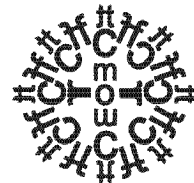
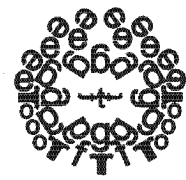


14 Ways to remember

Nzira gumi nena dzekuyeuka:

Exploring and preserving memories



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14 Ways to remember
Nzira gumi nena dzekuyeuka:
Exploring and preserving memories

Tashinga Matindike

A theoretical explication submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of
Master of Fine Art

Michaelis School of Fine Art
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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

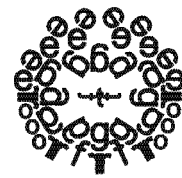
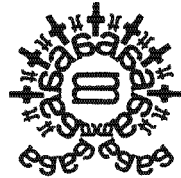
Signature:

Signed by candidate

Date: 30 November 2009

Dedicated to my mother, sister and niece

In memory of my brother



University of Cape Town

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Memories lie slumbering within us for months and years, quietly proliferating until they are woken by some trifle and in some strange way blind us to life. How often this has caused me to feel that my memories, and the labourers expended in my writing them down are all part of the same humiliating and, at bottom, contemptible business! And yet, what would we be without memory? We would not be capable of ordering even the simplest thoughts, the most sensitive heart would lose the ability to show affection, our existence would be a mere neverending chain of meaningless moments, and there would not be the faintest trace of the past. How wretched this life of ours is!—so full of conceits, so futile, that it is little more than the shadow of the chimeras loosed by memory. My sense of estrangement is becoming more and more dreadful. When I walked in Hyde Park yesterday, I felt unspeakably wretched and outcast amongst the colourful crowd. As if from afar, I watched the beautiful young English women with the same ardent bewilderment of my senses that I used to feel and embrace. And today I do not raise my eyes from my work, I have become almost invisible, to some extent like a dead man. Perhaps that is why it appears to me that this world which I have very nearly left behind is shrouded in some peculiar mystery.

From: *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave* by W.G. Sebald (2002: 255)

INTRODUCTION

My project is one of memorialisation, expressed as a creative process. A core theme throughout my work concerns the notions of absence and presence, as the project is founded on a personal loss and inspired by a desire to sustain the memories of my late brother.

My investigation involves the exploration and preservation of the memories of my brother. The body of work manifests as the residue of my reflections on grief and memory that I have chosen to exhibit in a commemorative manner. In turn, my practice has functioned as a source of comfort in the course of my mourning.



Seventeen years ago, I was forced to deal with the unforeseen death of my father. Fourteen years later, my brother's life came to an unexpected end, three months before his twenty-eighth birthday. Despite the gap of fourteen years between the incidents, both deaths had a colossal impact on my life and my psyche. I was faced with a crisis of loss and an awareness of insurmountable discontinuity effected by these events.

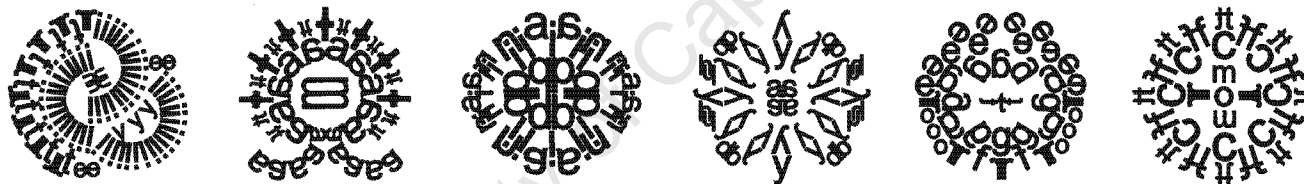
I yearned to establish a means whereby I could express my grief in a personal and appropriately complex process. In this project, I have responded to this crisis, even though it has put me in a particularly vulnerable position. This sense of vulnerability comes into play when the extremely personal details of my grief are exposed to the public.

Over the years, the inescapable absence of these two individuals in my life gradually became increasingly pronounced. Coping with the loss and the challenging task of accepting their absence seemed inconceivable. In this respect, I find resonance in Adrian Parr's description of "an incommensurable experience or reality" (Parr 2008: 112). I experienced their deaths as abandonment. I wanted to confront my emotions, but also anticipated that the process would involve immense dedication and unforeseen personal challenges-in this sense, the expression of my grief and exploration of my own response was manifested in my work as an artist.

This document serves as an introduction to my body of work, where I aim to contextualise my individual experience of mourning and remembering, within selected theoretical discourses.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In the first chapter, I examine the act of memorialising in relation to the way in which both my Shona belief system and Catholic upbringing have influenced my expression of it. As an introduction to the material manifestation of my project, I also provide a brief overview on the history of the curiosity cabinets from the sixteenth century, as well as briefly discuss the function and value of archives and their relevance to my project. Included in this section is a discussion concerning secrecy and an outline of certain elements of aesthetic experience within my Catholic context, both of which have greatly influenced my approach to archiving and curating my archive into exhibition format.



In the second section, I examine the works of selected contemporary artists who have influenced my practice. Here, I address specific areas of interest present in works of art produced by Christian Boltanski, Mike Kelley, Félix González-Torres, Willem Boshoff, Joseph Cornell and James Kazar. I draw attention to various aspects of their work that interest me, particularly the display of objects and notions concerning memory and secrecy.

SECTION 1

THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT



1.1 Absence and memorialisation

My father played a great role in my upbringing, especially since his position in the family unit was extremely significant in the patriarchal society I was born and raised in. My country of origin is Zimbabwe and the tribal group I belong to is that of the Karanga, who form part of the Shona speaking group of people.

Having said this, I consider it significant to state that each of the experiences communicated through my body of work is expressed in relation to my individual capacity, without the intention to speak on behalf of or represent anyone else in a totalised manner.

In my project, I have drawn on my personal experiences and complex background to a great extent, as it informs my perspective on mourning and the expression of my grief. However, I do not wish to create the sense that my work or this text attempts to speak about any of these contexts (Zimbabwean-Shona, Catholic, female and so on) in essentialist terms.

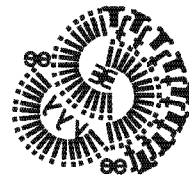
In this regard, it may be useful to refer to a thoughtful meditation about the location of culture, as expressed by Homi K. Bhabha (1995: 3):

social differences are not simply given to experience through an already

authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project-at once a vision and a construction-that takes you 'beyond' yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present:

Even then, it's still a struggle for power between various groups within ethnic groups about what's being said and who's saying what, who's representing who? What is a community anyway? What is a black community? What is a Latino community? I have trouble thinking of all these things as monolithic fixed categories.

In my view, Bhabha highlights an extremely pertinent issue in this passage, as the experience of one individual cannot possibly be exactly the same as that of another-even if their background contexts are highly similar. In principle, an individual has the authority to voice his or her personal experience, speaking from within a particular context, but that enunciation cannot be finally determined only by its cultural context. In fact, as Bhabha suggests, any such act of speaking is involved in a dynamic process whereby the community from which someone speaks produces its own (shifting) identity.



It is customary in the Shona society to take on your father's family name and totem¹. A male child is thus highly regarded as he is expected to sustain the continuation of the patriarchal lineage. As a result, after my father's death my brother became recognised as the paternal figure within the family, and as such, its leader. This was because he was the only male child in my immediate family. Following my brother's death, the male absence within my family unit became more conspicuous, as there were particular roles and responsibilities that my mother could not fulfil (within the framework of these cultural practices).

Inevitably, when my brother passed away, I had to take on the role of being the eldest in the family. This inherited position is accompanied by much responsibility, for which I was not mentally and emotionally prepared. To a certain degree, I felt I was expected to withhold my own grieving, and fulfil a public role, as well as actively participate in the organising of my brother's funeral arrangements. My duties included overseeing the customary traditions of the burial ceremony and ensuring that they were carried out correctly. To give an example, on the night before a burial takes place, the coffin spends the night in the residence of the deceased, whilst friends and relatives talk about his or her life, as well as sing throughout the night. Gatherers state their various recollections of the deceased individual. Those that are Christian usually relate their eulogies to Biblical scriptures and lessons. This act of memorialising is intended to offer comfort to those mourning the deceased.

¹ In the Shona society, family totems are used by people who belong to the same clan. My father's family names are Vhudzijena and Matindike. My father chose to use the name Matindike. His family totem is *Soko makwiramiti* (the monkey that climbs up the tree).

In addition, I was given the task to investigate the possibility of my brother having fathered a child during his lifetime. As mentioned previously, a child, especially a male child would ensure that the family blood line and name would be continued. Thus it was a crucial responsibility, knowing my brother was the only son born into my immediate family. However, it is my choice that, the result of my investigation remains undisclosed to the general public.



The situation is further complicated by the fact that my immediate family are also members of the Roman Catholic faith². As a consequence, part of the funeral arrangements meant conforming to specific rites of the church, such as the Holy Mass³ that was delivered by a priest before the body was buried. Importantly, by fulfilling the expectations around my brother's interment, it became clear to me that both of these sets of burial rites are, imposed externally, and are not uniquely expressive of my individual grieving process.

² Catholicism was brought into Zimbabwe from Europe by missionaries. Both my parents were schooled in Catholic institutions and because they respected and valued Catholic education, my siblings and I also attended Catholic schools. Common prayers said by the Catholics include the Our Father, The Hail Mary and the Creed.

³ The Holy Mass is a form of worship practiced in the Catholic Church. The order of the Mass is specific with the inclusion of particular prayers and rituals.



FIGURE 1: Greendale Cemetery, Harare, Zimbabwe (2006)

In terms of the burial practices within the Shona society⁴ and that of the Catholic Church, the funeral functioned as a final ceremony intended to commemorate and celebrate my brother's life. However, there is another aspect that both the Catholic and Shona burials have in common, and that is the belief that my brother's spirit would rise from his body and experience a new life after death. It is this belief, that in a peculiar way can be seen to be the motivation for my body of work. In a sense, I wanted to give expression to the physical absence of my brother in my life and re-figure his presence in a creative manner that is commemorative. In order to properly situate my commemoration, I embarked on an investigation of memorialisation as an

⁴ In the Shona society, it is believed that when someone dies and their body is buried in accordance with the customary expectations of their clan, they will rise in the form of a spirit and be reunited with God and their ancestors. Similarly, in the Catholic belief system, it is believed that when one dies, their soul rises from their body and they are spiritually reunited with God.

active way of remembering, or maintaining the presence of the dead within the memory of the living.



