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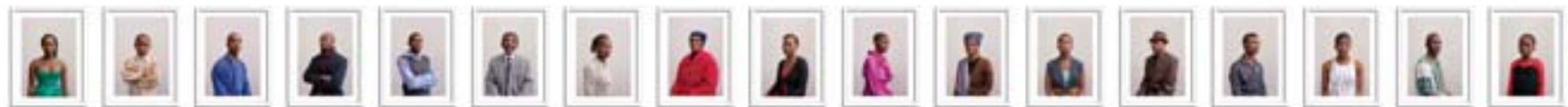
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Native Work: an impulse of tenderness

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Submitted for the award of the degree of Masters in Fine Art.

Supervised by Carolyn Hamilton and Pippa Skotnes.



Top: The 21 black-and-white portraits which comprise one part of *Native Work*, shown here in the grid arrangement in which they are exhibited.

Below: The seventeen colour portraits which comprise the remaining part of *Native Work*, shown here in the linear arrangement in which they are exhibited.
(Note that in reality these two series of portraits are the same size as each other, but are shown here in different scales so that the proportions of the framing and mounting can be seen, and in order that they fit together onto this page).

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INTRODUCTION

Native Work is an installation-artwork consisting of 38 portrait photographs. It was made in response to an encounter with the archive of Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's photographs of black southern Africans taken between 1919 and 1939. In its creative focus on traditional* black South African culture in a post-apartheid context, *Native Work* is one of a series of related – but independent - projects occurring contemporaneously with it in the city of Cape Town (a situation examined more closely in the conclusion to this document: see p. 33). *Native Work* is motivated by a desire for social solidarity - a desire which emerges as a particular kind of historical possibility in the aftermath of apartheid. As such, it finds inspiration in Duggan-Cronin's commitment to affirm the lives of those black South Africans who many of his peers would have dismissed as unworthy subjects of such attention. *Native Work* echoes that commitment by staying close to an impulse of tenderness discernible in Duggan-Cronin's life-long project, and pays homage not only to Duggan-Cronin, but also to the expressive life of those who appeared in his work.

In the following text, I begin by introducing myself, drawing attention to the racial constraints of my upbringing so as to give the reader some sense of why first seeing Duggan-Cronin's work affected me the way it did. The reader will then be introduced to Duggan-Cronin, with some discussion of the ambiguity with which he has been seen over the last few decades. In the following chapter, I write at length about the process of making *Native Work*, contextualising it within my prior practice as an artist, and drawing out some of the technical, conceptual, political and social aspects of its making. This chapter is followed by a look at questions around the reception of *Native Work*, using these to enquire more deeply into what the project might mean for a viewer. The conclusion situates *Native Work* within the context of other, current projects that also engage traditional culture. Finally, there is a postscript which deals with the ethical issues raised by the making of *Native Work*.

*A note on terms

I use terms such as 'race,' 'traditional,' 'tribal' and 'native' in this thesis, understanding both that they are unstable and disavowed. However, due to the nature of my project, I have mostly resisted the urge to put these terms into inverted commas, and have followed their usage during the colonial and apartheid periods. My intention is not to valorize the terms, but rather to use them to indicate the stereotypical attitudes they imply.

INTRODUCING MYSELF

To give the reader a sense of why first seeing Duggan-Cronin's portraits in 2009 had such a powerful effect on me, let me begin by introducing myself.

I was born in Cape Town in 1965, at the height of the apartheid regime. One of the effects of growing up where and when I did was that my life was deeply racially constrained. All of the people I was educated with, all of my friends and their parents, all of the people I grew up with in my suburb, were white. Anyone who was not-white was treated according to a hierarchical calculus of access and worth depending on whatever putative race group apartheid judged that person to belong to. A consequence of this regime for the local world I have called home since birth has been its multi-dimensional segregation.

One way of understanding this segregation is to look at language differences in Cape Town. Where I come from, the language you speak, and how you speak it, is still a general indicator of your degree of inherited privilege. In the rough rectangle of land which stretches about 40 kms eastwards from the slopes of Table Mountain to the foothills of the Hottentots Holland Mountains, there are sudden thresholds which mark stark changes in the language spoken, and life lived, by the people between these two landmarks. In the west, close to the central, fertile slopes of Table Mountain, are mostly privileged English first-language speakers. As you move onto the sandy plain, you find the displaced people whose first language is Afrikaans, but not the Afrikaans of whites: rather the altogether different Afrikaans of coloured people. Moving even further away from the picturesque mountain, onto the sandy, exposed plain proper, is a huge, densely packed population whose first language is isiXhosa. These are the people apartheid classified as black, displacing them as far as possible from the resourced city centre to a dangerous, uninsured life on the far-flung periphery. Growing up when I did, 'we' (who saw ourselves as superior Europeans) were taught to devalue the language, life and look of these people, and were physically prevented from interacting with 'them,' except usually through the form of an exploitative, cruelly hierarchical master/servant relationship. As a consequence, today most



A view of Cape Town and Table Mountain which conveniently hides the vast plain behind it.



The wind-swept sandy plains on the other side of the mountain.

whites, including myself, cannot speak isiXhosa, the language spoken as a first language by the enormous population of people with whom we share this broader territory we call home, and on whose cheap labour we still daily depend.

It is virtually impossible for apartheid-era South Africans not to have been deeply affected by racism. So intense and encompassing was apartheid's systematic division of the world into a racially hierarchised landscape of exploitation of one human group by another that even the most basic, unconscious responses of the people within its sway were shaped to perpetuate the system. *Everything* was viewed through the lens of racial difference: how a person spoke, how they moved, their gestures, what their bodies looked like. One of apartheid's great successes was how it functioned by exerting obsessive control over the realm of human sensory – or aesthetic – experience.

As someone with artistic tendencies, I have been interested in aesthetic experience since I was a child, often preoccupied with questions of style and beauty. But my ideas of style, beauty, art – and culture generally – were deeply determined by centuries of (first) colonial, and (then) apartheid cultural racism. Not once in my art education at school or university did we look at the aesthetic lives of black Africans.

Apartheid carved up everything in its ambit into two mutually exclusive realms: the European and the non-European. While I was morally appalled by what I understood of apartheid, I was also deeply conditioned as an apartheid subject to believe the official, widely-held perspective during apartheid that cultural complexity and sophistication was a European legacy, and that native Southern Africans were devoid of anything that might be dignified with the label culture.

No doubt the timing was right, but seeing a couple of Duggan-Cronin's portrait photographs in 2009 had a big impact on me. Something in the photographs made me see the black, tribal, primitive, African, native sitters in them as singular, cultured human individuals. There was something shockingly dignified about them, a bearing and a styling of costume which ran at puzzling odds to my received ideas about what to recognise as



Chief Muhlaba of the Tsonga photographed at Thabina, northern Transvaal 1933 - the first Duggan-Cronin portrait I ever saw.

culture. Most importantly, these works appeared as cyphers to me, as indicators of local lives and histories of which I suddenly realised I was completely ignorant. A compulsion to start learning about these lives that had previously been invisible to me was initiated by that first encounter.

The more I looked at Duggan-Cronin's work, the more interested I became in a thread that seems to me to run through his portraits. It appears as an impulse of tenderness, a desire to show each of his sitters in what he considered to be the most flattering light possible. Duggan-Cronin made photographs which he seemed to hope others would find *beautiful*. Considering that he was working squarely within a conservative Western European (colonial) aesthetic idiom, we might say that he laboured to make native South Africans beautiful to those very colonial viewers who would normally consider the subjects of these works as being unworthy of attention by artists. Duggan-Cronin's is an inescapably culture-bound idea of beauty, but he was using it in a potentially counter-cultural way. He brought all of the devices of the long tradition of the western European honorific portrait to bear on his sitters: a slightly lowered point-of view in relation to the sitter's face, connoting importance; lighting from the top left or right – a device used in a wide range of western European art historical practices to convey a sense of being singled out, favoured, illuminated; a pyramidal, head-and-shoulders composition, communicating a quiet stability and monumentality – even a sense of timelessness. At the same time, the ability of his particular photographic apparatus to record so much surface detail lent these beautified subjects a somatic presence and singularity way beyond their simplification as mere types.

In short, Duggan-Cronin was classicising and humanising subjects who were typically viewed by his peers as primitive on the one hand and cheap labour on the other hand. It was an inspiring surprise to find someone with a Western European art training working almost a century ago to depict native Africans with such humanising, aesthetic care.

Apartheid racialised *everything*, making it appear natural that the world is divided into separate human groups, each with their own kinds of bodies and souls, each with



Some of Duggan-Cronin's portraits (please note that they have all been slightly cropped).

their own kinds of cultures. Duggan-Cronin's work both affirms difference, *and* seeks out commonalities *across* racial difference, doing so within a particular Western European aesthetic framework at a time just prior to apartheid beginning its particularly intense denigration of native life and history. He disrupts the assumptions apartheid required its subjects to make about the lowly status of native Africans, using all of the tools in his aesthetic arsenal to seduce and convince his viewers of their equality.

Prior to beginning it, I hoped to use my Masters as a pretext for developing more opportunities to meet and work with first-language isiXhosa speakers. My hope was that these encounters would help me overcome some of the deep prejudices and preconceptions I had grown up with as an apartheid subject. Duggan-Cronin's project offered me a way of working out how to make a body of artworks which make necessary *both* my inheritance of the Western European art tradition, *and* the cultural histories of the first-language isiXhosa speakers in my city.

INTRODUCING DUGGAN-CRONIN

Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin was an Irishman who settled in South Africa in 1897 at the age 23, working for all of his life at the De Beers gold mine in Kimberley – first as a compound guard, and later in the dispensary of the prison hospital (Godby 2010: 55). In 1904 - at the age of 30 - Duggan-Cronin bought his first camera and began photographing the black mine workers with whom he came into contact on a daily basis (Bensusan 1996: 102). These southern African migrant workers came from a wide variety of cultural – largely rural - backgrounds, forced through the machinery of colonial governance to work far from their birth-homes. Duggan-Cronin became interested in what he saw as these people's tribal customs (Nilant 1997: 244), his interest increasing as he witnessed firsthand how the traditional ways of life of indigenous peoples were being quickly changed in their encounter with modernity (Hart 2009: 35). As Duggan-Cronin's confidence as a photographer grew, he began photographing black miners "...not only in their working clothes but also in the traditional dress that many had brought with them" (Hart. 2009: 35). (Tantalizingly, it is unknown whether this traditional dress was brought to the mines as a matter of course, or in response to requests from Duggan-Cronin (Hart: personal conversation)). Eventually, Duggan-Cronin started making trips to photograph tribal people in their villages, using all of his spare time from work to photograph what Bensusan describes as the 'Bantu tribes of Southern Africa' (Bensusan 1996: 105). Duggan-Cronin travelled some 128 000 kms with Richard Madela, his assistant, taking roughly 5 000 photographs in the process. This massive investment of his time and resources took 20 years of his adult life, from 1919 to 1939 (Nilant 1997: 244).

Since his death in 1954, Duggan-Cronin's work has largely been known to people in four forms. The first is as sets of prints intended for distribution as teaching aids to university ethnography departments (Godby 2010: 79). Secondly, a series of fibre-based enlargement-prints were made under the direction of Duggan-Cronin during his life-time, many of which were hung by him in the rooms of his *Duggan-Cronin Gallery*, an institution which still exists in Kimberley today. There, Duggan-Cronin arranged his photographs according



A photograph of Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin, probably taken by Richard Madela in 1938.

to tribal group. Third are a series of albums containing selected silver-gelatin contact-prints, also arranged according to tribe. The fourth and probably most important form of Duggan-Cronin's work was its publication in print. Between 1924 and 1954 a fraction of his huge body of photographic work was published by Cambridge University Press, retouched for printing, and accompanied by essays and captions written by various well-known anthropologists of the time (Hart 2009: 36). This publication took the form of an 11-volume series titled *The Bantu tribes of South Africa*, and the single-volume *The Bushman of South Africa*. Anthropologists who wrote for it include Dorothea Bleek, G.P. Lestrade, Werner Eiselen, Monica Wilson, and N. J. Van Warmelo.

