⁹¹ By looking at the accession dates for artworks by black South African included on the *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995/from the South African National Gallery Permanent Collection* (1996 - 1997) exhibition, one can see the profound influence that Martin and her revised acquisitions policy may have had on the composition of the permanent collection.⁹² For the period 1985 - 1990: of the 211 South African artworks, collected in this period and displayed in this exhibition, 41 were produced by black artists (19%). For the period 1991 to 1995: of the 310 South African artworks, collected in this period and displayed in

⁹⁰ This approach to developing young and emerging artists was characterised by *Fresh*, a residency programme funded by South African artist Marlene Dumas. The programme included Senzeni Marasela, Bernie Searle, Usha Seejarim, Tracey Rose, Moshekwa Langa and Dorothee Kreutzfeldt. (SANG, 2003)

⁹¹ Some shifts are more nuanced and only evidenced in minutiae. Carman (1987:20), for instance, has described how, approaching political transition in the 1990s, an Anton van Wouw sculpture titled *Kaffir Hammer Boy* was renamed *The Hammer Man*. Initially a generic term for black people, this word later became an ethnic slur. In democratic South Africa the word is prohibited and deemed hate speech, and thus its usage criminal. Used officially to refer to black South Africans, the word appeared in historical accounts by anthropologists, missionaries, and artists. As a result, a number of works in the SANG's permanent collection by nineteenth-century topographical artists like Frederick I'Ons, Thomas Bowler, and William Atherstone make liberal use of the word to refer to people or regions. Separately there are also twentieth-century works by Dolf Rieser and Dorothy Kay. The SANG, however, has not formally changed these titles on their database or collection checklists. Proud, curator of historical collections, suggests that "there was some debate on this a while back" but because of their etymology and the historical development of their meaning, "to alter titles is to tinker with the archive and impose contemporary morals on the art of the past." However, when the works are exhibited, the onus is on the curator to re-present the work with sensitivity, and thus exhibition labels are temporarily altered or edited. (Proud, 2014: private correspondence)

⁹² This analysis includes only the works on the exhibition of contemporary South African art. It excludes historical acquisitions, international acquisitions, and all acquisitions not included on the exhibition.

this exhibition, 99 were produced by black artists (32%) (SANG, 1997).⁹³ If one does the same analysis, looking at individual artists, not artworks, then for the period 1985 to 1990: of the 140 individual artists, collected in this period and displayed in this exhibition, 27 were black (19%). For the period 1991 to 1995, of the 178 individual artists, collected in this period and displayed in this exhibition, 69 were black (39%) (SANG, 1997). Therefore, of the 96 black artists represented by the Gallery in this period, 72% of them were collected after the revised policies. The results show a substantial proportional increase in the representation of black artists and artworks after the *Policy Manual* of 1991. Though, for the period 1991 to 1995, despite the overwhelming rhetoric regarding transformation, black artists still constituted a minority.

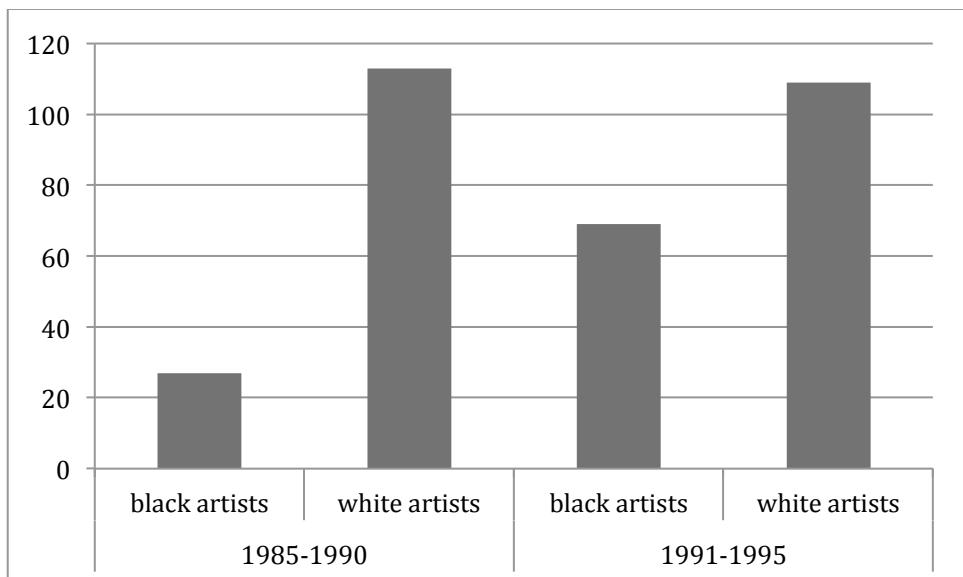


Figure 2: Quantitative analysis for demographic representation of artists (white vs. black) in the exhibition *Contemporary South African 1985 - 1995 from the South African National Gallery Permanent Collection*, before and after the *Policy Manual* (1991).

⁹³ Notably this statistic was calculated with photographic series counting as single units. The SANG had acquired multiple photographic series in this period (all of which by white photographers). For the reader's interest, if all the photographs were to be counted for the period 1985 to 1990, of the 211 South African artworks in the exhibition collected in this period only 41 were produced by black artists (19%). For the period 1991 to 1995: of the 496 South African artworks in the exhibition, and collected in this period, only 99 were by black artists (20%).

As discussed in the previous chapter, in 1999 the SANG and 14 other Cape Town museums, were incorporated into the overarching structure later named Iziko. Under the administrative umbrella of Iziko, the SANG was able to apply for ad-hoc “transformation funding” (Iziko, 2005:61). Money was granted conditionally to purchase works that aligned to Government’s strategic objectives, to purchases works from previously disadvantaged artists, to repatriate African heritage objects and artworks, and to reference the ‘national priorities’ of HIV/AIDS, the empowerment of women, and youth issues.

With the ‘transformation funding’ the Gallery was able to collect seminal works by contemporary black artists like Robin Rhode, Tracey Rose, Moshekwa Langa, Zweletu Mthethwa, Santu Mofokeng, Zanele Muholi, and Nicholas Hlobo, among many others. The gallery was also able to fill some gaps in its historical collection, acquiring works by Noria Mabasa, Ernest Cole, Albert Adams, George Pemba, Ernest Mancoba, Lucky Sibiya, and Louis Maqhubela, many of whom were insufficiently represented in the SANG’s permanent collection, despite having been established artists working in South Africa and in some instances abroad.

Upon reflecting on this period a decade later, Proud suggested there was “an odour of prescriptiveness” about the Department of Arts and Culture’s (DAC⁹⁴) guidelines, and that the gallery had been “drawn down a political path” (Proud, in Thurman, 2007:1). The democratic government approach was thus described as “the kind of state interference that can compromise the intellectual and aesthetic freedom needed by an art gallery” (Thurman, 2007:1). However, an executive director at Iziko at the time, Patricia Davison maintained “The Department of Arts and Culture never tells us what to buy [but] there is an overall transformation agenda” (Davison in McKune, 2009:3).

⁹⁴ In 2002 the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) became the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC).

3.5. Complicating the Narrative: The Bailey Bequest

As purported by museum theorists previously discussed, museums are perceived as ‘apparatus’ for the application of ideology and power. However, many of these accounts deny art museums (including their directors and their benefactors) the capacity for complexity and agency. Furthermore these accounts deny visitors and viewers the capacity for critical engagement. The premise is that museums are technologies of the state, and are used as stages for the cultural performances of nationhood. However, as argued by Trodd (2003), the script for this cultural performance is authored by a social elite, who conflate their own individual desires with broader communal interests. The members of this ‘social elite’ are often independent from, holding views distinct to, the political hegemony of the day. The personal desires, tastes, and values of individual patrons, benefactors, or museum directors are reflected in the art museum, and these do not necessarily conform to the ‘official’ national narrative. Trodd argues that overly simplistic and uncritical interpretations of museums have pressured results in a “bleakly deterministic and functionalist account of the development of cultural and social policy” (Trodd, 2003:21). To avoid a reductionist analysis, whereby a complex web of processes is reduced to a question of functionality, this chapter considers some of the complexities and contradictions inherent to the narrative. Such an example is found in the Abe Bailey Collection.⁹⁵

When the Art Gallery was founded in 1871, it was an intervention by local ‘art lovers’ and much of the early collections were the result of benefaction. Thus much of the early collections reflect the personal desires, tastes and values, of the patrons and benefactors. Indeed these benefactors may have been part of a social, political or economic elite, and they may have embodied a particular set of interests, reflecting specific (sometimes dominant) ideologies; however, their

⁹⁵ Abe Bailey and his bequest are given much attention and focus in this study. Other gift collections and benefactors, like those of Alfred de Pass, Sir Edmund and Lady Davis, and Lady Michaelis, may provide similar insights, however Bailey’s bequest is the largest in the Permanent Collection, and arguably no other patron or gift collection has remained as contentious at different points in the SANG’s history. For is for these reasons that Bailey and his collection have been foregrounded.

benefaction was not necessarily aligned to the ‘official’ narrative. In fact sometimes benefactors held values that competed with the ‘official’ national narrative.

The Abe Bailey Collection of portraiture and sporting art, received in 1947 on a permanent loan, is the most valuable bequest in the SANG’s collection. Its position in relation to shifting dominant national narratives is a useful illustration of these complexities. The bequest was incompatible with the national narrative when it arrived in the mid-twentieth century, and is seemingly incompatible with the transformational agenda of the early twenty-first century. In addition to this, it has been subject to seemingly uncritical reflections and reappraisals.

Sir Abe Bailey was a Randlord mining magnate and protégé to the imperialist par excellence Cecil John Rhodes. There is no doubt that Bailey’s orientation was unequivocally British in aesthetic taste and political posture. Indeed, he was complicit in the Jamieson Raid and was later knighted for his services to the British Empire. By the 1930s Bailey was one of the world’s wealthiest men. Bailey owned newspaper houses with which he influenced public opinion of the mining industry, and he was a member of the dominant political, economic and social hegemony of his time. He exercised his power, dubiously, for profit and for Britain. The Bequest reflects Bailey’s individual values and his British aristocratic aspirations. The paintings by Thomas Gainsborough, Sir Joshua Reynolds, George Stubbs, and J.M.W Turner are all definitively British, as is the vast collection of ‘sporting pictures’.

Sympathetic to Bailey, Tietze (2001:2) has considered how Bailey might have thought this “highly anglophilic collection” appropriate for a South African audience. The answer was, “of course,” that when the bequest was being conceived, “the Cape was still oriented culturally towards the ‘Mother Country’ and struggling to conceive of itself as part of a larger ‘South Africa’” (Tietze, 2001:2). While the first mention of Bailey’s bequest appears in a minute book in 1935, Bailey died in 1940 and as result of the World War II the collection only arrived in November 1946. Prime Minister Smuts officiated the opening exhibition of the Collection in March 1947, and the following year he lost the 1948 general election to his political rival Malan. Perhaps when the bequest was being negotiated, or when it was housed in storage during the war, the nationalist narrative was still being developed. However, by the time the Abe Bailey Collection arrived in

1946 power had shifted, and cultural orientation was shifting with it. The Bequest reflected Bailey's anglophile values, and by mid-century these were incompatible with South Africa's reimagined nationhood. In a reappraisal of the collection, Tietze (2001:6) suggested that Bailey had a "strong affection for South Africa" and bequeathing to its National Gallery "a collection of pictures that he had 'enormously enjoyed' must have seemed highly appropriate." Although, in a separate journal article, Tietze (2011) has described how Bailey Bequest initially offered the collection a British institution, which rejected it on the basis of its quality. That is to say, the SANG was not Bailey's first choice, and that, the collection "would not have found any greater favour in the mid-twentieth century if it had stayed in Britain" (Tietze, 2011:166).

In her reappraisal, Tietze (2001:2) considered how "Bailey was personally convinced of the need for common ground to be found between the Afrikaner and the British, a conviction which lay behind his sponsorship of the Union Club movement and its journal *The State*." Following the War, Bailey sought to preserve ties between South Africa and Britain in order to safeguard his political and business interests. Thus, upon Unification, Bailey embraced the political view that reconciliation should be found between Briton and Afrikaner.⁹⁶ Bailey was thus the founding sponsor of the pro-Union journal *The State*, a publication likened to propaganda (Merrington, 1997).⁹⁷ Bailey's aimed to retain his political and economic privileges, afforded to him by imperial ties with Britain, and his convictions were thus motivated by profit and imperial duty. His personal convictions regarding 'reconciliation' were a means to this end. Tietze has also

⁹⁶ Under the terms of his will, Bailey established a Trust in this regard. According to the *Smuts Papers* the trust aimed to "further the good relations between the white races in South Africa" (Poel & Hancock, 2007:296). As a product of his time, Bailey was a racist: "I am for the white race being on top of the black" (Bailey in Neame, 1929:167). Historian Peter Merrington has considered how the imperative to propagate 'reconciliation' between Briton and the Afrikaners (who in the early twentieth century were still considered to be two distinct 'races') was integral to the creation of the Union of South Africa. As a self-governing dominion within the British Empire, the Union was politically and culturally both national and imperial (Merrington, 1997).

⁹⁷ Notably, while Bailey was its sponsor, the cover of *The State* was an illustration of *Physical Energy*, the sculpture by British artist George Watts that rests upon the Sir Herbert Baker-designed Rhodes Memorial (which in 1909 was still under construction).

suggested that he was an “enthusiastic supporter of South African cricket” (Tietze, 2001:4). However, Bailey’s patronage of cricket in South Africa, where he funded British-South Africa cricket tours, was also politically motivated (Murray, 2008:375-376).⁹⁸ In fact the British High Commissioner to South Africa, Lord Selborne, grouped “sport” with politics, business, literature and indeed art, as having the potential for ‘imperial value’ (Selborne, 1908:n.p.).⁹⁹ In 1911 Bailey was knighted for his contribution to the establishment of Union.

Proud (2001:1) has suggested that when the collection was opened in 1947 it was “greatly welcomed,” and that the conditions specified as part of the bequest (to be kept as one collection and exhibited as a whole) were easily accommodated. Considering the reception in press and in parliament, as discussed in previous chapters, for Proud to argue the collection was ‘greatly welcomed’, without any reference to the overwhelmingly negative sentiment, is more than simple flattery. Tietze has suggested that “almost immediately the sporting art section in particular found itself the target of negative comment, subtle or otherwise, concerning the questions of thematic relevance and artistic merit” (Tietze, 2011:168). Indeed, Tietze suggests that “the very existence of such a collection at a National Gallery in Africa was regarded as ideologically problematic” (Tietze, 2008:n.p.). When Smuts opened the collection at the SANG in 1947, his

⁹⁸ Connecting sport to questions of national sovereignty and nationhood, Bailey, who was the President of the South African Cricket Association, proposed the formation of an Imperial Cricket Conference (now known as the *International Cricket Conference*) to regulate the rules concerning international matches. The conference was founded with England, South Africa and Australia as sole members. To celebrate the new organisation, and to “emphasise South Africa’s role as an equal partner,” Bailey proposed a triangular series among the three nations (Gemmel, 2011:701).

⁹⁹ Lord Selborne, who succeeded Lord Milner as High Commissioner of South Africa, considered how Bailey’s triangular tournament had the potential for political value:

“Every time a team of Springboks or cricketers is brought together, representing the whole of South Africa, whether against Britain or Australia, the sense of South African unity is increased, and this without distinction between Boer and British . . . A triangular tournament would also have an Imperial value . . . The more the reality of Empire is brought home to its people in any shape or form, the more the idea becomes part of their natural being, and as there are more men interested in sport than in politics, art, literature, or business, there is a large number who are touched by the influence of such a contest” (Selborne, 1908:n.p.).

speech described how Bailey “made no great pretence to be a man of great discrimination in art.” (Smuts in Tietze, 2001:4)

Dismissing aesthetic criticisms of the bequest as being politically motivated, Tietze has suggested that in the context of a post-colonial South Africa “we can finally admire their documentary and aesthetic value without feeling the need to take sides on the issue of colonial politics” (Tietze, 2001:6). However, considering the extent to which ‘politics’ has impacted the SANG throughout its history, it continues to do so in the present. The Abe Bailey Collection thus remains contentious. After Naidoo was appointed director of Art Collections at Iziko, he conceptualised his debut survey exhibition *1910 - 2010: Pierneef to Guguleptive* (2010). The exhibition used the entire gallery, and thus Naidoo negotiated with the Bailey Trust for the collection’s temporary de-installation (the collection had previously occupied a room dedicated to the Bequest’s display). Upon critique of his exhibition, Naidoo attributed the negative reviews to his decision to unhang the Abe Bailey Collection. In so doing Naidoo suggested that Bailey’s Bequest was a colonial collection, and thus not representative of South African culture. Although the initial review had not mentioned the collection at all, this assertion sparked a furore. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the symbolism now attributed to Naidoo’s removal of ‘colonial works’ in favour of ‘transformation’ was deemed anathema to conservative critics like Lloyd Pollak.¹⁰⁰

Considerations of the Bequest’s relevance ask pertinent questions about the purpose and function of the Gallery. Is the Bailey Bequest relevant to South African culture in the present? Was it relevant to South African culture when it arrived? For many, the answer is *No*, but for certain sectors of South African societies, *Yes*, then and now. Yet, is the question regarding relevance itself even relevant? If the function of the SANG is to provide the South African public with access to the most important obtainable art, South African or international, would the Bailey Bequest fulfil these requirements? A minority of individual works within the bequest *Yes*.