FIGURE 2: Sacred Heart Catholic Cathedral, Harare, Zimbabwe (2006)



FIGURE 3: Greendale Cemetery, Harare, Zimbabwe (2006)

Even though the manner in which my brother was laid to rest provided some comfort⁵, the persistent sense of loss and the lack of resolution motivated me to express my personal experience of grief by making use of collected memories of him. Arriving at this point involved three different stages: acknowledging the loss, confronting the loss, as well as finding the means by which to present my experience and comprehension of loss and remembering.

It seemed logical for me to deal with my loss within my practice as an artist, as this would allow me to effectively express myself in a manner that allows for an exchange between the personal and the general, the clear and the ambiguous, and as something inherently involving an individual process (as opposed to the more formalised societal rituals of the cultural and religious contexts outlined above). This body of work then, is in effect my response to my crisis-work that engages with the complexities of representing loss, mourning and remembering, both in a private mode (to myself), as well as publicly, as an expressive act of remembrance. Therefore, while the work comes from a private experience and is highly personalised, I am expressing this within the context of contemporary fine art production, where I pay particular attention to conventions and effects of cataloguing, display and curatorship.

⁵ I consider my brother's burial comforting for the reason that his body was laid to rest at home, that being Zimbabwe; in a cemetery near our family home. In the Shona society, it is socially preferred that a human body is not cremated, but laid to rest on the ancestral ground of the deceased individual. However, due to resettlement brought about by urbanization and various other considerations, most people are buried in cemeteries near their areas of residence. On the other hand, some families insist that their relative is buried on the land where their ancestors originally settled. These pieces of land that are occupied by families are usually found in the rural areas of Zimbabwe and are known as *kumusha* (home).



FIGURE 4: My late grandfather Paridzirayi Matindike-Vhudzjena sitting outside the Vhudzjena homestead in Nyajeria, Masvingo in Zimbabwe (2007)

University of Cape Town





1.2 Curiosity cabinets

My attention was quickly drawn to the various objects that were once the personal possessions of my brother. These items include clothing, letters, music CDs and Parallel to these are my memories and the collected memories of him that are embedded within my psyche. My decision to make use of his belongings was inspired by a curiosity to investigate the ability of the various objects to evoke the presence of the person they belong(ed) to.

The objects represent my brother, both within his own life and now, his absence in mine. I set myself the task to establish an archive of his life using the objects in my possession and curate them into a public form of exhibition.

The value of these objects as a collection can be understood as follows:

Objects, images, practices, and places remind us of the deaths of others and of our own mortality. At the time of death, embodied persons disappear from view, their relationships with others come under threat and their influence may cease. Emotionally, socially, politically, much is at stake at the time of death. In this context, memories and memory-making can be highly charged and often provide the dead with a social presence amongst the living. Memories of the dead are a bulwark against the terror of forgetting, as well as an inescapable outcome of a life's ending (Hallam & Hockey: 2001).

The practice of collecting objects so as to 'contain' and evoke memories and resonances has a rich and fascinating history. An especially interesting case that reveals the historical progression of the use of collected objects is that of the curiosity cabinet. In existence since the sixteenth century, curiosity cabinets emerged as a result of an increasing interest in the collection of objects from different parts of the world. These objects were then displayed and presented in curiosity cabinets. These cabinets were designed for people to view and learn from with the hope that they would acquire what Patrick Mauries (2002:23) describes as an accurate and exceptional body of knowledge of the natural world and various exoticised cultures⁶.



FIGURE 5: Collected paraphernalia belonging to the late Tawana Matlhaike (2006-2009)

⁶ It is important to note that the objects that once belonged to my brother are generic items, unlike the exotic objects present in curiosity cabinets of the sixteenth century. Thus, the objects in my collection are not 'curiosities' in the conventional sense, however, it is the manner in which they have been assembled and curated that arouses visual interest.

One can only imagine that there was an additional meaning of the object-one that exceeded their aesthetic value and qualities, namely some of the artefacts that were found on the African continent. The primary use of some of these objects was intended for ceremonial practices, which when removed from their original context, would not be overtly revealed to the collector and viewers.

In spite of this, the interest in collecting continued to develop and in most cases, the "contents varied according to the means and interests of their owners: physicians collected anatomical specimens; merchants bought rarities from far-flung trading posts; artists gathered prints, drawings and casts of ancient sculpture; princes and potentates inventoried local resources" (Microcosms, 1995).

Despite the amount of valuable information derived from the objects, be it for scientific, historical, anthropological and many other reasons, it is sure that any knowledge gained through viewing and examining the objects outside their original context would have been biased. The majority of the artefacts were collected from various parts of the world through different means, including colonisation, war, or migration. As a consequence, it is possible that in their entirety the objects were perceived as being a reflection of a 'truth,' with a "mysterious and hierarchical vision of society, fundamentally indebted to the legacy of scholasticism and its allegorical perception of the world" (Mauries 2002:35). Nonetheless, notions concerning the origins and history of items found in different parts of the world have since developed.

As indicated by Mauries (2002) on the cover of his book *Cabinets of Curiosities*, the history of curiosity cabinets is one that reflects a progressive fragmentation in which, all the various components contributed to the overall appearance and significance of the cabinet as a whole, "embracing scheme of interpretation and aesthetics."

Mauries maintains that one of the true motivations behind the proliferation of cabinets of curiosity was a need to jointly contain the natural world and art within a display. Perhaps Mauries is suggesting that curiosity cabinets had the ability to maintain a balance between what was considered ordinary in contrast to the creative and rare qualities of art or artefact. The exhibiting of 'found objects' in cabinets may have been viewed as an attempt to contextualise 'the unknown' through the use of a familiar mode of presentation.



FIGURE 6: Collected paraphernalia belonging to the late Tawanda Matindike (2006-2009)

In a manner converse to this conventional sense of the curiosity cabinet, I have selected specific objects and articles that I am already familiar with and that contain a history, attained through use by their previous owner. In addition, most of these objects will be familiar to most of the exhibition viewers. The 'curiosity' or 'exoticism' of those objects lies in the fact that while they are clearly objects of a personal nature, they are

presented in the explicit absence of the person to whom they belonged.

It is also important to note that during the sixteenth century, the language of collecting objects for use in curiosity cabinets, differs from my own interest in and intentions of collecting. During the sixteenth century, it appears that the interest in 'collecting' focussed more on wealth, power, status and knowledge. In support of this argument, it has been found that "the Curiosity cabinet is the precursor of the museum and, like the museum, performed an educational function, facilitating the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge and encouraging both theoretical and practical applications. Unlike the modern museum, however, the Curiosity cabinet was not intended for a public audience; knowledge was power, and thus was the private preserve of an elite few" (Microcosms, 1995). In contrast, my collection of objects is representative of a desire to retain or preserve that which is known by myself and (in certain instances) other individuals who knew my brother.

Whilst the objects in the cabinets of curiosity may have encouraged a somewhat voyeuristic approach, (as though the objects provided a small peephole into 'othered' sites and cultures), my approach is almost archaeological-the intention is to 'excavate' material from the residue of my brother's life, preserve it, catalogue it and curate its display, so as to offer it to the public as a record of a past life.





FIGURE 7:
Fred Wilson, "Re-seeing Modernism" in *The Museum: Mixed Metaphors* (1993)

By way of further elucidating my approach to curating my archive, it may be useful to refer to an example here. In an attempt to challenge the kind of partial understanding of artefacts, when presented in a de-contextualised manner, artist Fred Wilson's installation (Fig. 7) illustrates the value of historical and contemporary research when considering and using objects for display purposes.

Wilson's exhibition comprised of various artefacts (dance regalia, carved masks and traditional house posts) that belonged to several communities of the native Americans. However, "signs from the contemporary life of these communities were nowhere to be found. After conducting research in and around Seattle, Wilson invited local artists-Philip Red Eagle, Glenda J. Guilmet, Annie Hanson, Raymond Colby, and Larry Ullaaq Ahvakana - to each produce a videotape for the exhibition. From musical performance to readings of short stories, interviews with war veterans to an artist's studio tour, the videos offered a view of Native American life as it is lived today. Installed in the gallery on five different monitors, the voices of a current generation were meant to demystify and enliven the artefacts of the past" [Gonzalez 2008: 94].

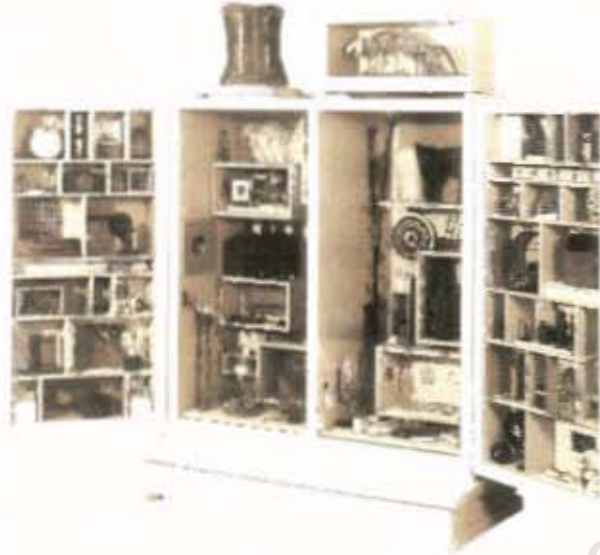


FIGURE 8:
"The cabinet reduced to a small cupboard
by Natasha Nicholson (born 1945) is above
all a receptacle for a personal mythology"
(Mauries 2002: 233).

It is possible to deduce that through this installation, Wilson desired to broaden the interpretation of the various artworks. While appearing aesthetically pleasing, the relevance and meaning of the objects in their present context may have drawn greater appreciation, owing to the inclusion of the narration juxtaposed to their past.