In their far-reaching form as images in books, Duggan-Cronin's photographs were thus located, in part, within a particular South African anthropological discourse and would have contributed to a view of black southern Africans as primitive, unchanging, tribal. Michael Godby has written about the effects of this anthropologising of Duggan-Cronin's work, the connection of Duggan-Cronin's pictures to the racism and paternalism inherent in some of the anthropology of the day (Godby 2010: 70). As such, Duggan-Cronin's photographs could be used to justify belief in the spurious existence of objective human types, some of whom (the 'natives,' for example) were considered to be more like animals than humans (Lewerentz 2008: 152). Read in this way, Duggan-Cronin's work can also be seen to depict native southern Africans as racially and culturally pure types who live in an eternal, history-less present, with unchanging traditions.

By excluding all photographs from the printed volumes which showed any kind of modern life, Duggan-Cronin's work further denied black Africans their modernity. Michael Godby writes of how any traces of Western modernity were carefully removed from his scenes (Godby 2010: 66), and although there are a number of photographs in his oeuvre which show the influence of Western culture in the lives of his sitters, none were ever published in the *Bantu tribes* volumes. It's unclear whether Duggan-Cronin was responsible for these editorial decisions (he may in fact have had little say in the matter), but these 'tidied-up' images create the impression of people untouched by modernity – a dangerous



A cover of one of the published volumes through which Duggan-Cronin is best known.

fiction given apartheid's exploitative conflation of African ethnic difference, primitiveness and enforced poverty. Duggan-Cronin never made explicit the real conditions of migrancy and grim rural poverty faced by most black southern Africans. By carefully presenting the lives of black southern Africans as a paradisical rural idyll, in which civilization would only be an interference, Duggan-Cronin's work could be easily co-opted by those who would use it as justification for separate development, the cornerstone of apartheid (Godby 2010: 78).

Yet despite these suspect motives and damaging consequences of his work, there seems to be a genuine interest on Duggan-Cronin's part in what he saw as black southern Africans' cultural richness and diversity, in their *beauty*, even if his perspective on culture was conservative in its hope that native traditions should not change (Bensusan 1966: 104).

On one hand, Duggan-Cronin focused on differences of cultural expression in the many people and groups he photographed, leaving to posterity a massive record of these expressions. Robert Hart, director of the Duggan-Cronin Gallery speaks of the pride with which descendants of subjects in Duggan-Cronin's photographs respond to these images (Hart: personal communication). Duggan-Cronin's emphasis on the specificity and singularity of those he recorded extends to the way he titled his pictures. Overwhelmingly, these titles use terms which *came from the sitters themselves*, and are in their own languages. These terms are especially used as titles in the many albums he made of his contact prints, and which he provided for visitors to his gallery to peruse. Although they are most probably local translations of the life-stages anthropologists were looking for in their encounters with natives, these terms nevertheless represent a wealth of information about some of the black southern Africans of the time.

On the other hand, Duggan-Cronin also emphasised what he saw as shared, human commonalities between his sitters, and between his sitters and the white viewers who came to look at his work: the love of a mother for her child, the authority of leaders, the production of craft, *rites de passage*, dandyism in the young, marriage. It would be easy to dismiss his perspective as culture-bound, but that would be to overlook his intention to

humanise, even if this occurs within a Eurocentric, colonial framework.

Also, should one form the impression that Duggan-Cronin's sitters were completely powerless in terms of their representation, it is worth remembering that one of the ways Duggan-Cronin gained potential sitters' trust was to photograph people, then develop and print these photographs in the field, showing people the results (Bensusan 1966: 103). This opens up the possibility that there were more complex relations of control over the final image than any hastily-formed idea of the all-powerful colonial photographer might lead us to conclude. Later in this document, I will discuss the ways in which my own work is inspired by this possibility of a more multi-lateral agency between artist and model.

Clearly, Duggan-Cronin's legacy is a complex one. Godby writes of Duggan-Cronin's "mixed fortunes," how his work is "displayed proudly at one moment and stowed away in embarrassment at the next, only to be exhibited again for some new purpose" (Godby 2010: 54). There is something contradictory in Duggan-Cronin, bound up as he is in the racism of his time, yet deeply committed to a project which records the human life of those many of his peers may have treated like animals. As Anna Douglas writes: "Duggan-Cronin is caught up in, indeed is produced by and yet simultaneously tries to side-step the philosophies of racial difference" (Douglas 2009: 11). It is a position which very much echoes my own.



Duggan-Cronin showing a group of Xhosa men photographs he had taken previously.

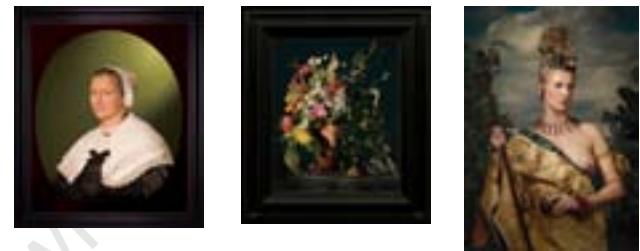
MAKING *Native Work*

In the year before seeing Duggan-Cronin's work for the first time, I had become interested in re-thinking the history of Cape Town. I made two bodies of work which re-imagined the history of the Cape by treating both indigenous Khoikhoi and Dutch settler history as equally necessary: *Secretly I Will Love You More*, and *Flora Capensis*. Very little record is left of the details of pre-colonial Khoikhoi life: most of what we know is conjecture. This required that I work in a roundabout way, alluding to, and intimating, the presence of Khoikhoi life in my work, rather than clearly stating it. When I saw Duggan-Cronin's portraits for the first time in 2009, I was struck by the visual richness of the record he left of indigenous local culture, a history of which I was completely ignorant. Furthermore, a significant part of this record focused on the cultural history of the isiXhosa-speaking people amongst whom I have lived all of my life, but whose histories were denigrated and suppressed by apartheid. The more I saw of Duggan-Cronin's work, the more inspired I was to do something which affirmed these repressed traditional, tribal inheritances in South African cultural history *now*, and to do so in a way which echoed Duggan-Cronin's honorific use of the Western portraiture canon.

In the two years after seeing Duggan-Cronin's photographs for the first time, before beginning this Masters degree, I made two further bodies of work. One represents my earliest attempt to grapple with the relationship between Xhosa and European history, and is based on stories of European (white) castaways becoming Xhosa in the 18th century (*African Hospitality*).

The other, called *Native Life* was a small project based specifically on Duggan-Cronin's work.

In this latter project, I imitated Duggan-Cronin's portraits for the first time, making a



Earlier work of mine which relates to *Native Work* (from left to right): *Secretly I Will Love You More*, *Flora Capensis*, and *African Hospitality*.



Native Life, my first attempt to use Duggan-Cronin's archive as the basis for new work.

double portrait: one of a white man dressed in Zulu beadwork, the other of a black man in the kind of jacket, collar and tie that would have been worn by many city-dwelling black men at the same time that Duggan-Cronin was taking his portraits of Africans in tribal clothing. In *Native Life* I wanted to disentangle the way that apartheid conflated “nature” (differences between bodies) and “ethnicity” (cultural differences) (Hall 2000: 223). My project was also a way of using Duggan-Cronin against himself, to make a photograph that was aesthetically identical to his work in every way, except that it showed what Duggan-Cronin never showed in his gallery: a black man in modern, metropolitan clothing.

At some stage in my Masters work, I decided to pursue a variant of this idea of presenting people who apartheid would classify as belonging to different races (white and black), with different cultures (European and African), in *each other's* clothing. As will become clear in the story which follows, I eventually reached a point where I couldn't make this work, and abandoned it instead for a new idea, one which ultimately led to the final series of thirty eight portraits.

Before knowing where to start *conceptually*, I had begun by first trying to understand *technically* what it was that I found so beautiful in his work.

In attempting to grasp how Duggan-Cronin had achieved his visual effects, I began by immersing myself in the study and practice of film-based photography. Under the tutelage of the photographer Andrew Barker I deliberately stayed away from the familiar world of digital photography and retouching. During this preparatory stage, I undertook various experiments with film, working with different kinds of 35mm colour and black-and-white film, 120 colour positive film, and 8 x 10 black-and-white film. I worked on a wide range of cameras, from a disposable 35mm automatic camera to the intensely manual Sinar P. At the same time I started experimenting with lighting - sometimes available daylight - sometimes a home-made version of studio lighting, using small still lifes and bedside lamps.

Eventually I settled on a particular camera: the Linhoff Standard Press 4 x 5. This camera has a number of features which were helpful in trying to learn how Duggan-Cronin



An early experiment with small-scale studio lighting, on medium format colour positive film.



The Linhoff Standard Press large format camera.

made his images. In the Linhoff, film has to be loaded into dark-slides, one sheet per photograph. This brought me into intimate contact with the film as an *object*, with material characteristics, an intimacy which made me more attentive to the relationship between this materiality and old photographs I had seen reproduced in books. Each photograph required the loading of a dark-slide into the camera, an elaborate, slow setting up of the shot, including tricky focusing on a ground glass screen, and the care to remember numerous small, but vital, elements without which the developed film would look very different to one's expectations. This slowed-down, only-one-shot-at-a-time, lots-of-things-can-go-wrong approach potentially results in a very different way of making images compared to the semi-automatic, keep-shooting-until-you-get-what-you-want, edit-in-Photoshop approach I was accustomed to. One has to be far more calculating and deliberate, a care which translates into a kind of classicising quietness in Duggan-Cronin's portraits.

Still unsure of my direction, but knowing that I would probably be making portraits for my final body of work, I then turned from the relatively easy focus on still-life subject matter to photographing people. Initially these portraits were made in available light, and coincided with my first experiments in the dark room. After a few months of taking photographs on film, the photographer Vanessa Cowling had taught me to develop and print my own 4 x 5 negatives. During this intensive phase of experimentation, I learnt amongst other things how to make contact prints, enlarge, deal with grain, and dodge and burn. After many weeks of work, I was only able to produce *one* tiny print which I really liked, and had begun to get a deep sense of how skilled (and wealthy!) I would need to be to make a large series of film-based, hand-printed black-and-white portrait photographs. Around this time, I decided it might be wise to start learning to work in more controlled conditions, with more flexibility. Vanessa Cowling taught me the rudiments of studio lighting, and I gradually made the change from film-based photography to digital photography. Then I made another long visit to the Duggan-Cronin Gallery in Kimberley, where I could look at Duggan-Cronin's work with a much more technically educated eye.

Formally, I began to notice various things about Duggan-Cronin's work. For example,



One of the first portraits I took on 4 x 5 film, and developed myself.

the catch-lights in his sitter's eyes are horizontally oriented, a small but significant detail pointing to the fact that they are standing in front of an open sky. Relatedly, the lighting in his portraits is usually quite diffuse, probably the result of working outdoors in open shade. After much experimentation with a single studio light lent to me by Jan Verboom, I found a way of bouncing the light off the high walls and ceiling of my studio to achieve a similar effect: horizontal catch-lights, and diffuse, overhead lighting.