¹⁰⁰ In fact in 1970 A.H. Honikman, as Chair of the Board of Trustees, approached the Bailey Trust in an attempt to sell some works from the Bailey Collection, with the aim of purchasing new British, European, and American works with the proceeds. The Trust refused, and Honikman then requested permission to have some artworks from the collection lent to overseas galleries, “in order to get other worthwhile works in exchange” (Honikman in Tietze, 2011:172)

For the most however – *Not really*. Respected art critic and historian Linda Nochlin (1995:91) considered the bequest when visiting the SANG in 1995:

Fortunately tucked away in relative obscurity, was a memento of colonialism's contribution to the great western tradition in South Africa. This group of tenth-rate foxhunting scenes had been donated to the Gallery by a wealthy benefactor with the proviso that they always remain on view . . . It was just a reminder that the western tradition is not always so great . . . Such worthlessly enshrined relics also remind us that we who have inherited that tradition must constantly revise, deconstruct and reconsider it in the light of present-day concerns and passions.

A further argument was that the loss of the bequest would “effectively put paid to any further donations as potential benefactors must be assured that legal undertakings will be honoured” (Pollak, 2012:8-9). It must be noted that in the *Stratford Report* the question of Gift Collections is duly engaged. Stratford suggested that, “in a way,” it is fortunate that the SANG is the recipient of these donations, but in another sense, “one cannot help regretting that their acceptance has, to some extent, prevented the Trustees from exercising that discrimination which is so essential to the building up of a really worthy national collection” (*Stratford Report*, 1947:5). Implicating the Bailey Bequest, *Stratford* suggested that to refuse gift collections, especially when coupled with conditions that the whole or none be accepted, or that all or none be displayed, may seem not only rude, but unwise. To accept them, often results in “filling up of wall space with works which, for one reason or another, are not fitting for inclusion in a national collection” (1947:5). As a result of this dilemma, the *Policy Manual* (1991:12) contained the following clause:

Objects donated to and accepted by the Board of Trustees become the full legal property of the SANG under the trusteeship of the Board of Trustees. Restrictive conditions of donation are not encouraged and may be cause for refusal.

Discussions about the Bequest’s relevance to a South African context began when the collection first arrived and continue in the present. In the late 1940s the bequest symbolised the imposition of British and imperial values at a time of shifting dominance in political and cultural power. In

the present, after another shift in political and cultural power, for some the bequest represents a disdained colonial heritage. For some critics, perhaps the collection's removal embodies a threat to their own European heritage. Yet the complexity of the Bequest's history, and of Bailey himself, have been mostly ignored.

3.6. Contradicting the Narrative

In challenging the simplicity of functionalist theories of a singular dominant narrative, it is important to consider how the SANG's directors themselves have held positions inconsistent with the dominant 'national narrative' of the period. During John Wheatley and Edward Roworth's honorary directorships, the Gallery's position and perceived function, and resultant collection practices, were unaligned to the growing Afrikaner nationalist imperative of the 1930s and 1940s. Art entering the permanent collection in the first half of the twentieth-century reflected the values of the individual directors and individual patrons. As discussed in the first chapter, nationalising discourses started emerging as early as 1910 with reference to 'South Africanism', and the balance of power began dramatically with shifts in political power in 1924, and again in 1948. Despite the gallery having received criticism for its British bias as early as 1930, it only adapted to the nationalising imperative, with the first drafting of policy documents, after the new political dispensation in 1948. With John Paris as the new director, combined with a profound shift in context, the SANG realised that its previous role had been an anachronism, and that the collection was imbalanced. It needed redress and 'fill the gaps' in order to be representative of South African art.

However it was only under Bokhorst when a considerable number of black artists entered the permanent collection. Importantly these acquisitions were made despite the ever increasingly racialised policies and ideologies of the apartheid regime. According to Trodd (2003:21), the idea that museums are spaces for the inculcation of state-imposed ideologies and master narratives implies a failure to register that the state itself is an "amalgam of often competing and contradictory forces." Indeed, the Governmental *Report of the Boysen Committee of Inquiry into the need of state-aided Institutions* (1962), considered that the SANG should "not wish to exclude contemporary art of our non-white races which form an integral part of the South African art

movement” (SANG, 1962b:2). Considering the racially segregationist and marginalizing policies of apartheid this consideration appears an anomaly. Yet two years later, in 1964, the SANG acquired *Street Scene* by Gerard Sekoto, the first of many artworks by a black artist to enter the collection in the second half of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Another element that contradicts the centralised national narrative is the fact that international developments in museum practices, unaligned to domestic developments of ideology, have profoundly influenced SANG practices throughout its history.

Raymund van Niekerk, the SANG’s first ever South African-born director, who held the position from 1976 to 1989, was an internationalist who despised the nationalising agenda (Proud, undated). Under his directorship the SANG paid considerable attention to international contemporary art to avoid the potential risks of parochialism resulting from the cultural boycott. Under considerable financial pressure, van Niekerk was able to purchase works of international importance.¹⁰¹ As financial resources were limited, van Niekerk found innovative solutions and thus collected much graphic art, editioned paper-works, and photography. When South Africa was at its most volatile and the State the most repressive, between the Soweto Uprising and the dismantling of apartheid in the late 1980s, van Niekerk started acquiring a genre of art that contradicted and subverted the ‘official culture’ of the apartheid state. Resistance Art was a genre of socially active art that confronted the apartheid regime of the time. The acquisition of Paul Stopforth’s *The Interrogators* (1979) characterised this decisive component of the SANG collecting practices under van Niekerk’s directorship. Importantly, *The Interrogators* entered the permanent collection as a ‘Trojan horse’. According to Dubow, who chaired the Acquisitions Committee meeting, the work was submitted under the non-confrontational title *Triptych*, comprising three panels, each depicting one of the three police interrogators responsible for questioning the political activist Steve Biko before his death in police custody. The work was

¹⁰¹ In addition to paintings by André Lhote, R.B. Kitaj (the Kitaj single-handedly consumed a quarter of recently increased annual budget), under van Niekerk the Gallery acquired works on paper by Man Ray, Frank Stella, Henri Matisse, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Édouard Manet, David Hockney, Josef Albers, Richard Hamilton, Robert Motherwell, Pablo Picasso, Alberto Giacometti, Tom Wesselmann, Mimmo Paladino, Lucian Freud, James Rosenquist, amongst many others (SANG, 1982).

accepted when Dubow argued that its technique, not its subject matter, was of artistic importance (Dubow, 1997:30). The SANG's collection of Resistance Art is now a fundamental component of the permanent collection. According to Dubow, the SANG has "the best collection of South African art in the world from the so-called transitional era between the immediately 'pre-negotiated revolution period', and the 'post-negotiated revolution period'" (Dubow, 1997:35). According to the Annual Reports, under van Niekerk the Gallery also acquired works by a number of black South African artists, including Albert Adams, Dumile Feni, Omar Badsha, Noria Mabasa, Billy Mandini, Peter Clarke, Jackson Hlungwani, Johannes Segogela, Tyrone Appollis and David Koloane (among others). In addition, between 1987 and 1989, the SANG also acquired Ndebele Beadwork, Xhosa loveletters, and a beadwork dress.

In the 1990 and 2000s the 'national narrative' might have centred on an uncritical engagement with national reconciliation, pejoratively labelled 'rainbowism'. Indeed when this was the SANG's proclaimed position, the Gallery acquired art highly critical of the new dispensation's approach to nation-building, transformation, and sometimes the new dispensation itself.

The other obstacle to the 'official national narratives' was and remains the enduring lack of financial resources. Even if aligned to a national agenda, the implementation thereof would have been, for the most part, hindered by the meagre financial situation. In fact, the financial situation has seemingly always influenced collection practices. Benefactors like de Pass purchased modern works for the Gallery because of the prohibitive cost of Old Masters. One can only imagine what Roworth might have purchased if his aspirations were supported by sufficient resources. The *Stratford Report* (1947:5-6), for instance, suggested that a national gallery should naturally contain Old Masters, but that they were costly and hard to come by, "and thus beyond the reach of purchase even if the Gallery's financial position is substantially improved in the future." Stratford (1947) recommended obtaining 'Old Masters' on loan. More emphasis was placed on living artists, more specifically, living artists from South Africa, and thus the SANG would fulfil its nationalising duties, and do so cost-effectively. Many years later, in 1992, in a letter to Lesley Shapiro, the then Curator of Modern Paintings at the JAG, Martin lamented the severely strained financial position. Martin concluded: "this is of course one of the reasons why we concentrate on contemporary South African art" (Martin, 1992:n.p.).

3.7. Recounting the Narrative

SANG collection practices have adapted to the successive redefinitions of South African nationhood. The composition of the collection has shifted and adjacently so have perceptions of it. Indeed the manner in which history is reflected is itself the construction of a new history. Upon critical reflection of the SANG's history as a means of contextualizing the present, there appears to be a pattern whereby newly appointed directors reflects negatively on previous practices. Previous collection practices are considered a reflection of divergent ideals. These reappraisals provide a pertinent indication of shifts in the Gallery's orientation. However sometimes these reappraisals strategically misremember history, and contemporary progress and contemporary values are juxtaposed against oversimplified and sometimes inaccurate renderings of that history. By omission or commission, besides indicating a particular objective, this practice has reflected a lack of critical perspective.

In 1972 Bokhorst lamented the neglect of South African art by preceding directors, who had 'conservative personal tastes in matters to art'. Yet what constituted the nation, and the role of the national gallery within that nation, was so fundamentally different before the mid-century, that the comparison seems rhetorical. Notably, Bokhorst was writing in the foreword to an exhibition of South African art, celebrating South Africa's decade of independence from the Commonwealth. Bokhorst was applying nationalist criteria to a Cape Colonial context. In fact, the Gallery was only officially given the 'National' designation in 1931.

A similar argument can be made for the comments made by Martin and Naidoo, where a complex context was avoided in favour of a reductive narrative. In the 1990s Martin bemoaned the "near absence of black artists from South Africa's museum collections" and spoke of how the policy changes precipitated by her arrival would map a new direction (Martin, 1997:28). In her contribution to the *1985 - 1995 Contemporary Art from the South African National Gallery* catalogue the critical changes in policy and practice under Bokhorst was relegated to a footnote. Black artists and alternative modes of artistic expression were certainly under-acknowledged as a result of a complex history, however, that Kumalo, Maqhubela, Sekoto, Clarke, Sihlali,

Hlungwani, *et al.*, were collected by the SANG in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, under Bokhorst and van Niekerk, engages a critical understanding of this complex history. Arguably, Martin's rhetoric skimmed over details unbefitting the new narrative. Furthermore, throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, works of historical African art entered the collection. Such acquisitions were in a minority, but to suggest that black artists were altogether neglected is not the whole truth. Africa, according to Martin (1990:n.p), "was relegated to the Annexe Gallery with minor shows." However in 1962 *Rock Art in Southern Africa*, an exhibition of rock paintings and engravings, was the major exhibition of the period under review and occupied seven rooms at the SANG, with an immense 26 650 visitors. The Annual Report of that year suggested that "it is obvious that this type of exhibition should be arranged more often." The exhibition, curated by the SANG in collaboration with the South African Museum, toured other centres in South Africa, and "arrangements for sending this exhibition to Europe and America in 1964 were also under consideration" (SANG, 1963:15). In 1967 the Gallery hosted exhibitions of Rhodesian African sculpture and separately an exhibition of tapestries, carpets and linocuts from the Rorkes Drift Art and Craft Centre.¹⁰² Notably, these exhibitions were of the highest attended in the period (SANG, 1968:14). That is not to say that these collections and exhibitions were sufficient, but rather to suggest that they existed, and have since been forgotten.

Policies and practices changed dramatically under Martin's directorship. Yet the proclamation introducing Naidoo was that his arrival heralded a new vision for the National Gallery, albeit a 'new vision' not strikingly dissimilar to Martin's of the early 1990s. By declaring 'a new vision', while omitting reference to the radical shifts in practice and policy under Martin, Naidoo's assertions overlooked prior progress, and thus reflected a lack of critical perspective. It appears that the details which complicated or contradicted the SANG's incumbent director's narrative were underplayed. Rhetoric perpetually reassured the construction of a revitalised 'new' South African identity, emphasising redress for institutional imbalances, without critically considering the complexity of South African history.

¹⁰² Notably a second exhibition from the Rorkes Drift Art and Craft Centre was mounted in 1972. On this occasion, the exhibition was opened by Chief Mongosuthu Buthelezi, the "Chief Executive Councilor of the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly" ("Buthelezi Opens Art Show", 1972:3).

3.8. Compromising the Narrative

Richards (2009) has argued that cultural producers and curators have a responsibility to history because of the power they hold over its production. History should not be compromised, misrepresented, distorted or erased. In the 1990s curators at the SANG narrated a history whereby the Gallery had previously reflected colonial and apartheid ideologies, which was mostly, but certainly not entirely, the case. In the context of a democratic South Africa, as the argument was made, the Gallery would be integral to the construction of a new society, a new culture, and would contribute to social healing and national cohesion. Of course, in order to do so, it would require funding. A decade later, with the previous strategy perhaps less successful than hoped, curators at the Gallery tried a different approach. In an editorial published in the *Sunday Argus* in 2006, Proud (2006:14) described how the Gallery had, in fact, tried to acquire a number of paintings by Sekoto in the 1940s, but that there was no money and therefore the acquisition was voided:

The gallery began collecting works by Gerard Sekoto and other black artists in the 1960s . . . It actually considered to buy works by Sekoto in the 1940s, but given the pre-1949 absence of any acquisitions budget at all, these purchases fell through.

This is an incredible claim and demands some clarity. Proud had been working at the Gallery, as the curator of historical collections, no less, for more than a decade when he made this assertion. Indeed, four oil paintings by “a ‘native’ artist, Gerard Sekoto” had been submitted to the Gallery’s Board of Trustees in 1944 (SANG, 1944). It was agreed not to purchase any of the works, and importantly, no reasons for this decision was given.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ When asked for evidence for this claim, Proud referred to this reference in the minute book, which gives no reason for the decision not to acquire (2014: private correspondence).

Proud's implication was that the Gallery tried to collect Sekoto in the 1940s, but that, because of insufficient funding, it did not until the 1960s. To claim, as a matter of fact, that the purchases in 1944 were refused because of the SANG's financial position is inaccurate and deceiving. The Gallery was certainly acquiring works throughout this period.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, Proud omits a host of details that might contradict his implication. For instance, Sekoto was identified in the SANG's desiderata throughout much of the 1950s. In fact, in 1953 the Gallery underbid on a work on auction, and their offer of £50 was rejected. At this time, the Gallery's Special Purchases Fund had an accumulated a balance of £4 947 (SANG, 1953:2). When the Gallery did buy a Sekoto painting in 1964, two decades after rejecting the initial four in 1944, the asking price was R320. The Gallery decided to offer R168, planning to increase the offer to R210, only if necessary. All the while, R14 000 was available in the purchasing fund (SANG, 1964:4). In 1965 three more oils by Sekoto were submitted, but ironically it was "resolved not to recommend for purchase; but rather to endeavour to get an early Sekoto before 1948" (SANG, 1965:3).¹⁰⁵

This narrative of the Gallery being perpetually underfunded is not untrue, but the extent and details thereof have been distorted, perhaps to nurture sympathy in an attempt to attract patronage. Another claim in Proud's editorial (2006:14), referring to the state's "miserly investment in its national art museum," was that the SANG first received an acquisitions budget in 1949. Proud (2006:14) claims that by 1966 "it was a mere R600 per annum." This is also incorrect. In the early history there was no distinction between the state's grant-in-aid and the acquisitions budget. It might not have received an acquisitions grant before 1949, but it certainly received a grant-in-aid much earlier. After applying for a parliamentary grant in 1877, by 1880 the SAAA received £100 pounds per annum. This was doubled to £200 from 1883 (Fairbairn, 1990:551). The grant was reduced to £90 from 1915 as a result of the Great War. This may have not seemed like much, but between 1883 and 1915 it accounted for as much as £6700.