My brother's belongings serve as a substitute for his physical presence and at the same time, the objects embody his loss. Hallam and Hockey (2001: 1) propose that material objects come to represent or form extensions of the body-from funeral effigies to photographs. Their claim suggests that the objects that I have inherited and collected, mediate my relationship with death and the dead as they call to mind or are made to remind me of my brother's death and my own mortality (Hallam & Hockey 2001: 2). Therefore, despite my brother's physical absence, his remaining belongings or objects are traces of his past that I now use in order to preserve my memory of him.



1.3 The Archive

Whereas curiosity cabinets provide one, perhaps de-contextualising approach to collecting and preserving, there are other modes of collection and preservation that are also of significance. The archive is one such example and particularly the notion of the archive as a record of the past. This is the main concept on which my practice is founded.

As indicated by Achille Mbembe (2002: 19):

the term 'archives' first refers to a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state. However, by 'archives' is also understood a collection of documents-normally written documents-kept in this building. There cannot therefore be a definition of 'archives' that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents stored there.

One such example would be the Centre for Curating the Archive at the University of Cape Town:

which was established as a vehicle for the conservation and creative use of object, image and paper. Fundamental to its establishment is the recognised need to provide optimum conditions for the long term storage of collections while at the same time making them accessible for scholars and students. At the heart of the Centre is the understanding of collections and archives as important sites of knowledge, and as products of both the traditions of art, ideas and values, and of social and political circumstances (Centre for Curating the Archive, 2008).

Thus the Centre for Curating the Archive is valuable both as a structure or building that 'houses' important historical records, and is a point of access for scholars and other interested parties who want to make use of, as well as reflect on the significant information it contains.

As maintained by the Archive Online Centre (Updated 16 Jan 2009), "in the course of daily life, individuals and organisations create and keep information about their personal business activities. Archivists identify and preserve portions of this recorded information that have lasting value. These records-and the places they are kept-are called "archives." Archival records take many forms, including correspondence, diaries, financial and legal documents, photographs, and sound recordings" (Archives Centre, 2009).

Archives are, however, not only to be found in formalised institutions and structures. More informal and creative forms of collecting and archiving are present in contemporary society. In terms of contemporary means of 'storing' information, the concept of 'memory boxes' has gained much popularity amongst many different societies across the world. Be it the birth of a child, the capturing of a historical event, or an attempt to 'capture' the life of a deceased relative, memory boxes have become a socially accepted means for recording information. To give an example, in 2000 the Sinomlando Centre initiated a Memory Box Programme that was motivated by similar projects in Tanzania and Uganda. The project provides psychosocial support to families and orphaned children affected by HIV/AIDS. Boxes are used to store the memories of families, as well as the story of deceased relatives. Included in the memory boxes are personal possessions and

memorabilia. The Sinomlando Centre has since become one of the leading research and training institutions for Memory Work in South Africa (Sinomlando, 2009).

Engaging with the notion of an archive as an access point to the past and as a means to maintain remembering, has been a central concept for my practice. Significantly, even though archives are conventionally understood mainly in relation to their function as places for recording, they also have public lives in the sense that material from the archives is used in many public ways, such as publications and exhibitions⁷.

The power of curating objects within an archive is powerfully expressed in the curator's statement to the exhibition *Curiosity CLXXV-A Paper Cabinet*:

For us artists and curators, definitions and identities of objects are important indeed, often central to how we understand our own practice. A collection of objects curated into a display may be equally convincingly argued to a book as a sculpture. An installation of paper works and projections could be described as printmaking, a series of photographs as painting. For us, the definition of an artwork has less to do with its material presence than with the history of the discipline it brings with it into the zone of display in which it is encountered (Chidester in Skotnes, Van Emberden & Langerman 2004: 11).

⁷ See *Miscast* (1996), curated by Pippa Skotnes. The exhibition relies fully on the use of collected material to convey its intention.

In view of this perception and understanding of objects, the display of the items in my installation is approached self-consciously. The careful curation of each object in my exhibition is shaped by my recollections of an absent person and is intended to both record the life of that person, and through its display draw attention to his physical absence. By making use of my personal memories as a structuring device for the installation, I am constantly "remembering" different things with each object. This repeated act of remembering has become ritualistic to me. In turn, the practice obligates me to constantly revisit various thoughts, emotions and events from the past.

While analysing the power of the archive and its limits, Mbembe (2002: 20-21) usefully describes the functions of an archive and regards it particular status when he makes reference to it as 'the archive.' He likens 'the archive' to a sanctuary-one that contains "the ritual of making secret" (Mbembe 2002: 20). Furthermore, Mbembe makes it clear that

'the archive' is primarily the product of judgement, the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others discarded...Consequently, because of its being there, the archive becomes something that does away with doubt, exerting a deliberating power over such doubt. It then acquires the status of proof. It is proof that a life truly existed, that something actually happened, an account of which can be put together. The final destination of the archive is therefore always situated outside its own materiality, in the story it makes possible.

The objects in my memorial archive create and reveal a visual narrative, thus giving evidence of and telling the story of my brother's life; informed by my recollection of him. The memorial archive has been designed with the intention of remembering and celebrating my brother's life, in view of the notion that "death-related objects are often made to highlight their temporal capacities and limitations in ways that allow them to act powerfully within memory (Hallam & Hockey 2001: 48). Thus, by making use of the objects I have inherited or found I am constantly aware that with time, they may become worn and change , which in turn affects the preservation of the memories they 'contain.' However, "archives are born from a desire to reassemble these traces rather than destroy them. The function of the archive is to thwart the dispersion of these traces and the possibility, always there, that left to themselves, they might eventually acquire a life of their own" (Mbembe 2002: 22).



In this chapter, I have outlined the circumstances from which my body of work was born. I have traced the importance of the interplay between presence and absence within my project, through reference to curiosity cabinets, and its contrast to my work, the role of curatorship in establishing relations between objects, memorial practices, and archives as a site for memory. From this basis, I shall proceed to discuss the works of several artists who, in varying ways have engaged with some of these issues.

SECTION 2

RECENT AND CONTEMPORARY REFERENCES

In this section, I discuss selected examples from the production of six recent and contemporary artists whose work and techniques has influenced my practice. The specific artists I examine include Christian Boltanski, Willem Boshoff, Mike Kelley, Félix González-Toress, James Kazar and Joseph Cornell. In my discussion, I detail specific characteristics and themes present in one or two of their selected works and highlight their relevance to my work⁸.



2.1 Christian Boltanski: Found objects, installation and memorialisation

French artist Christian Boltanski is well known for his use of images and objects in his highly sensitive and considered installations that are most often concerned with the Holocaust. "Boltanski's work focuses on the passing of time, articulating all the signs and faint traces of an inevitably compromised passage" (Eccher 1997: 11). Thus, this could be understood as Boltanski's effort to 'capture' a moment in time, while negotiating the different ambiguities that arise in the process, such as the shifting perspectives on the past and understanding the way in which historical events have an effect on individuals.

⁸ It is imperative to note that in my discussion, I do not intend to provide a complete overview of the artists' oeuvre. Instead, I focus on specific works while discussing the various techniques and concepts utilised by the artists and at the same time draw on similarities that relate to my practice.

Consequently, despite the fact that Boltanski does not know the individuals in his images personally, he is able to create a resonance within the present of the past; while in turn making the past (in this case Holocaust) appear less distant-an immediate presence or a space for recollection. Through his theatrical presentations, the viewer 're-lives' the trauma and the loss of countless lives.

"Boltanski gives expression to mourning and this in a cool, unsentimental way. He employs impoverished means, things worn and discarded. His dossiers in tin boxes, filling tiers of shelves, evoke the wretched, Kafkaesque archives of a thoroughly administrated, guilt-suffocated world" (Beil 2006: 30). Boltanski takes seemingly mundane objects, such as photographs, bulbs and the like, and creatively transforms his collected objects into a commemorative display.

Boltanski's desire to provide the viewer with installations that could be considered visual testimonies may be the reason as to why he is regarded "a history painter, in the sense that he presents historical tableaux" (Beil 2006: 24).

Boltanski's displays confront the fragility of what could be termed 'abundant death,' as "he creates works that erase the borderline between what the memory accomplishes and what recollection is capable of feeling in terms of fragility and mourning" (Beil 2006: 33).

He successfully approaches and presents his subject matter in such a way that his "art maintains a proximity with the most important working strategy developed in twentieth-century art: collage and assemblage" (Beil 2006: 26).

One work that demonstrates traits of memory and recollection is *La maison manquante* (The Missing House, Fig. 9). In this particular work, which was exhibited in Berlin in 1990, Boltanski listed on the wall, the names of previous residents of a house located at number 15/16, Grosse Hamburger Strasse. The majority of the names that appeared on this list were Jews who had disappeared in extermination camps (Beil 2006: 29). Having understood the source of the names and the historical event which they are linked to, the viewer is most likely inclined to 'recall' thoughts of horror, mass murder, as well as the unforgettable and unforgivable Adolf Hitler, who was responsible for the inhuman torture and abuse towards the Jews. Thus, in dealing with a brutal fact or reality as a subject matter, Boltanski "creates works that erase the borderline between what the memory accomplishes and what recollection is capable of feeling in terms of fragility and mourning (Beil 2006: 33).

Similarly in my work, I draw attention to a historical event that is based on fact, however, the manner in which I have chosen to curate and present my experience of 'this fact' provides room for the viewer to carry out an interpretation outside my understanding or experience of the fact.

While considering Boltanski's work, it is impossible not to mention the theatrical nature of his work, for it is this technique or approach to exhibiting that draws the viewer to his displays of mass produced objects and images. This he does, by using localised lighting to accentuate areas of complete darkness in which he exhibits images and mass objects, that he illuminates from the front or in the rear. Boltanski is fundamentally "convinced that the observer completes the work of art" (Beil 2006: 48). While acknowledging Boltanski's statement, perhaps it is the experiential nature of his works that is the 'key' to understanding his serious subject matter pertaining to the memorialisation of the horrifying and tragic recollections of the Holocaust.



FIGURE 9:
Christian Boltanski, *La maison manquante* (The Missing House) (1990)



FIGURE 10:
Christian Boltanski, *Installation* (1987)



2.2 Mike Kelley: *Repressed Memory* (1996)

Mike Kelley is an American artist well known for his sculptural works that comprise of assemblage, the use of objects, video, collage, as well as performance. In his work, he tackles a variety of issues, including gender and class.