As far as *form* is concerned, I noticed that Duggan-Cronin composed and lit his subjects in a way that emphasised their sculptural qualities, with a tendency to calm, reduced forms. In the beginning, my attempts at costuming display my lack of awareness of this feature of Duggan-Cronin's portraits, but with time, my ability to work in a more classically sculptural way improved.

In the move from film to digital photography, I was careful to retain as many of the visual qualities of Duggan-Cronin's film-based photography as possible. The principal ways I achieved this were to add digital grain to the images, keep the tonal values from getting too contrasty, and print all the final digital files as true photographs: black-and-white fibre-based Lightjet silver-gelatin prints, and Crystal Fuji matt Lightjet prints.

Conceptually, the project of making *Native Work* underwent a number of modulations before it took its final form. Early in the second year of the Masters, I was still in the middle of my first big idea, an extension of the double-portrait *Native Life*: to dress up both white *and* black models in tribal costume based on Duggan-Cronin's photographs. At some point in this stage of the project I came up against a brick wall: despite casting more than 200 people I couldn't find enough white models who looked convincing in African traditional costume. At this stage I hadn't yet begun photographing black models for the project, somehow unconsciously thinking that it would be easy to find black models who looked as though they could have come out of a Duggan-Cronin photograph (something I had, miraculously, achieved in the diptych *Native Life*). Even in this earlier stage of the project I was looking for faces which conformed to a particular approach to beauty, an inclination



A detail of one of Duggan-Cronin's portraits, showing the horizontal catchlight.



Unsuccessful attempts to work with white models in multi-figure compositions in the landscape.

I had picked up from looking at Duggan-Cronin's sitters' faces. At this stage I was also investigating the possibility of working with multi-figure compositions in the landscape, but found these experiments too expensive to pursue, requiring as they did long trips out into the countryside, big budgets for accommodation and catering, and a nerve-wracking lack of flexibility in relation to elements like weather and quality of daylight.

After months of struggling with the project, I realised one day that in concentrating on finding white models I had completely neglected to think about how to find black models. It suddenly dawned on me that finding the right black models wasn't going to be as easy as I'd thought. I contacted my friend, Kazi Mnukwana, a lecturer in musicology, and asked her if she knew of anyone who I might employ to help me find the right models. Kazi recommended Thokozile Ntshinga, who agreed to meet me for coffee at the Artscape Theatre, where she was directing a play for schools. I don't know what I expected, but as our meeting progressed, it became clear through the constant requests for her autograph that Thokozile was *famous*: a 'celeb' known by many black people in Cape Town for her role in the first season of *Egoli*, the super-successful South African soap opera. Thokozile put my mind right about the kinds of faces I was looking for. "If you want people of all ages to model for you, and you want them to look as though they come from the village – not the city – you will have to go to those parts of the black suburbs that are furthest away from the city centre, where the poorest, most vulnerable people live, the people with the most direct links to the rural areas."

It was at this stage that the weariness of the previous months of unsuccessful toil suddenly evaporated: I was completely energised. From around this time it became clear just how transformative the task of meeting and photographing people outside of his comfort zone might have been for Duggan-Cronin. It was enlivening to suddenly have this opportunity myself. As I began to spend more and more time *elokshin* (the term my black acquaintances use to name those territories into which apartheid had forcibly removed them or their parents) I could feel myself changing.



Earlier experiments with models from different 'race groups.' Note the model in the bottom right corner (shown in detail below), the only white model who looked right for the project. This is probably because her features are reminiscent of sitters in Edward Curtis's work.



I had found my project: to work with people who my conditioning as an apartheid subject had made it very difficult for me to get to know. In order to use the Masters as an opportunity to challenge some of the racial constraints of my upbringing, I decided to work as much as possible with models from those racially separated parts of the broader city that I would never normally have an opportunity to visit. From this moment on, my project changed direction: I knew that henceforth *all* of my portraits would be of black people. My final project began taking shape: to make affirming portraits of contemporary black people dressed in traditional costumes, styled and photographed in a way which recalled Duggan-Cronin's honorific portraits. It would be an homage to Duggan-Cronin, an echo of his complex celebration of the beauty of black southern Africans, and an echo of his passionate labour.

I realised that this was a risky endeavour - a white man dressing black people in tribal clothing. It could easily be misread as yet another project which unwittingly exoticises, objectifies and primitivises black people. Deciding to put these important reservations on hold, I opted to follow my heart, and dive into the contemporary, contested world of traditional clothing, to see if I couldn't find a way to unsettle the taken-for-granted, dismissive ways in which many people read Duggan-Cronin's work. A hope grew in me to also make images which my *black sitters* found beautiful, paying homage though my work not only to Duggan-Cronin, but also to the sitters in his photographs, and the beauty of the forms of dress in which they had presented themselves.

As all of the people I wanted to photograph would be isiXhosa speakers, traditional Xhosa clothing became my primary focus in the costuming of sitters. Most of the people who modelled for me would not normally wear clothing of this kind: it's old-fashioned, from a time past. In this double homage - to Duggan-Cronin and to the sartorial expression of his sitters - decisions about what models would wear were thus largely mine, although there were some important exceptions, which are described below. The traditional costume elements I worked with came from various places, but centred on a mid-20th century collection of Thembu (Xhosa) beadwork and other items lent to me by Stephen Long, the South African beadwork expert.

Thokozile was far too busy to help me as an intermediary, so she put me in touch with Mhlanguli George, a young theatre-maker who recently had recently come from King Williams Town to live in New Crossroads. Mhlanguli became my constant companion on the project. He effected numerous introductions to potential models, translated between myself and all of the many isiXhosa-speakers I met who don't speak English, made recommendations about appropriate behaviour in social and cultural situations outside of my experience, and organised models prior to shoots via telephone. Vuyukazi Sihele, a dance teacher, who Thokozile connected me to, was also a big help on the project, communicating on my behalf to child-models, their parents, and the staff of the schools they attend.

As the weeks went by, I entered the exciting but arduous phase of arranging with people to pick them up at their homes *elokshin*, bring them to my studio in the city, provide lunch or tea, costume them, photograph them (at this stage my two assistants, Kyle Weeks and Hylton Boucher were taking all the photographs), take people back home (sometimes 40 kms away), print the photographs, visit people again to show them the photographs to make sure they were happy with them, and so on. Prior to all this, I have made many photographic and costume tests over the months, working with a couple of young black students I had approached on campus. This meant that when the final models arrived to be dressed up and play their part, I could show them reference photographs I had taken previously of what I wanted them to wear, and make sure they were happy with my plans. But something unexpected happened when one of the final models – Sakhwi Ndubata – arrived for the shoot.

Sakhwi came to the shoot at my studio on his own steam from faraway Makhaza to Cape Town station. I had offered to pick up Sakhwi at the station, but, perhaps a misunderstanding arose through my rudimentary isiXhosa, he walked the long distance in inclement weather from the central station to my studio. So when he arrived at my studio door, I was surprised to suddenly see him, touched by how much trouble he must have gone through to get there and, quite unexpectedly, bowled over by what he had chosen to



Mhlanguli George



Sakhwi Ndubata

wear: an impeccable suit and hat. Suddenly, the singular *contemporariness* of Sakhwiwo, as a black, metropolitan, post-apartheid Xhosa man, really struck me. The kind of romantic traditionalising and Africanising I was attempting in my black-and-white portraits no longer seemed enough. It was only part of the story, important, but incomplete.

Around that time, a new problem had begun to worry me. What if viewers assumed that models dressed in these traditional costumes every day, that this was a fixed, true or essential image of them and their culture? This assumption would be made even worse by another potential assumption: what Hal Foster calls the “primitivist assumption” - that this traditional dress indicated a primitiveness or backwardness on the part of the sitter (Foster 1996: 178). I knew I had to find a way to disrupt these potential assumptions.

I asked Sakhwiwo if he'd be happy about us not only photographing him in the traditional costume I had prepared for him, but also in this smart, formal clothing he had worn of his own accord. It was at this moment that the idea for a second, parallel series of portraits emerged. Without Sakhwiwo's generous sartorial expression that day, I might not have made this vital leap. The idea developed further a little later that day when I took Sakhwiwo home, and he invited me into his home. On a shelf in his sitting room, were a couple of photographs, both of Sakhwiwo. One was a formal portrait, taken in a studio in East London, shortly after Sakhwiwo's initiation ceremony. It was the first time I had seen a formal portrait in the home of any of the models I had visited. A few days later, in the middle of another shoot, I was showing one of the models I was working with the photographs I was taking of them on the computer monitor. As I was aiming to output the photographs in black-and-white, I opened one of the files on the monitor in photoshop, and converted it from colour to black-and-white. The model I was with said ‘No!:’ she wanted to see it in colour. I suddenly realised that my decision to photograph the sitters in black-and-white may well be seen by my models as *inferior* step away from colour. I decided to make the second, ‘self-styled’ portrait series in colour. This would have a double function: it would be closer to models' expectations of a good photograph, and it would create more of a sense, in contrast to the antiquing effect of black-and-white, that these are portraits of people

taken today. I began contacting everyone we had photographed, and asked them if they would allow us to photograph them *again*, this time wearing smart clothing of their own choice. Everyone had already been photographed at least once, and so they knew what the process entailed. Everyone agreed.

When approaching people about this second portrait, I tried to involve the sitters as much as possible in the way they were represented. I made it clear to sitters that I was most concerned to make a portrait with which not only I, but each of the sitters, should be happy. Models had been promised two framed portraits, one black-and-white, one colour, to keep once the project was over. So, in various ways, I attempted to make colour portraits which really appealed to each sitter. This included asking sitters to bring more than one outfit to the shoot, so that they could experiment with, evaluate, and choose what they thought they looked best in. I made sure there were good mirrors around so that people could dress themselves. Every time a new colour portrait was finished, I printed it and showed it with all the completed portraits to models I re-visited, showing them the series they would become part of, and taking some time to work out how they wanted to look in relation to those other portraits. Whilst photographing people I also linked the camera to a large monitor so that models could see themselves, giving them some degree of control over how they posed for the camera. Once I had taken a few photographs of each model, we would stop, and I would ask the model to look through what we had taken and choose their favourite, proceeding in this way until the model had chosen their favourite photograph out of the day's shooting. If people were unhappy with the day's shooting, I offered to re-photograph them, but no-one took me up on this offer.

By this stage I had gained enough experience to start working unassisted, and so it happened that I achieved another goal I'd set myself by undertaking a Masters degree in Fine art: to learn to take my own photographs.

As I began to learn and think more about what models were wearing in my photographs, I started seeing traditional Xhosa costume in a new way. The phrase

traditional costume might easily give the impression that these forms of dress, seen in the work of photographers like Duggan-Cronin, were somehow unchanging, but in reality tradition adapts and mutates continuously. As the artist and performer Athi Pathra Ruga succinctly puts it: ‘Tradition equals change’ (Pathra-Ruga 2010: personal communication). Blankets, for example, although seemingly quintessential Xhosa items of dress, are actually partial, hybrid appropriations of European objects. In lieu of tradition’s mutability, I therefore decided to relax about authenticity, working rather in a free, syncretic way that owed an obvious debt to the costumes in Duggan-Cronin’s many photographs of Xhosa people, but which did not obsessively aim for the truth.

There is another reason for being relaxed and inventive about traditional costume in my photographs: Duggan-Cronin is known to have tinkered with, supplied and re-used costume elements in his portraits, blurring the certainty with which we can say his sitter’s clothing is authentic or not (Godby 2010: 61).