¹⁰⁴ As discussed previously in this chapter, in 1972 Bokhorst had dismissed this "favourite excuse" as overlu simplistic. Bokhorst declared: "It can of course be brought forward that the purchasing funds were extremely limited in those years, but then again we notice that in the year 1943 alone no less than eleven sculptures by Mitford-Barberton were bought" (Bokhorst, 1972a:n.p.).

¹⁰⁵ Gerard Sekoto's *Four Men and a Guitar* (1944) was purchased in 1971 (SANG, 1982).

Considering that Sir Thomas Butterworth Bayley's grant of £500 in 1872 is often fondly remembered, one wonders why the State's contribution is forgotten.

Between 1915 and 1947 the grant was increased dramatically, as a report published in 1950 suggests that "prior to 1947 the Government paid an annual grant of £2850 to the Board of Trustees" (Union of South Africa, 1950:n.p). The report also suggests that in 1947 the amount increased to £4000, and again in 1949 to £6127. In addition to the Government grant, at this point the City Council of Cape Town was contributing £1000 annually. It is important to remember that in 1953 the Gallery's Special Purchases Fund had an accumulated balance of £4947 (SANG, 1953:2). According to the Annual Report of 1961-62, the grant-in-aid was R29 312, of which R600 was allocated specifically for purchases.¹⁰⁶ However, by this point R3000 was also received from the City Council, of which R1500 was transferred to the acquisitions budget. This means that Proud's assertion (2006:14) that "by 1966 . . . [the acquisitions budget] was a mere R600 per annum" is misleading as it ignores the City grant, and the grant-in-aid, but it is also simply incorrect. After much campaigning from Bokhorst and his Board of Trustees, the Government acquisitions grant was increased to R14 000 in 1964 (SANG, 1964:11). It was increased to R18 000 in 1965. The year Proud claimed the Gallery received an acquisitions grant of R600, the amount was increased again to R26 000. According to the Annual Report of 1968, these increases enabled the Gallery to "fill many gaps in the permanent collection and to pursue more actively its aim to present the full story of South African art" (SANG, 1968:n.p). Beyond these omissions and inaccuracies, Proud did not give any indication of what R600 in 1966 may have equated to in value in 2006, when he wrote his article.

Referring to a more recent history of insufficient government funding, Proud (2006:14) suggested that without ad-hoc funding from the National Lottery and the DAC the Iziko SANG would have very little to offer the public. The acquisitions budget was R141 000 in 2006, but Proud omits the details regarding ad-hoc funds. The Iziko (2005:66) Annual Report for 2004-05

¹⁰⁶ During 1961-62 and 1962-63 the Gallery spent R6746 on acquisitions, illustrating that the grant-in-aid, in addition to the purchasing grant, appear to have been used for acquisitions (SANG, 1964:3).

for instance refers to grants from the National Lotteries Board and the DAC amounting to over R2 000 000. In this sense the ‘minuscule budget,’ without reference to other allocations, serves to mislead.

3.9. A Future Untold?

Details may have been misrepresented, but in general the narrative of financial lack holds true. In 1947 the *Stratford Report* (1947:2) considered the “lack of funds” as being the primary motivation behind Roworth’s sales from the permanent collection in the 1940s. When von Moltke resigned from his position in 1962 he asserted that “the State did not provide enough for proper research in the visual arts” (von Moltke, 1962:n.p). By 1980, van Niekerk had reached the stage where when visitors asked how much the SANG’s purchasing grant was, he replied “Nothing” (de Villiers, 1980:6). In 1998 Martin noted with concern: “The collection stagnates if not added to, particularly at a time when South Africa’s visual artists are making reputations abroad” (Martin, in Morris, 1998:8). The Gallery received no acquisitions budget at all between 1997 and 2003.

Under Naidoo’s directorship the Iziko SANG reported “significant acquisitions in terms of redress” (Naidoo, 2014:n.p). Between 2009 and 2012, the Gallery acquired artworks by Noria Mabasa, Billy Mandini, Lionel Davis, Peter Clarke, Samson Mudzunga, and George Pemba, among others. It was also able to acquire artworks by emerging contemporary artists, like Kudzanai Chiurai, Athi-Patra Ruga, Cameron Platter, Nandipha Mntambo, James Webb, Zanele Muholi, and Mary Sibande, among others. However, according to the 2012-13 Annual Report, Iziko has since been unable to implement its acquisitions policies owing to dwindling acquisition budgets. The report (2013:15) asserted that, in order for the Gallery to contribute to nation-building and social cohesion in the future, the SANG and other Iziko museums would need to be financially empowered, “to proactively collect these works and play a defining role in the memorialisation of South Africa’s heritage.” As a result of financial insufficiency, no acquisition budget was allocated during the period 2012-13, and thus no acquisitions were made via purchase. Despite the lack of acquisitions budget, alternative initiatives for contributing to the

collection, endowment, gift, or bequest, were also inadequate.¹⁰⁷ A similar impasse is described in the Iziko Annual Report for 2013-14:

Iziko does not currently have adequate funding to acquire new art and social history items that broadly reflect the rich heritage of those who were deliberately marginalised under colonialism and Apartheid. (Iziko, 2014:14)

It is perhaps ironic that the Gallery was able to acquire work by black artists in the 1960s and 1970s, but in 2014 admits that it is unable to implement its acquisitions policies of redressing the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. How can the Iziko SANG be expected to memorialise South African heritage or institutionalise South African art history, without adequate resources? With inadequate resources, how can the Iziko SANG be expected to do so without the vision or capacity for taking alternative initiatives – in campaigning for endowments, gifts or bequests?

The inevitable dangers for the SANG, in not acquiring art in the present, are the potential for critical gaps in future collections. To what extent will the Iziko SANG be a stakeholder or a participant in the construction of the next generation of artists, as Dubow questioned of the SANG in 1964, those who would “dictate the mainstream of South African art in the next decade or so” (Dubow, 1964:n.p). It is critical that in the 2012-13 financial year, not a single work was acquired by the Iziko SANG’s Art Collections Department through purchase (Iziko 2013). Is the Gallery neglecting a generation of South African artists? In 2006 Proud described a visit from the Government’s Portfolio Committee on Arts and Culture, and where curators were asked “Why do you need money for acquisitions? Don’t you have enough pictures already?” (2006:14). A generation from now, will there be ‘critical gaps’ in the collection, gaps left by a neglectful, misguided, and underfunded past?

¹⁰⁷ This is evidenced by the fact that only a handful of works entered the collection through donation. Including three photographs: Andrew Putter’s *Native Lives* (2010); and Jean Brundrit’s *Making History (Voortrekker nooitjies): Dit is slegs deur hul onwrikbare geloof dat hulle sal oorwin* (2003) and *Making History (Voortrekker nooitjies): Hulle moet saamwerk om die daaglikse take uit te voer* (2003); and four etchings: Nandipha Mntambo’s *Green Hump; Red Hump; Study I; and Study II* (2010).

Chapter Four

Performing Nation: SANG Exhibitions Practices Post-1994 in Context

In the present, as in the past, the SANG has positioned itself in relation to the national narrative of the day. The first chapter in this study described how the SANG has adapted itself to redefinitions of South Africa nationhood. The second and third chapters examined how consistent repositioning was reflected in the SANG's policies, and subsequently implemented in collection practices. Exhibitions are a Gallery's primary means of communicating its policies to its publics, and thus this chapter focuses on exhibition-making as the performance those roles as articulated in policy.

By engaging historical precedents, in particular the SANG's contributions to the 1952 Tercentenary Festival, this chapter will illustrate how the nation, as a subject for exhibitions, is not merely a recent phenomenon. By exploring debates and developments, particularly in the 1980s, regarding the roles of galleries and museums, this chapter aims to give sufficient context to more recent practices. Then, by closely reviewing three survey exhibitions mounted after the dramatic redefinition of South African nationhood in the 1990s, this chapter will examine the displays of national identity, and question if and how these displays transformed in the period under review. The exhibitions *Contemporary South African 1985 - 1995 from the South African National Gallery Permanent Collection; A Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994 - 2004 from the Permanent Collection of the Iziko South African National Gallery; and 1910 – 2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive*, display key sets of ideas relating to South African identity. These ideas have then been expanded upon and engaged in public discourse. Comparative analyses of these exhibitions enable an enquiry into the display of national narratives, and question if and how these displays have transformed in the period under review. In the discussion of each exhibition three broad questions are asked. Firstly, how have these exhibitions, in the artists and choice of artworks exhibited, and in their curatorship, contributed to debates around nationhood? Secondly, how have exhibition catalogues and related marketing material presented the respective curatorial arguments? Thirdly, how have critical responses to each exhibition engaged these outlined positions, and supported or subverted their respective displays?

4.1. Historical Precedents: ‘We Build a Nation’

President Nelson Mandela is regarded as the father of the ‘new’ South African nation. In his autobiography, *A Long Walk to Freedom* (1994), the idolised inaugural President of a democratic South Africa suggested that white South African history, and the birth of the South African state, took place on 6 April 1652 with the arrival of the Dutch settler Jan van Riebeeck. In describing the launch of the ANC’s Defiance Campaign¹⁰⁸ on 6 April 1952, Mandela (1994:142) considered how on that same day “White South African’s would be celebrating the three-hundredth anniversary of Jan van Riebeeck’s arrival at the Cape.” In 1952, 6 April was declared Van Riebeeck Day, a formal public holiday that was later renamed Founder’s Day in 1980. It was the day “white South Africans annually commemorated as the founding of their country” and conversely the day that “Africans revile as the beginning of three hundred years of enslavement” (Mandela, 1994:142).

In commemoration of the founding of the South African nation, the 1952 Tercentenary Festival celebrations were taking place throughout the country. The SANG was no exception, and proudly contributed three exhibitions to the festivities. These included an exhibition of sculpture centred primarily on the British sculptor Henry Moore, an exhibition of British eighteenth-century painting, and most importantly the *Exhibition of XVII Century Dutch Painting* “most closely connected with the birthday of South Africa” (Anderson, 1952:n.p).¹⁰⁹

In the preface to the catalogue accompanying the exhibition of seventeenth-century Dutch painting, the SANG’s director John Paris described how the proclamation of the festival was “We Build a Nation” (Paris, 1952:3).¹¹⁰ According to Paris, the “progress of a nation” is measured by

¹⁰⁸ The ANC’s ‘Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws’ was a large-scale non-violent protest against Apartheid laws, using public disobedience as its strategy.

¹⁰⁹ The exhibition of seventeenth-century Dutch work was described as the “most distinguished part of the cultural feast” (Anderson, 1952:n.p).

¹¹⁰ Notably the theme of the exhibition ‘We Build a Nation’ is reminiscent of the State-sponsored nationalist propaganda film *Die Bou van ‘n Nasie / They Built a Nation* (1938). A short text at the start of the film set out its ideological framing:

its arts: “not only by what it makes for itself” but also “by what it admires,” and that it was time to assess the country’s cultural accomplishments in this regard (Paris, 1952:3). Comprising a collection of Old Masters and historical maps of the Cape, lent by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and Mauritshuis in The Hague, this exhibition emphasised the achievements of the Dutch schools of the seventeenth century. According to Paris (1952:3), it was the greatest period of Dutch art history, and importantly represented the time when “our founder,” van Riebeeck settled in the Cape “and gave cause for this rejoicing.” Paris (1952:4) described how substandard work had previously been admired for lack of alternatives, and suggested that this was, in fact, the convention “in all new countries acquiring culture.” However, now that an appropriate means of comparison had been provided, a new phase in the history of South African art criticism would finally commence.

The arts section represented only a small part of the much larger nation-building festival. According to Ciraj Rassool and Leslie Witz (1993:448), the 1952 Tercentenary Festival programme “raised fundamental questions about the construction and composition of the South African nation, what constituted a national history, and the icons and symbols of that history.” Van Riebeeck, who before the 1940s had little place in public history, had been designated the role of ‘founding father’ in this newly constructed national history (Witz & Rassool, 1993:451). The arts section of the Van Riebeeck Festival was officially opened by the Union’s Governor General E.G. Jansen, who had famously refused to wear the ceremonial uniform or take the oath of allegiance to King George VI when sworn into office a year before in 1951. Jansen was a fervent nationalist and republican, a member of the ‘Afrikaner Broederbond’, and chaired the committee that first proposed the building of the Voortrekker monument (Marx, 2008:267).

The Tercentenary Festival was an attempt to display the power of the recently established apartheid state. The SANG’s contributions, especially the *Exhibition of XVII Century Dutch*

“This is a saga of dogged endurance and high ideas / A story of the taming of a savage country, the conquest of a savage people and the building of a nation” (Maingard, 2007:54).

Painting, is tethered to the apartheid government's broader political and ideological scheme.¹¹¹ The South African state was beginning to propagate its new image of the nation and the SANG was complicit in its reimagining. The exhibition performed the dominant nationalist narrative of the day, emphasising pride in a common European heritage¹¹², while constructing an independent South African national history and identity. However, considering that the ANC's Defiance Campaign against the recently established apartheid system was launched on the same day, was this 'official national narrative' reconcilable with the South African national reality?¹¹³

If, as suggested by Mandela, 6 April 1652 marked the birth of the South African state, then 27 April 1994, the day that held the first democratic elections in South Africa, marked the rebirth of that South African state. The public holiday, Founder's Day, was swiftly abolished after Mandela was elected President. In its place, the founding of the 'new' South Africa is annually commemorated on Freedom Day, on 27 April, in celebration of the first universal franchise elections. Notably in 1992 the City of Cape Town officially cancelled its 'Jan van Riebeeck Day' celebrations. According to Frank van der Velde, then Mayor of Cape Town and occupant of the 'Van Riebeeck Chair', the City Council had decided to cancel celebrations of the 340th anniversary of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck because "it would be divisive to focus on a one-sided Eurocentric founding of Cape Town" (van der Velde in Witz & Rassool, 1993:447).

4.2. Getting Our Houses in Order

¹¹¹ According to Witz and Rassool, the juxtaposition of 'white civilisation' and 'primitive Africa' was central to the Festival: "the achievements of industry, science and mining were put on show alongside the 'Bantu pavilion', a 'Zulu kraal', a display of 'South-west African bushmen', a reconstruction of a 'traditional English village' and a replica of the market place of Culemborg, van Riebeeck's birthplace" (Witz & Rassool, 1993:451).

¹¹² According to the Official Festival Programme, a central theme of the festival "asserted the development of settler co-operation in the founding of the South African nation" (Witz & Rassool, 1993:457-8).

¹¹³ Notably most opposition to the Tercentenary Festival did not come from the ANC but rather from individuals and organization associated with the Unity Movement, which contested in graphic terms the idea of settler founding.

At the 51st annual SAMA conference themed *Museums in a Changing and Divided Society*, academic Dr Jan Hofmeyer stated during a panel discussion: “We museums are lucky, we have to date had too low a profile to be politicised. We still have time to get our houses in order” (Hofmeyer in Carmen, 1987:36).

Towards the end of the 1980s South Africa was on the verge of radical societal transformation, and gallery and museum professionals were beginning to get their houses in order. Around this time, two exhibitions were mounted in Johannesburg that were considered watershed moments in South African art. The first was *Tributaries: A View of South African Art* in 1985. Researched and compiled by BMW South Africa, and curated by Ricky Burnett, the exhibition challenged conventions and assumptions about South African art by elevating modes of artistic production previously dismissed as ‘craft’, ‘transitional’ or ‘outsider’ art, to the category of ‘fine art’. Artworks, by both black and white artists, fine art and ‘craft’, were exhibited alongside each other with the objective of showing the similarities between them (Marschall, 2001). Such was the impact of this exhibition that South African artist Andrew Verster suggested that after *Tributaries*: “nothing in our art world will ever be the same . . . this show does what no other collection of South African art has ever done” (Verster, 1985:n.p.). *Tributaries* was premised on the fact that, because of South Africa’s cultural orientation towards Europe, arbitrary distinctions were drawn between art and ethnography. The criteria for ‘fine art’ was constructed in Europe and therefore African modes of artistic production were excluded from official art histories. Writing in 1985 in the accompanying catalogue, Burnett asserted that prevailing exclusive distinctions between modes of artistic production seemed like a “colonial anachronism” (Burnett, 1985:3). In response, *Tributaries* was ‘inclusive’, and the exhibition included a broader range of South African visual arts production. Black South African artists, working in modes of visual and cultural production pejoratively labelled ‘craft art’, ‘traditional African art’, ‘transitional art’, and ‘tourist art’, were shown together with white artists working in Western tradition artistic modes. Importantly, they were presented beside each other, without hierarchical divisions (Marschall, 2001:51). The objective of the exhibition was thus to demonstrate aesthetic affinities despite differences in race, culture, style and form.