In his work *Repressed Memory* (1996), Mike Kelley reveals an interest in "contemporary theories of 'Repressed Memory Syndrome'" (Stals 1997: 119). This work makes strong associations with the act of remembering, as the work is an attempt to "recover the memory of buildings in which he had been educated and to map these memories on their existing plans in order to produce complex models" (Stals 1997: 119). The work is a solid model that is viewed from above.

While Kelley's work deals ostensibly with remembering, it also raises questions about the reliability of memory and its function in 'archiving' the past.

Inevitably, Kelley could not recall everything to perfection and where he could not account for a memory, "these lost spaces were modelled as solid blocks (blocked memory), while divergences between remembered patterns of use and actual forms were forced in favour of the memory, resulting in complex three-dimensional projects that seemed to Kelley almost utopian in their impossibility" (Stals 1997: 119).

The prominence of the interplay between remembering and the blind spots of memory in Kelley's work, has gained my own thinking about the incompleteness of my own remembering of my brother, as well as the absences within my memorialisation of his

life. As a result, I have inserted certain symbolic elements within my exhibition that stand in for the not-remembered, as can be seen in the work *Usandikanganwe (Never forget me)* (Figures 34 & 35), where I displayed blank postcards for memories I cannot account for, because the receiver did not return the postcard, or it may have been lost in the mail. Similarly, in certain places in my exhibition, I make use of obfuscating elements (such as paper, acetate and the like) to suggest the incompleteness of my own recollection.



FIGURE 11:
Mike Kelly, *Repressed memory* (1996)



2.3 Félix González-Torres: *Candy spills* (1990 onwards)

Born in Cuba, Félix González-Torres (1957-1996), was popularly known for his sculptures and installations that were of a minimal and conceptual nature. González-Torres' work reflects on issues concerning loss and mourning, related to the death of his partner who suffered and died as a result of the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

González-Torres' work draws upon a desire to maintain the remembrance of his late lover through creative expression. He uses a variety of materials to symbolise notions of the body, death and loss. For example, in his series of works entitled *Candy spills* (Figs. 12 & 13), which commenced in 1990, the viewer is permitted to take pieces of candy from the artwork, which sits in a colourful pile.

Perhaps through this work, Félix González-Torres intends to shed light on issues concerning the ephemeral nature of the human body. As such, the sweets symbolise the body that is then consumed by someone (the viewer) in a gesture that mimics the way in which the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) completely takes over the body of an infected individual in the form of an opportunistic illness. The work could further also be interpreted to refer to the finiteness of life, in that there is a limit to the amount of candy that make up the work. If the pile of candy is seen as a metaphorical substitute for the human body, then it foregrounds the limited number of years one has to live.

There is a direct link between Félix González-Torres' work and my own, in the sense that we are both in the process of memorialising someone with whom we were close. What is of special interest to me, however, is the way in which the work not only speaks as

a specific memorialisation of a single life, but also resonates with experiences shared by many people: for example, the sense of love, passage of time, loss and loneliness.

More importantly, the way in which González-Torres has figured the work creatively as artist, so that in its conception, material, composition and display it communicates its intention, is a compelling testimony to the power of objects and artworks to evoke through simplicity, complex associations and awareness.

In my work, I have similarly relied on the power of objects to evoke resonances with a viewer's own experiences, despite the fact that my project presents an intensely personal moment of mourning. In its conception as installation I hope to contain and unify the objects in a particular logic that is unique to the production of artworks, in which the special dynamics of display and creative intervention provides the structures for interaction and meaning.



FIGURE 12:
Félix González-Torres, *Untitled-Candy spill* (1991)



FIGURE 13:
Félix González-Torres, *Untitled (Revenge)* (1991)



2.4 Willem Boshoff: *Secret Letters* (2003)

South African born artist Willem Boshoff works in a conceptual way that addresses various issues, including, most saliently, memory, power and language. Boshoff's sculptures and installations are based on breathtakingly thorough research, and often impress with their rich details and obscure information.

In his installation *Secret Letters* (2003), Boshoff created two wooden panels that contain handwritten letters that have been creased. The text of the letters is deliberately hidden. In-between these letters are legible note cards. Recorded onto these note cards are important events that Nelson Mandela missed when he was in prison.

While imprisoned, Nelson Mandela and his fellow inmates on Robben Island often received letters in secret. The prisoners employed a secret system as a means to communicate with those in the 'outside' world. These secret letters contained personal information that the inmates shared amongst themselves and those that they kept in touch with beyond the boundaries of the prison. Some of them were even love letters (Boshoff, 2008). The letters in Boshoff's work reference this secretive form of communication that took place on Robben Island.

This work in particular calls to mind the notion of secrecy, which is also present in my work. In their crumpled state, the letters appear mysterious and one feels compelled to unfold them and view their contents. Boshoff, however, chooses not to reveal the contents of the letters in an overt manner. Instead he chooses to 'protect' their secrecy by presenting a 'partial' truth. Even in the fact of their presentation, letters still signify something, (an expression, a plan or

an event), however, tension is created as the viewer cannot easily access the contents of the letters.

In Boshoff's work, there is also a pertinent reference to the way in which language can conceal, or keep a secret, even as it seemingly 'speaks.' This dynamic is played out in my work in an important way, and in a way that refers to the way in which I have referenced the practice of archiving. Throughout my exhibition, I have made use of text that variously describes and catalogues memories, but there are certain key pieces of information that I have withheld in the work (and continue to withhold in this text).

The information is not always accessible in the exhibition, and the viewer is directed to consult the catalogue of memories. Nevertheless, even here, the curiosity is frustrated, as these memories are deliberately cryptic.



FIGURE 14:
Willem Boshoff, *Secret Letters* (2003)



2.5 Joseph Cornell: *Medici Slot Machine* (1942)

Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) was an American artist who made intricately designed and detailed collages assemblages and sculptures from found objects. Cornell's use of found objects evidences his interest in 'collecting and curating'. The objects he used to construct his works varied in nature depending on where he found or collected them.

As is the case in the presentation of some of my works, Cornell's assemblage boxes are intended for viewer interaction. For instance, in the series of boxes titled *Medici Slot Machine* (1942) Cornell utilised various materials including paper, photographs and painted glass. The box construction is made from wood, which has been covered by glass. The box houses images and wooden cubes that are covered in differently coloured metal. In a way, Cornell's boxes, suggest a sense of mystery as they 'house' items inside them that are not necessarily accessible to the viewer, thus, leaving the viewer in a state of 'wonder.' Their decorative and mysterious nature is similar to that present in the Greek mythology about 'Pandora's box.'

In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman on earth. Zeus ordered Hephaestus, the god of craftsmanship, to create her and he did, using water and earth. The gods endowed her with many talents; Aphrodite gave her beauty, Apollo music, Hermes persuasion, and so forth. When Prometheus stole fire from heaven, Zeus took vengeance by presenting Pandora to Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother. With her, Pandora had a jar which she was not to open under any circumstance. Impelled by her natural curiosity, Pandora opened the jar, and all evil contained escaped and spread over the earth. She hastened to close the lid, but the whole contents of the jar had escaped,

FIGURE 15:

Joseph Cornell, *Box assemblage*

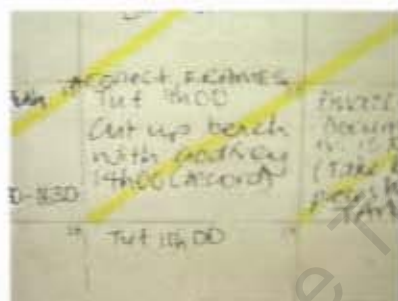
"The American Joseph Cornell (died 1972) is among the artists for whom the cabinet of curiosities proved a potent inspiration. He evolved a personal genre known as box assemblage, a form of three-dimensional collage, in which he sought a place elements as far apart from each other as possible, in the smallest possible space, thus creating multiple poetic resonances and provoking the spectator's capacity for association." (Mauries 2002: 227)



FIGURE 16:

Joseph Cornell, *Medal Slot-Machine: Object* (1942)

In this chapter, I have outlined various ways in which my exhibition resonates with the work and concerns of contemporary art production. I have aimed to emphasize the way in which my strategies are visual ones, or ones that are embedded in an engagement with the dynamics of display. In this way, I have attempted to situate my work in a contemporary art context, as well as draw attention to the ways in which my concerns manifest in the exhibition as artists methodology. In the following chapters, I explore these notions further.



Date: Friday 1 May

Time: 21h00

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Don't know what exactly to write... It's been a while since I've had to confront my thoughts and feelings concerning the bench. It all started last year, I was really excited... I really get involved, made to your height, 1,78m, I could never forget... remember when we used to measure ourselves against the wall in the house The wood, pine, just like the cage

framing that your coffin was covered with
I will never forget those heartbreaking
words in red... HUMAN REMAINS... as if
there was nothing more to you than that.
No soul, no life - what once was... Those
words removed all elements of life that
existed in you. Each nail hammered with
the pain of remembrance. I didn't have
enough time to deal with your death. It
all happened too fast. I had to "keep my
cool," remain my organised self; mask my
grief with an act of responsibility - this!
I wasn't ready for ...





Date: Saturday 2 May

Time: 14h 36

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Thirteen more days until the "cremation." I like to refer it as that. I have formed a bond with the bench, as it began to represent you in a way. The idea was to have the bench symbolise you, dad and granddad - at that point in time, sekuru (granddad) was still alive. It's ironic that Tina went to visit sekuru (granddad) kumusha (family homestead / farm) and took



Date: Sunday 3 May

Time: 19h10

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

sekuru (granddad) died... he is probably with you right now. The meaning of the bench has changed. It began to represent death as opposed to people - the three of you are no longer here I am only left with memories, I will cherish forever... This is why I want to "cremate" the bench - to end the relationship - what once was. It was becoming too intense and for once I want to be the one "in control" of the

situation, nonetheless, the end result will
always be a memory...





