

LOCATING ME IN ORDER TO SEE YOU

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Compulsory 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.

Signed by candidate

Signature:

Date: 20.08.07

LOCATING ME IN ORDER TO SEE YOU

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Introduction

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I have produced a series of sculpted cast figures in the medium of cowhide as part of my Masters degree. This document, titled *Locating Me in Order to See You* serves as an explication of the practical component.

Initially I examine the broad context in which my sculpture has been produced, and that in which it will be presented and likely to be received. In attempting to position myself within Contemporary Art discourse, I have specifically considered how Contemporary Art from Africa is often read and comprehended by both those producing work on the continent and the Diaspora, and those interpreting, critiquing, collecting and marketing it, mainly in the West.¹

The basic premise for this is a discussion of the inescapable labels of Black Artist and Black Art and what they imply within the context of Contemporary Art discourse with reference to Africa and more specifically, South Africa. As an emerging Contemporary African Artist I am faced with confronting some of the stereotypes and assumptions associated with art and artists of the continent and/or the legacy of the Apartheid regime.

My experiences as a woman existing between two cultural spaces; Western and Nguni², and the artwork I have created and how it may be read as a result is significant in this regard. Through exploring the art created by a variety of Black South Africans and other African artists, particularly women artists in South Africa, it is clear that modes of creating art have shifted and that the reading and interpretation of art created by these women, including myself can and should be reconsidered without being conditioned by existing assumptions. In this study I have sought to uncover some of the reasons that may account for the limited shifting in interpretations, and to identify how engagement with my own work could be directed and expanded.

¹ *West*: The 'Western World' refers to countries of Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Within the context of this document I highlight that West is no longer a term used just to indicate geographical location, but is used to describe European and Anglo-American hegemony within the reading and defining of art, history and culture.

² *Nguni*: Nguni refers to both a group of clans and nations living in southeast Africa, and to a group of Bantu languages (Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Phuti and Ndebele) spoken in southern Africa. In this paper I make reference to Nguni cultural practice as I understand my cultural heritage and have experienced it within my family context. My intention is not to attempt to speak for interpretations of Nguni cultural practices in other Nguni people's experience, or from an anthropological or ethnographic position.

I choose to create work in cowhide, this material is one that has historical associations and is linked to my cultural background in various ways but for this body of research, exists and is considered within a context that is also removed from these aspects. Subjective views of the significance of this material, drawn from the past but with reference to the present, impact on both understanding and engagement with the work I create. It has been suggested, within the context of my research that the way in which I work as well as the material I use could be compared, for example, to the work and materials used within Inuit³ cultural practices.⁴ My use of cowhide, although linked to various cultural experiences, is not intended to directly reference historical indigenous cultural practices. My intention is to engage with the physical and tactile properties of hide and aspects of control that allow or prevent me from manipulating this material in the context of the female body and Contemporary Art. I have used cowhide as a means to subvert expected associations with corporeal presence, femininity, sexuality and vulnerability. By working on a life size scale in this medium through installation in actual space, I hope to explore this.

In this regard I have examined interpretations of material as well as process within art making in the work created by artists such as Janine Antoni and Yinka Shonibare. I draw parallels to the work created by Zanele Muholi and Lolo Veleko as well as Shirin Neshat, which challenge expected representations of the female body and experience within particular cultural contexts. Similarly, the work I create seeks to encourage alternative modes of looking at the female body.

Within the first Chapter I have examined some of the issues impacting on how Contemporary Art from Africa and African Art is contextualised and understood. African Art has and continues to be cast into an ambiguous 'ethnographic' mass, which denies each piece its history, function and individuality. In this chapter I highlight how this archaic and romantic view of African Art still influences regard for Contemporary Art from Africa and the problems that occur when work created by artists from the

continent does not conform to this stereotypical package or the artist objects to the work being interpreted in this way.

³ *Inuit*: A member of any of several aboriginal peoples who live in coastal regions of the Canadian Arctic and in Greenland (Encarta World English Dictionary).

⁴ Discussion at Michaelis 29 March 2007.

An examination of the inescapable labels of Black Artist and Black Art, and associations with Black practitioners within the context of contemporary South Africa and the Diaspora follows. Through my reading, it has become clear that the residue of the country's history of Apartheid cannot be divorced from the present. This chapter sheds light on shifts and developments in South African art, and the necessity for a questioning of prevailing notions of the nature of Black Art or art made by Black people and therefore the very definitions of 'art' as we understand it. It is clear that there still exists a tendency to homogenize Black and African Art, to apply Western criteria to the analysis and evaluation of art from Africa, and to be dismissive of it when it fails to conform to those criteria. Through drawing attention to the experiences of various Black Artists, particularly Black women, I highlight the diversity and some shifts in recent production in South Africa, and draw attention to the erroneous tendency to associate an essential Black identity with art production, that Blackness and Black Art be reduced to a single acceptable set of experiences, and that working in South Africa necessarily implies a historical political significance in the work.⁵

In 'Between Worlds' I draw attention to the context of the globalized world, migration and the challenging of culturally specific practices through examples of work created by Shirin Neshat and Yinka Shonibare. Like myself, both these artists are informed by their multicultural influences and explore their individual hybrid positions through their artwork.

'In Memory' investigates notions of personal and cultural memory and how these have influenced my art creation. I draw attention to my experience of existing between two cultural spaces; Western and Nguni and how this has influenced the work I have created to date. The dialogue between the dichotomies of the conscious and subconscious is considered, and how this impacts on my art creation is also discussed within this chapter.

⁵ Within this context I would like to highlight how I have been stereotyped and categorised through the use of words such as Black and African Artist. My intention is not to essentialise the experience or art of the artists I have used as examples. My use of terms such as Black and African Artist are as a result of the language necessary to emphasise the problematic nature of these stereotypes.