It would thus be a mistake to think that the traditional costume I dress sitters in is *either* authentic *or* fictional. Rather, it represents a particular, located attempt to revisit tradition, to articulate it with the interweaving, sometime contradictory demands made on it by myself and my models, each of us with our own particular desires. Although my sitters in their day-to-day lives, like myself, wear their own versions of contemporary, global street fashion, most of them have a complex, lived relation to the kinds of historical costume in which I dress them.

For example, three of the sitters (Notyatyambo Madiglana, Linda Mhlawuli and Sisipho Matho) are young teenagers who spend most of their spare time in Vuyukazi Sihele’s large traditional dance group, performing at schools, in their community, and all over the country, dancing in costume inflected by tradition. Another two of the sitters (Sihle Mnqwazana and Given Mkhondo) are young actors, studying drama at the University of Cape Town. Both have chosen a stream in the curriculum in which isiXhosa is the principal language of dramatic expression. Part of this course has seen their Xhosa lecturer, Mfundo Tshazibane,



Some of the many young dancers who work after school every day with Vuyukazi Sihele.

helping his students explore traditional Xhosa forms in their work. One of these students (Sihle Mnqwazana) put some of the photographs I had taken of him on Facebook. A local, young black celebrity contacted him, saying how much she liked the pictures, and added that she had some of his clan names to pass on to him. Sihle's uncle, with whom he staying whilst studying in Cape Town, also remarked that he was pleased that Sihle's work on my project gave him an opportunity to look at Xhosa tradition. Sihle, who wears the initiate's costume in my photographs, may well be wearing this costume in the near future when he goes through his own initiation, an event about which he has complex feelings, as a young, urban, tertiary-educated black man.

In another case, when it was the turn of one of the older women (Mrs Nofikile Sibenga) to don the costume I had prepared for her, she demurred, claiming, rightly, that it contained too many elements which in the days of her youth signified 'young married woman.' She set about experimenting with a few of the many costume elements I had all over my studio, and within minutes wound a head-wrap in a form which I had seen in Duggan-Cronin's archive, but which I had no idea how to imitate. Another of the older women (Mrs Nopumzile Msengezi), watching Mrs Sibenga costume herself, asked me: 'What character would you like me to play?' Having by then some knowledge of the significance of various costume elements, I noticed that she was wearing white beads threaded tightly through her ears – signifying her status as an *uqirha*, a traditional healer. I took a chance, and on the spur of the moment suggested she play an *uqirha*. She took off her hat, and jersey, revealing the hidden headband and necklace of an *uqirha*. All she required was a piece of white fabric from my costume collection – and she suddenly became the character which she actually *is*. For all of these people, African tradition is a continuing dimension of their day-to-day life, a complex modulation of the present in terms of the past, part invention, part memory. In keeping with the continuing variation of tradition, as something always changing, never fixed, my approach to tradition was 'in the spirit of,' rather than rigidly adhering to some 'authentic' idea of what is traditional. It was pleasing to hear from Mrs Nofikile Sibenga, the person with the longest experience of the traditional past, that my syncretic, invented image of the girl initiate (Notyatyambo Madiglana) with a curtain of beads hiding her eyes,



One of the photographs of himself in traditional costume which Sihle Mnqwazana put onto MixIt.



Mrs Nofikile Sibenga in my studio costuming herself in front of a mirror.

aroused a strong sense of the appropriateness of such images in the contemporary world as reminders of the traditional Xhosa value of *hlonipha* (a complex notion roughly translatable as ‘respect’).

The new, second series of colour photographs, of the same sitters who had been costumed by me in traditional clothing in the black-and-white portraits, and who now costumed themselves in contemporary clothing, thus became the primary way in which I sought to provoke another reading of both my own and Duggan-Cronin’s portraits. Seen in relation to the black-and-white portraits, the colour portraits have the effect of complicating the assumptions a viewer could make about the sitters, the place of costume in the portraits and the role of the photographer.

By the end of August in the second years of my Masters, I had taken all of the photographs which comprise the final body of images: *Native Work*, a series of twenty-one black-and-white portraits of seventeen black Capetonians dressed by me in traditional costume, and seventeen colour portraits of the same sitters wearing contemporary, formal clothing of their own choosing. All that was left was to take the work into post-production, making final decisions about colour, digitally-added grain, tonal values and scale, and to start thinking about the reception of the work, an issue to which I now turn.

THE RECEPTION OF *NATIVE WORK*

As the project has unfolded, I have developed a number of supplementary tactics for steering viewers away from potentially stereotyping readings of my works. By highlighting the constructedness and theatrical nature of my project as a whole, I attempt to challenge taken-for-granted suppositions about the relations between ethnicity and race, about the fixity implicit in common ideas of tribe and tradition, and about simplistic distinctions between the modern and the traditional.

My strategy for achieving these effects consists of working within the following arenas: the titling of individual works; the use of interpretive material to accompany the work when it is exhibited; control over which of the portraits are exhibited (or published) at any one time; and the potential role of other kinds of writing, including the academic writing and catalogue material.

I will now address each of these in more detail.

Titles

A set of albums are stored at the Duggan-Cronin Gallery, the primary archive of Duggan-Cronin's estate. Each album contains a selection of contact prints of photographs Duggan-Cronin took of a particular tribe. Sometimes more than one tribe is represented contiguously in an album. These albums were once available for gallery visitors to peruse, and most of the contact prints in them are titled in Duggan-Cronin's hand. What is striking about these titles is the predominance in them of words which come from the people Duggan-Cronin was photographing. In the Xhosa albums, for example, we find words like '*amaxego*', '*abafana*', '*amakosikazi*', and '*indoda*'. These descriptive terms, in the language of those who are photographed, often roughly correspond to general nouns in English ('young ladies,' 'youths,' 'boys') but add another layer of documentary richness to Duggan-Cronin's project. Names of actual people are not typical in Duggan-Cronin's titles, unless

they are the names of the powerful – usually chiefs. Even the relatives of these powerful people are often unnamed, and are only described in the role they play as a relation of the chief, for example ‘Sister of Chief X.’

In a latter-day echo of this practice, Zwelethu Mthethwa has argued for *not* using the names of his subjects in the titles of his portraits of black cane workers because the idea of privileging biographical difference over group life is alien to the Zulu cultural worlds from which his sitters come (Corrigall 2011: online). Given the reductive effects of many ethnographic photographs and their tendency to present their subjects anonymously - and Mthethwa’s practice notwithstanding - I have decided to draw attention to the biographical singularity of my sitters by using their names in the titles. My intention is to use proper names as a humanising effect in response to the dehumanising effects of apartheid’s long night between Duggan-Cronin’s time and my own. Each of the colour images is therefore simply titled with the sitter’s name. Here, the suggestion is that the photograph and the title are metonymic for an actual, singular individual. As my intention in these portraits has been to construct an image of everyday modernness, these photographs largely occupy the role of a contemporary, formal portrait.

In the titling of my traditionalising portraits, on the other hand, I want to suggest a much greater degree of acting, of dress-up, of role-playing. The role the person plays is deliberately ambiguous, for example, a role that could be based on a title from one of Duggan-Cronin’s photographs, or a role that the sitter might authentically perform at some stage *in their actual life*. My decision here has been to use the name of the sitter in a phrase that recalls the way an actor would be billed for a film or a play, for example John Smith as ‘The Queen.’ Within this, there have been some decisions to make. These are some examples of possibilities from which I could have chosen:

Nopumzile Msengezi as

A Traditional Healer' (an anglicised phrase)

'The Traditional Healer' (definite article)

'Uqhira' (a word the sitter would use to describe herself)

'An Uqirha' (indefinite article)

'The Uqirha' (definite article)

The problem of choosing amongst these alternatives is compounded by the fact that some of the images of tradition I have constructed are fictitious. So although the image of Notyatyambo Madiglana would be recognisable to many southern Africans as an initiate (or possibly a bride), my image is a syncretic, cross-cultural invention. The beadwork is Xhosa, but the blanket is Sotho. I could not easily use an isiXhosa word for 'bride' or 'initiate' in my title here, as these words still carry too much specificity in terms of traditional ideas of what a Xhosa bride or initiate might look like. These would also affirm tribal/ ethnic difference, something I wish to avoid stressing in too finalising a way in these portraits. My solution has been to affirm a lesser thread present in the titling of works in Duggan-Cronin's monographs: a designation of people in roles filtered through a Westernising, Eurocentric sensibility. These titles could be seen to be demeaning in their reduction of someone to a type or role (for example: 'Xhosa Girl,' or 'Some Xhosa Types'), but by appropriating only those that might be re-used respectfully, I hope to also make visible the multivalent nature of my images. What are these roles these people are playing? Are they African roles that can be adequately described with English terms? Are they traditional roles which belie an inescapable entanglement with European culture? By bringing the specificity of a person's actual name ('Notyatyambo Madiglana') into a relation of performance ('as') with a generalised, Eurocentric take on an 'African' role ('An initiate') seems to me to steer a course which I hope is provocative, evocative and respectful in the right combination.

Below: two portraits of the same person, with the titles beneath each portrait.



Siyasanga Bushula



Siyasanga Bushula
as A Mbira Player

Display

Another of tactic for directing the reception of this body of work is to make sure that the black-and-white and colour portraits are only ever seen *together*. These works were not only made for a Masters degree in Fine Art: it is also my intention to exhibit them publicly and commercially. To prevent the ‘ethnographic’ portraits being seen alone – without the contextualising, unsettling influence of the colour photographs – the work will only be available for acquisition as an entire series, with the stipulation that the thirty-eight portraits must always be seen together (or possibly in part, but only if a model is represented in *both* a colour *and* a black-and-white portrait). Similarly in publication: if anyone is shown in a traditional portrait, they must also be shown in a colour portrait.

Interpretive material

The other main constellation of tactics I will use to open up readings of the work comprise all the kinds of writing which might accompany the work, from a short interpretive text which I feel should be displayed on the wall near the work, to a catalogue which might be published with the work, to papers and journalistic articles that might be written about the work, to this thesis, which is available as a semi-public document. In even the most basic of these, the interpretive text to hang with the work, a few things need to be made clear: the work is a response to my encounter with Duggan-Cronin; I dressed most people in the traditionalising portraits, whereas people dressed themselves for the colour portraits; the traditional costume is a creative interpretation of traditions partly recorded by Duggan-Cronin, but also interfered with by him; the sitters each have their own complex relations to these traditions, and might wear similar costumes today for any of a variety of reasons, just as an academic might wear a gown, or a bride might wear a white dress with a veil. Lastly, it is important to say that as a white apartheid-born subject, I was forcibly kept apart from fellow black Capetonians, and that making this work was a pretext for making connections to those from whom I have long been separated.

CONCLUSION

There is even today a big difference in the way that African and European heritage is valued. Channel television in South Africa is rich in programmes (usually English or American) which educate their viewers in the characteristics, meanings and values of antiques. To my knowledge there are no such programmes taking the same approach with, for example, old Xhosa beadwork.

One of the effects of modernisation has been a disdain for the old in preference for the new. This idea was necessary to apartheid's plan to create groups defined and separated by rigid ethnic differences. By affirming the ethnic differences of native populations, and preventing these populations from accessing the benefits of modernity (housing, medicine, education.), apartheid was able to make a neat elision between traditional native culture (beadwork, reed houses.) and backwardness (which was actually a form of enforced, multi-dimensional poverty).

At a key moment in the Rivonia Trials, Nelson and Winnie Mandela dressed in defiantly African ways, signaling the otherness, to them, of the state which claimed a right to judge them.