Date: Monday 4 May
Time: Unknown
Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Quite a few people have been asking me why I made the bench ... well, it all began after your funeral. Sekuru Vhudziyera (Granddad Vhudziyera) could not make it for your funeral, being so old, he could hardly move and a trip to Heerare would have been too strenuous for him. Babamukuru Seru (Big father Seru) suggested that a small bench be made out of the pine framing

that protected your casket when it travelled from Canada to Zimbabwe. We all considered it a very good idea. Babamukuru and mom felt it was the best way for seturu vhudzija to remember you, seeing as he could not attend your funeral. The pine framing is still in the workshop at home.





Date: Tuesday 5 May

Time: 21h51

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Today was the opening of the 2nd Year master of Fine Art students' exhibition. I exhibited your letters - don't worry, they are safe. I am sure you saw the entire show... Sometimes, I think about how laborious a task it was to put the bench together. I learnt so much making the bench became a ritual. I remember mentioning to Jane Alexander and Kurt Campbell that

Sometimes I would dream about the bench,
and imagine the next stage. Each day I
worked on the bench, I injected it with life.
It slowly became a being... we formed a
relationship...





Date: Wednesday 6 May

Time: 19h13

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

It feels weird writing to you... you know why.
The bench has a certain "presence" in my studio.
As the reality of the "cremation" draws near, I
am getting more and more nervous about how I
am going to "fill" the gap, its space - its place.
I know that this may sound weird, but seriously,
I have bonded with it. It represents the beginning
of this project, my relationship with my work

thus, letting go of it is going to be extremely difficult ...





Date: Thursday → Monday

Time: Unknown

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Phew! I finally got the courage to tell Godfrey about the "cremating" of the bench. I knew that he too would be hurt about it, because he showed me how to make the bench. He explained each part of the process, so that I would make it correctly. Perhaps some people think that "cremating" the bench is a crazy thing to do, but I know exactly why I am going to do it ... I should not lose focus.



Date: Friday 8 May

Time: Unknown

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

I marked the position of the bench in my studio, using masking tape. I have decided to consider that space "sacred." Therefore, I am not going to use that space, neither will I allow anyone to stand in that space as a means to express the fact that it is very difficult to replace something of great value and importance in one's life overnight, and in your case, ever. You

can never be replaced and you will always
be missed dearly...



and I can always refer back to them when I feel like it.





Date: Sunday 10 May

Time: 14h13

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

I have just been thinking about what I am going to do after the 14th of May, when my entries into this diary come to an end. Like your funeral, I am making the final arrangements for the bench. Godfrey has agreed to assist me with the cutting of the bench, so I don't hurt myself. Robyn will record the session and now I need to organise getting the

pieces of wood home, so that I can "cremate"
them in the fireplace and collect the ashes.
I think I will ask Tands to help me with that.
I saw Naida today, she is attending meetings
in Cape Town... we talked about you over lunch...
memories...





Date: Monday 11 May

Time: 1800

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

I know that this has nothing to do with the bench, but someone opened one of the envelopes in the letter boxes. I did predict it happening, but I did not think that someone would really do it. I don't know... I was totally gutted when I saw the two opened envelopes, but I must say, Francis' perception on the entire situation changed my



attitude. I must think positively! So it happened! Perhaps something will come out of it, perhaps nothing will. I am less worried now than I was this morning. I felt that the "secret" had been let out. The whole concept is to "keep/contain the 'secret' within the works — whatever it is! At the time that it happened I was really vexed I couldn't even express it. I felt as if I had been violated. I began to question whether or I was being naive, thinking I could "trust"

the gallery space and its viewers. Pippa Skotnes did have an interesting opinion. After I told her that I had "rectified" the situation, she suggested that perhaps I should not have done so. In this way the "breach in" would have become part of the "process." Although part of my concept is to present things without altering their authenticity, I don't think that leaving the envelopes opened would have been a "safe" thing to do. The letters are very personal, they contain information intended for a specific receiver. Carine called me to chat about the incident. I felt better after that.



Enough about that, tomorrow is the cutting
of the bench. I have mixed emotions about it.
I must remember to charge the video camera
and set the tape in the correct place. It's
going to be weird... I am sure you will be
there watching the entire process... Right
now, I know you are wondering why it is I
chose to "cremate" the bench on your birthday.
I will explain tomorrow.





Date: Tuesday 12 May

Time: Unmention

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Your birthday has always been the most significant day of your life. Not a year would go by without you making "your day" special. All your peers and friends know you as "Taw 14". Most of the people who are sending back messages on the post cards remember you by that name. You truly meant a lot to all of them and my heart aches each time I read their memories of you. They all speak so

PHILOSOPHY OF WORK METHODOLOGY

Date: Wednesday 13 May

Time: Unknown

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Tomorrow is the "big day." I decided to look up the exact meaning of the word "cremation." According to the Chambers Dictionary, it means "the act of burning, especially of the dead." For me, the bench died the day I stopped working on it. Thus, it has been "dead" for a while, however, I felt I had to wait for the right time to "cremate" it. At the time that I decided that I was going to "cremate" the bench, I felt extremely uneasy about the whole thing. Finally, I gained the confidence to do it, so tomorrow it is !!!



Date: Thursday 14 May

Time: 14h00

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

Happy Birthday big bro! Rest in peace...

SECTION 4

PRACTICAL BODY OF WORK: METHODOLOGY



4.1 Remembering as ritual

My methodology is fundamentally informed by the outline of memorialisation and archival practices as outlined in the first section. In this way, I have delineated the following central tenets to the method by which I have constructed this body of work: Remembering as ritual, assemblage and installation, secrecy and concealment and lastly, the utilisation of reference to a Catholic aesthetic.

Memorialisation may be understood as being ambiguous in a number of ways. In its attempt to preserve, it necessarily foregrounds certain aspects of the event, or life it wishes to preserve and thereby obscures other aspects of it. In this sense, my project is a visual memorial of my brother's life, but importantly, it is done with the awareness that it reflects my own remembrance of him. Therefore, it is a self-consciously mediated memorial.

The nature of my practice involves the collection and exhibition of inherited and found objects from my brother's possessions that constitute my archive of his life. The method I have employed necessitates careful consideration of the manner in which the objects are handled and exhibited.

In an attempt to conserve the past, I refrain from manipulating the original state in which I found the various articles. My practice involves the use of these objects to reference my

memories of my brother and in this way prevent them from gradually fading away. Significantly, each object has been categorised on the basis of a memory that I have recorded in relation to that object. The collection of memories contribute to the specific details and compositional devices applied in my method of display.

Chidester (2004: 61) argues in favour of the usefulness of memory as a guiding force for collection and preservation, when he claims that "in memory, we can construct a certain kind of narrative continuity-linking discrete episodes, reinforcing recurring schema-that transcends past time." My creative process makes use of memory in this fashion, by remembering and reflecting on collated memories as a means to steer the composition and appearance of my body of work.

The most apparent way in which my memories function as an ordering device, is the fact that I make use of a cataloguing system that provides details of the objects, along with an account of the different memories evoked from these objects. This information is 'contained' in a filing cabinet. The cabinet functions as a way of memorialising the deeply personal, but is ironically manifested by reference to an everyday familiar process, such as cataloguing in a library.

In addition, most of the techniques and styles that I employ contain symbolic significance. This includes materials, specific measurements applied, as well as the curation of the items as a collective. The process has required that I have, for this project, undergone serious periods of reflection.

In an essay entitled "Memory and the archive," Arjun Appadurai (2003: 11), suggests that memory disappears gradually with time and that each access or regular visit to a memory is inclined to manipulate ever so slightly and shift the original memory's form, shape and content. According to Appadurai (2003: 11), "the message and meaning dissipate and shift towards a dreamlike authenticity. Memory fades and so do sites, since they are conditioned and defined by memory."

In acknowledgement of this claim, I have chosen to curate my memorial archive with the intention to allow the objects the ability to manufacture an image of a history and at the same time giving shape and presence to that history. My archive is inventing a narrative, in effect, by defining the space of a ritual encounter of the past (Maleuvre 1999: 1). In spite of the fact that I am deeply aware of how my working with the objects may alter both them and their memories, I trust that the objects retain some traces of my brother's life, or at least reflect my personal engagement with these objects in context of a larger narrative, that is, my knowledge of my brother's life.

The title of the exhibition *14 ways to remember (Nzira gumi nena dzekuyeuka)* makes reference to the number fourteen that occurs throughout the body of work. This number is linked to personal facts about my brother's life; the specificities of which, I have chosen not to disclose in the work or in this text.

Through the ironic play between secrecy, preservation, memory and narrative, it should be apparent that the core objective of my practice of archiving is to draw attention to the physical presence of the objects as a means to evoke a sense of loss and absence.



4.2 Assemblage and Installation

According to Christopher Tilley (1994: 70):

Material culture is a framing and communicative medium involved in social practice. It can be used for transforming, storing or preserving social information. It also forms a symbolic medium for social practice, acting dialectically in relation to that practice. It can be regarded as a kind of text, a silent form of writing and discourse; quite literally, a channel of reified and objectified expression.

In light of the above, it could be understood that installations that contain objects, or as defined by Tilley, 'material culture,' are a 'symbolic medium for social practice.' One such practice takes place in the gallery space, where a work of art is installed so that viewers are able to visually engage with the objects on display. During this process, the viewer may also 'connect' with the work beyond its aesthetic value and purpose, for example, by recognition of everyday objects and activities (such as clothing, CDs and playing basketball, which should be familiar to most viewers).

In terms of installation, the objects on display could be considered to have the ability to operate beyond their material or physical form in that they also have the ability to tap into the viewer's "everyday consciousness" (Flood 2007: 12). Flood maintains that "From the very beginning, sculpture has always rubbed shoulders with the real. Its association with religion and personification has given it a totemic presence that complicates space and viewer perception much more than any other medium (2007: 12)."

The relevance of Flood's argument is illustrated in the sculptural works produced by the Portuguese artist Carlos Bunga. Bunga is well known for making cardboard installations that are usually of a very large scale (Reisman 2007: 40). While making reference to architecture, Bunga's installations carry themes of "memory and remembrance" (Gioni 2007: 72), as his sculptures take on the form of the skeletal frames of a house. Massimiliano Gioni (2007: 72) describes this as being "a process of eradication that also evokes a sense of nostalgia for one's own home."