In Chapter Five, representation of the female body is considered with brief reference to Feminism. Although Feminism may seem an essential aspect of my production, I have chosen not to focus on this area for a number of reasons. This term has most often been defined and used by middle-class White women and much of the earlier writing on this subject did not take into account the experience of Black women. Black Feminist writing that acknowledges this position is from the perspective of African American women and their views on the oppression and marginalisation they have, and to a degree still encounter. While a feminist reading of my work is not irrelevant, I have instead highlighted that through the use of my own body as a subject and object, I have taken control of representations of my body and therefore, hopefully influenced how it is seen by viewers of my installations. It is not my intention to present my work and experience in the context of oppression and marginalisation, or the female body as abject.

Lastly, I highlight the importance of material and process within my art creation. Within the final chapter I discuss my engagement with cow hide as a material and aspects of my process that impact on the control I have over my final product. I discuss my artistic creation, paying particular attention to individual art works created as part of my degree.

Contemporary African

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The question of how Contemporary Art from Africa and African Art is contextualized and understood is important in locating African Art production within the modern world. The dichotomy that exists between these interpretations is one that is highlighted by the confusion arising between understandings and expectations of ethnology and creative output. Associate Professor of Art History at Emory University Atlanta, Sidney Littefield Kasfir, in the article entitled; "African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow" states that studies on African Art have been focused on the situation and objects created during the period before and after colonialism on the continent. The various art forms that have emerged and been collected from the Continent over this period have been grouped in the category of 'traditional' or pre-colonial. This type of art; '...exhibited qualities that made it authentic (in the sense of untainted by Western intervention). Most crucially, it was made to be used by the same society that produced it' (1999b: 90). This idea of authenticity, though noted and questioned by many contemporary scholars, is still a consideration of importance to major art museums and some of the most prominent collectors and dealers across the world.⁶ According to Kasfir, the tradition of collecting art, the process of appropriation, reclassification, and public display does not allow for the limits of what can be classified 'authentic' to go far beyond a handful of collected objects presented out of context.

African Art has and continues to be cast into an ambiguous 'ethnographic' mass, which denies each piece its history, function and individuality. This African Art, without identified artist, removed from its context or function (in the case of masks for example) is what most often, in the minds of many, characterizes 'Authentic African Art'.⁷ The consequence of this all-in-one anonymity is that one artwork can stand for a whole culture, the whole culture is then assumed to be homogeneous yet at the same time unique. This archaic and romantic view of African Art still influences regard for Contemporary Art from Africa and becomes problematic when work created by artists from the continent does not conform to this stereotypical package or the artist objects to the work being interpreted in this way.

⁶ This view is re-enforced by prominent exhibitions such as 'Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African art and Thought', 'Gold of Africa' as well as the permanent displays of the National Museum of African Art, the Metropolitan Museum's Rockefeller Wing and the National Museum, Lagos (Kasfir 1999b: 90).

⁷ 'In Western museums these objects underwent a double taxonomic shift – first from exotica to scientific specimens when the earlier 'cabinets of curiosities' gave way to newly found museums of natural history in the late nineteenth century; and following their "discovery" by Picasso and his friends in the early decades of the twentieth century, they underwent a second promotion into art museums and galleries where they were recontextualised as art objects' (Kasfir 1999b: 99).

This situation is very apparent when examining responses to art exhibitions aimed at showcasing contemporary art from Africa. Most recently, 'Africa Remix', curated by Cameroonian Simon Njami, is the largest collection of contemporary African art ever to be shown in the world. This exhibition hosted in Düsseldorf, London, Paris, Tokyo and South Africa showcases the work of two hundred and twelve African Artists living and working both on the continent and the Diaspora. Njami's questioning of what 'contemporaneity' represents within Africa as well as the aesthetic and intellectual shifts of identity that are represented by the artists included in this exhibition, were met with varying responses. Njami (2005:13) comments,

Most people think of Africa as being limited to a group of countries south of the Sahara, with the region that starts in the north as almost a whole other world...It contradicts the importance of Islam throughout sub-Saharan Africa, already present well before the European 'discoverers' set foot there. In short, it seeks to negate the common history that united the destinies of nations colonized by the same powers and their ensuing struggles for liberation.

This type of thinking makes invalid the exchanges between the countries from the western parts of Senegal, around the eastern horn of Africa⁸ and their North African neighbors. Njami emphasizes connections and exchanges that have occurred between African countries and how this has influenced the history and therefore the art creation within the continent.⁹ Njami also aimed to assert that Africa is a continent of different countries and peoples, including the descendents of colonists, not a group of people south of the Sahara homogenized by the colour of their skin and perceived commonalities in cultural practice.

⁸ Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger.

⁹ This focus on African art that originates from countries south of the Sahara is made evident through art collections such as "The Contemporary African Art Collection" (C.A.A.C – The Pigozzi Collection) This collection, based in Geneva, is the largest private collection of contemporary African art in the world. It was born of the meeting of Jean Pigozzi, an Italian, Harvard-educated, venture capitalist and André Magnin, a French independent curator, specializing in art from non-Western cultures, and especially sub-Saharan art. The collection includes works from all forms of art including drawing, painting, sculpture, installations and photography. Although this collection has brought international attention to work of more than eighty artists who work and live both on the continent and the Diaspora, its focus has only been on the work created by artists in the sub-Saharan region. André Magnin comments 'The exhibition proposed for the contemporary section of Arts of Africa is distinguished by the fact that it shows artists who live and work in black Africa, save for two who divide their time between Cameroon and Europe.' (www.caacart.com/html/about_am_en.html) This focus on 'black Africa' within the Pigozzi collection allows for the stereotyped view of 'authentic' Africa being in the region south of the Sahara to continue. And as a result negates the exchanges and connections between the countries on the continent as a whole.

The *Evening Standard* critic Brian Sewell's evaluation of the exhibition was:

...in following the West, they mimic it in witless parody, or ape in modern materials and terms what little they know of a genuine African past, or embark on tasks that can only be completed with the obsessive industry of the deranged. Had we in the West...left Africa to be still the Dark Continent and work out of its own purposes, I have no doubt that an Emil Torday of today could have brought new ethnic objects as beautiful as those he acquired for the British Museum a century ago (Sewell cited in Donaldson March 13, 2005).