The second exhibition was *The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art* (1930 - 1988). Organised by the JAG in 1988, and curated by Stephen Sack, the exhibition comprised black artists working between 1930 and 1988 who had hitherto been overlooked by official art histories and art institutions (Sack, 1988). As a project of art historical revision, the exhibition, research and subsequent catalogue traced the unwritten stories of black South African artists. In his foreword to the catalogue, JAG's director Christopher Till considered how *The Neglected Tradition* was indicative of the Gallery's new role "in a multi-cultural and diverse society." The JAG would now collect, display, and document "the artistic endeavours of *all* South African artists." (Till, 1988:5; my emphasis)

In the revised edition of her survey of South African art, *Painting in South Africa* (1993), Berman (1993:xxiii) suggested that the acknowledgement and reappraisal of diverse strands of South African visual culture: "was clearly indispensable to the immediate healing process and ultimate reshaping of South African society." However this unprecedented respect for diversity was not merely a South African phenomenon. Developments in art theories, and new approaches to visual and material culture, were having a profound impact on the international art scene, its exhibitions, and its discourses. These international developments endorsed multiculturalism and diversity, and ultimately the erosion of elitist and exclusive distinctions between 'insider' fine art and 'outsider' folk art, traditional art, craft and ethnic artefact (Berman, 1993:xxiii). The theories of Post-modernism, a movement in art, architecture, literature, philosophy, and criticism of the late-twentieth century, was a departure from modernism and all it entailed and represented. The result was scepticism for the assumed truths regarding art and culture. Boundaries between the constructed distinctions of high and low art forms were being eradicated, and traditional fine art genres were being disrupted. Ideas of pluralism and diversity were central to this new wave of thought, and so was the deconstruction and reappraisal of assumed histories.

At the 6th annual conference of the South African Association of Art Historians in 1990, Martin presented a paper titled *Expanding Boundaries? Museums Past and Future*. Martin described how the SANG's new exhibition programme would give a more "balanced and representative view of art activities in this country – past and present" (Martin, 1990:n.p). This process would involve retrospective exhibitions of previously marginalised black artists, the incorporation of modes of

visual arts production hitherto under-acknowledged, and the inclusion of emerging contemporary black (and white) artists. In so doing, the construction of the new South African canons would take place. In the same way that Bokhorst cited trends in international art to contextualise the collections of historical African art in the 1960s and early 1970s, Martin cited international and local developments in exhibition-making, and new theoretical discussions, as having a profound impact on her own approach.

In a contribution to the *Journal of South African Art History* in 1993, Martin considered the controversies regarding some of the international exhibitions of this time.¹¹⁴ According to Martin these exhibitions maintained a negation of the developing world, and that in the process of ‘othering’ they were preserving distinctions between ‘the centre’ and ‘the periphery’. However, Martin (1993:99) concluded, embracing South Africa’s position on the African continent: “Not only are we fundamentally implicated in the lives of the Other, we are part of the Other. Let us therefore acknowledge, restore and celebrate our Otherness.” Thus Martin applauded the “success” and “progress” of local exhibitions, which she asserted had far exceeded the efforts from abroad. Because South Africa was “no longer being determined by a ready-made, imported culture,” Martin determined local exhibitions to be more appropriate in engaging distinctions between the mainstream and the periphery. In this regard, Martin referred to how *Tributaries* and *The Neglected Tradition*, among others, had addressed “the imbalances in our society and in our history as well as the need to rewrite South African art history” (Martin, 1993:99). After reference to these precedents, Martin (1993:99) considered the responsibilities and duties of art museums:

The time for reconstruction and reconciliation, for repatriation and restitution has begun. There is a compelling need for museums to determine how far they are measuring up to their responsibilities. For, after fulfilling all our duties, and after

¹¹⁴ Martin’s list included ‘Primitivism’ in twentieth century art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern (1984), at the Museum of Modern Art in New York; Magiciens de la Terre (1989) at the Centre Pompidou and Parc de la Villette in Paris; *The other story* (1990) at The Hayward Gallery in London; and *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art* (1991) at the Centre for African Art in New York, among others.

contributing to learning in all its facets, we also have a responsibility to the national well-being, to fostering a national consciousness and to building a national culture. We must put all the lies, the distortions and the prejudices of Eurocentricism behind us.

Cultural developments in South Africa and abroad, in theory and in practice, can be considered highly influential to the parallel developments in the SANG in the 1990s. Considering the timing of Martin's journal entry, that in 1994 South Africa transformed into a democracy with a new political dispensation, perhaps under Martin's directorship the SANG was 'getting its house in order'. While a curator at JAG in 1987, Carman similarly considered how galleries in South Africa needed to be more relevant to more people, not simply because they were bound by policy¹¹⁵, but vitally, because they wished to "survive in this country" (Carman, 1987:36).

4.3. Powerful Vehicles for Writing and Rewriting Art History

The SANG was closed for renovations between April 1989 and October 1991. Unobstructed by the demands of day-to-day running of the Gallery, the SANG's curatorial team was able to developed the policy changes that culminated in the *Policy Manual* (1991) discussed in chapter two. Guided by these new policies the SANG re-opened with *Affinities*, an exhibition comparable to *Tributaries* in how it sought to illustrate "the relationship and cross-pollination between western European and African art" (Loppert, 1993). The exhibition opening was officiated by anti-apartheid activist Mamphela Ramphele. In her heavily politicised speech, Ramphele questioned the framework within which art "can begin to reflect a truly national culture" (Ramphele in "Forging a national culture in SA", 1991:8). Ramphele (1991:8) suggested that art under apartheid privileged the white sector of society, and "bore no relationship to the lives of the majority of people." Mocking the vast extent to which the realm of fine art was removed from

¹¹⁵ Referring to the terms of the JAG's *Deed of Donatio Inter Vivos* (1913), the Gallery was established "for the behoof and public benefit of the inhabitants of the said town and the neighbourhood thereof and of others resorting thereto" (Carman, 1985:36). The same could be said for the SANG, because when the *South African Gallery Act* (1985) was issued by the Cape Parliament, the collection was appropriated in "trust for the people of the Cape Colony" (Kendall, 1941:16).

the realities of South Africa, Ramphela (1991:8) asserted that “one would have been forgiven for thinking of South Africa as a part of Europe which had drifted off and got attached to Africa by some historic-geographic accident.” In attempts to reverse this perception, the *Policy Manual* (1991:7) had described how the SANG’s new exhibition programme would enable the Gallery to “participate in the rewriting of art history in South Africa, and curate exhibitions which will give a balanced and representative view of art activities in this country – past and present.” The policy of inclusion over exclusion was thus pursued. Amended in 1996, the exhibitions policy included a further aim: of redressing imbalances “created by our history and by Eurocentric attitudes and approaches” (SANG, 1991:41).

Crampton (2003:218-9) considered how, under Martin’s directorship, exhibitions in the early 1990s engaged “debates about democratization, nation-building, and identity in the rapidly transforming ‘New’ South Africa.” Reflecting on the decade of the 1990s, Marschall described these movements in gallery practices as ‘strategies of accommodating’ the works of black South African artists. Like *Tributaries*, the *Affinities* exhibition demonstrated aesthetic affinity despite formal or cultural difference. The other strategy of accommodation was of revisionism in the vein of *The Neglected Tradition*. In this regard the SANG mounted many retrospective exhibitions, described by Martin as “powerful vehicles for writing and rewriting art history.” With reference to the exhibitions of Peter Clarke (1992), Durant Sihlali (1994), Ernest Mancoba (1995) and George Pemba (1995), Martin suggested that “each artist in his own way was ignored, neglected and relegated to the margins of South African art making and history” (Martin, 1996:n.p).

4.4. Contemporary South African Art: 1985 - 1995

In the 1990s South African art history was being actively rewritten and a new, redefined canon of South African art was in the process of being formed. According to Marschall (1999), this process of dramatic change was characterised by a number of exhibitions, particularly the SANG’s *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995/from the South African National Gallery Permanent Collection* (1996 - 1997). This exhibition was curated by Emma Bedford and presented a survey of works acquired in the tumultuous decade of national transition. As a survey of art made,

acquired, and displayed at a time of great political, social and ideological transition, the exhibition stood as a testament to how the artists, individuals and the Gallery itself “experienced, perceived and understood that period” (Bedford, 1997:11). As a reflection of a decade defined by the transition from apartheid to democracy, Martin (1997:21) suggested that the exhibition was a powerful reminder “that art and politics cannot be separated,” evidenced by the significant collections of politically charged art acquired in the period under review, and thus exhibited in this survey.

With reference to calls that political considerations be put aside¹¹⁶, Martin (1997:22) suggested that the challenges and possibilities had become “indefinitely more complex, diversified, ambivalent and contentious.” Martin was thus engaging the contradictions and complexities of this new South African society. Perhaps paradoxically, considering how the Government understood the role of public arts institutions, as serving a social function, and her own understanding of the responsibilities and duties of the art museum, Martin asserted that artists “can neither be compelled nor coerced to toe any line, political or aesthetic . . . demands cannot be placed upon them by politicians, institutions, self-appointed guardians of public morals and well-being” (Martin, 1997:22).

In South Africa a discussion about art and culture is considered incomplete without due reference to the relationship between culture and politics. In the ‘old’ South Africa, according to Martin (1996:10), “culture was used both as a basis for apartheid and as a site for liberation.” The exhibition: *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* reflected this position, and art with explicit political orientations were displayed prominently. Paul Grendon’s *Ons Vir Jou Suid-Afrika* (1984-86), Jane Alexander’s *Butcher Boys* (1985-86), Billy Mandini’s *Fire Games* (1985), Cedric Nunn’s *Mpophomeni Youth Member, killed by Inkatha, Natal* (1987), Sfiso Ka Mkame’s *Letters to God* (1988), Kevin Brand’s *Nineteen Boys Running* (1988) and Willie Bester’s *The Soldier* (1990) and *Challenges Facing the New South Africa* (1990), among many others, spoke

¹¹⁶ Sachs’s *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* (1989) is discussed in chapter one.

critically of the context in which they were created. In this sense, the exhibition asserted its position as being against historical amnesia (Martin, 1997:20).

Included on the exhibition was a photograph documenting the iconoclastic destruction of three sculptures by Gail Neke titled *Eugene Terre'Blanch and his two sidekicks* on 15 January 1992.¹¹⁷ As described in the exhibition catalogue, six members of the *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) (AWB), a white supremacist group led by Eugene Terre'Blanche, destroyed the works during the exhibition *Recent Acquisitions*. In addition, the AWB threatened to "blow up the museum" if it continued to feature "unfavourable art images of its members" (Martin, 1997:21).

The period was also marked by the dismantling of the apartheid regime, and other artworks reflected the hope for a new democratic South Africa. Trevor Makhoba's *Things Will Happen* (1991), Vuyisani Mgjima *Unification* (1991), and Christian Nkuna's *The Road to Democracy* (1995), among others, all embodied the sense of optimism and idealism that accompanied the transition to a democracy in 1994. Other works were apolitical, characterised by abstraction or solely by aesthetic concerns. David Koloane's *Emergence* (1988), Neville Dubow's *Street 1* and *Street II* (1989), Jackson Hlungwani's *Christ Playing Football* (1989), Durant Sihlali's *Fragments of the Ancient Wall* (1991), Lia Masilele's *Untitled* (1994) and Isa Kabini's *Untitled* (1994), among others, were seemingly devoid of political impetus.

By exhibiting modes of visual arts production previously considered 'outsider art' or 'craft', in an exhibition of 'contemporary art', the SANG aimed to contribute to the broadening of the definition itself. In works like Jackson Hlungwani's carved sculptures and Bonnie Ntshalintshali's ceramics, Isa Kabini's Ndebele paintings (commissioned by the SANG), and Given Makhubele's beaded tapestries, the SANG was broadening its scope and exhibiting 'inclusively'. Martin

¹¹⁷ Notably this was not the first time that political intolerance prompted iconoclasm at the SANG. An intriguing incident is undated but is detailed by Bokhorst in a newspaper article celebrating the SANG's centenary in 1972. Bokhorst described how an unknown "politically-inclined young man" defaced a Crosland-Robinson painting of Paul Kruger (1904). After "slicing the nose in half, the man then disappeared into the gardens." (Gray, 1972:n.p)

(1997:20) wrote in the catalogue's introduction that previously state support for the arts "was exclusively to the benefit of white South Africa." However, Martin asserted, "things have changed rapidly" (Martin, 1997:20). The exhibition thus served as a performance of the SANG's ability to adapt to new conditions. It was simultaneously critical and optimistic, political and apolitical. It was simultaneously critical of its own past, while outlining the aspirations for its future as redemption.

The exhibition catalogue included the SANG's recently promulgated vision and mission. The vision of the SANG (1997:9) was now to "provide a cultural and educational resource, encourage involvement in the visual arts, and nurture a culturally diverse but shared national identity." The mission of the SANG included "acknowledging the multi-cultural nature of South African society" in an attempt "to accommodate this diversity while recognizing and supporting the building of a national culture" (SANG, 1997:9). In the catalogue's preface, Bedford (1997:13-14) remarked on how the political transformation to democracy "brought with it many cultural changes and consequent demands." In this regard, the exhibition illustrated the Gallery's commitment to maintaining a high standard of art, while still "nurturing a diverse but shared national identity" (Bedford, 1997:15).

In the catalogue Martin described how the SANG's financial situation had influenced acquisitions. Where previously the Gallery may have purchased international art, or focused on already established South African artists, the financial position meant that the Gallery's collection practices now involved an "open-ended and pluralistic approach" (Martin, 1997:18). Like Bedford, Martin (1997:18) emphasised the SANG's role within a transforming South Africa: "We inform, construct, change and direct the narrative – aesthetically, culturally, historically, politically – through our acquisitions and exhibitions," and, justifying its purpose as a public art museum, Martin asserted that the SANG, as the 'national' gallery, was "integral to refiguring and reinventing South African art and identity." Accordingly, this entailed addressing "the historical problem of cultural difference in South Africa" (Martin, 1997:19). As a means of communicating its role to its public, the exhibition demonstrated the new multicultural and diverse image of the nation. In doing so, the SANG demonstrated its capacity for the imagining and display thereof.

Reflecting on the exhibition in 2004, Martin (2004:54) described how its catalogue told the story of the process of transformation that was initiated at the SANG in 1990. Indeed, in addenda, the catalogue for *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* included the new acquisitions and exhibition policies (SANG, 1997:38-43). It also included the names of those who made up the Acquisitions Committees in the period under review, and thus the transformation thereof. In the period under review the Acquisitions Committee comprised SANG staff members, representatives of institutions and associations, and government appointees. At least one of the government appointees, during apartheid, had been a prominent state censor.¹¹⁸ After 1994, the government appointees were representative of the new political dispensation, and in theory more representative of the new government's political concerns than their predecessors.¹¹⁹

In a review of the exhibition published in *Third Text*, Jacqueline Nolte (1997:95) referred to the catalogue as being an 'introspective approach', and considered that the Gallery was performing a public audit as a "voluntary exposure in the spirit of national reconciliation." With the inclusion of policies documents both old and new, lists showing the changing composition of the acquisitions committees, and texts by the curator and director both lamenting the past, yet being enthusiastic for the future, the SANG was actively engaging their own position – as a national gallery in a transforming nation. Importantly, they were doing so transparently, and as such Martin (1997:22) described the exhibition as an opportunity: "to take stock, to assess and measure our Acquisitions Policy and its implementation, to identify gaps and map future directions."

¹¹⁸ At least one government appointee was former member of the Apartheid state's Censorship Board. According to Annual Reports, and the *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* catalogue, H. van der Merwe Scholtz had served on the SANG's acquisitions committee from 1979 to 1993. While Chairman of the Publications Committee in 1977, van der Merwe Scholtz described of J.M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* (1977): "sex across the colour bar takes place but the characters are situated historically and geographically such that it is completely acceptable" (van der Merwe Scholtz in Graham, 2012:153).

¹¹⁹ These included among others, Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa, Lionel Davis, and David Koloane.

The SANG was not unique in this regard. There was a proliferation of publications assessing art museum collections in this same decade, most notably the JAG's *A Decade of Collecting 1986 - 1996* (1997). This trend, according to Charlton (1997:59), was ultimately motivated by a desire to communicate the discernable shifts in gallery practices and policies. Apparently museums had simultaneously reflected the transforming social and political climate of a particularly important decade, and were now willing to communicate their efforts.

The exhibition *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* and its catalogue reflected the period under review. As a survey of contemporary South African art, the exhibition presented the subjects, styles, and concepts that had characterised the decade. The transition from an apartheid regime to a young democracy was thus the subject of display and interrogation. The SANG was critical of its past and, while not uncritical of its present, questioned the South African future and its role within it. As the first major exhibition after the dramatic shifts in policy, the exhibition demonstrated and validated the shifts in collection and display practices. Much of the rhetoric proclaimed the SANG's role in building the new South African nation, and the exhibition can be read within this discursive frame.