Not surprising, as apartheid's repressive machinery grew, a number of progressive black voices during apartheid urged black people to *put away* signs of their traditional past, especially their clothing, as these played straight into the hands of the apartheid propagandists who pointed to these signs as confirmation of the need for separate and unequal development. Complicatingly, when Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa in 1994, he refrained from wearing ethnically-specific clothing, arguing that he didn't want to accentuate tribal differences amongst an African population already fractiously divided by half a century of apartheid.

But today, there is evidence that the traditional has not disappeared in many South Africans' recent attempt to put aside difference in order look for commonalities.

Unsurprisingly, tradition hasn't died out, it has just mutated.

Take for example the traditional dancing that the roughly fifty or so young dancers spend their spare time learning with Vuyukazi Sihele (mentioned previously). The dancing these children learn is a *fusion* of Tswana and Xhosa dance, a contemporary *hybrid* that emerged when a group of young *Xhosa* men, now in their early 20s, were exposed to the dance videos of a well-known *Tswana* choreographer a few years ago. The choreographer eventually came to Cape Town to teach them. So although all of the roughly 50 young dancers (five to eighteen years old) are *Xhosa*, their traditional cultural expression as dancers derives largely from the traditions of a *different* group: the *Tswana*.

In another example, Mfundu Tshazibane (the UCT Drama School lecturer also mentioned above), has recently staged and directed an adaptation of Nongenile Masiththus Zenani's *Mbengu-sonyangaza ndakwenz'int'emb!* Tshazibane's retelling of these stories, especially as they have come to us through the increasingly revered figure of Zenani (whose stories were collected in the 60s and 70s by a white academic), belies the idea that black people had no culture during apartheid. Mfundu uses Zenani's material to produce a form of theatre which is intensely traditional, but in ways which rely on - and instantiate - a re-thinking of *Western theatre*.

In yet another example, a white friend of mine, Chris Ntombemhlope Reid , is a *Xhosa*-trained *sangoma*. Chris spends half his year in Mpondoland working as a traditional healer, fluent in *Xhosa*, attired, as he is when in Cape Town, in the skirts, beads and headdress of a *sangoma*, and always barefoot.

These and other contemporary projects point to a local interest in revisiting traditional, non-Western, native African cultural practices, and with a depth of commitment in strong contrast to the superficial Africanising sometimes employed tokenistically by those with no real interest in anything *actually* African (I am thinking, for example, of the way zig-zags are often drawn into any design which needs Africanising).

The body of photographs I have made for this Masters degree is another effort within this constellation of current attempts to take African tradition seriously. It was inspired by what unexpectedly appears to be something of this same impulse in the work of Duggan-Cronin, almost a hundred years ago. At the same time as it recognises the complex place of African tradition in the contemporary world, and tries to steer a course between affirming respect and delirious captivation.

In conclusion, a word about the title of my project: *I am the native of my title*. A primary concern of mine over the last 25 years of working as an artist and teacher in Cape Town has been to engage and explore the local. It is my experience that there is a profundity of source material for creative, socially and environmentally conscious work in those territories close to and *in* what each of us call home, but of which we are unconscious. I find myself in a world in which, to quote Mbembe, '[b]lacks and whites are becoming strangers to each other in ways not witnessed even during apartheid' (Mbembe 2012: online). As born and bred Capetonian, the project being described here constitutes a labour, as a native of this place, to open myself up to encounters with those other natives of my home that apartheid blinded me to, separated me from, and exploited so that I could live well.

Postscript: ethical concerns

Native Work raised a number of ethical concerns, some of which I was able to discuss with Fiona Ross of the UCT Ethics Committee. Below is a description of some of my responses to the ethical dimension of the project.

In order to find models, I visited places where people met regularly in groups: schools, gyms, senior clubs, clinics, theatre troupes and dance groups. This meant that I could take a quick photograph of anyone interested in being involved in the project, look at their faces in the quiet of my studio, and then return to those whose faces seemed right for the project, arranging to take them to my studio at some future time to costume and photograph them. During these initial meetings, I showed people lots of examples of Duggan-Cronin's work, asking how people felt about them, or about being represented in this way. As the Brett Murray *Spear* affair made clear, no amount of prior knowledge can prepare one for how people will react to one's work once it enters public space, but before starting work on the portraits, and all through the many weeks of their production, I continually made sure that all models were happy with being represented in the way I was choosing to show them.

All models and intermediaries were paid every time I worked with them, reinforcing the actorliness of their role in the project. I personally transported models from their homes to my studio and back (often as far away as 40 kms), and always made sure that there was a constant supply of food, coffee, tea, water, and juice. My studio was kept warm (we worked during winter), so that people were comfortable whilst waiting to be photographed, and privacy was provided in case people needed it (often they did).

As is conventional when working with under-age models, when working with children I always worked in the presence of an independent adult, and always with the written consent of parents, and with the knowledge of at least one independent, respected community member (usually one of the children's senior teachers) who I felt understood the nature of the project.

From Andrew Putter

Tel: 083 4848 758

University of Cape Town, Michaelis Campus, Orange street, Cape Town

My name is Andrew Putter. I am studying photography at the University of Cape Town. I am interested in photographs of Xhosa people taken 100 years ago by a photographer named Duggan-Cronin. He tried to show the beauty and culture of black people in his photographs. During the years of apartheid, some people tried to use his photographs to show that black people are inferior. Because of this, many people do not feel good looking at Duggan-Cronin's photographs today, and do not see the beauty in them. I want to dress up black people in traditional clothing and photograph them in a way that looks like Duggan-Cronin's hundred year old photographs. By doing this I want to show that black people were beautiful and cultured 100 years ago, just as they are beautiful and cultured now.

English translation of the form given to all models.

This letter is to ask your permission to let me photograph you (or your child). I also ask your permission for me to then own the photograph so that I can use it for my University studies, and also to possibly sell it if someone wants to buy it. In this way I can earn some money for the work I am doing. I can pay you a small amount of money to let me photograph you, and for the right to own the photograph.

I will take the photograph in a room at the University, in the city. It will take a few hours for me to photograph you (or your child), and I usually work on a Saturday or a Sunday. I will always pay for the transport to bring you (or your child) to the University and to take you (or your child) home again.

English translation of the release form given to all models.

All models (or their parents or guardians, if they were children) were given a short, simply-written isiXhosa document which outlined my intentions in the project and which was illustrated with some of Duggan-Cronin's portraits. Models were also asked to sign a simple release form. The English versions of the outline and the form are reproduced on the previous page (see previous page, right), with the isiXhosa version reproduced here on the right. These documents were read through by Mhlanguli and me with small groups of models, so that we could explain more fully their import, and answer questions.

At the outset of the project, I had decided to portray some of the women bare-breasted in the traditional portraits. According to some of my amaXhosa informants, this would not have been inappropriate. As time went by, I decided to abandon the idea. The scandal around Brett Murray's *The Spear* took place in the middle of my project, making any kind of portrayal of the black body even more contested than it usually is. In Achille Mbembe's public response to Murray, he reminds us that 'after almost 20 years of freedom, the black body is still a profane body. It still does not enjoy the kind of immunity accorded to properly human bodies' (Mbembe 2012: online). A young Xhosa filmmaker I met in New Crossroads also spoke of his discomfort at seeing photographs of bare-breasted African women hanging publicly in the Iziko South African National Gallery. When I said that I had met many young black people who regularly dance bare-breasted, he said 'Yes, but they wouldn't go and fetch wood like that.' This comment more than anything decided me against not making publicly-viewable images of bare-breasted women.

I continually kept sitters in touch with how the project was unfolding, visiting them with new portraits as these were being made, checking that each person was still comfortable with potentially being seen publicly as a face in amongst all of the other portraits. I also constantly negotiated and renegotiated the ways in which I had clad them (or they were choosing to clad themselves).

At the end of the project, all models (and their friends and families) were invited to an event close to their homes at which I could thank them all publicly, and hand over to them

Igama lam ndingu Andrew Putter. Ndifundela ukufota kwiDyunesithi yase Kapa. Ndinomdla wokuthatha amafoto abantu bakwaXhosa awayethathyathwe kwiminyaka elikhulu edlulileyo ngumfoti ogama lingu Duggan-Cronin. Wayezama ukubonisa ubuhle nenkcubeko yabantu abamnyama kwifoto zakhe. Ngexesha lengcinezelo abantu abamhlopho basebenzisa amafoto akhe (Duggan-Cronin) ukunyemba abantu abamnyama Ngenxa yoko abanye abantu abathandi ukubuka amafoto akhe (Duggan-Cronin) kwaye ababoni buhle kuwo. Ndifuna ukunxibisa abantu abamnyama impahla yesiNtu ndithathe amafoto abo njengokuba uDuggan-Cronin wayenzile kwiminyaka elikhulu edlulileyo. Ngokwenza oku ndifuna ukubonisa ukuba abantu abamnyama babebahle kwaye benenkubeko kwiminyaka elikhulu eyadlulayo njengokuba bebahle kwaye benenkubeko nangoku.

Ndibhala leleta ukucela imvume yokufota wena okanye umntwana wakho, ndikwacela imvume yokusebenzisa amafoto kumsebenzi wam wesikolo nokuwa thengisa kumntu owafunayo. Ngalendlela ndinga fumana imali ngalo msebenzi ndiwenzayo. Ndingakubhatala imalana ngokundivumela ndikufote, nemvume yokuba ndisebenzise ifoto yakho. Ndizakufotela kwigumbi lokufotela kwiDyunesithi yaseKapa. Izakuthatha iyure ezimbawla ukufota wena okanye umntwana wakho, ndisebenza ngemiggibelo okanye ngecawa. Ndizakubhatalela imali yokhwela ukuya nokubuya.

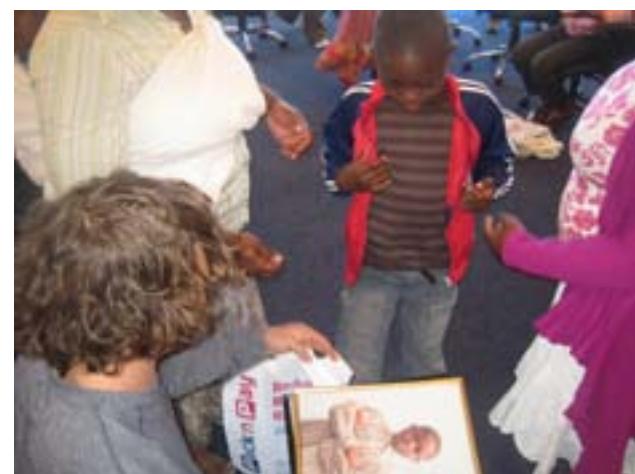
isiXhosa translation of the form given to all models.

a gift of their two framed portraits – one black-and-white, one colour. This was the first time all the portraits were seen together publicly, and it felt right that this first showing should be amongst those who are represented in the works. Everyone was pleased with how they looked in the photographs, and appeared to be happy with the project as a whole. The event was catered, and everyone was given taxi, bus and train fair to get to the event from their homes.

In closing, it is important to point out that many things complicate the erroneous idea that my models were fully aware of what their involvement in my project entails. For example, there is the fact that I *paid* people, and that this money was for many models an important supplement to often meager earnings. This made it impossible for me to always know what motivated models and means that I must allow for the possibility that some models might have secretly had a problem with my project, but may have taken the work anyway because they really needed money. (I hope they will forgive me for writing of them in this way – it feels necessary, but also exposing). Then there is the problem of my poor (but improving) ability to speak isiXhosa. Once again, I undoubtedly missed many subtleties, and may have sometimes caused unintentional harm through my lack of linguistic competence. Another issue is the fact that most of my models have never been in an art gallery, or studied academically, meaning that my project of dressing them up in old-fashioned clothing, photographing them, and then selling this photograph to a stranger as an artwork would not necessarily make much sense to many of them.