Clearly, Sewell's appreciation of art from Africa is limited to the 'ethnic' objects displayed as part of ethnographic exhibitions that are typical of many European museums. This critic feels that the work presented, as part of 'Africa Remix' is 'unauthentic' tainted by Western influence and ineptly imitates Western traditions of art creation. The individual modes of creation of each of the artists included on this show are rendered irrelevant as a result of this critic's expectation of a recognisably African uniformity. 'Sewell then goes on to essentially assert that African art must remain the pre-colonial art of the continent and that the true African artist would thus be one who is still creating the kinds of works that an Emil Torday of today (some gruesome puns there) would find beautiful, because they reiterate cultural practices that were valid 200 years ago' (Ogbechie, S. 2005 [online]).

The question of 'power' is central to discussions of how African Art has been and continues to be distributed globally. Njami comments on this relationship in "Remembrance of Things Past – Ten years of debate about African Contemporary Art." He asserts that; 'Power, and there is no denying it, is in the hands of the international market and the curators. They are the ones who lay down the rules that all international artists, particularly African artists, must obey' (1998:124). According to Njami 'power' is also 'in the hands' of collectors and the long established cultural tradition of circulating and marketing art in the West.

The dichotomy that exists between the powerful and the powerless within the art milieu can be considered in relation to the theories of French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1993) where the notion of various forms of Capital¹⁰ can be seen to contextualise both positions. These various forms of Capital are influenced by the power relations that impact on the functioning of a certain group or society. His theory references French society but

¹⁰ *Academic Capital*: Derives from the formal education and can be measured by degrees or diplomas held.

Linguistic Capital: Concerns an agent's linguistic competence.

Symbolic Capital: Refers to degree of accumulated prestige or celebrity (Bourdieu 1993:7).

can be used as a model or framework to understand Capital as it relates to different social environments. Bourdieu states: “‘Cultural Capital’ as a form of knowledge, an internalised code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts. He suggests that a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence that is the code, into which it is encoded’ (1993:7).

Bourdieu believes that in order to gain this code, or Capital, one has to enter into a long process of acquisition or learning through ones family, educated members of ones social group and learning institutions. According to his theory, family, the social circle and education impact on the Cultural Capital one will acquire. Cultural Capital can according to his definition, be seen as the source of power that helps to dictate how successful an individual will be within a specific society.

In his opinion, the ruling or dominant class dictate the behaviour of the lower classes through their social, intellectual and economic power. He also states that despite the apparent freedom of choice in the arts in France, people’s artistic preferences strongly correlate with their position in the social space. He asserts that class or social standing plays an influential role in determining an individual’s idea of taste. His definition of Capital attempts to incorporate the position of artistic creation within the ‘field of power’ (the dominant power relations or ruling classes) in a specific society, the position of each artist competing for legitimacy within that field (the objective position/class and the objective characteristics of each) and the structured and structuring dispositions which generate practice (the established and accepted definitions of art practice and how the individual fits into these categories/characteristics). Within the context of Africa, the reality is that there is barely an infrastructure to support the production and circulation of art on the continent, which has obvious consequences for its international distribution. The contemporary African artist is thus virtually entirely dependent on Western structures to consume and validate her/his production.

International exhibitions are often curated from existing catalogues, journals and websites and are also informed by recommendations from key contacts. It is very evident that the ways in which African artists are marketed both locally and internationally, that

a touch of 'ethnicity' is often significant, not only in the look of the work they produce but also in how the artist is presented to the world.¹¹ 'These altered realities have sociological, economic and political, as well as aesthetic dimensions. The frequent lack of a viable indigenous art market and the resulting constant flow of "cultural capital" to foreign patrons are not only part of a deeply seated post-colonial economic dependency. More crucially, economic incentives have begun to shape the work produced...'
(Kasfir 1999:65).

Kasfir uses several case studies to illustrate how patronage acts as cultural mediation between artists, their production and their audience. In her research she shows how patrons and brokers of art act as mediators between the artist and their audience in order to promote or sell work created. Through her investigation she exposes how economic incentives began to shape the work created by various artists. Some artists were encouraged by their patrons or brokers to create certain types of artwork in order to increase the work's marketability.¹² Are art patrons and brokers in South Africa encouraging the promotion of certain types of artwork to the international market? South African artist and art historian, Thembinkosi Goniwe comments,

Though the West might seem to dictate the terms of entry into the global art world, artists are not passive and they develop strategies for manipulating and subverting the terms. However, most South African artists (and those from many other places) whose art careers are seductively subjugated by the West must contend with being dominated. They face the

¹¹ For example: Moshekwa Langa was advised early in his career to use the name Moshekwa in favor of his other name Aaron or his nickname 'Blackie' and Godfred Donkor being marketed as a Ghanaian rather than a British artist, which he once mentioned he identified with more (Informal conversation. 2004).

¹² The most written about of these patrons, Mexican born Frank McEwen was very influential within Southern Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. He became the Director of the National Gallery in Zimbabwe and established a workshop aimed at training Zimbabwean artists. As various sculptors were assimilated into this workshop they abandoned their earlier art creation styles and heeded McEwen's advice to

'...look deep within themselves to a collective Shona (Indigenous Zimbabwean tribe) mythology and to avoid anything that bore the taint of 'airport art' – a term he coined – including realist representations of all kinds and common carving materials such as wood and soapstone...The sharp distinction which McEwen drew between pure, original artistic expression and a practice aimed at the craft and souvenir market was deeply impressed upon early workshop sculptors' (Kasfir 1999a:71).