4.5. A Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994 - 2004

The year 2004 marked the 10th anniversary of South Africa's democracy. Described by the CEO of Iziko Museums, 'Jattie' Bredekamp (2004:12), as "part of the national celebration of a decade of freedom," the Iziko SANG mounted a major exhibition – *A Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994 - 2004 from the Permanent Collection of the Iziko South African National Gallery*.¹²⁰ The exhibition was also curated by Bedford, and the Gallery was still under the directorship of Martin. This exhibition, like *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995*, was a survey of a decade. While its predecessor charted South Africa's transition to a democracy, *A Decade of Democracy* was a critical assessment of that young democracy.

¹²⁰ Other venues hosted exhibitions commemorating this milestone of democracy, most notably *Democracy X* at the Castle of Good Hope.

The introduction to the *A Decade of Democracy* catalogue opened with a quote by Nelson Mandela, after which Bedford outlined the exhibition's various approaches and intentions. The exhibition was an attempt to map the cultural, social and political terrain of South Africa's first decade as a democratic state. According to Bedford (2004a:4-5), "enormous strides" had been made since the country's metamorphosis to a 'new' South Africa in 1994, and while the task of "transforming an Apartheid regime into a democratic government and society" was an incredible challenge, it was a "challenge [to] which artists have risen willingly." After decades in which art was seen as a political tool, Bedford (2004a:5) insisted that artists had continued "to grapple with political, cultural and social issues." In this sense, Bedford argued, art had engaged, and often led, the debates around transformation in South Africa. *A Decade of Democracy* was then not a one-dimensional celebration of a decade of freedom, as the CEO of Iziko had suggested. Rather, it was a critical, complex, and self-aware engagement with transformation. Lize van Robbroeck thus succinctly defined the exhibition as "an active renegotiation of heritage, memory, and identity in the rapidly transforming socio-economic milieu of contemporary South Africa." (van Robbroeck, 2004:42)

While the *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* catalogue had focused on the institutional transformation of the gallery, the changes in policy and committee representation, the *A Decade of Democracy* catalogue was an authoritative publication of art historical significance. Edited by Bedford, the catalogue constituted an anthology of essays by critics, curators, academics and art historians, writing in response to some of the themes central to the exhibition. The exhibition and its catalogue were thus an appraisal of visual arts production, in the context of the post-apartheid transformation of South African society, and the theorisation thereof. As such it stood as a testament to "the redoubtable achievements of the SANG in the face of considerable financial adversity" (van Robbroeck, 2004:47).

Martin's essay, *The Horn of the National Art Museum's Dilemma*, was devoid of the optimism prevalent in the *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* catalogue. Reflecting on the 1990s, Martin (2004:54) described the feeling of "renewal and enthusiasm" as the Gallery anticipated "a new era in which there would be interest in and support for our museums." All optimism was

now replaced with a sobering confrontation with reality. In her essay, Martin lamented the lack of funding and governmental support. For Martin (2004:60), inadequate funding was compromising transformation of the Gallery. Martin compared the Iziko SANG budget to ‘Freedom Park’, the then recently conceptualised post-apartheid monument to the liberation struggle located near the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria (itself a monument to struggle and liberation). Martin was dissatisfied with Freedom Park having received a disproportionate allocation from the DAC’s budget. In response to Martin’s lamentation, Joost Bosland suggested, perhaps harshly: “Martin [needs] to realise that Freedom Park might just be deemed more important than some white building in Cape Town, by its very nature inaccessible to most South Africans.” (Bosland, 2004)

In his review of the exhibition, posted on South African art criticism website *ArtThrob*, Bosland contemplated the nature of the Gallery in the context of a post-apartheid and post-colonial South Africa. According to Bosland, “the audience to which the gallery caters is still predominantly white,” and the “very notion of a National Gallery is profoundly interlinked with the implied superiority of the European nation state” (Bosland, 2004). Where the democratic government’s priority was to “create jobs and fight poverty,” Bosland argued that the role an art museum assumed in this regard was limited (Bosland, 2004). Presumably, in a society with limited financial resources, after financing the HIV/Aids pandemic, job creation, education, land redistribution, etc., the surplus was perceived by government to be better spent on a monument to post-apartheid freedom. Considering the context of the period, with national priorities focused on redressing legacies of the apartheid past, van Robbroeck, like Bosland, felt that it may have seemed “an untenable indulgence to fund something that apparently has no value to the overwhelming majority of the country’s population” (Van Robbroeck, 2004:47). Although, arguably this could apply to both the Iziko SANG and Freedom Park, or to neither.

According to critic Ivor Powell (2004:62), Government’s lack of interest and engagement was characterised by the Deputy Minister of the DAC Ntombazana Botha, whose opening speech for *A Decade of Democracy* was, in fact, “a recycling of another speech by her predecessor.” Worst of all, according to Powell, this fact was only emblematic of Government’s generally indifferent approach to art in the decade under review. Although Government may not have done very

much constructively, Powell (2004:62) asserted, “at least it hasn’t interfered too much.” Bosland, in agreement, considered that “non-interference” was all that an art museum in South Africa could legitimately request (Bosland, 2004).

For the South African state and its national gallery, the first decade of democracy concerned the processes of transformation. For the Gallery this entailed being incorporated into Iziko Museums and having its budget severely reduced. In spite of this, *A Decade of Democracy* confirmed the Iziko SANG’s dedication “to the promotion of fine art” (van Robbroeck, 2004:47). Van Robbroeck considered the Iziko SANG’s success in mounting this important exhibition, despite the severely reduced budget and stifling Iziko bureaucracy, as especially significant (van Robbroeck, 2004:47). Like Robbroeck, Powell commended the Iziko SANG for what had been achieved, describing the collection as “genuinely authoritative in terms of the decade of South African art” (Powell, 2004:62).

With critical consideration for context, Powell’s review contemplated the conventional understanding of Art and the purpose of a ‘National Gallery’; suggesting that when combined with the rhetorical context of democratisation and Africanisation, the space created an uncomfortable contradiction. For Powell, the understanding of art that is practised and maintained by national arts institutions like the Iziko SANG, are both “overlaid and underpinned by the values and realities of a globalised Western epistemology” which is “irredeemably and irreducibly Eurocentric” (Powell, 2004:63). This identity, Powell argued, registered an active position taken by the management of the Iziko SANG, who might have exercised a very different set of choices in the decade under review. The Iziko SANG did not actually radically redefine its position, nor did it adopt a new model for museum practice. Rather, after broadening the definition of ‘excellence’, to cater for diverse modes of visual arts production, it insisted on the same framework of gallery, one “defined in the globalized discourses of high art” (Powell, 2004:63). Questioning the display of Ndebele beadwork in the exhibition, Powell (2004:64) argued that the ‘artefact’ was created within a discourse separate to, and perhaps incompatible within, the framework of the “internationalising national gallery.” Without sufficient contextualisation and explanation, the artefact lived, according to Powell, ‘a half life’. Without description of the social, cultural, or utilitarian significances, the artefact would be suppressed and

overwhelmed by the “discourses of ‘Art’ with a capital A,” and beside its purely aesthetic elements, the decontextualised artefact was read in this context without the “considerations that determined its creation” (Powell, 2004:64). This confusion, Bosland suggested, was the result of insufficient critical engagement with the various complications involved in incorporating so called ‘cultural production’ into the paradigm of ‘high art’ (Bosland, 2004).¹²¹ The subtitle of the exhibition was *South African Art 1994 - 2004*, and resonant of the *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* exhibition, it suggested canonical significance, and as Bosland (2004) observed, granted “the status of ‘art’ for all included objects.” However, for a rather complex debate, regarding the power of the institutional space in relation to the meaning and reading of visual and material culture, at no point did Bedford use the catalogue to properly address these strategies of reform.

Powell (2004:62) also questioned the “cries of *Amandla!*” at the opening of the exhibition, which he described as being “as appropriate to the occasion as a lap dance in a high Catholic mass.” Considering the ‘Amandla’ translates to ‘power to the people’, Bosland (2004) asked: “Would impassioned cries of *Amandla* within the halls of Iziko SANG not be the biggest compliment Bedford and Martin could get?” Perhaps Powell had underestimated the Iziko SANG’s ability to redefine its position? Alternatively, perhaps Powell was questioning the sincerity of their its repositioning altogether.

In a scathing review, art critic Lloyd Pollak criticised the Iziko SANG for favouring art with socio-political concerns at the expense of formal and aesthetic criteria. For Pollak (2004:9) the exhibition emphasised how “ideological concerns, rather than quality, dictated the institution’s purchases.” For Pollak, “politically explicit material,” comprising works referring to South

¹²¹ Notably the inclusion of ‘cultural artifacts’ in South African gallery collection and displays was accompanied by concerns of contextual alienation as early as the 1990s. Art historian Anitra Nettleton considered how, referring to the adoption of ‘traditional African art’ into a western model ‘high art’ framework, cultural workers were placing together objects removed of their original contexts, and the resultant cultural heritage was “being constructed rather than reconstructed” (Nettleton, 1995:67). However, as Anderson (1991) would have argued, all cultures are imagined, and thus cultural heritage is always constructed. Any distinction between construction and reconstruction, or the authenticity thereof, is merely rhetorical.

African realities of land redistribution, migrant labour, unemployment, homelessness, poverty and HIV/Aids, had dominated *A Decade of Democracy*, with the result of “bludgeoning ideological heavy-handedness” (Pollak, 2004:9). However, it should be noted that Pollak (2003:12) made a similar claim a year prior, when he asserted that “Iziko’s passion for ideological posturing and meaningless Utopian gestures has replaced the quest for aesthetic excellence and ensured yet another triumph of the third rate.” Taking aim at the director, Pollak alleged, as if accusing her of a crime: “Ever since Marilyn Martin assumed directorship of the SANG in 1990, she had done all in her power to attract the previously disadvantaged to the institution” (Pollak, 2003:12).

Joyce Ntobe, the black female alter ego of artist Beezy Bailey, wrote a letter to a local newspaper commending Pollak’s “outstanding, brave and honest” critique of the exhibition (Ntobe, 2004:10). Both Bailey and Ntobe are represented in the permanent collections of the Gallery, and yet neither were exhibited in *A Decade of Democracy*. In the letter, titled *Hoist the Curator*, Ntobe (2004:10) sarcastically asserted that the reason for her own exclusion was because her “alter ego is a white man.” According to Ntobe, in agreement with Pollak, the Gallery should progress uncritically, and without reference to social realities, or a complex past. Bedford, according to Ntobe, should be “replaced by a black person with humour, imagination and vision – unconstrained by our tragic past” (Ntobe, 2004:10).

One week later and the same newspaper published a response: “Firstly,” Bedford asserted, “Joyce Ntobe is not a black woman” (Bedford, 2004b:10). Bedford then used this opportunity to highlight the growing list of contemporary black artists represented in the exhibition, and to take aim at Pollak. Bedford (2004b:10) rejected Pollak’s critique as lacking balance, suggesting that it reflected the “narrow perspective” and “personal tastes and opinions” of someone unwilling to question “their own limitations.” Essentially, Bedford concluded, Pollak lacked the capacity to engage, intellectually or aesthetically, with the “provocation and complexities” of contemporary South African art (Bedford, 2004b:10).

Pollak, having judged *A Decade of Democracy* a priori, was no doubt also unsympathetic to Martin’s financial predicaments. Although commended by Powell and van Robbroeck, Powell

argued that it was the “relentless socio-political partiality” and not necessarily the lack of funds, that prevented the exhibition “from providing a representative conspectus of new directions in South African art over this decade” (Pollak, 2003:12). For Pollak *A Decade of Democracy* failed to deliver more than “telling indictments of apartheid inequity” (Pollak, 2003:12). The nexus question, for Pollak, regarded the ‘function’ of the exhibition. Was the goal of *A Decade of Democracy* to showcase a survey of South African art in the period under review, or rather, was it an exercise in public relations, “designed to persuade government how ‘transformed’ acquisition policies have regenerated the National Gallery and made it an effective instrument of social engineering?” (Pollak, 2004:12).

Pollak’s theory, that ideological concerns dictated the collections strategy, as a means to acquiring greater Government funding, was ostensibly undermined by the antithetical nature of some of art deemed “politically explicit material” (Pollak, 2004:12). As Bosland observed in his review, while some works were “unequivocally celebratory,” like Jackson Nkumanda’s *Presidential Inauguration*, other works, like Esther Mahlangu’s *Suid-Afrika Vorentoe*, and Jonathan Shapiro’s *About Art*, were less forgiving, and in some instances, encompassed scathing critique of Government itself (Bosland, 2004).

Furthermore, Pollak’s suggestion that ideological concerns were favoured over quality suggested that the two were mutually exclusive. This decade followed a period of unprecedented political and social tension, indeed one when culture was considered a weapon in the struggle against apartheid. Artists in a democratic South Africa remained critically engaged in social and political realities, not necessarily as a medium of communicating ‘indictments of apartheid inequity’, as unsympathetically argued by Pollak, but as a complex cathartic engagement, with society and with identity, and the transformation thereof. Not merely for the artists, indeed for the viewers too.

In his catalogue essay *Spaces to Say*, Rory Bester considered post-apartheid political engagement in contemporary South African art. Bester (2004:24-25) considered how Sachs’ seminal essay *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* (1989) signalled a false crisis for those “who felt stranded without anti-apartheid subject matter.” It was a false crisis because, instead of a shift away from

political influences in the 1990s, contemporary South African artists continued to be politically engaged. South African visual art at this juncture would thus, according to Bester (2004:24-25), “continue to play a pivotal role in interrogating a nation in transition.” Admiring the exhibition’s complexities and political engagements, art critic Chris Roper suggested *A Decade of Democracy* created a sense of unease about one’s South African identity, and moreover the realisation that one’s ‘identity’ was in fact unidentifiable. While the exhibition was supposedly part of the ‘celebration of a decade of freedom’, the experience was by no account celebratory. For Roper (2004:1), *A Decade of Democracy* thus managed “to be proudly South African – and severely critical of that pride.”

4.6. 1910 - 2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive

When Riason Naidoo was appointed director of Art Collections at Iziko in 2009, senior figures in the South African art world, like Sue Williamson, hailed his appointment. In her review of *1910 - 2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive*, Naidoo’s inaugural exhibition at the Gallery, Williamson (2010) asserted that the “movement away from the all white curatorial team at the SANG had long been seen as a necessary part of the post-Apartheid transformation of the museum.”

In 2010 South Africa hosted the FIFA Soccer World Cup. In the press release for *1910 - 2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive*, Naidoo (2010) described how the Iziko SANG had initially planned to mount a “football exhibition of some sort,” an idea scrapped. Instead the Gallery decided to host a survey exhibition of a century of South African art from 1910 to 2010. This would, according to Naidoo, allow the Gallery to “turn the focus in on ourselves” and thus present “a reflection of our own art stories” (Naidoo, 2010:n.p). The exhibition set out to acknowledge both accepted and neglected contributions to the development of South African art history, with particular emphasis on contemporary art, which Naidoo felt had been the subject of much recent attention abroad. Furthermore, it sought to highlight “different aesthetic value systems,” juxtaposing works considered high art with those considered to be ‘traditional’ or ‘craft’. Suggesting a critical self-awareness, which was arguably absent from the exhibition itself, Naidoo claimed in the press release that the project would recognise the “perils of nationalism and its

manifestations” and that the conceptual framework of the exhibition was therefore critical of the South African milieu (Naidoo, 2010).

The title of the exhibition *1910 – 2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive*, provided political and art historical bookends for the century under review. The year 1910 referenced the Union of South Africa and the unification between the previously warring Boer Republics and Britain. Furthermore it suggested a subtle analogy: Union prompted a new South Africa with the imperative of reconciliation between two groups of English and Afrikaans. This allusion to nation-building considers a more recent history in the democratic South Africa. The title also contrasts J.H. Pierneef with Guguleptive. While Pierneef was the iconic South African landscape painter who, as described by art historian Frederico Freschi (2009:34), “identified strongly with the aims and aspirations of Afrikaner nationalism,” Guguleptive referred to a collective of young black artists working in a conceptual mode from Gugulethu, a township in Cape Town whose inhabitants are mainly black. As signifiers they represented seemingly opposite ends of a political and art historical spectrum. The fact that the narrative begins with Pierneef’s ideological landscape paintings and ends with Guguleptive’s conceptual art not only gives an indication of the vast socio-political and art historical transformations in South Africa over this century, but makes it the subject of the exhibition itself.