It goes without saying that the fuller implications of what this work means – to the sitters, to me, to the viewers of the works – will only be revealed when the work is seen publicly and feelings are expressed about it in the public domain.

It is my sincere hope that any harm that has been done is outweighed by what good might have come from this project.



The event at Lookout Hill.

Reproductions of the 38 final portrait photographs produced for *Native work*

Dimensions: 501mm x 351mm, with a 40mm white border.

Medium [black-and-white]: silver gelatin, fibre-based lightjet print with selenium toning ('true photograph')

Medium [colour]: Fuji crystal matt lightjet print ('true photograph')

Edition: 3 + 2 AP



Athenkosi Mfamela as
A Young Man Dressed for the Dance



Siyasanga Bushula as
A Mbira Player



Khubekile Dayi as
A Councillor



Thandokazi Mbane as
A Native Girl



Sihle Mnqwazana as
An Initiate



Jackson Mabena as
A Married Man



Sakhwi Ndubata as
A Chief



Nopumzile Msengezi as
A Traditional Healer



Anele Mbali as
A Native Youth



Notyatyambo Madiglana as
A Native Girl



Siyasanga Bushula as
A Shepherd



Anita Mbanyaru as
A Young Married Woman



Given Mkhondo as
A Young Man Dressed for the Dance



Sihle Mnqwazana as
A Praise Poet



Linda Mhlawuli as
A Native Maiden



Sisipho Matho as
A Native Maiden



Notyat�ambo Madiglana as
An Initiate



Given Mkhondo as
A Young Man Dressed for the Dance



Nomboniso Runqa as
A Native Maiden



Nofikile Sibenga as
A Married Woman



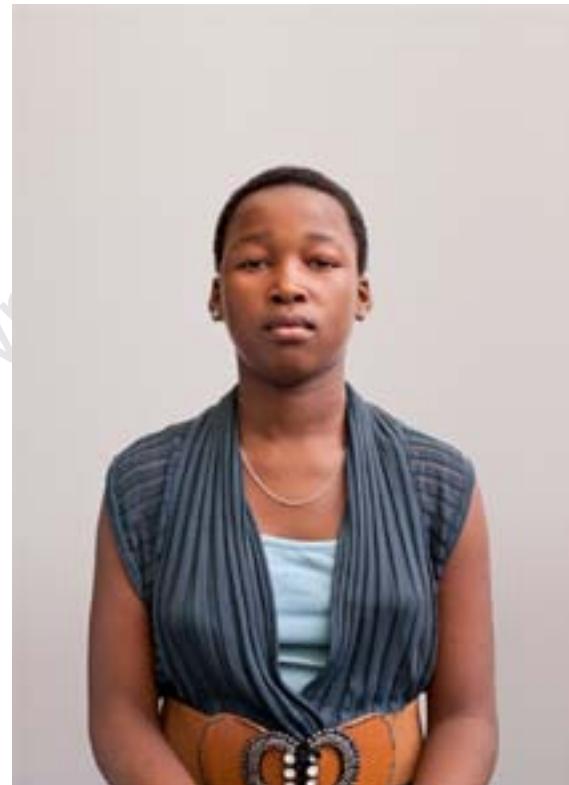
Nokilunga Memeza and Endinalo Memeza as
A Mother and Child



Athenkosi Mfamela



Nofikile Sibenga



Notyatyambo Madiglana



Jackson Mabena



Given Mkhondo



Anita Mbanyaru



Nokilunga Memeza



Khubekile Dayi



Anele Mbali



Sakhwi Ndubata



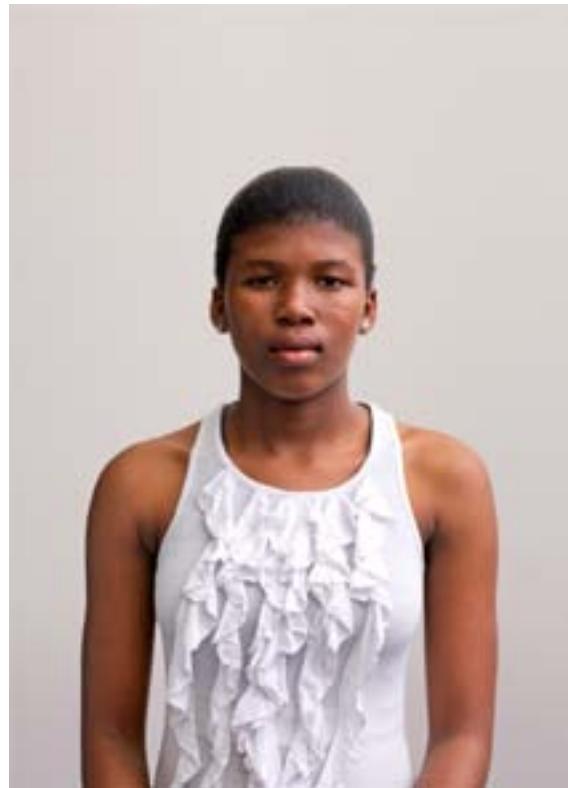
Nopumzile Msengezi



Nomboniso Runqa



Sihle Mnqwazana



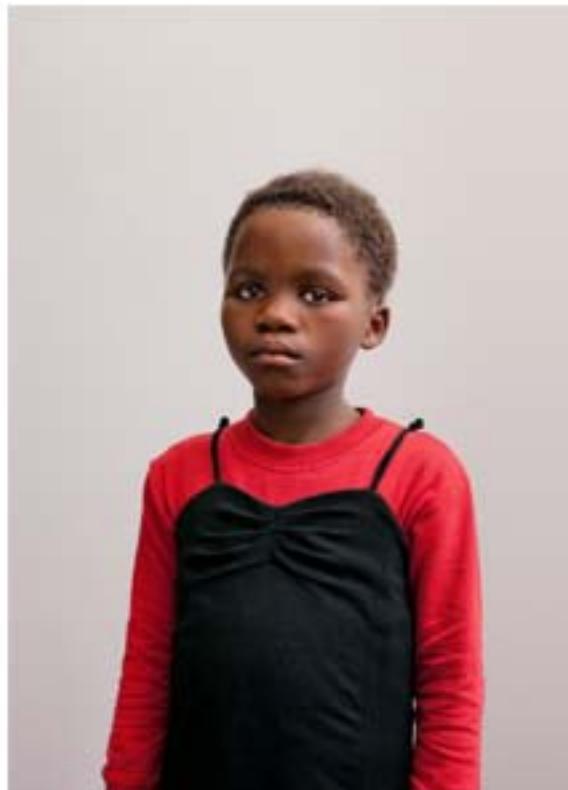
Sisipho Matho



Siyasanga Bushula



Linda Mhlawuli



Thandokazi Mbane

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My sincere apologies if have forgotten anyone.

Appendix: Preparatory work

The following pages illustrate some of the process of making *Native Work*.



My first, small-scale experiments with studio lighting.



In order to begin to understand the practical activity of photography, I initially worked with a number of cameras. I eventually settled on a large-format, 4 x 5 film camera: the Linhoff Standard Press camera. These are some of the first photographs I took with the Linhoff. They are shown here as negatives, and include some of my first still life experiments and subsequent photographs of people.



An important series of experiments consisted of learning how to develop and print my own 4 x 5 negatives. Here are some of the many printing tests I made. All work was printed on resin-coated paper, using silver chemistry.



More printing tests, experimenting with contrast in printing.



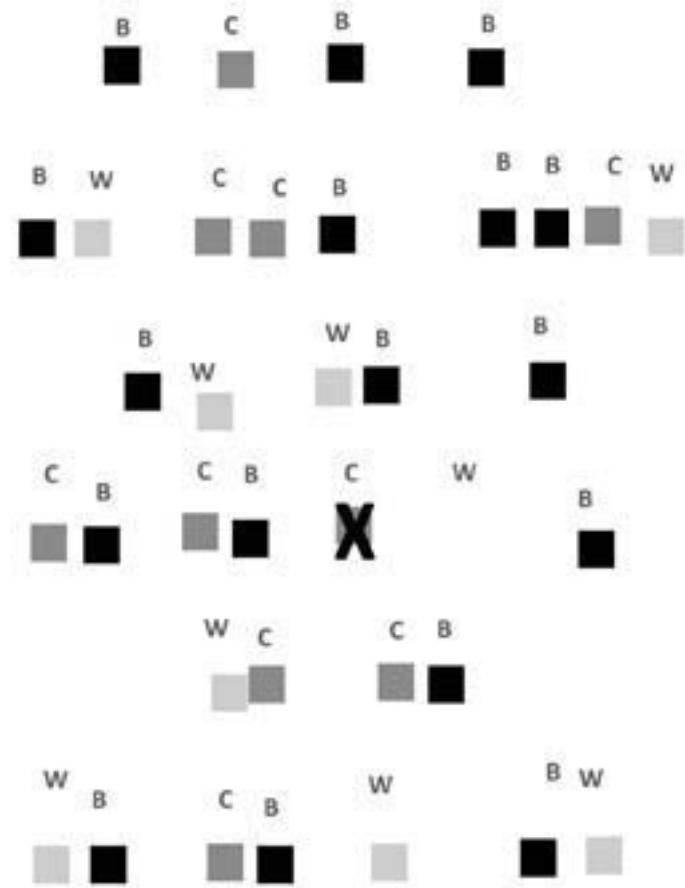
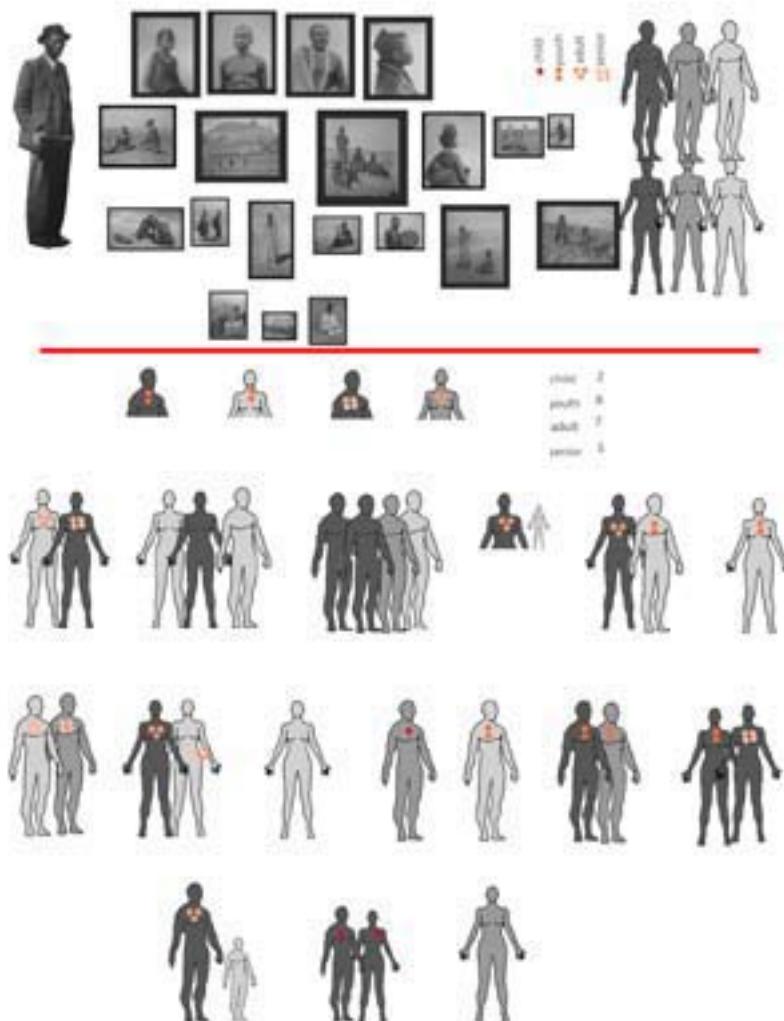
Printing tests which explore the effects of projecting the negative through various kinds of filters.