Kasfir explores how both brokerage and patronage within African countries continued to be influenced and dictated by European colonisers until the mid 1990's (Kasfir 1999a:88-123).

challenge of being themselves: to enter the West on their own terms, to resist and subvert the manipulation and coercion of Western condescension, which makes them palatable as different. (cited in Van Wyk (ed) 2004: 37)

Goniwe makes it clear that although the West remains a determining power for entry into the global art milieu, and in the context of South Africa, Black artists are still at the mercy of White custodians, artists are continuously confronted with the challenge of entering this market on their own terms as well as relying on being positioned or marketed by others, i.e. curators, gallerists, collectors, administrators and so on.

The classification of Contemporary Art from Africa is a highly contested space, which seems to be conditioned more by Western reception than artistic intention. It is clear that the West has and continues to structure the 'field of power', which dictates accepted definitions of art practice. Kasfir's observation regarding the studies of African Art makes it clear that the documentation of art production that has taken place both pre and post colonisation is not adequate: '... to refer to contemporary art exclusively as "postcolonial" is to deny it any deeper history and connection to what came before colonial incursion - colonialism in most African countries only represents about sixty years out of an art history extending back at least two thousand years in some places.' (1999a:13) This inadequate documentation of history and more specifically the history of art creation within Africa, makes it difficult to effectively gain the 'Cultural Capital' or code that would facilitate a better understanding of contemporary modes of creation employed by artists from Africa.

Although the chronological period identified by European modernism overlaps with the period marked by Contemporary African Art, and may suggest a casual connection, varying stylistic and philosophical differences challenge this connection.¹³ Within Africa, the modern came along with colonialism. 'A crucial difference between European modernism and contemporary art in Africa is that the latter has since its inception been engaged in political, social and historical matters of interest' (Nzegwu 1998:2). Contemporary African art, therefore, often is derived from radically different cultural

¹³ Critic Clement Greenberg comments; 'There (in Africa) "the modern" came hand in hand with colonialism, and is closely identified with the imposition of social and economic transformation based upon colonialist theories of "improving the native"' (cited in Kasfir 1999a:10).

¹⁴ Professor of African Studies and Philosophy, Interpretation and Culture at Binghamton University, New York.

and historical realities. Nkiru Nzegwu¹¹, makes it clear that the majority of African artists are affected by both colonial and postcolonial circumstances within the continent. She asserts that an expanded understanding of the relationships between art and historical memory, art and identity, art and decolonisation as well as the varied forms of modernity within Africa is sorely needed (1998:2).

Nzegwu asserts that an understanding of the 'contemporary' as it relates to art from Africa begins with acknowledgement of the modern era and its impact on the Postmodern.¹⁵ Postmodernism presumes a conscious awareness of modernism and its success, failures and limitations. Within the context of Africa, varying 'modernities' were experienced at different times, making interpretations of the postmodern sporadic and highly individual (1999:13-14). Artist and art historian, Sallah Hassan states that the umbrella term 'contemporary', used loosely, signifies a wide range of artistic forms and traditions without real engagement with the theoretical or methodological questions raised through the work.¹⁶ Used more strictly, this term refers to paintings, sculptures and prints of formally trained artists and marks the distinction between, '...educationally and non-educationally trained artists' (Nzegwu 1998: 3).

It is still, however, difficult for Africans as well as the rest of the world to adequately contextualise Contemporary African Art. It is very clear that patronage, art history and theory as well as the general market for art is dictated and dominated by the West and this has a broad impact on Africans themselves, even when in a position of power. This dilemma is highlighted in the opinion piece: "Save the Johannesburg Biennale/Sao Paulo and the Africans" by Rasheed Araeen. The second Johannesburg Biennale which was curated by African art critic, writer and curator, Okuwi Enwezor, was commented on;

When Mr. Enwezor was appointed it was hoped that he as an African would understand this and would pay special attention to South Africa's achievements, and would provide a

¹⁵ 'It is acutely characterised by fragmentation of realities and acknowledges, rejection of the epistemology of Euro centrism, and the revelation of the pseudo-nature of the positivist concepts of universalism and objectivity....that underscored cultural multiplicity, facilitated the coexistence of multiple ethnicities, encouraged resistance to hegemonic domination, initiated anti-imperialist struggles, supported trans-culturalisation of values, and disrupted the notion of history as progressive and linear' (Nzegwu 1998:4).

¹⁶ 'Used loosely, "contemporary art" adumbrates an assortment of styles ranging from realist landscapes, portraits and street scenes, to mythological and spiritual symbolism, and from arabesque, geometric and hardedged abstraction. Included in this vibrant eclectic mix are neotraditional sculptures, ceramics and textiles' (Nzegwu 1998: 3).

platform for South Africa to have a dialogue with "the international art community" on this basis... Instead of developing and asserting its unique identity, different from other biennials, formed by the dynamic of its own historical conditions, the Johannesburg Biennale ended up mimicking what was happening in other parts of the western world. The Johannesburg Biennale, in my view, was a failure. It was a case of a missed opportunity for which South Africa had to pay a heavy price, in terms of its intellectual energy, efforts and economic resources which could have been used for much more useful purposes

(Araeen 2000. [online]).

It seems to have been assumed and hoped that as an African, and prominent contributor to contemporary discourse concerned with art from Africa, Enwezor would or should have been able to present and engage with the artwork selected for the Biennale in a different way.

According to Araeen, Enwezor's treatment of this exhibition failed. Enwezor, has been a significant presence in the reconsideration of Africa and written extensively on and frequently curated Contemporary Art from Africa and therefore, it could be argued that Araeen should certainly have expectations of him. Araeen was in the hope that Enwezor would take into account the dynamics of South Africa's past and present historical conditions and in so doing, make this Biennale 'different from other biennales'. His argument is that the second Johannesburg Biennale did not present a view of contemporary African art that was different to that seen on other such shows across the world.

What do African or Asian (for that matter Latin American) curators do when they are allowed into this dominant system with its colonial institutional structures still intact? Do they challenge or reinforce them? We must ask these questions because without asking these questions we would fall into the kind of anti-establishment rhetorics whose only purpose is to gain an entry into the system without a new vision and radical agenda to change it.