Bunga's installations could be considered to be an extension of 'the personal' in that they are a reflection of the absence of something he desires and continues to remember. His installations are thus an expression of this longing that is possibly based on a memory of an experience that is now a fragment of his past. Consequently, despite its 'industrial nature,' Bunga's installation or modern sculpture, "comes across as assertive, almost inevitable, and thus monumental (Gioni 2007: 84).

FIGURE 17
Carlos Bunga, *Untitled* (2005)



Using Bunga's work as an example, it is possible to deduce that natural or generic objects have the ability to assume a different kind of resonance when they are used within a creative format, such as an exhibition. Within this format, they become objects of 'wonder,' as is suggested by Stephen Greenblatt in his discussion regarding *Marvelous Possessions*. Greenblatt (1991: 73) puts forward the idea that "the marvelous stands for the missing caravels laden with gold; it is-like the ritual of possession itself-a word pregnant with what is imagined, desired, promised." With this in mind, it can be understood that 'the power' of possessing an object also has an effect on its meaning. In effect, the possessor has 'the power' to modify or add onto the object's original or intended meaning.

In my body of work, I am relying on the objects on display to resonate with the viewer in a particular way. Even though the objects may be considered familiar and of the everyday world, it is through their association of the death of a loved one and my own mourning, that they achieve this resonance.





4.3 Secrecy and Concealment

Another characteristic present in my use of objects is the deliberate insertion of secretive elements. I have intentionally chosen to mask particular objects I do not feel comfortable revealing to audience. However, their inclusion in my body of work serves to emphasise the fact that the objects do exist and that they are part of my brother's archive.

I have also made use of designs, that I have constructed using the letters of words that describe the feelings I experienced during my process of mourning. The use of obfuscation as a methodology here, is due to my belief that secrecy allows for the protection of personal information. This gesture is one that functions both as a deictic action, in that it draws attention to the presence of secrets, and as a protective one, in that I do not release the (what I regard to be) sensitive information of my brother's archive.

When discussing the notion of secrecy as *Intentional Concealment*, Sissela Bok (1982: 5-6) defines it as:

...a path, a riddle, a jewel, an oath—anything can be secret so long as it is kept intentionally hidden, set apart in the mind of its keeper as requiring concealment. It may be shared with no one, or confided on condition that it go no farther; at times it may be known to all but one or two from whom it is kept. To keep a secret from someone, then, is to block information about it or evidence of it from reaching that person, and to do so intentionally: to prevent him from learning it, and thus from possessing it, making use of it, or

revealing it⁷. The word 'secrecy' refers to the resulting concealment. It also denotes the methods used to conceal, such as codes or disguises or camouflage, and the practices of concealment, as in trade secrecy or professional confidentiality.

One could question the desire to use secrecy as a technique to produce work that is inevitably going to be accessed within a public forum - namely the gallery space. Perhaps the use of secrecy can be read as intending to 'layer' the meaning of the work. Thus, the process of interpretation becomes an active one in that, it is less direct and challenges the viewer to consider various possibilities of understanding that may not have otherwise come to mind under conventional circumstances or methods of presentation. Primarily, the use of secrecy and concealment is intended to convey the difficulties of 'speaking' about loss, and emphasize the fact that such speaking is always fraught.

Bok maintains that a secret may be shared with another person or is intended to remain with its original source. In this case, throughout the making and discussion of my body of work, I never openly reveal the intricate details concerning my brother's death. In that way, I am trying to intimately protect personal information, from the general public.

⁷ Bok (1982: 6) further elaborates on this point by stating that "there are of course, many other reasons why information or evidence may not reach a person, quite apart from intentional secrecy. Unintended distortions or blockages may occur either at the source, en route, or at the receiving end of any communication."

FIGURE 18

Henry Darger

In the Realms of the Unreal

(The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, caused by the Child Slave Rebellion)



FIGURE 19

Henry Darger

In the Realms of the Unreal

(The Story of the Vivian Girls, in what is known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, caused by the Child Slave Rebellion)



Darger's colourful and detailed illustrations exist as the evidence of his creative expressions that span an entire life. They could also be viewed as an extension or expression of the various aspects of his personal life story. For example, his childhood was quite traumatic, as, after having lost both his parents at a very young age, he ended up in a mental asylum for children. It was here that "he and other child inmates were forced to do heavy manual labour; an experience that clearly inspired the 'child slave rebellion' at the centre of his narrative" (Carolin & Sam 2006: 56).

One may imagine that Darger's lifelong production of drawings was a means whereby he expressed some of his personal traumatic experiences and thoughts. Importantly, however, he did not do this for an audience, at least not in the formal sense of a gallery visiting public. The gradual and expansive collection of images can be considered as a personal archive that in its collected state represents a vast repository of his personal narrative. Interestingly, in their (original) unpublished form, this archive-these drawings-constitute a secret of sorts.



4.4 Catholic Aesthetic

As mentioned earlier, the role of the Catholic faith and church has always been an important aspect of my life. Right from the conception of my project, my religious convictions have greatly influenced the composition and execution of my creative ideas; be it through ritual in prayer, or while reflecting on the mass that was said at my brother's funeral. As a consequence, I embarked on curating my body of work by making use of what I term, a 'Catholic aesthetic.'

This process involved identifying, examining and applying specific characteristics that are commonly found in Catholic churches: in particular those that I have attended as a regular member. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that at no one point in my text or body of work do I attempt to argue the credibility of the Catholic faith and its religious doctrines. My interest in this religion is purely based on my individual experience of Catholicism.



FIGURE 20:
Sacred Heart Catholic Cathedral,
Harare, Zimbabwe (2006)

In a historical summary on the Cathedrals of England, Alec Clifton-Taylor (1967: 10) points out that, "it would be generally agreed that one of the most enjoyable characteristics of the cathedrals is their unending variety: despite affinities of detail, no two are really much alike." It is not surprising that they continue to draw attention of viewers because of their complex, intricate and theatrical natures.

A cathedral could furthermore, be rightfully considered as a kind of memorial, as in it, takes place numerous ceremonial and thus memorable events. To give an example, the Westminster Abbey cathedral in England is associated with globally memorable events such as the wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana (1981) and the funeral of Princess Diana (2006). Despite the difference in tone between these events, the Westminster Abbey will forever 'contain' the memories of both proceedings.

An understanding of a church as functioning in some way as a kind of memorial, an indexical signifier for events that are remembered, has guided me to shape my exhibition around the formal structures and spaces of these buildings.

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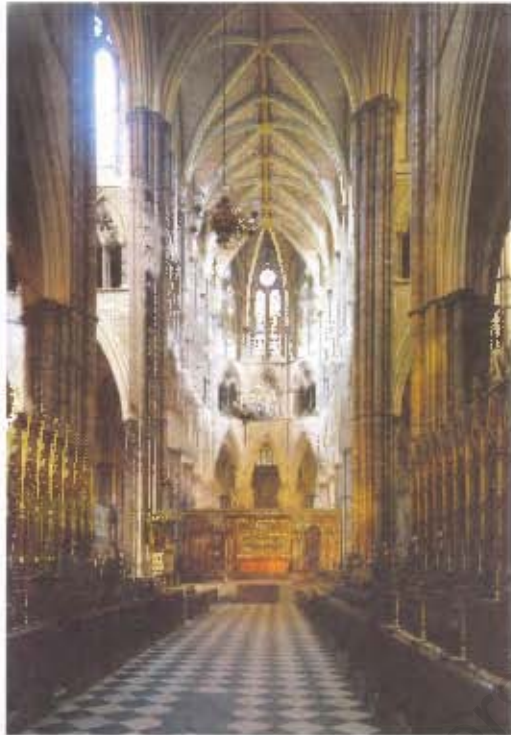


FIGURE 21
Westminster Abbey,
Choir and transept, begun 1245.
Paid for by Henry III as a setting for the
shrine of St. Edward the Confessor, the
Anglo-French design was enhanced by
rosette diaper and large-and small-scale
figure sculpture.

FIGURE 22
Plate III Canterbury: Stained glass detail
from the north aisle of the Trinity chapel
(close-up of detail)



Nicola Coldstream (1994: 11) in her historical outline, points out that:

A church building was the earthly embodiment of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and everything in it, from its decoration to its liturgy and music, reinforced the message. It was the place where the worldly life met with the spiritual, where people were linked to God physically and symbolically through the act of communion, and where they prayed for salvation through the intercession of Christ and the saints, chief among them the Virgin Mary. In the western Church the use of imagery had had a long and uninterrupted history, but now, especially in Decorated England, imagery became paramount. Saints and biblical figures were depicted not only in stained glass but in sculpture, with statues deployed on walls, window embrasures, screens and alters, surrounding the congregation with three-dimensional figures, large and small, the denizens of the Heavenly Kingdom brought uncannily to life. Paradise was shown not as a remote abstraction but as a palpable presence.

The sense that a church figures as a physical representation of paradise affected the way in which I have curated the archive of my brother's life. Parallel to the 'paradise' alluded to in Catholic cathedrals, the 'atmosphere' (that is, the creation of a theatrically animated space), is a reference informed by my familiarity with Catholic rituals to the afterlife, or a sacred place of remembrance. This, I have achieved in the gallery, through the structural allusion to the spaces of the church (the alter, the pew, the arches and so on), as well as the deliberate lighting.

The cross and the Crucifix is a common feature in all Catholic churches. Within the Catholic faith, recognition of the cross and its significance is further extended in the form of a physical gesture. This gesture involves making the sign of the cross against ones forehead, upper-torso and shoulders, while reciting the words, "in the name of the Father and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

In the Catholic faith, the cross makes reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Thus, in the Catholic faith the crucifix and the cross, symbolise this event. Accordingly, in the Catholic belief system, the cross and the crucifix function as a constant reminder of the death of Jesus Christ-that is, his physical absence, which is at the heart of my project.

My use of the iconography of the cross is intended to evoke this association between maintaining the memory of someone and referencing his physical absence.

Another recurring characteristic of the architecture of Catholic churches is the use of arches. In fact, historically, the various designs and variations of arches are considered some of the most important innovations in the history of architecture. Beautifully designed and inescapably visible to the viewer, arches form an integral part of the structural designs of Catholic cathedrals.

In its practical sense, an arch is a support structure and in the same sense, its architectural role in my own mind resonates my brother's role within my family unit. My use of this form in my work is symbolic of his role, which is now only accessible through memory.