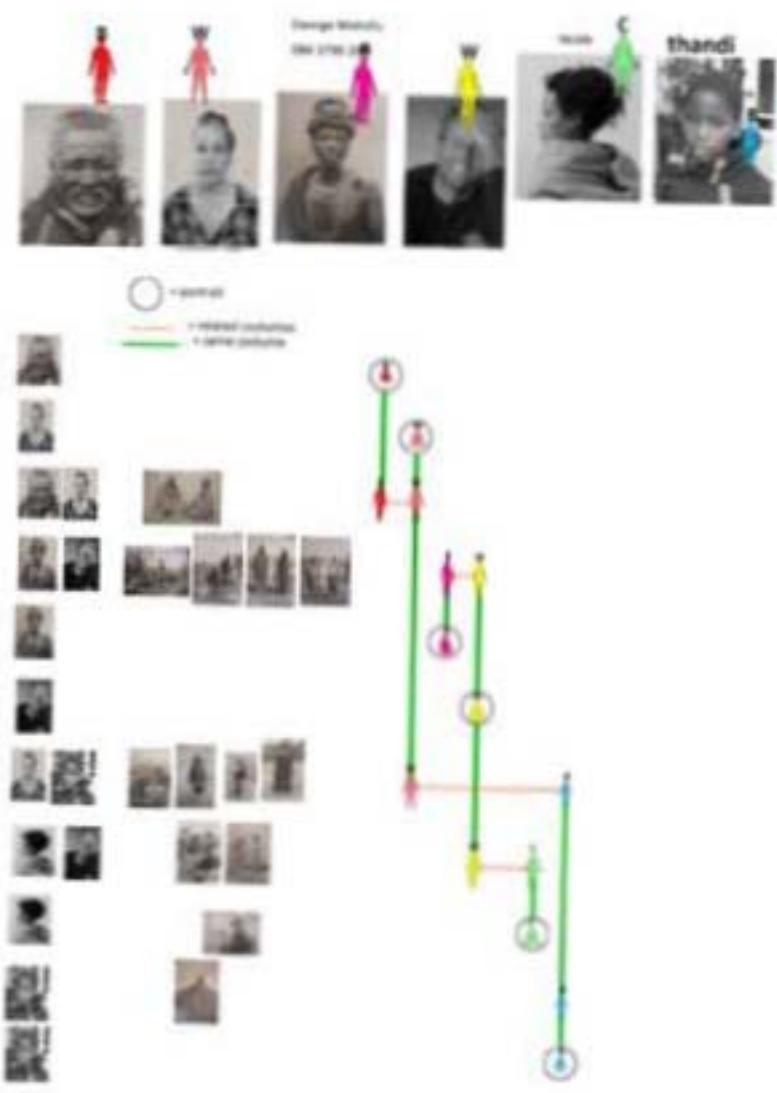
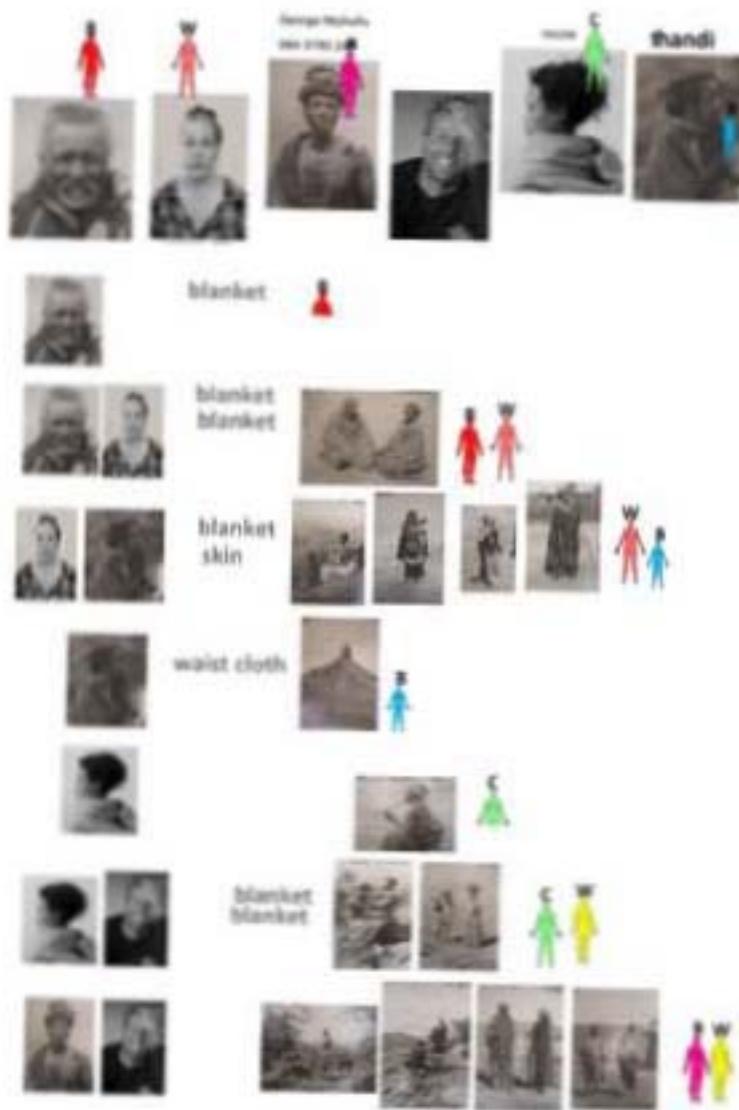
Printing tests, including contrast and enlargement tests, and working directly onto the negative.



Dodging and burning tests.



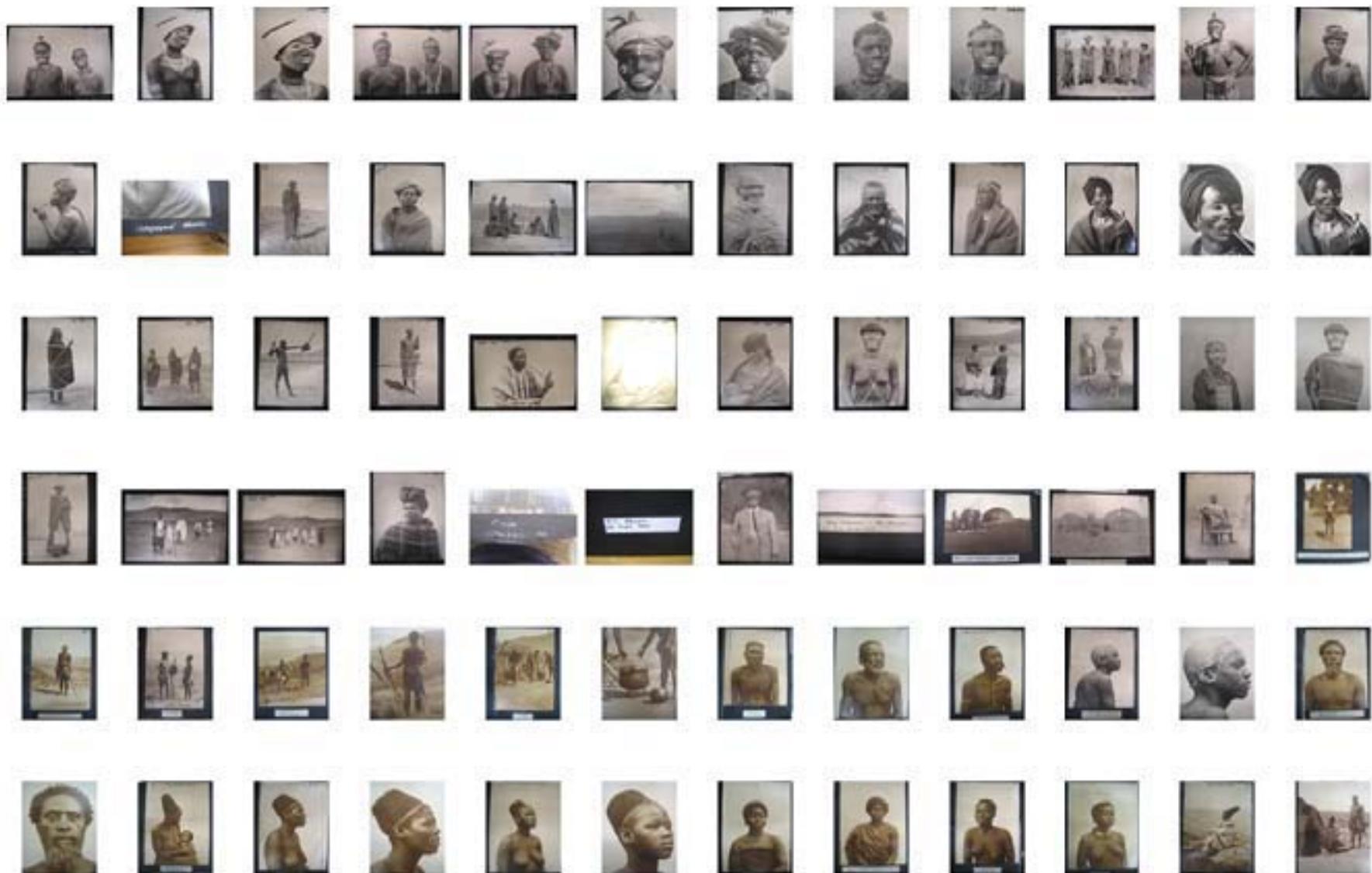
Two of many diagrams I made in order to make sure that I covered all 'race groups' in my photographs.
 This was still at the stage when I was using models of different 'races' in my work.



Two diagrams which start to link actual models and costume elements to poses and landscapes taken from Duggan-Cronin.



A diagram which indicates the specific ages of models, 'races' and compositions I wanted to work with at one stage.
This diagram is still from an earlier version of the project, before I decided to work only with black people.



In November 2011, I spent a month at the Duggan-Cronin Gallery in Kimberley. During that time, I took many hundreds of photographs of the contact prints in Duggan-Cronin's albums. Only a tiny fraction of these images can be seen in Duggan-Cronin's published monographs.



More of the photographs I took of Duggan-Cronin's albums.



In Kimberley I also found a number of photographs of the ways in which Duggan-Cronin's work had been displayed during his lifetime. I experimented with some of these display ideas when I exhibited some of my work-in-progress on the *Imperfect Librarian* exhibition in early in 2012. *Imperfect Librarian* was an exhibition held at the Michaelis Galleries at UCT, curated with the work-in-progress of thesis students in the ARC programme.



On the left is one of the first photographs I took of a model in costume approximating the tribal dress which had interested me in Duggan-Cronin's work. I used a digital camera and studio lighting. Nicole Fortuin, a first-year drama student, posed on many occasions for me during this phase of the project, allowing me to learn how to costume, light and pose models. On the right are some early full-figure costume tests with Quito Asmal-Dik.



Initially I had thought of working with the full-figure. Here are some variations on a theme, with Precious Zuma modelling. The baskets were borrowed from Binky Newman, who has worked with basket-makers in South Africa and Zimbabwe for 30 years. None of these photographs, or the models who posed in them, were used in the final body of work.