(Araeen 2000. [online])

Araeen's expectations, although somewhat founded seem to express the same kind of short-sighted view shown in Sewell's argument regarding 'Africa Remix'. Although it is true that Enwezor should or could have given more attention to South Africa's historical context while making decisions about what artists are included in the show and how their work is presented, the thought that as an African he would somehow automatically be better able to do this is equally problematic. The expectation of Black/African curators and critics to be able to represent or speak for Black people/Africans, negates individual experiences and reinforces the impression that there is a homogenous 'Africaness' or 'Blackness' that unites all African people. This view does not take into account that

although African curators, artists and critics are beginning to create shifts toward an independent vision, the West still determines the 'field of power' in which we all continue and sometimes choose to operate.

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Inescapable Blackness

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"You never forget you are a woman and you never forget you are black"

The above comment was made by Gabsile Ngcobo, a young woman artist and curator living and working in contemporary South Africa, in the film *The luggage is still labelled* by Vuyile Voyiya and Julie McGee. This documentary, made in 2003, was aimed at highlighting the experiences of various artists in South Africa. The focal point of the discussion was on the inescapable labels of 'Black Artist' and 'Black Art' within the context of contemporary South Africa. It is made clear through the discussions within this film, that the residue of the country's history of Apartheid cannot be separated from the present.

The implementation of the Apartheid laws in 1948 encouraged and enforced racial divides, especially concerning the education available to certain groups of the South African population. Legislation regarding living areas as well as other forms of segregation that discriminated against those who were classified as 'non-White'¹⁷ citizens was enforced. 'Apartheid has been notoriously effective in withholding all but the most basic education from the majority of the South African population, a strategy created by its government to prepare Black South Africans for the most menial of occupations'¹⁸ (Atkinson and Breitz, 1999:14). The segment of South Africa's population that was classified as 'Black' according to these rules, were provided with education that intentionally limited intellectual empowerment and therefore employment and income.

The development of a society based on the principles of Apartheid created a class structure based on racial difference. Within the context of South Africa the 'field of power' was and largely still is dominated by a White minority which has resulted in social and professional positioning that has caused black artists (particularly Black women) to have to compete for legitimacy irrespective of the quantity or quality of Cultural Capital they each possess.

¹⁷ 'Non-white': encompasses all those that were historically classified during the colonial and Apartheid periods as other than European or White (Oxford English Dictionary, 1996).

¹⁸ The Bantu Education Act of 1953 enforced the provision of separate and unequal education for the African population. 'The result was, and continues to be, stark inequalities in the entire range of educational conditions – school buildings, sports and other recreational facilities, staff-pupil ratios, qualifications of teachers, subjects taught and so forth. This in turn is reflected in the quality of the education available to Africans and the level of education they achieve as compared to whites' (South African Research Council 1991:7).

provides examples of how race and ethnicity have contributed to the construction of feminine and masculine behavior and work, and how this construction then influences the style, meaning and areas of artistic creation in which men and women operate. However, she unfortunately provides very little information about the Black woman artist's position in her observations.

Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz, editors of the book *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art* emphasise the social and political conditions that have contributed to the formation of representation and identity in South African art. This collection of essays by various contributors provides a diverse range of perspectives relating to knowledge of the factors that influence representation and therefore the way in which artists in South Africa, particularly women artists, view themselves as well as the ways in which others view them.

Atkinson interviewed artist Bongki Dhlomo-Mautloa who relates her experience of being a South African artist trained, living and working in the contemporary art world. She provides an account of how her political, social and economic background has contributed to her identification of herself as a Black woman artist. Dhlomo-Mautloa further comments on how she has been represented as well as misrepresented and how this has influenced her self image. She states; 'The problems that existed when I first joined the art field have not changed. At every point I am made to remember that I am a Black woman in South Africa' (cited in Atkinson 1999:118).

South African artist Bongekile Bengu, provides insight into her experience as a young Black woman artist that has received training in European art history and theory. She was educated in the United States of America and completed her Masters in Fine Art at the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town. Her interview for the *African Arts Journal* of the summer 2000 provides a personal account of her position. She mentions the fact that there are certain stereotypes associated with the perceived identity of the Black woman and more specifically, the Black woman artist in South Africa. 'Every day I experience stereotyping, racism and sexism. Women, especially Black women are still not taken seriously' (Coleman 2000: 46). Dhlomo-Mautloa, Ngcobo and Bengu make it clear that they too consistently remind themselves and are always reminded by others of their race and country / continent of origin.

Bengu's work received no critical discourse between the years 1997 and 1999 when she held her first solo exhibitions. 'Viewers dismissed her imagery of strong Black women as 'romantic', and her interest in producing "African" imagery as either exclusive in its insistence on Black experience or too inclusive in its perspective that transcends the local' (Coleman 2000:47). Bengu felt as if people were too threatened to speak or felt the work insignificant or were unsure what to conclude. This is experienced by other Black artists, including myself in various circumstances.

A variety of assumptions are made about me as an artist as well as the work I create as a result of my chosen medium in the context of my being African. Many people have associated my choice to use the organic material of cowhide with my cultural background. There has been the thought that this material directly relates to the practice of giving and receiving lobola.¹⁹ I was unsure of how to feel about these responses, as my work was never intended to directly reference this practice. What 'code' was being applied to the understanding of my work? Were those assumptions fuelled by the fact that I am a Black woman artist working in this medium? Would the same conclusions be reached if I were making the same work but was not Black or female?

My educational experience is one that was historically reserved for and accessible to the White population of this country. I have since the beginning of my education attended historically 'White only' schools and therefore received the same type of education as my White peers. Through the type of education I have received as well as my cultural and family influences, I have experienced a combination of 'privileges' (which has provided me with a form of Cultural Capital not accessible to many other Black learners that were educated during the same period) and a strong understanding of my heritage. Does the material I use reflect the type of education I have received in art creation? How is my work received and understood or misunderstood as a result of a lack of understanding of the material I choose to use?