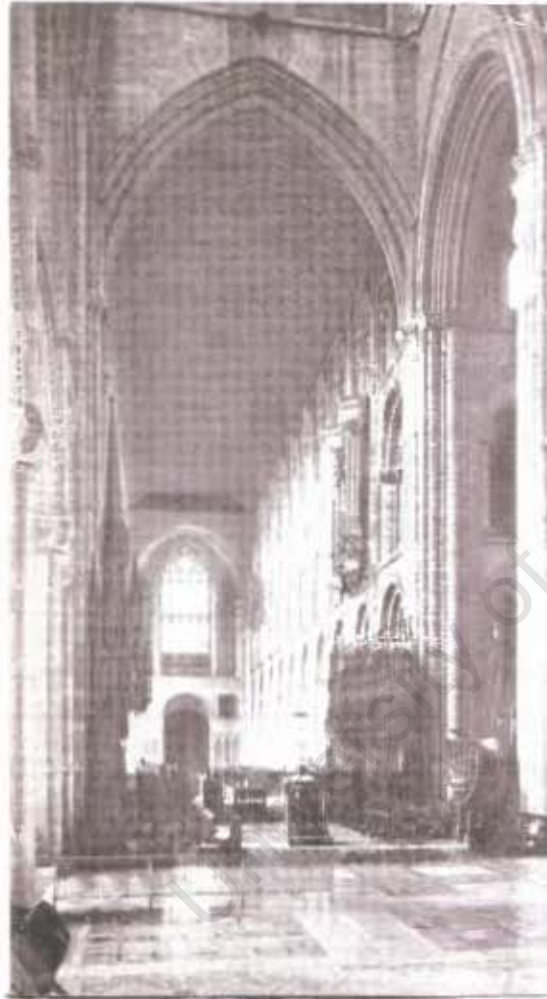


FIGURE 23
Cathedral
Peterborough: Interior, looking west

Within Catholic churches, there are also altars that are used by priests who serve the Holy Mass which is said in remembrance of Jesus Christ. During the celebration of the mass, the members of the congregation sit in pews, where they partake in various rituals and periods of mediation that sometimes involve the act of kneeling down in prayer.

In my work I replicate the form of the altar and the pew, by incorporating both their structural forms and ritualistic functions in my the creation of 'my paradise.'



In this section, I have aimed to present an outline of the main structuring concerns of my methodology. These can be discerned at many levels of my exhibition, from the way in which the objects have been treated and ordered, to the design and the manipulation of the space.

SECTION 5

INDIVIDUAL WORKS

Thus far in my dissertation, I have traced the various references, influences, structuring concerns and methodologies that have shaped my exhibition. In this section, I pause at individual works to provide context and detailed description of the way in which each contributes to the central theme of my work.



5.1 *With and without you* (2009)

Installation

Medium: Collected paraphernalia, wooden frames, glass, paint; clear and tinted acetate.

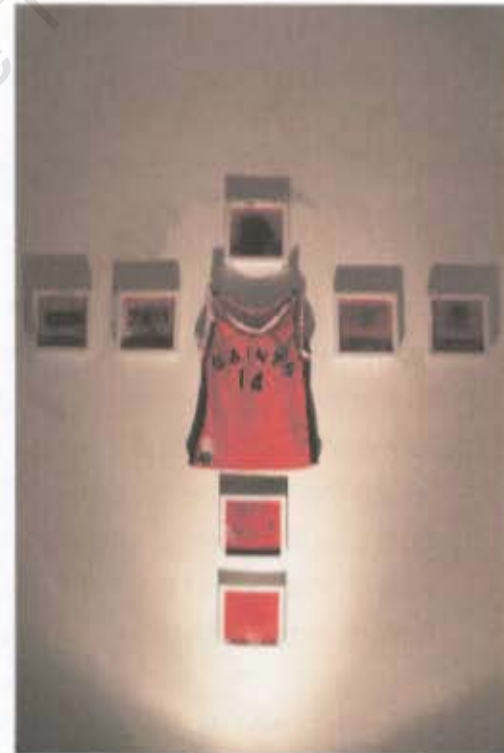
The work *With and without you* (Fig. 24) is the centre piece in my body of work and thus in my exhibition. The installation is made up of seven frames that contain various objects from my brother's archive. The seven frames are presented in the shape of a cross and hanging in the centre of the 'cross' is a basketball vest that my brother wore when he played for the St. George's College Basketball team, his high school team

The frames were handmade and painted white. The objects have been covered with sheets of clear and red acetate and glass, so as to interfere with the 'ordinary' state of the objects, as well as suggest the appearance of stained glass windows within a cathedral. Included in the frames are verses of text that are memories that I associate with the objects.

In each instant, all the recollections are articulated as though I am speaking directly to my brother, as a means to further draw attention to his absence within my life and the gallery space. This work specifically draws on notions of absence that are suggested through the presentation of a basketball vest that does not contain a body. Placed directly opposite this work in the space, is the video entitled *Number 14* (Fig. 36), which is a recording of my brother playing basketball. At certain intervals, the video changes to a recording of the burning of the bench I built and burnt (see section three). A further elaboration of this work is provided at a later stage in this section.

With and without you also contains religious connotations that are associated with the crucifix within the Catholic belief system, which I previously made reference to in discussion concerning my use of the Catholic aesthetic.

FIGURE 24
With and without you
Installation
2009





5.2 Track 14 (2009)

Installation

Medium: Compact discs, adhesive and pins; wood, paint, jersey, cotton fabric, thread and lights

Track 14 (Fig. 25) commemorates my brother's interest in and love for music. The work consists of compact discs that are part of my brother's musical archive. Beneath the display is a structure on which the viewer should kneel to listen to the CDs. This replicates the frontal part of a pew. Earphones that are connected to an iPod have been attached to the work, so that the viewer can actively engage with the display, by listening to the first song of each CD.

The display of CDs takes on a colourful appearance, in an attempt to remind one of the appearance of stained glass windows present in cathedrals. Each CD has been attached to the wall using adhesive and pins. The use of localised lighting accentuates the circular forms of the CDs and creates shadows around them that resemble halos. The pillow that lies at the bottom of the kneeling structure contains a jersey that belonged to my brother and one that I wore religiously after his death. The top part of the pillow has a prayer, which was embroidered in white thread. The prayer was composed by my brother and its original format was handwritten on a piece of lined paper.

A book containing 'musical memories' that my brother's best friend collated, rests on the ledge of the kneeling structure. The collection of memories is a tangible point of

entry for the viewer, in formulating an understanding of the meaning that the music collection had for my brother.

In this work I give emphasis to the ritual act of kneeling down in prayer. Accordingly, the work gives the viewer an opportunity to 'sample' the contents of the archive and at the same time participate in a ritualistic act.

FIGURE 25
Track 14
Installation
2009





5.3 Size 9 (2009)

Installation

Medium: Cardboard, T-shirts, pins and adhesive

Size 9 (Fig. 26) makes reference to the notion of absence. It draws attention to the lack of shoes amongst my brother's returned belongings and in his archive. Using fourteen empty boxes that were made to his exact shoe size, I created 'mini coffins' for the missing shoes. The lids on all the boxes have been covered with T-shirts that I affixed onto the edges with pins.

Each T-shirt had to be cut to size and this process was extremely difficult as I felt that I was 'destroying' them. In spite of this, I chose to display and preserve the specific sections that stir up memories of my brother. The remnants of the shirts have been 'buried' in the work titled *Sour dreams* (Fig. 26).

Collectively, the boxes formulate a colourful composition that functions as a visual narrative, which could be viewed as my brother's self-portrait-made in his absence.

FIGURE 26
Size 9
Installation
2009





5.4 *In memory of...* (2009)

Installation

Medium: Hand made and painted wooden shelves, framed photos, jersey, vest, sunglasses, bracelets, three glass urns with ashes of books and 'the bench' and crushed roses.

The meaning of this work is directly suggested in its title. *In memory of...* (Fig. 27) consists of a variety of objects and images. As a collection the objects on display relate to each other. Some of the objects were 'processed' before arriving at the final state in which they have been presented. For example, the bench, which was afforded a detailed account in section three

of this paper, was first built by hand and then burnt ('cremated'). The ashes of the bench are contained in the glass urn positioned in the centre of the shelf. Incorporated in the contents of this urn are burnt nails and crushed yellow rose petals that have personal significance in relation to the ritual of visiting my brother's grave. The other two glass urns respectively contain crushed yellow roses and the vestiges I collected after burning some of my father's literary works⁹.

The photos in the black frames were discovered on a camera that belonged to one of my brother's friends. The photos were taken by my brother himself, but in their casual and everyday

⁹ My father, Gabriel A. Matindike wrote a series of educational books in both Shona and English. These books are used in the Zimbabwean educational system. The collection of literary works amounts to thirty-two books, which have been published by Longman and College Press Publishing Houses in Harare, Zimbabwe.

nature, they evoke an uncanny present absence. Beneath the photos, I have displayed on three shelves, the objects that appear in the photos and in this way further suggest a sense of discontinuity and absence.

FIGURE 27
In memory of...
Installation view
2009



FIGURE 28
In memory of...
Installation view (displayed on the
work titled *Memory Box* (2009))
2009



5.5 *Ndine pfimbi yangu (I have a secret) (2009)*

Installation

Medium: Plinths, wooden boxes, glass and paper

The work *Ndine pfimbi yangu (I have a secret)* (Fig. 28) has been made with the intention to express an inability to directly deal with or discuss death. The work consists of seven wooden boxes that each contain a letter and a book. The boxes were made using pine that was sanded and painted matte white. The sheets of glass were cut by hand and polished. The little books stand upright in the front section of the boxes. The sheet of glass obstructs access to the envelope that contains a letter.

The letters have been placed in sealed envelopes, as they are not intended for public exposure. Tension is thus created between the viewer and object, as the viewer is denied complete access to the presentation. Each booklet outlines the nature of the letter without actually revealing its exact contents. In turn, the viewer is expected to 'trust' the information provided in the book. The letters are never intended to be read by the viewer and they will always remain a secret in their sealed state.

The work raises questions relating to notions concerning truth, in view of the authenticity of an object.