The exhibition sought not to conceal South African histories of British colonialism, Union, or Afrikaner nationalism, indeed this section of South African history was displayed prominently. Rather, *1910 – 2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive* sought to unearth and tell other histories, those omitted or neglected as a result of exclusive hegemonies and a complex South African history. According to the press release, Naidoo was concerned that the Iziko SANG’s permanent collection was unrepresentative of the nation’s art, and to avoid “geographic parochialism,” Naidoo and his assistant curator Joe Dolby visited and loaned works from collections all over the country (Naidoo, 2010:n.p). This would allow the exhibition to be “truly representative” of the nation’s art, celebrating the “richness and diversity” that the country had to offer (Naidoo, 2010:n.p). Unlike *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* and *A Decade of Democracy*, which drew only from the permanent collection, Naidoo privileged an idea of the ‘nation’, and a ‘story of South African art’, that was not limited to the national art collection. Naidoo suggested

in his press release that the exhibition was not about “raising the National Gallery flag,” but rather about working with other museum collections in order to highlight the gaps in the Iziko SANG’s permanent collection (Naidoo, 2010).

A large number of works from various sources were loaned and exhibited. The exhibition was mostly chronological, referring to a number of South African social and historical themes, including the first contact between white colonists and native Africans, meditations on the South African landscape, reflections of urban life and the conditions of apartheid, Resistance Art, and the struggle movement. As if in progression, the logical conclusion of this story was the democratic South Africa of the present. In the pamphlet that accompanied the exhibition, in the absence of any catalogue, Naidoo avoided making any overarching statements about the exhibition and rather focused on the Iziko SANG itself. Naidoo described how the exhibition heralded ‘a new vision for the National Gallery’. The Gallery, he wrote, now aimed to be “more inclusive” in the audiences to which they appealed, “more critical” in the selection of exhibitions mounted and artworks acquired. The committees that worked with the Gallery aimed to be “more diverse” in their demographic composition. Ultimately, Naidoo declared, the Gallery aimed to be “more representative of a multicultural society in Africa.” (Naidoo, 2010)

In response to *1910 - 2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive* critics lamented the perceived lack of curatorial coherence. In *Art South Africa*, academic and art historian Gerard Schoeman’s review was especially unforgiving. Referring to the press release, where Naidoo (2010) stated that the exhibition consisted of a “reflective selection of art from around the country,” Schoeman asked, “A reflective selections? What is all this clutter then?” Schoeman ultimately asserted that the show was reminiscent “of a cobbled together student art exhibition” (Schoeman, 2010:56-57). Lloyd Pollak, in his review of the exhibition, issued another polemic against the Gallery. Published in the *South African Art Times*, a magazine not renowned for art historical or critical rigour. Under the title *SANG’s Reputation Trashed for the 2010 Show*, Pollak focused all criticism on the recently appointed Naidoo. Pollak (2010:1) exclaimed: “the curator of the show, and director of the institution, has no thesis to propound, no argument to advance and no interpretation to propose.” As a display characterised by ‘inclusiveness’ and ‘diversity’, the exhibition was criticised for being overloaded with divergent aesthetic directions. Pollak felt that

“the sheer glut of works on display” created an overpowering visual experience, one “unredeemed” by any curatorial direction, and only exacerbated by the absence of a contextualizing catalogue essay or text (Pollak, 2010:1). And so the furore began.

David Smith’s newspaper articles *Gallery director defends decision to swap Gainsborough for African works* (Smith, 2010a) and *Colonial art masters brushed aside* (Smith, 2010b) racialised and sensationalised Pollak’s critique. The controversy, according to Smith, had centred on Naidoo’s decision to remove paintings by ‘colonial art masters’ which had provoked the negative review. This position was encouraged by Naidoo himself, now with the appellation ‘first black director of the collection in its 139-year history’, who had suggested to Smith that the reaction was racially motivated, and saying: “there is definitely resistance to change” (Naidoo in Smith, 2010a). Smith was also encouraged by the utterances of *The South African Art Times*’ editor Gabriel Clark-Brown who, independent of Pollak’s review, suggested Naidoo was a ‘political appointment’ (Smith, 2010b).

Indeed, the Abe Bailey Collection, the ‘art masters’ to which Smith referred, were de-installed to hang *1910 - 2010 Pierneef to Guguleptive*, which utilised the entire gallery. Yet Pollak made no mention of this in his review. Pollak’s initial critique regarded the overwhelming nature of the exhibition, with “hundreds of works crowding the gallery’s walls” and a “scarcity of guideposts or explanations to steer one through it” (Pollak, 2010:1). Smith ignored these criticisms and focused solely on the motive, posited as Pollak’s inherent racism.

Art critic Mary Corrigall denounced Smith’s “ridiculous story” in her critique *Shoddy arts journalism and Riason Naidoo’s Pierneef to Guguleptive* (Corrigall, 2010). Corrigall asserted that a negative review in the *South African Art Times* was an inaccurate reflection of South African art world sentiment, and that if Smith had made any enquiries at all about the South African art world, he would have been made aware of this. According to Corrigall (2010) this was an active omission, and Smith wanted to position Naidoo as the “new black appointment” who “ruffles the feathers” of the *ancien régime*. Mocking Smith, Corrigall asked, “Has [he] actually seen *Pierneef to Guguleptive*, because there are quite a number of artworks from the colonial era?” (Corrigall, 2010).

Although Corrigall offered her own critique, and like Pollak, suggested that the exhibition was encumbered by an overindulgence. Although this may have created an “extravagant visual spectacle,” Corrigall asserted the sheer excess of works on display was simply overwhelming. Generally Corrigall felt that these failings did not detract from the overall positive values of a “grand exhibition,” and that overall, *Pierneef to Guguleptive* proved Naidoo’s worth as a brave and “astute” curator. (Corrigall, 2010)

In an attempt to rationalise the degree of criticism directed at Naidoo for his *Pierneef to Guguleptive* exhibition, Corrigall concluded that it was precisely because South African public art galleries were so poorly patronised, that they occupied such an important place for those in the arts communities. As such, those entrusted with their management would always be subjected to “vigorous criticism,” always needing to “prove themselves worthy” (Corrigall, 2010). Despite some vehemently critical reviews, and subsequent controversies, the exhibition was perceived a success and attracted new audiences and international attention to the Gallery. Naidoo was invited to make presentations on the exhibition at art centres around the world, including Tate Modern, London (2010); Virginia Commonwealth University, Qatar (2011); ACASA Triennale, Fowler Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles (2011); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); Dak’art biennale, Senegal (2012); Independent Curators International Curatorial Workshop, Bag Factory, Johannesburg (2013); School of Arts, Wits University, Johannesburg (2013); the Independent Curators International workshop in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (2014); and the California College of the Arts, San Francisco (2014).

4.7. Mediating the Past, Present, and the Future

Davison has argued that museums have the potential to mediate between past, the present, and the future. The SANG gives visual and material form to South African art history, it promotes, validates and authorises versions of that art history, and as a result it establishes and preserves the public memory thereof. Museums, according to Davison (1998:145-146), are thus understood to “anchor official memory,” which is a process that involves “both remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion.” According to Davison (1998:145-146), the institutionalised neglect of

black artists in South Africa and “the more recent moves to redress this exclusion,” served as a pertinent illustration how museums have the potential to construct, re-construct, and redress public histories. With a potential for such benefit or harm, for the efficient or inefficient repair to institutionalised public memory, it is indeed a responsibility that warrants rigour.

In an interview with Bronwyn Law-Viljoen for *Art South Africa*, Naidoo admitted that “the state of museums in Africa is not healthy” (Naidoo in Law-Viljoen, 2010b). With its complex history of racial privilege, the SANG had previously reflected exclusive art histories. Naidoo (2010b:n.p) suggested that *Pierneef to Guguleptive* “started to address some of the problems.” Were these ‘problems’, resulting from an inherited art history, then not being addressed in *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995* or *A Decade of Democracy?* And were they not being addressed in the other exhibitions, mounted after the shifts in exhibition policy in 1991? Naidoo suggested that the exhibition was an opportunity to present the new vision for the Gallery, one that offered new audiences, those previously excluded, an opportunity to “see their own histories” (Naidoo, 2010:n.p). The implication of a new vision presumed that Martin’s tenure was vastly different. Was this a denial of the dramatic institutional transformation of the 1990s? Few will deny Naidoo’s claim, that “different ideologies affect how art is collected and what exhibitions go on display” (Naidoo, 2010b). However, was Martin’s directorship ideologically incompatible with his own? Considering the radical shifts in policy and practice under her directorship, it would be difficult to argue in favour of what Naidoo might have been implying.

Perhaps a quantitative analysis of the three post-apartheid survey exhibitions referred to in this chapter might complicate Naidoo’s implication. apartheid racial prejudice favoured whites South Africans. South Africans considered ‘non-white’, or not of a European heritage, were prejudiced against. Thus this analysis crudely uses ‘black’ as a blanket term to signify all races discriminated against during apartheid. A demographic analysis of artist representation for these three post-apartheid survey exhibitions is revealing.

- Of the 318 artists represented in *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995*, 96 (30.1%) were black and 222 (69.9%) were white. As described in the previous chapter, this figure

was largely the result of the revised *Policy Manual* of 1991, after which the works of 72% of these black artists were acquired.

- Of the 172 artists represented in *A Decade of Democracy*, 100 (58.1%) were black and 72 (41.9%) were white.
- Of the 347 artists represented in *Pierneef to Guguleptive*, 175 (50.4%) were black and 172 (49.6%) were white. These statistics are illustrated below:

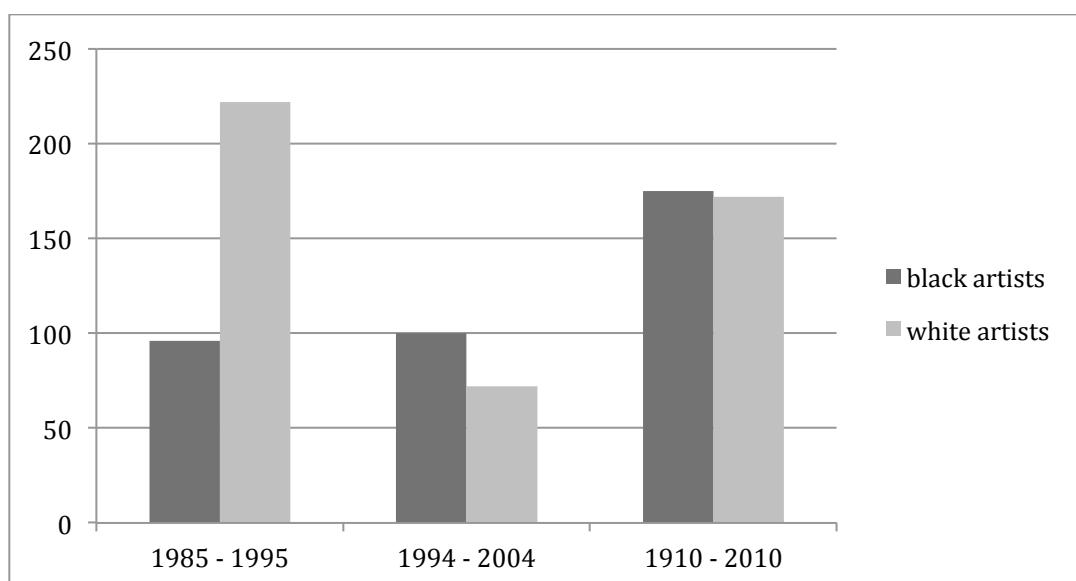


Figure 3: Quantitative analysis for demographic representation of artists (white vs. black) in the three survey exhibitions under review.

Naidoo's *Pierneef to Guguleptive* displayed more individual black artists than either *A Decade of Democracy* or (unsurprisingly) *Contemporary South African Art 1985 - 1995*. However, *Pierneef to Guguleptive* also displayed artists reflective of South Africa's colonial and Afrikaner nationalist histories, and thus many white artists were represented too. Naidoo was not limited to the Iziko SANG's permanent collection nor was he limited to a short decade-long timeframe. As a result, artists black and white were represented in equal proportion. Martin and Bedford's *A Decade of Democracy*, however, was proportionally more in favour of black artists. For that reason, and for the visible shift in proportion from survey to survey, among all the other shifts in practice and

policy hitherto discussed, one may feel it inappropriate to misremember, misrepresent, or omit these critical endeavours.

These survey exhibitions have focused on South African identity as the subject for their display. The image of ‘nation’ staged and performed by the SANG pre-democracy is distinct in composition to the image of ‘nation’ staged and performed by the SANG post-apartheid, albeit the structure and function of that narrative was essentially the same. Should a national gallery narrate, perform, construct or exhibit the ‘identity’ of the ‘nation’ to which it belongs? Perhaps the tune has changed, but ultimately the Gallery remains an instrument for ‘nation-building’.

PART 3

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A ‘NATIONAL’ GALLERY WHEN THE NOTIONS OF ‘NATION’ TRANSFORM RADICALLY?

Chapter Five

Reflecting on the Question: “What Does it Mean to be a ‘National’ Gallery?”

This study does not critique the particulars of the various nationalisms in South Africa. Aligned to the arguments in Anderson’s seminal study on nationalisms, *Imagined Communities* (1991), which asserts that all communities are imagined, this study does not critique the constructions of nationalisms, or question their authenticity. The fact that elements of nationalism were made manifest in the SANG is simply a characteristic of national galleries. Rather, this study offers an objective enquiry into complex periods of transition in South African history, and suggests how they have impacted on the form and function of the SANG. This paper eschews a reductive and oversimplified narrative and thus indulges the nuances, the complexities and the indeed the contradictions.

South African nationalisms have been imagined and re-imagined, and these shifts have been then demonstrated in South Africa’s ‘national’ gallery. This study has thus investigated the SANG’s position as a projection and a reflection of cultural (re)imaginings, as evidenced in the policies and practices relating to its central competencies of collection, preservation, research and exhibition. There is a sense of parallel between the constitutional and social watersheds of 1910, 1948, and 1994. This study has identified and compared the SANG’s position in reflecting these moments. According to historian, Peter Merrington (1995:41), new nationalisms have a tendency to self-identify “in parallel contradistinction with or from previous epochs or regimes.” As such, with the centralised cultural planning and policy-making that followed the new political dispensation in 1994, although the image of ‘nation’ was different, the structure and format of its narration was much the same. Furthermore, the new imagining was positioned in dialogue with its antecedent. While previous nationalisms were exclusive and focused on separate identities, the new nationalism was inclusive and focused on ‘unity in diversity’. Furthermore, the focus for Iziko has been to redress imbalances inherited from a complex history, and therefore it is always in dialogue with that history. In considering the cultural activities of the past, one can be more critical of the cultural reconstructions in the present and the future. A more detailed consideration of context, sympathetic to nuance and complexity, might allow for insight into

other radically transforming societies. South Africa offers a curious example in this regard because it has undergone seemingly consistent radical transformation.

Around 1948 the idea of an ‘official culture’ seemed to be more explicit than ever before. This official image of ‘nation’ was exclusive, and comprised only the European-origin white settler identities. It excluded the many other imagined nations, particularly those of the black majority. The previously unofficial or subaltern notion of nation later becomes integral to the official re-imagining. For the SANG, the concept of ‘filling the gaps’ to tell the full story of South African art was essentially about redressing the art historical imbalances inherited from previous and divergent official notions of nationhood. Yet there were instances when the SANG’s practices contradicted these exclusive notions of nationhood. The collections of Resistance Art by the SANG from the late 1970s, for instance, indeed challenged the ‘official culture’ and is now a cornerstone of the permanent collection. Similarly, many artworks by black artists, and artwork in modes not consistent with the international mainstream, were collected during apartheid. What is perhaps most interesting about this fact is how it had been mostly under-acknowledged by contemporary reflections on past practices. Considering Arnold’s (1986:106) suggestion that “history is not a body of calcified facts; it is accessible to re-interpretation,” this study not only reflects on this history, but also considers the related discourse, and thus reflection includes the interpretations and re-interpretations of that same history. In studying this art history and its re-interpretations, the study hopes to enable interpretations of the present, consider possibilities for the future, and not merely and unsympathetically pontificate on the past. In the Iziko SANG’s present, the demand for transformation prevails. To fulfil its duty, a false dichotomy has been constructed, measuring current progress against a very simplified, perhaps even distorted version of what had come before. Considering the context of this complex history, to simply dismiss everything pre-democracy as redundant would be a serious mistake.

Perhaps questions need to be asked about the extent to which the Gallery has moved away from the European model from which it was based. In this sense, has the Gallery really transformed? The concept of the ‘National Gallery’ was born out of enlightenment ideals. Its relationship with colonialism was ever more pertinent as it presided in a colony. A repositioning of a ‘National Gallery’ in a post-colony would thus arguably involve a reorientation of some of the most basic

Eurocentric enlightenment-era assumptions concerning the functions of a national gallery and the definitions of its art. With regard to the Iziko SANG, one might feel that considerations of content have shifted and the definition of its art has been broadened. However the format and the structure remain essentially the same. Although a different tune is being played, the Iziko SANG remains an instrument for ‘nation-making’. At the very least, that is how it understands and proclaims its role, a role that it admits it is unable to fulfil, owing to inadequate resources. Writing in the *A Decade of Democracy* exhibition catalogue, Martin (2004:60) predicted this outcome:

As we celebrate a decade of democracy and the multitude of gains this has brought to the country, we do so against a background of general crisis that is affecting arts and heritage as well as other sectors of society . . . The institutional framework for arts, culture and heritage has changed significantly and much for the better since 1994, but the spectre of inadequate funding and inefficient delivery has stalked the transformation process from the outset and it will not go away.