¹⁹ *Lobola*: An exchange indigenous to the Nguni people of Southern Africa, that occurs between two families as an act of good faith and a solidifier of the promise of marriage. The family of a woman promised to be married is presented with cows as a gift of exchange and good will from the family of the man she is to marry. This practice has recently begun to receive criticism that it encourages and enforces the objectification and commodification of women and the 'sale' of women for cows.

I recently participated in a group exhibition held at Centro Atlantico De Arte Moderno (CAAM), in Las Palmas de Grand Canaria (Canary Islands). This exhibition entitled 'Olvida Quein Soy - Erase me from who I am' was aimed at presenting new ways of viewing art from South Africa and developing new conversations around the work as well as the artists from this region. It was therefore very surprising to read the first draft of one of the catalogue essays regarding my work. In an essay entitled "Perspectives on African embodiment", a scholarly writer wrote the following comment:

In the final section of this paper, I would like to comment very briefly on a few works from the exhibition *Olvida quien soy/Erase me from whom I am* in relation to two important (and, yes, variously problematic) themes: animals and masks. Historically, one of the commonest ways of denying the humanity of African people was to compare them to animals; for contemporary artists, therefore, to evoke the animal as symbol of the human is a strategy, which is not without risk. In the late 1970s, for example, South African artist Ezrom Legae used images of chickens -- plucked, mutilated, even crucified -- to represent the suffering of black South Africans, particularly the children of the Soweto uprising. Not the greatest example of symbolism, you might think, but for Legae, it was the sheer numbers of chickens -- you could kill one, but there would always be another to take its place -- which made them useful images of humble, but hopeful, resistance. The strategy adopted in Nandipha Mntambo's "Stepping into self" [IS THAT THE CORRECT TITLE??] from *Olvida quien soy* is both bolder and riskier. Here, a series of slim female torsos constructed of different kinds of fur move in procession, with an upright posture, which seems to exude confidence. On one level, this recalls an earlier piece of South African art such as Sydney Kumalo's "Walking Torso 111" from 1978, but whereas Kumalo's torso evokes a generalised humanity via its anonymous, non-racialised musculature, Mntambo 'steps into' a particular identity which is female, and 'black' (the fur is predominantly black), and which bravely confronts a history of racist associations of Africans and monkeys (Unpublished draft of essay for possible use in the 'Olvida Quein Soy -Erase me from who I am' exhibition catalogue).²⁰

The writer, while preceding his comment with a range of appropriately referenced observations and readings on the misrepresentation of Africans, is not offering any art critical insight to my work, but an interpretation that is based on racial and gender stereotypes as well as inappropriate assumptions. Regardless of the countless efforts I made to provide him with information about my work with regard to material, process and intention, it is clear that the information was considered unimportant to the writer.

²⁰ Unpublished draft of essay by Partrick Williams sent to me for proof reading in 2006.

He unfortunately had not even bothered to use the correct title for the work displayed, this seems to have amplified his misreading of the work I create. *Balandzeli*, (the work included in this exhibition) is made from a particular animal: a cow. Does the use of animal skin implicitly make any reference to a 'monkey' or its related racist associations? To which Africans does the association of 'monkeys' refer? All Africans? South Africans? Does the aesthetic decision to use black hide necessarily indicate identity as a Black woman?

A colleague has mentioned time and time again that the fact that I am Black and working in this medium will cause people to have certain associations or expectations of my work. She believes that I perpetuate stereotypical thought because of my choice of materials such as hide, bone and beads. Therefore according to this conclusion, to create what I want, in the media I prefer will always be read and interpreted in a certain way.

There seem to be expectations and assumptions by non-Black observers and critics regarding what sort of art Black artists produce. This implies that it is essentially 'different' and should fulfil certain criteria that make it identifiably 'Black' as several comments by artists and critics in Voyiwa and McGee's video (2003) indicate. Goniwe comments; 'The term 'Black Artist' seems to imply that certain themes, ideas and stylistic traits will be stereotypical to this art creation.' South African artist Moshekwa Langa comments; 'People are looking for specific ideas of Blackness but when they meet something that is not so clear cut, it's a huge problem. So if I don't fit into that mould, then I am not Black.' South African art critic Lloyd Pollack states, 'No set of criteria has been established for the critiquing of 'Black Art' the notion of quality is judged by a very narrow and selective white frame of reference' (Voyiwa & McGee 2003).

The assumption that there is a fundamental 'Blackness' or 'Black experience' and that art made by Black artists, whilst it is indeed assessed from a selective White frame of reference, needs its own set of criteria for critique is short-sighted. This kind of thinking suggests that there is a homogenous 'Blackness' and negates individual intentions and experiences.

Sadly, conservative white artists and critics who control the cultural production of writing about art seem to have the greatest difficulty accepting that one can be critically aware of visual politics – the way race, gender, and class shape art practices (who makes art, how it sells, who values it, who writes about it) – without abandoning a fierce commitment to

aesthetics. Black artists and critics must continuously confront an art world so rooted in a politics of white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal exclusion that our relationship to art and aesthetics can be submerged by the effort to challenge and change this existing structure (hooks 1995:5).

While bell hooks makes reference to the situation in America in her writing, her viewpoint is pertinent to South Africa, where control of cultural production and consumption is still by predominantly determined by White individuals, as well as the continent and the Diaspora where the Western model is either practiced or dominates from afar.

Frieda H. W. Tesfagiorgis states; 'Without a discourse of their own, Black women artists remain fixed in the trajectory of displacement, hardly moving beyond the defensive posture of merely responding to their objectification by others' (Bobo 2001:147). Tesfagiorgis makes it clear that discourse and dialogue surrounding the work created by Black women is important and that positioning one's self rather than allowing or relying on being positioned by others is key in avoiding objectification. Tesfagiorgis states that artists, Black women in particular, need to clearly articulate how they would like their work to be understood rather than only relying on critics and writers who may misinterpret the work they create. It seems more important for artists in general to position themselves within art discourse so as to avoid being positioned by others.