FIGURE 29
Ndine plimbi yangu (I have a secret)
Installation view
2009



FIGURE 30
Ndine plimbi yangu (I have a secret)
Installation view
2009





5.6 *Undiyeuke (Remember me) (2009)*

Installation

Medium: Wooden frames, paint, found objects, laser cut triplex board, adhesive and lights

As is suggested in the title, *Undiyeuke (Remember me)* (Fig. 31) signifies another attempt in the installation to preserve the past. In this work, I selected six different types of objects that specifically relate to my brother's death. The objects are sealed in wooden frames that I made and painted by hand. Each frame has a cover made from triplex board that has been cut into by a laser cutting machine. In certain instances, I choose to reveal the complete object. However, the objects contained in most of the frames are barely visible, as I made the decision not to completely reveal their contents. It is in this work that I apply secrecy as a technique in the presentation of my work. Exhibited beneath the frames are clothes that belonged to my brother.

The frames are displayed in pairs and each set is contained in an arch that I constructed using cards made out of triplex board. The cards utilise the series of designs I created using the list of words that denote the feelings I experienced after my brother's death.

Localised lighting has been applied above each arch, with the intention to contribute to the theatrical mode of presentation that my exhibition takes on. The use of the very dark spaces that are illuminated in specific areas alludes to the effect that my brother's death had on my psyche - where at certain points in my life I felt I had attained 'all the answers,' on other occasions, I felt I was in a vacuum of obscurity.

FIGURES 31&32
Undiyeuke (Remember me)
Installation view
2009



FIGURE 33
Undiyeuke (Remember me)
Installation view (detail on clothes)
2009





5.7 *Usandikanganwe (Never forget me) (2009)*

Installation

Medium: Wood, paint and paper.

The title of this work makes reference to the conservation of memories as a means not to forget.

In essence, the work is a presentation of collated memories. The initial stage of the project involved recording all the various emotions that I went through after my brother's death. Once I had forty-nine words for these emotions, I converted each one into a design, which I then used in the production of my postcards. I sent the postcards to people that knew my brother.

Each participant was expected to write a memory of my brother and then post the card back to me. The process was exceptionally challenging, as I had to formulate relationships with people I had either not met, or not spoken to for a considerable amount of time.

All the returned postcards are presented on a large plinth, which I designed and built, so that it would suggest the presence of an altar in a cathedral. The postcards or 'memories' are positioned in an upright manner on a plinth. The postcards that were lost or not returned in the post are displayed as blanks.

The end result of this process is a presentation of collective remembrance.

FIGURES 34, 35 & 36
Usandikangarwe (Never forget me)
Installation view
2009





5.8 Number 14 (2009)

Installation

Medium: Wood, paint and paper.

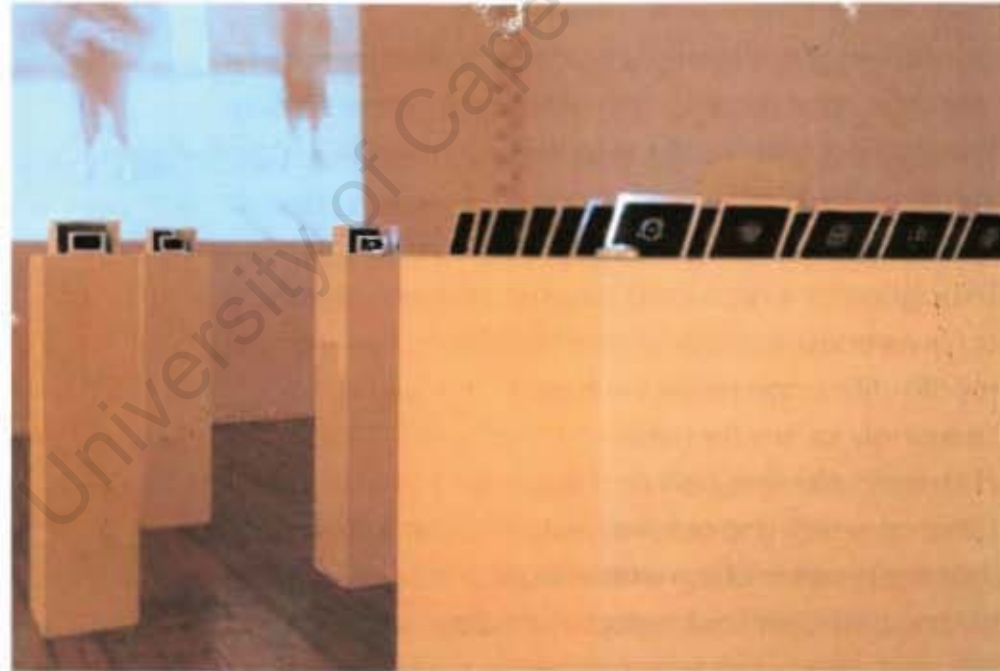
Number 14 is a video work that interchanges the burning of the bench I built and a recording of my brother and his friends playing basketball. I found the video on a camera that my brother owned, after his death. This work is intended to call attention to a desire to retain the past in the present.

Basketball was my brother's favourite sport and I felt it was important to incorporate his passion for the game in one of my works. While the video provides the viewer with a memory of my brother in the physical form, the work directly opposite titled *With and without you* (Fig. 24) juxtaposes this presence, as included in the installation is a vest that does not contain a body and therefore further accentuates a sense of absence.

Conversely, the burning of the bench makes reference to the termination of a relationship- in this instance, signified by my investment in making the bench, made in memory of my brother. As previously mentioned in my diary, the bench symbolises the relationship I shared with my brother. Thus, in the same manner that the relationship ended as a result of his death, I chose to end 'my relationship with the bench; the main difference being that I had the ability to control the time at which the relationship would end and the form that the termination would take.

My decision to burn, or as mentioned in my diary, to 'cremate' the bench was motivated by the use of fire in the work of South African artist Sandile Zulu. As Colin Richards suggests, "Fire is a social and spiritual phenomenon for Zulu" (Richards 2005: 24). In this sense, fire may very well be a medium by which Zulu 'sanctifies' his various artworks. Similarly, the burning of the bench symbolised something sacred that is now only accessible through memory.

FIGURE 37
Number 14
Installation view
2009





5.9 Memory box (2009)

Installation

Medium: Found wooden cabinet and paper.

The *Memory box* is 'the key' to the rest of work in my exhibition. It has been deliberately displayed as the first object that the viewer interacts with before approaching the rest of the body of work.

Contained in the *Memory box* is the collection of my memories that are linked to all the objects on display. The *Memory box* functions as the residue of my recollections during the time that I was sorting and arranging the objects into exhibition format. Throughout the recording process, I have maintained an awareness that each time I reminisce, my recollections can never be exactly the same. Seemingly so, my memories may progress, thus I have chosen to place a pen and paper on the table on which the cabinet rests, in order to suggest that the process of remembering is continual, as history continues to develop each day. This work raises questions concerning authenticity in relation to societal views on what is 'true' and 'false.'

FIGURE 38. *Memory box*, 2009





5.10 *Sour dreams* (2009)

Installation

Medium: White cotton pillow case with machine embroidery, pages of books written by my father and pins.

FIGURE 39
Sour Dreams
Installation view
2009



The work *Sour Dreams* (Fig. 37) functions as the 'resting place' for all the remnants from my process of preservation. Contained within the pillowcase are all the bits and pieces that I did not want to dispose of permanently, as the more I interacted with the objects in my brother's archive, the more 'precious' they became to me. Out of respect of the belongings of a dead person (and influenced by the Shona traditional belief system), I made the decision to collect the various pieces of shirts, pages of books, stems of roses and so on. Each of the objects in the pillow has been recorded along with a memory in the *Memory box*.



In this chapter, I have traced some of the details of the process and thoughts behind the production of individual elements of the installation. All of these are, however, informed by the larger context and concerns outlined in earlier chapters of this document. What should be apparent from the outline here, is the way in which the objects utilised within the installation have particular significance because of the context of their display, and the choices made within this display. In this sense, the curation of my archive of my brother's life is shown to be a key attribute of making meaning and shaping the experience of my audience.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have outlined the core motivation behind my work and the concepts that describe my production. The historical background in the first section contextualised and unpacked the various notions that I have investigated during my exploration of memorialisation and archiving.

The second section consisted of a reflection on the work of selected artists, their terrains and their relation to my practice and body of work. In addition, the reference to these artists and their works, points to the use of unconventional means of research as an alternative means for expressing and presenting valuable knowledge - that is, the expression of ideas in a creative, visual manner that cannot be approximated in textual format.

The 'bench diary' that constitutes the third section, provided further insight on the core of my project, which is born from a personal experience. This section is not contextualised and articulated within an academic register, due to the fact that the project itself is not constrained by the objective language of that format. Instead, in this section, I aimed to give expression to the very real and personal experiences on which the project has been founded.

The fourth section, constituted an explanation of the methodology I employed in my work, and here I provided practical and visual examples of the process by which the installation came to be. In addition, I highlighted the ways in which the various motifs that I dealt with in each work, contribute in various ways to the central exploration of memorialisation. Following this, in section five is a detailed discussion of each of my works.

14 Ways to remember (Nzira gumi nena dzekuyeuka has been produced without the intention to seek final closure. Instead, my exploration on memorialisation has provided me with the mental, emotional and creative space in which to tackle my feelings towards and thoughts towards an immediate and personal reality - that of my brother's death.

My decision to carry out this investigation within an academic forum has provided me with the means to guide the direction of my exploration and relate it to other areas of study that have been, or are currently being pursued by other researchers, and thus locate it in a broader inquiry into social and cultural activity. Subsequently, I hope that this paper can contribute to other fields of research pertaining to memorialisation and the creative expression of the complexities of dealing with loss.

Lastly, although this archive has been produced and displayed under conventional circumstances (in a studio and presented in a gallery), this archive will not expire. Like history, it will not remain static, but enter into the public sphere in its own way. As is the custom in Shona society, the belongings of my brother, which makes up the bulk of this exhibition, will be passed onto friends and family that knew him. In this way, the exhibition in its disseminated form, will continue to preserve memory and constitutes another way to remember (*imwe nzira yekuyeuka*).



R.I.P Tawi 14

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