It has not gone away. In the Iziko (2013:15) Annual Report for 2012-13, the position was outlined as follows:

Iziko has conducted a careful analysis of our collections and has a policy and strategy for acquisitions, but currently cannot implement this due to dwindling acquisition budgets. If we are to contribute meaningfully to nation-building and social cohesion in the future, national museums must be empowered to proactively collect these works and play a defining role in the memorialisation of South Africa’s heritage.

Despite this bleak financial position, the rhetoric of revitalisation has prevailed. In 2014 Rooksana Omar, the CEO of Iziko, published a newsletter titled *Celebrating 15 years of Iziko* on the Iziko website. Omar outlined how, in the following five years, Iziko aimed to propel its museums into a “new era.” The primary function of Iziko museums, and their exhibitions, collections, research, education and public programmes, would be to “promote nation building,

social cohesion and to raise awareness of South Africa’s diverse history, culture and heritage” (Omar, 2014). Museums, according to Omar, are not simply the repositories of memory and cultural diversity, they are also spaces where “culture is generated” (Omar, 2014).

The Iziko website enables members of the public to contribute to discussion. Mario Pissarra, the writer, curator and founder of Africa South Art Initiative (ASAI), commented on Omar’s newsletter:

Has the establishment of Iziko Museums enhanced the performance of its affiliated museums? Or have layers of bureaucracy created a dysfunctional, costly structure that stifles creativity and initiative? . . . Wake up Iziko Board! Wake up Department of Arts and Culture! (Pissarra, 2014)

There was never a response to Pissarra’s comment. According to financial statements in the Iziko (2014:73) Annual Report for 2013-14, in the financial year ending 31 March 2014 Iziko received R61 515 000 from the DAC, and spent R65 726 754 on personnel expenses. For this financial year, with all income and expenses, Iziko incurred a net deficit of R6 054 995.

5.1. Material Culture, Patronage, Memory, Nationhood, and Modernity

Prior (2002:3-4) has considered the following elements integral to a critical consideration of the form and function of an art museum in the twenty-first century: “[1] nature of material culture, [2] patronage, [3] memory, [4] nationhood, and [5] modernity.” As a frame of analysis for the SANG, these revaluations encompass disparate and contested territories: [1] the status of artworks previously deemed ‘unworthy’ of a national art collection; [2] the benefactions by patrons like Sir Abe Bailey and conditional funding from successive governments; [3] the mnemonic function of a visual and material art historical archive, and the construction and preservation of public memory thereof; [4] the denial of a complex palimpsest created by successive divergent South African constructions of ‘nationhood’; and [5] the seeming refusal (or inability) to escape a nation-building approach to form and perceived function. While these elements have been woven into previous chapters, they are reflected on here.

After societal prompts the SANG started collecting and displaying art previously considered unworthy of a national art collection. First this meant including works by local white South African artists. Later it meant including under-acknowledged black South African artists, and separately including neglected modes of South African artistic production. In adapting to its broader environment, domestic and international, the Gallery's approach to visual and material culture has transformed dramatically over time.

The Abe Bailey Collection has been used extensively in this study. Not only was Bailey an important figure in South African history, but also his art collection on permanent loan to the SANG prompted two debates, for different reasons, about the function and role of the Gallery in South African society. The bequest is the most valuable collection in the permanent collection, and is one of the largest collections of sporting art in the world. Even with these considerations, the majority of it is described as having "limited appeal in South Africa" (Stevenson, 2002:178). The collection had limited appeal when it arrived in the mid-century, when in the context of an increasingly powerful nationalist political environment it was considered a symbol of British culture and thus an anachronism. When in the early twenty-first century it was deinstalled, it prompted an equally contentious debate, also of ideological dissonance, about the Gallery's role and function in South African society.

The other important sponsor of the SANG is the State itself. The State has funded and continues to fund the Gallery, perhaps inadequately, since at least 1880. Successive governments have imposed government policy on the SANG, and successive governments have granted conditional funding to the SANG. These policies and conditional funds have been aligned to broader strategic governmental objectives.

The SANG acts as a metonym for South African visual culture. It embodies, reflects, promotes, fosters, and engages the shifting visual and material cultures of the nation to which it belongs. It is simultaneously active, reactive, reflective and generative. Museums and galleries give material form to authorised versions of the past and over time these narratives are institutionalised in public memory. As a participant in the construction of a collective memory, the form and

function of the SANG has a real consequence. This responsibility is not confined to the present and the future, but also to contemporary reassessments of its past. The SANG has constructed the story of South African art in its collections and displays. With social transformations the story has been revised and rewritten. In particular instances when the story was recounted, an oversimplified narrative was favoured over complexity. In denial of a complex palimpsest, in order to exaggerate contemporary relevance and progress, the present is juxtaposed against misleading renderings of the past.

The SANG contributes to the performance of nationalism, and enables society's self-identification within it. The concept of the museum is imbued with modernist ideologies of progress, but is the attempt to represent nationhood, and its progression, ultimately political and thus ultimately flawed? According to art historian Annette van den Bosch (2005:81-89), globalisation has meant a renegotiation of the notions of citizenship and national identity. As a result of this, the model of art museum that emerged in the nation-building era is now experiencing dramatic discontinuities. The SANG, considering its prevailing self-proclaimed function, has not yet redefined itself and its collections in the light of these transforming global conditions and realities.

5.2. What Does it Mean to be a National Gallery in the South African Context?

In 1972 the Chair of the SANG's Board of Trustees referred to the SANG as a "temple of art" and described how it preserved and exhibited collections representative of South Africa's "founder nations" and of "primitive Africa" (Honikman, 1972:1). This concept of 'founder nations' was underpinned by the assumption that a common European ancestry created unity amongst South Africa's various settler cultures. As such, white South African artists had a "traditional spiritual kinship" to Europe ("Balance in art", 1947:8). The editor of *The Monitor* newspaper in 1947 asserted that for white South Africans, the "mode of living, our art, our philosophy, and our outlook is European . . . we are Europeans and not Africans!" ("Balance in art", 1947:8). Of course, this has since changed, and rhetoric now proudly refers to a common African heritage. For instance, in 1997 Martin described "our identity as Africans" and "our place on and relationship to the African continent" (1997:20). In this regard, art historian Sandra Klopper

considered in 1996 how the possessive pronoun ‘our’ to signify an African rather than a European heritage was simply characteristic of the new “new language of cultural ownership” (Klopper, 1996).

National galleries are fixtures of the modern nation state of the West. In a post-colony like South Africa, the architecture signifies a colonial history and thus the context in which it was founded. The architecture of the SANG stands, both physically and symbolically, as a testament to the projects of colonialism and modernisation. The building is a framing device, which one assumes impacts the experience of art within it. The physical building, as a ‘temple of art’, and its location in the Company’s Garden, provides a discursive frame that encloses and influences the reading of its art and displays. In acknowledging this, in an absurd and somewhat self-defeating attempt to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable aspects of South African history, an Iziko press release in 2013 stated:

While it may seem like quite an imposing building, with its stark white façade, towering Greek pillars, and massive doors opening out onto the Company’s Gardens – the interior of the Iziko South African National Gallery is as warm and familiar as a Xhosa mud hut. (Iziko, 2013)

This excerpt encapsulates the crisis of identity that appears to befuddle the current positioning of the Iziko SANG. The emergence of museums and art galleries in Europe in the nineteenth century were “intimately connected with the promotion of imperialism and industrialization” (Rankin and Hamilton, 1997:41). In the colonies, museums underpinned settler ideologies and later, in the South African example, nationalist and apartheid ideologies. In the 1990s, after the most recent of a succession of watershed socio-political shifts, South African public museums and galleries faced the challenges of overcoming these legacies and reconstituting their roles in society.

To the question “What is a National Gallery in the South African context?”, perhaps the answer is *a chameleon*. It has often needed to prove its ability to adapt itself to new conditions. So often has it shifted its shape, perhaps it is best defined as a shape-shifter, and thus by its ability to

adapt. Ostensibly it is a state technology; a self-professed instrument for nation building whose success in this regard is moot. Has that claim been deceiving and false, made to exaggerate relevance, to attract and retain funding, for self-preservation and the safeguarding of its permanent collection?

In its early history the Gallery served the Cape Colony's art loving publics. Its purpose was to acquire and exhibit the best obtainable artworks for the Colony. Of course, what was 'best' was subjective and aligned to individual values and ideals. For a colony of the British Empire, these values and ideals were constructed in Britain, and early collections reflected and affirmed that relationship. After the Union of South Africa was established in 1910, under the aegis of Empire, the Gallery understood its function as to collect the art of Europe as a reflection of civilised values, and to bind English and Afrikaans South Africans to a common European heritage. Although because of the values and ideals of individual directors and patrons, this still meant predominately British art. In the mid-twentieth century, in the midst of powerful nationalisms, the arrival of a new political dispensation, and the implementation of formal SANG policy; the Gallery started to collect and display 'national art' rigorously, and in addition the art from the 'founder nations'. The idea of the nation was nationalised, and it was no longer an extension of the Empire. It was now claiming an independent identity. From the mid-to late-twentieth century, the Gallery's focus was on South African art. There were of course exceptions, especially under van Niekerk. However, the unequivocally nationalist orientation of the political hegemony, combined with limited funding mostly prohibiting purchases of international art, meant that these exceptions remained as such.

In the 1990s when the most recent radical transformation of society resulted in a democratic South Africa, a new nation-building project began. The new nationalism focused on reconstruction, reconciliation, diversity and transformation. The repositioned function of the SANG was proclaimed as being integral to the nation-building project. The reoriented nationalism of the new political hegemony, combined with the fact that limited funding was more conducive to pluralism, meant a broader and more diverse consideration of South African cultural production.

The SANG was not merely reflecting a shifting society. It was not suddenly made aware of existing imbalances, as this was an unmistakable characteristic of colonialism and apartheid. Rather, the SANG needed to prove to the new political dispensation, and to the new South Africa, that it had a role to play and it thus realigned its positioning in relation to social and political objectives and requirements, in order to retain and attract the funding it needed in order to survive.

5.3. Is the Iziko SANG at Risk of Misrepresenting the Story of South African Art?

For Michel Foucault, museums were grouped with hospitals, prisons, and schools, as the institutions used by state powers to control, regulate and reform its citizenry (Foucault, 1967). Foucault might have thought it highly symbolic then that Nathi Mthethwa, the former Minister of Police, was appointed Minister of Arts and Culture in 2014. The year he was appointed, Mthethwa suggested in an interview that South Africa had “not yet succeeded in developing our culture” (Mthethwa in Davis, 2014). Post-colonial cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1990) has argued that cultures are never developed, but are always in the perpetual state of development. Yet, as defined by Iziko Museums of South Africa, the Iziko SANG’s function in contributing to the development of culture is unequivocal. The SANG and other Iziko museums are charged with the tasks of transformation, nation-building, promoting social-cohesion, and other strategic national objectives. In return government’s financial support is expected. Approaching the 1990s, Carman (1987:36) described how South African galleries were reconstituting their roles because they wished to survive in this country. In discussing apartheid-era collusion of culture and politics, Richards considered how the survival of art was vested in the preservation of its autonomy, and argued that if forgoing autonomy is a form of preservation or survival, “then the art-world hereby implicated is rendered all the more vulnerable” (Richards, 2010).

In fulfilling these ‘strategic objectives’, is it possible that the Iziko SANG is at risk of misrepresenting South African art history? A pertinent example of the clash of art and the official culture is found in Government’s reaction to the exhibition *Innovative Woman* at Constitution Hill in 2010. The exhibition included photographs of black lesbians by Zanele Muholi. The then Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana, fled the exhibition in outrage. A few months later,

she reasoned: “Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation-building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this . . . It was immoral, offensive and going against nation-building” (“Lulu Xingwana describes lesbian photos as immoral”, 2010). Muholi is critically acclaimed nationally and internationally. Her photographs were shown at the Venice Biennale (2013), Documenta (2012) in Kassel, and are included in the collections of the MOMA in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Iziko SANG in Cape Town. With the explicit and active requirements for ‘Strategic National Objectives’ at a public art gallery, does the Iziko SANG risk losing its focus and deprioritizing Art?

In 1993 Berman (1993:xxiii) warned that with the “urge to correct the misconceptions and redress the sins of former years” there would be the danger, of equal severity, of “swinging in the opposite extreme.” The potential risks, Berman (1993:xxiii) noted, included that of “supplanting existing prejudices with other, no less invidious, ideological prescriptions.”

Constructing a South African identity is not a governmental competency. The DAC should rather create an environment in which arts and cultural institutions, like the Iziko SANG, are well-funded, well-managed, well-promoted, and *independent*. Whatever the definition of ‘art’ may be, the Iziko SANG is a platform for collecting art, preserving art, exhibiting art, educating the public on art, and researching art. Even if it is a more ‘inclusive’ nation than before, one feels the Iziko SANG should not be an instrument for nation-building at all. Historically the SANG has collected and exhibited art of the nation according to national objectives. The SANG’s role post-1948 was to redress the imbalances inherited from a colonial orientation. In the 1990s its role was to redress imbalances inherited from an exclusive nationalist orientation. This centralised culture-as-the-extension-of-politics programme at the SANG seems to always have been inappropriate. Yet why is this the prevailing function? The Iziko SANG now acts as an “agency of the Department of Arts and Culture” (Iziko, 2014). Yet as an agent for government’s national objectives, does the public art gallery still have agency of its own? Albie Sachs’ seminar paper *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* (1989) argued for a more critical approach to culture in the approaching new South Africa. He called for autonomy in the arts, devoid of political influence, didacticism, and moral or utilitarian functions. Considering the centralised nation-

building cultural agenda first presented in the *White Paper for Arts, Culture and Heritage* in 1996, it appears that the new South Africa did not heed his call.

In 1987, anticipating the radical social transformation of the 1990s, Carman (1987:36) considered how “we still have time to give a new perspective to our policies with regard to acquisition, display and education, to ensure that our inherited art history survives and continues to be relevant.” This will be the case in perpetuity. Art galleries must always give new perspectives to their policies and practices, and must always be willing to adapt, not only to accurately reflect the nations to which they belong, and not least to survive, and in so doing protect and preserve their permanent collections. Yet to do so without autonomy, as an end to a political means, is to be made vulnerable.

5.4. “Perceived as elitist, white-dominated, traditional institutions”

In 1997 Martin (1997:20-21) stated that “the days of the numerical majority functioning as a cultural minority are over, and different structures are being put in place or are emerging.” Art historian Anitra Nettleton suggested that the irony of the transformation agenda of South African galleries and museums in the 1990s was that the project was almost exclusively administered by white curators and directors (Nettleton, 1995:69).¹²² According to Sabine Marschall in 1999: “there can be no doubt that virtually all the key players – art historians, museum curators, gallery directors, art critics and publishers – are still white” (Marscall, 1999).

In the catalogue for Bedford’s exhibition *Ezakwantu: Beadwork from the Eastern Cape* (1993-1994), Bedford quoted Ivan Karp, who argued: “the struggle is not only over what is to be represented but over who controls the means of representation” (Karp, 1991:15). Similarly, at the

¹²² Art historian Anna Gauge’s consideration of museums in Western Africa offers a parallel in this regard. Gauge has suggested that newly independent decolonizing states used museums as a tool to diffuse new notions of nation, but that this new representation of nation was often assigned to Europeans, “often to the same people from the colonial era” (Gauge, 1997:28).

conference *Fault Lines* in 1996, Martin considered how “redress only occurs when individuals and groups are empowered to represent themselves” (Martin, 1996). However, Martin then conceded: “At the moment South Africa lacks the black researchers, art historians and curators who can fulfil the task of reclaiming and representing history and art history” (Martin, 1996:n.p.). Such was the legacy of apartheid that years later, writing in the *A Decade of Democracy* exhibition catalogue in 2004, Martin’s position was unchanged: “we *still* lack the black researchers, art historians and curators who can fulfil the task of reclaiming and representing history and art history” (Martin, 2004:64; my emphasis). In the same chapter Martin lamented financial allocations to Freedom Park in Pretoria, and suggested that the monument was being privileged: “at the expense of what are perceived as elitist, white-dominated, traditional institutions” (Martin, 2004:60). Yet presumably that it took as long as 15 years for the SANG to appoint a black candidate in a senior curatorial role, since democracy radically redefined the parameters of South Africa’s social and cultural landscape in 1994, only entrenched these perceptions.