As an emerging artist, attempting to take ownership of my position and locating both my artistic creation and theoretical discussion of my work is paramount. My choice to use a culturally and historically loaded material within a context that is somewhat removed from these aspects is a part of my positioning myself both in the centre and on the margins of both Nguni and Western cultural practices. Within the inescapable reality of being stereotyped because of my location, gender and race, I am positioned by others within the broader art milieu.

Between Worlds

University of Cape Town

I create work in a material that historically has certain associations and is linked to my cultural background in certain ways but exists within a context that is removed from these aspects although I am still located in Africa. Subjective views of the significance of this material, drawn from the past but with reference to the present are particularly interesting to me. There has been the question of whether my work is African or has links to my Africaness. The work I create definitely has some African link but not exclusively. It is my wish to examine the broader space that my work could occupy, allowing it to exist outside the confines of the reductive readings expressed so far.

Existing and working within the binary²¹ of Western and Nguni cultural practices places the work I create in a complex space. Working and existing 'between worlds' presents varying opportunities and challenges for individual artists who are located in Africa, or within the Diaspora. The binary opposition occurring between the West (dominant centre) and Africa (subordinate margin) as it relates to the creation and reception of art is expressed through the work created by artists such as Sokari Douglas Camp and Godfried Donkor.

Nigerian born Sokari Douglas Camp is a Black woman artist who lives and works in London. Feminist critic Jacqueline Bobo comments; 'She has placed herself in an environment where she can freely produce what she chooses without experiencing the limitations imposed on her by Kalabari²² or other traditions' (2001:151). Camp creates work that is impressionistic drawing on themes of masquerade, symbolic forms, colours, textures and sounds. She works in metal, a material that within Kalabari conventions of art creation is restricted to male production. Camp's subversion of assigned male and female roles within Kalabari cultural practices would, according to this comment, not be well received in Nigeria. Bobo seems to suggest that Camp is free to produce what she likes because of her choice to locate herself within the Diaspora. Does this then imply that she would not be creating the same type of work or be as successful if she were still living and working in Africa?

²¹ *Binary or Binary Opposition*: 'Binary oppositions reduce the potential of difference into polar opposites: Self/Other, rational/emotional, metropolis/periphery. In binarism, one term represents the dominant centre, the other term represents the subordinate margin' (Sarup 1996:57). Within this context the 'dominant centre' is represented by Western influences and the 'subordinate margin' by Nguni influences.

²² *Kalabari*: The Kalabari are an Ijo-speaking people who live on 23 islands in the Niger delta of south-eastern Nigeria (American Museum of Natural History).

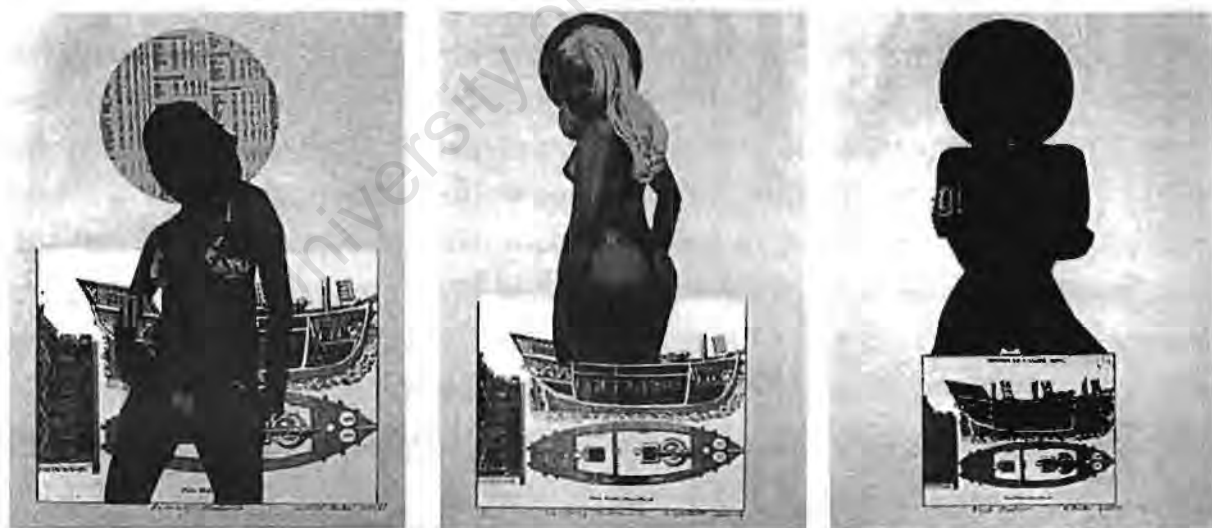


Sokari Douglas Camp
Flying fish with bubbles
Steel, wood and feathers
232 cm (H)
1995



Sokari Douglas Camp
Iriabo woman in her prime
Wood, steel and mirrors
187 cm (H)
1995

Artist Godfried Donkor expressed similar feelings in his lecture held at the Michaelis School of Fine Art on the 27 March 2007. Donkor is a Ghanaian born artist who moved to Britain at a young age and has lived there as well as in the Caribbean since. His work is greatly influenced by the presence of Africa and Africans in 18th century Britain as well as the British colony of the Caribbean. He locates himself as a 'British, African and Caribbean' and asserts his identification with all three places. Through the use of collage, Donkor has used both colonial and more contemporary imagery to express his thoughts on the commodification of the Black body. His series of work titled *Madonnas* comprises collected images of contemporary Caribbean 'pin-up' girls, a print of Christopher Columbus' ship as well as various slave ships used to transport Black people to what would become the African Diaspora. These seemingly objectifying and highly opinionated images have been met with various responses all over the world. Donkor mentioned that although he has shown these images in various exhibitions world wide, according to an art dealer he works with in Ghana, he would never be able to show them there. The art dealer made it clear that this type of imagery would be seen as offensive and obscene, within the context of Ghana because of their content.