Some of the collection of clothing elements I borrowed from beadwork expert Stephen Long. Most elements are from the mid-twentieth century and come from the village of Qunu in the Transkei. This particular collection includes pipes, bags, skirts, head wraps, and belts. Most of this material is irreplaceable, and had to be insured and treated with great care, much as one would treat objects in a museum collection.



After numerous experiments with costumes, I began to develop a costume repertoire by selecting and ordering photographs I had taken of these experiments. Seen here are some of my ideas for head coverings.



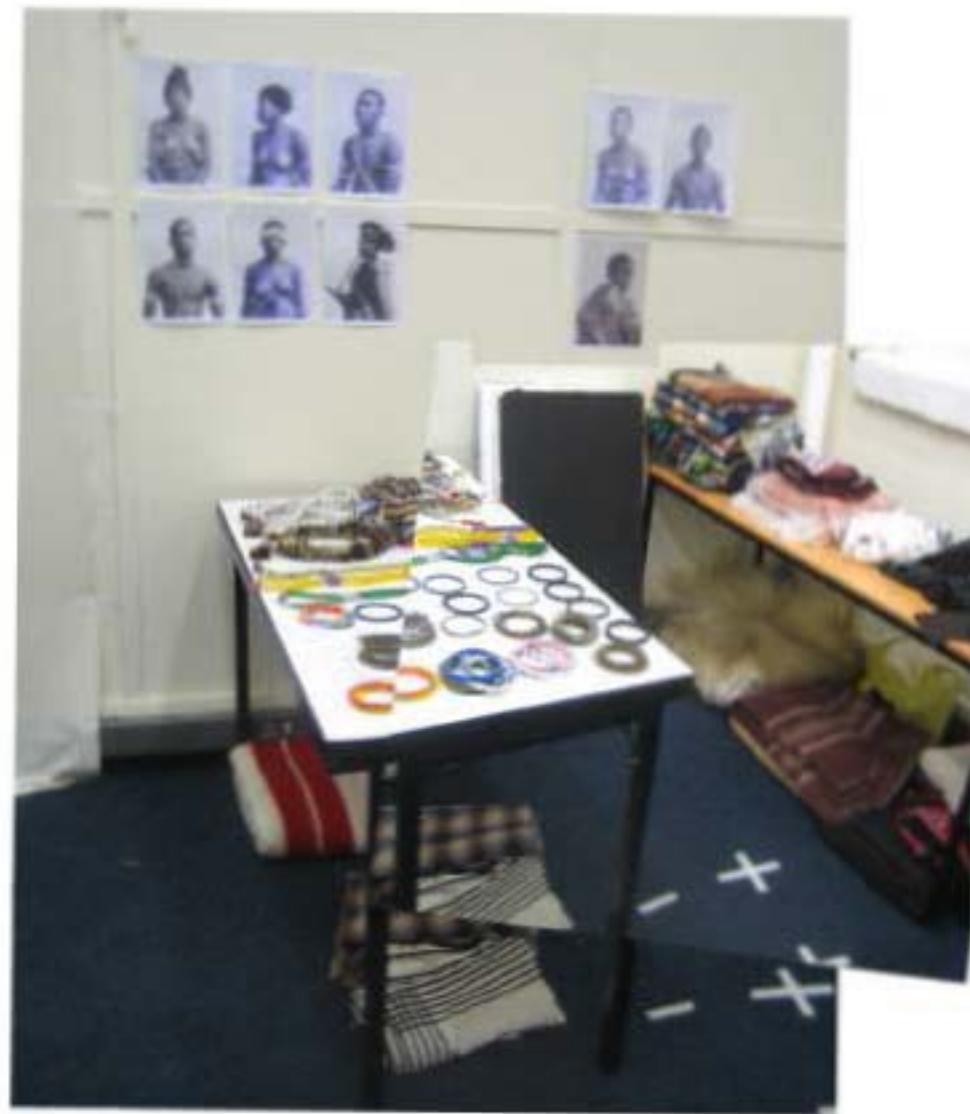
For want of a model, at one stage I learnt how to drape different kinds of cloth by costuming and photographing myself in a mirror.



On the left, some of the earrings I designed, and which were worn by models in the final works. On the right, some of the many pieces of cloth lent to me by Leigh Bishop, costume mistress of the Little Theatre at UCT. Some of these were used on people's heads and around their shoulders in the final works.



A couple of views of the studio in which I took the final photographs. On the tables can be seen some of the beadwork Stephen Long lent me, and on the wall in the images on the right can be seen photostats of Duggan-Cronin's portraits which I constantly referred to while costuming and photographing models.



More photographs of the studio in which I worked, with a focus on the bracelets (on the tables) and the blankets and cloths (under the tables) which were used for costuming.



During the course of making *Native Work*, I approached hundreds of potential models for the project. Here are some of the people I photographed.



More people approached as potential models for *Native Work*.



More potential cast: shown here are some of the people I photographed at Mhlanguli George's extramural theatre group, Vuyukazi Sihele's dance project, and a care project for the elderly in Gugulethu.



Shown here are some of the white people I approached before deciding to only work with black models. To find appropriate white models I visited high schools, campuses (in Cape Town and Stellenbosch), trance parties all over the Western Cape (as far away as Tulbagh), and a number of 'whole earth' fairs.



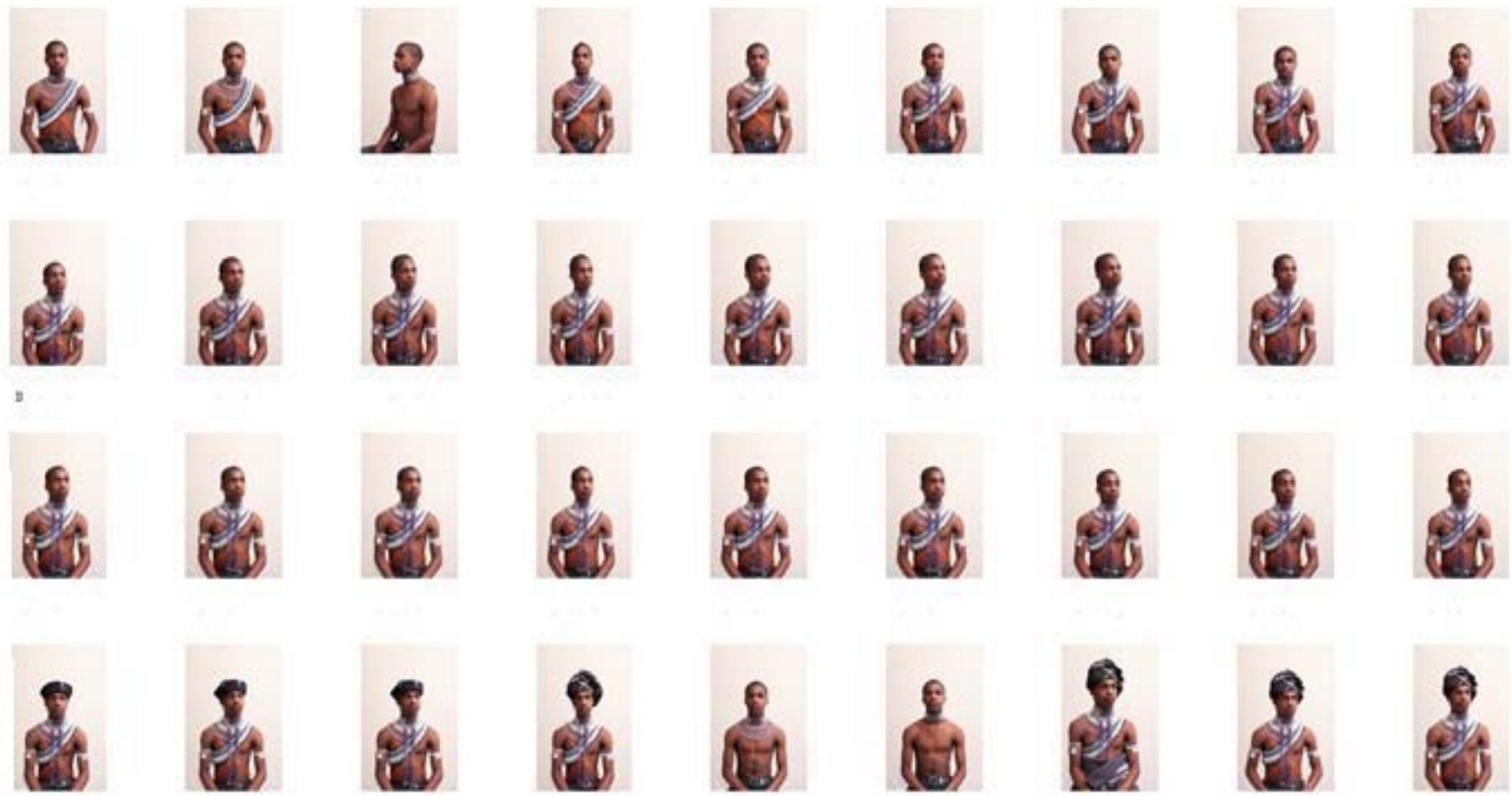
On the left is an enlarged view of a selection of early costume tests I exhibited on the *Imperfect Librarian* exhibition.
On the right is an exhibition view of the works.



These images were all made during an earlier phase of the project, and were not used in the final body of work. Shown here are some of the photographs I retouched to look like Duggan-Cronin's photographs, artificially adding a limited depth of field to the work, as well as catch-lights to the eyes. It was in these experiments that I also first learnt how to control more subtly the conversion from a colour file to black and white, using adjustment layers.



At one stage I wanted to photograph some of my characters in the landscape. On the left are photographs of some of the locations I visited to check their suitability. Sites included Cape Point, the Tygerberg Hills, Zeekoeivlei, and a private garden in Constantia. Each of these tests required the help of at least one other person, who posed in the landscape so that I could check the way figure and background would work together compositionally. On the right are some images shot on black and white 35mm film of locations at *!Kwa ttu*, 70 kms up the West Coast. I explored *!Kwa ttu* in quite a lot of detail as a potential site, even spending a weekend there with a crew and a number of models. In the end, shooting at *!Khwa ttu* turned out to be impossible, requiring too much money, long hours of travelling, complex timetables and a nail-biting dependency on the right weather conditions.



Once I had decided to make only head-and-shoulder studio portraits of black models, I set about photographing the seventeen models whose portraits comprise *Native Work*. Each model was photographed many times, with changes of pose and costume. Here are some of the photographs that were taken of Athenkosi Mfamela.



A view of the studio during the time of taking the final photographs. In the quest to imitate the catch-lights in the sitters of many of Duggan-Cronin's portraits, I worked with a single studio light which was bounced off the wall and ceiling of the studio. The light was lent to me by the photographer Jan Verboom. Visible in the windows are the long blinds I made to keep all day-light out of the studio.



On the left is a view of the studio during a shoot, and on the right Mrs Sibenga can be seen talking (in isiXhosa) about portraits in the final series I had already taken.



Four views of the same image, with successive retouching from left to right. Due to my lack of experience as a photographer, each of the 38 final photographs was extensively retouched, a process which took more than two months of full-time work. Most photographs went through more than 20 iterations before I was happy with them.



Four views of the same image, with successive retouching from left to right. In the case of the colour works, all the figures had to be cut out of their backgrounds so that they could be independently retouched. Retouching consisted primarily of matching backgrounds for colour and tone, dealing with the colour of skin and clothing, and enhancing the eyes and hair.