The legacies of a complex history, of colonialism, apartheid and a successful liberation movement, are structural and profound. These enduring legacies need to be addressed and redressed, and done so critically – without embellishing facts unbefitting simple dichotomous narratives. The Iziko SANG might need to be Janus-faced in its approach, looking to both its future and its past. With limited resources, the Gallery should use the resources that are available strategically, and not discard them because they represent divergent ideals. Apart from the collections of South African art, the strongest area in the collection comprises twentieth century British art. On one end of the spectrum of possibilities, it would be needlessly self-destructive to simply ignore these resources. On the other end, the gallery must be aware that the art is a mnemonic device, and while colonial collections might represent a positive sense of heritage for a white South African viewer, it is potentially a harsh and painful reminder of subjugation for black South Africans. Thus, it is a collection that should not be ignored, but rather might be dealt with in away that is sensitive to the complexity of South African history. It cannot simply aim to drive transformation, to overcome and redress the legacies of a complex history of colonialism and apartheid, or to carve a niche devoid of international or western influence. The Iziko SANG must, while cognizant of its Eurocentric and apartheid legacies, aim to make a positive contribution to art in a democratic South Africa, and thus demonstrate why it deserves greater

financial support. The enlightenment-era approach to the national gallery, with this obsession for nation-building, is seemingly redundant, and at the very least inappropriate.

5.5. Limitations, Shortcomings and Areas for Future Research

This study does not purport to be a biography of the SANG, nor an anthology of South African nationalisms, rather it attempts to focus on the points of contact between these two. It is not a complete history, and as a result much has been omitted, and much has been left unsaid.

Central to the study is the enquiry into how social transformation has impacted on racial inclusion at the SANG. Racial exclusion was a fundamental factor of South African colonialism and apartheid, and the constitutional watersheds that followed them impacted greatly on inclusivity and redress. As a result of this focus, alternative considerations appear unacknowledged. While Abe Bailey and his bequest were given much attention and focus, many the other patrons and gift collections remained largely unacknowledged by this study. While the study focused on racial biases, it excluded analyses of gender and regional biases, neither of which were explored in this study. Martin was the SANG's first woman director – any effect on impact on gender representation remains untested. Perhaps future researchers might measure whether or not her appointment impacted on the composition of gender in SANG exhibition and collection practices. In addition, there is a perception that the SANG's acquisitions of South African artists have biased those based in Cape Town¹²³ – yet this also remains untested. Perhaps future researchers might measure whether the SANG has favoured Cape Town-based artists, at the expense of artists in other cities and centres.

With regard to exhibitions, this study focuses on survey exhibitions and their performance of identity and nationhood. It does not closely examine retrospective exhibitions, or other curated exhibitions, many of which could provide an equally telling indication of the Gallery's presumed

¹²³ For instance Martin (1997:22) has suggested that “While the Director and some members of staff are able to travel to other centres in South Africa, our budget does not allow us to devise or pursue a strategy for buying nationally.”

role. Similarly, this study's considerations on policy documents focuses primarily on exhibitions and collections. There is no analysis of how the Gallery's educational programmes also reflected these shifts. Analysing art educational activities at the SANG might also provide further evidence of the Gallery's reorientation.

South Africa and its national gallery have experienced colonial nationalisms and a post-colonial liberation. Neither is exceptional in this regard. As a critical window into the study of a national gallery in the context of transforming nationalisms, this study could be expanded and located within a broader post-colonial and global museum context. Other public art galleries exist elsewhere, especially in post-colonies in the developing world, which might offer similar histories and similar crises of identity. National galleries in Latin America, India, and elsewhere in Africa, have not been investigated and compared. Hopefully this study can contribute to the work of other researchers in undertaking similar investigations.

In Conclusion

Part One offered an historical foundation, providing a brief history of the SANG within the context of radically redefining nationalisms. Chapter one thus started with an account of the launch of the SAAA by local art lovers in 1871. The early history of the institution, which eventually became the South African National Gallery, was contextualised within its colonial genesis. When the Cape Colonial Government nationalised the Gallery in 1895 the increased responsibility was not matched with increased financial support. Aggravated by frontier wars, economic depression, and South Africa's commitment to Europe's Great War, the Gallery's lack of support continued. The custom-built National Gallery finally opened to the public in 1930. On Government Avenue and adjacent to Parliament; and near the South African Museum and the National Library of South Africa, the Gallery was built in a classical design infused with a 'Cape Dutch Style', and is considered a feature of the nation-building project of the early twentieth-century. Having collections of European art asserted South Africa's position amongst civilised nations. In theory the Gallery became a symbol of a European heritage, with the potential to unite South Africa's various settler identities alongside a common European patrimony. The SANG's early history reflected this colonial upbringing and much of the first collections were of British art. This characteristic was enforced by a number of British-born directors, acquisitions being entrusted to buyers based in Britain, and British and Anglophile patrons. In a shifting political and cultural landscape, with increasingly powerful settler nationalisms, the Gallery's perceived British-bias received criticism as early as the 1930s. After director Edward Roworth's 'purge' of the permanent collection, prompted by a lack of funds yet to clear space for the incoming Abe Bailey Collection, a large bequest of mostly British sporting art, the SANG was adopted into the political spectrum directly before the 1948 general elections. In the ensuing Parliamentary debates the SANG was accused of promoting Anglicisation and a commission of enquiry into the management and function of the Gallery followed. Aligned to the nationalizing imperative of the period, and cognizant of limited financial resources, the *Stratford Report* recommended that the Gallery focus on building a collection of South African art.

This new role coincided with the new nationalist political dispensation in 1948 and the implementation of revived discriminatory policies under the slogan *apartheid*. John Paris, the

SANG's first full-time professional director, was able to professionalise the Gallery's management, implement the nationalizing recommendations outlined in the *Stratford Report*, and was able to attract some important exhibitions on loan. When the country separated itself from the commonwealth and became a republic in 1961, the SANG's nationalizing imperative continued. With an increased acquisitions budget under director Matthys Bokhorst, despite the increased marginalisation of black South Africans under apartheid, the SANG started collecting works by black South Africans for the first time. By 1976 mounting national and international pressure against the apartheid regime translated into a lack of adequate financial resources for the SANG, and the perceived imposition of a nationalist cultural agenda. The incumbent director, Raymund van Niekerk, tirelessly campaigned for increased funds while deriding the Nationalist Government's cultural policies. In the late 1970s and 1980s, throughout van Niekerk's directorship, many were anticipating a post-apartheid society, and much debate in cultural spectrums considered the role of museums and art galleries in the pending new South Africa. In 1990, a month before Nelson Mandela was released from prison, Marilyn Martin was appointed as director of the SANG. Martin would oversee the changes in policy and practice at the Gallery, changes that would establish the SANG's new role in contributing to the nation-building project of the 1990s.

The first chapter thus presented a history of the SANG in relation to three broad epochal shifts. The first shift was towards the Union of South Africa in 1910. Emerging Afrikaner nationalism prompted the second shift, and culminated in 1948 with a new political dispensation, the implementation of apartheid, and subsequently South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1961. The most recent shift followed the dismantling of apartheid and South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994. Not unlike the previous national re-orientations, the most recent transformation prompted a new national identity. Historically the SANG has reflected the nation to which it has belonged. With successive redefinitions of the South African 'nation', the Gallery has perpetually re-orientated itself accordingly. As such the first part of this dissertation aimed to provide the requisite base from which to more closely examine the re-orientations, as manifested in policies and practices, as presented in Part Two.

Part Two described the ways in which the SANG has consecutively redefined its role, reappraised its collections, revised its policies, and sought redress in its practices. Chapter two engaged SANG policy documents. The drafting of formal policy at the SANG was prompted by the *Stratford Report* of 1947. The policies in the mid-century systemised the collection, display, and promotion of South African art and redefined the Gallery's role as a truly 'national' gallery. Alongside the new nationalist political and ideological dispensation of 1948, for the first time 'the nation', and the development thereof, became the SANG's focus. According to these early policy documents, when art from abroad was collected and displayed, the purpose was the display the art of 'Founder Nations': the European states, predominantly Britain and the Netherlands, who were perceived to have 'founded' South Africa and thus influenced its artists.

In the early 1990s, contextualised by debates about the new roles for galleries and museums, the SANG's policies were drastically revised. Anticipating a democratic and multi-racial South Africa, art galleries sought to reconstitute their relevance. In so doing, their new roles as instruments of nation-building were proclaimed with gusto. The SANG would aim to collect and display artists and modes of artistic production hitherto un- or under-acknowledged by the Gallery. In so doing the SANG would aim to right and rewrite South African art history, and seek to redress imbalances resulting from histories of colonialism and apartheid. By 1996 this nation-building impetus had become government policy and thus mandatory. Soon thereafter the SANG was grouped with other museums and linked in the administrative structure of Iziko, the mandate of which was to drive the transformation process and redress historical and ideological imbalances in museums.

Historically these policy documents have articulated the SANG's values and ideals. By undertaking a comparative analysis of SANG policies, this chapter illustrated how modifications in SANG policy have articulated shifting values and ideals in tune with broader social and political transformations. In this chapter, questions of the SANG's perceived role, and the proclamation of that role were posed. However, what one realised, was that throughout much of the SANG's history, mostly owing to a lack of adequate resources, there has been a gap between what was considered ideal and what was possible in reality, and how in turn the latter influenced the former.

Modifications to acquisition policies have influenced the SANG's collection practices. These shifts have been evidenced by the Gallery's ability to adapt itself to transforming social requirements. The permanent collection, as an archive of material and visual culture, is an embodiment of South Africa's art historical canons. Chapter three charted the shifts in SANG collection practices and considers how the SANG has contributed to the construction and consequent reconstruction of the 'stories' of South African art history. By analysing the SANG's permanent collection, and its shifting composition, this chapter illustrated how the shifting ideals, as articulated in policy documents, subsequently manifested in practises. Like other public galleries in South Africa, the SANG's early collections comprised predominantly British art. With emerging nationalisms, the functions of the Gallery began to shift, and the SANG started collecting South African art. The SANG considered itself formative to the construction of South African canons of art; it would thus actively write the story, not merely record it. In the 1990s, the task would be to rewrite the story, to include black artists, and modes of artistic production, that were unwritten from this story. As part of Iziko Museums this imperative continued. In this one-dimensional narrative, one finds that rhetoric of redress has under-acknowledged purchases of black artists in the 1960s and 1970s, those now central to South African art historical canons.

Museum theorists suggest that art galleries are 'technologies of power'. In what is and what is not displayed, official cultures are validated and institutionalised in public memory. However, in some instances collection practices have contradicted or challenged the 'official culture' of the day. The Abe Bailey Collection in particular was highlighted. Similarly the collections of African art in the 1960s and 1970s and the collecting of Resistance Art in the 1970s and 1980s are pertinent to this case study. The imperative since the mid-twentieth century has been to tell the story of South African art history. However the story has been perpetually revised. Sometimes when the story has been recounted certain elements have been forgotten. Sometimes certain elements have been compromised. However, considering the current lack of sufficient resources, perhaps the most important question is: How will the future stories of South African art history be written or even recorded, without the requisite financial support?

Exhibitions communicate a gallery's function to its public. Chapter four presented an analysis of specific SANG exhibitions. With reference to historical precedents, in particular the 1952

Exhibition of XVII Century Dutch Painting, and local and international influences and debates in the 1980s, the central focus of this chapter referred to three survey exhibitions mounted after the radical societal transformation of the 1990s. In this chapter the SANG's contribution to the construction, display and performance of specific images of a post-apartheid South African nationhood were considered. The exhibitions *Contemporary South African 1985 - 1995 from the South African National Gallery Permanent Collection* (1996); *A Decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994 - 2004 from the Permanent Collection of the Iziko South African National Gallery* (2004); and *1910 - 2010: From Pierneef to Guguleptive* (2010), have each engaged notions of South African identity, and the role of the gallery in relation to that identity. These exhibitions, as communications of policy, were stages for the construction of knowledge and institutionalised memory. They have actively contributed to discourses surrounding the transition to democracy, the transformation of South African society, and the multiple layers of public history as a result of these transformations. By examining these exhibitions and the discourses generated in their construction and their public reception, one can further consider the debates about the role of galleries in the new South Africa, and the power of exhibition-making practices within that role.

The concluding fifth chapter focused on some of the broader questions regarding re-orientating nationalisms and the SANG involvement therein. This section also considered some of the limitations and shortcomings of the study, and as such highlighted areas for future research. Part Three thus reflected on some of the questions, contradictions, and contestations generated as a result of working on this study. These reflections aim to provide sympathy for a complex context, while still questioning complicity in an 'official culture', the lack of resources, and restrictive administrative bureaucracy. As a critical consideration of an art museum in the twenty-first century, the chapter questioned the status and shifting definition of visual and material culture; the patronage by Government and benefactors like Sir Abe Bailey; the function of the SANG in contributing to a visual and material archive and the public memory thereof; the denial of a complex and critical approach to successive constructions of nationhood; and ultimately the Gallery's role itself, and asks should an national gallery be an instrument for 'nation building'?

The SANG in a democratic context has transformed dramatically in a number of ways, yet it also demonstrates stubborn levels of continuity with the functions of the SANG in previous contexts.

The central question, which steered this study's research and writing, is its title: "What does it mean to be a 'National' Gallery when the notion of 'nation' transforms radically?" Time and again the Gallery has reflected the successive redefinitions of South African nationhood in order to survive, in order to retain and attract funding and in order to preserve its permanent collection. Thus the Gallery has repeatedly been defined by its adaptability. However with the most recent mutation seemingly more fixed on strategic national objectives than ever before, does the Iziko SANG risk losing focus on Art? And separately, to what extent has the Gallery been successful in fulfilling these national objectives anyway?

Postscript

On 8 May 2014 Riason Naidoo circulated an email referring to the non-renewal of his contract of employment. I quote it here in full:

Dear colleagues, partners, members of the media and friends

I write to inform you that I have reached the end of my 5-year-contract in April 2014 as Director: Art Collections, which concerns the South African National Gallery & Old Town House museums under Iziko Museums of South Africa.

It has come as somewhat of a surprise to me that I've been requested by Iziko to vacate my position and it is unfortunate that Iziko did not see it fit to extend my contract. I do believe that the actions of Iziko are unfair in this regard and will be looking to contest this decision further.

This is regrettable especially since I believe that we have achieved a lot at the South African National Gallery and the Iziko Art Collections department over the last five years under some very challenging conditions.

I attach a more detailed press statement and a list of select highlights concerning exhibitions, acquisitions and partnerships from May 2009 - April 2014.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for all your support during these last five years.

Riason Naidoo

In the supporting documents, Naidoo emphasised how under his directorship (2009-2014), the Gallery had reflected the diversity of the permanent collection, and by extension a multicultural South African society. In this context, Naidoo proudly described taking down the Abe Bailey Collection – “a standalone, dedicated and permanent exhibition that had been constantly shown since 1947” – and since integrated its artworks into other exhibitions where possible. Naidoo

cited this as a “creative solution to this longstanding dilemma” (Naidoo, 2014:n.p). Naidoo proudly described how the Iziko Art Collections department had appointed two experienced and qualified black employees to senior positions, which he described as “unprecedented for the South African National Gallery and the Art Collections Department” (Naidoo, 2014). In these supporting documents, Naidoo also listed the exhibitions and acquisitions under his tenure as evidence of Iziko’s transformation agenda and his success in its regard.

Naidoo also emphasised how these achievements were despite severe financial constraint. The accumulative exhibitions and acquisitions budgets for his department was reduced several times during his directorship: From R1 325 000 in 2010-11; R670 000 in 2011-12; R171 000 in 2012-13; and raised only slightly to R210 000 in 2013-14.

Much excitement followed the circulation of Naidoo’s email. Journalist Matthew Blackman (2014) published his article on *ArtThrob* the following day, misleadingly titled *Iziko Sacks Director Without Explanation*. In *The Guardian* Marianne Tham (2014) racialised the contract non-renewal with the headline “Blood on the walls as South Africa’s national gallery axes first black director.” Tham (2014) suggested that Naidoo’s “bold and ambitious curation has ruffled feathers among art establishments.” Others, like South African artist Kendell Geers, were in support of Iziko’s decision: “I will not be supporting his plea and I am in complete solidarity with the decision to not renew his contract” (Geers, 2014). Geers accused Naidoo of mishandling a retrospective that was planned for the Iziko SANG but later cancelled.

Ultimately, Naidoo felt that his contract’s non-renewal was unfair and he lodged a case with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). In October 2014 the CCMA made a finding in his favour, and Naidoo was reinstated to the position of director of Art Collections at Iziko Museums of South Africa.

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