Godfried Donkor
Madonnas
Mixed media collage on paper
48 x 64 cm
2001

It is clear that the choice to locate oneself as part of the Diaspora, rather than in Africa, presents a different set of circumstances and opportunities. The ability to move between the two locations/positions allows artists like Camp and Donkor, curators and writers like Njami and Enwezor, to exist both on the 'margin' (identified with Africa and some of the more stereotypical ideas of how Africans are understood) and in the 'centre' (located in the West), therefore being able to function more freely.

Within the context of the globalised world, where migration and the greater receptiveness to non-Western cultural practices is on the increase, many artists both on the African continent and in other parts of the world find themselves occupying the space of the hybrid.²³ Artists such as Iranian born Shirin Neshat and Nigerian born artist Yinka Shonibare explore their multicultural influences as well as their individual hybrid positions through their art creation. Both artists use themselves as object and subject of some of the work they create and make reference to their individual cultural backgrounds as well as Western cultural practices.

Shirin Neshat lives and work in the United States of America, she left Iran in 1974 and did not return until 1990. The work she began to create depicts the role of women in Iran and the phenomenon of veiling behind a black chador.²⁴ Through her use of herself as well as other Islamic women, Neshat uses the mediums of photography and film in her explorations of the topic of Feminism and contemporary Islam. Her four-part video work *The Shadow under the Web* which is screened simultaneously on all four corners of an exhibition room, depicts a woman in a chador (Neshat herself) running uninterruptedly beside a historic city wall, through a mosque or bazaar and down empty narrow alleys. The locations chosen for this film make reference to the divisions of public (occupied by men) and private (occupied by women) spaces within Islamic society. 'Neshat's film, which contains biographical features and whose subject is the transition between two worlds, contains – like her subsequent videos as well – deliberate inconsistencies that bring out the different societal structures, patterns of behavior and thought, taboos

²³ *Hybrid*: Something made up of a mixture of different elements. 'In the case of cultural identities, hybridity refers to the fact that cultures are not discrete phenomena; instead, they are always in contact with one another and this contact leads to cultural mixed-ness' (Huddart 2006:7).

²⁴ *Chador*: a dark traditional garment worn by Muslim and sometimes by Hindu women that covers almost all of the head and body (Encarta World English Dictionary).

and contradictions of Western and Islamic society' (Grosenick (ed) 2001:383). Neshat's experiences of both Western and Islamic cultural practices allow her to comment on both positions and how they relate to her art creation.



Shirin Neshat
The Shadow under the Web
Video installation
1997

Shonibare (2004) describes himself as a 'post-colonial hybrid' and presents a pioneering artistic contribution to the current and contemporary discourse around globalisation. His work ranges from sculpture displayed in installation format, photography as well as painting. His staged photographs explore his position on both sides of the binary of Western and African historical context. The series of photographs titled *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* shows him masquerading as a Victorian Dandy.²⁵ Within these pictures, Shonibare portrays himself as the 'perfect Victorian man', his positioning at the centre with everybody's gaze, implies that he is the object of desire. Shonibare seeks to deconstruct expectations of the Victorian narrative by portraying a Black person (himself) as a member of the aristocracy. It would have been most unusual to encounter a Black person in the

²⁵ *Dandy*: A man who is concerned with his elegant appearance and as a result is considered to be the best class.

circumstances stages within his photographs.²⁶ Through the work Shonibare creates, he makes transparent the dichotomy between Africa and Europe and interpretations of the 'exotic other' and 'civilised European'. 'Shonibare's work challenges all of us to take transtextuality seriously. We're not black or white, Igbo or Nigerian, European or African. We are all of these at the same time and from time to time' (2004:23). Through his use of textiles that have become identified as 'typically African' within his sculptural work, Shonibare provokes and disrupts perceptions of identity. Shonibare's use of patterned batik fabrics, which are produced in the West and then exported to Africa, highlights the contradictions that are present within what is imagined to be 'authentic'. Internationally, these fabrics, although they bear Western trademarks, have become associated with 'typically African' design and textile making style. Within the context of Africa however, the wax brands from Holland and England are considered a mark of authenticity as they are seen to be of highest quality available. Shonibare's work makes it clear that our individual identities are influenced by the global world and upsets fixed notions of what is perceived to be European and African through his art production.

My engagement with material and the possibilities that cow hide presents with regards to art production and how this relates to my straddling between Western and Nguni



Yinka Shonibare
Diary of a Victorian Dandy
Series of 5 C-prints
183 x 228.6 cm
1998

²⁶ During the Victorian period, most black people who lived in England/Europe were servants or slaves; it would have been unusual or odd to encounter a black person who was an aristocrat (Shonibare 2004:38).

cultural practices is with the aim to disrupt perceptions and preconceptions of identity. Through the use of myself as both subject and object I explore how multicultural influences have impacted on my artistic creation. Like the work produced by Shonibare and Neshat I seek to make it clear that our individual identities are influenced by the global world where the binary oppositions of center (West) and margin (Africa) are in constant flux. Like Shonibare and Janine Antoni who I discuss later, I seek to challenge perceptions and stereotypes of both art materials and production. These two artists engage with material in ways that are influenced by their individual backgrounds but exist within a space that is removed from these cultural identities. As in Shonibare's case the material I choose to use has certain inescapable cultural associations, unlike Neshat

Yinka Shonibare
Boy/Girl
Life-size mannequin, Dutch wax
printed cotton
180 x 150 x 70 cm
1998



however, my intention is not to consciously comment on cultural traditions. The animals I use are bred to be killed and their body parts consumed in various ways within a contemporary context. They are not animals that have been bred within a Nguni kraal or with the intention of being used within Nguni cultural practice. Although cows have been significant in my memories of certain aspects of Nguni cultural life, the animals I use have no direct connection to contemporary Nguni existence.

University of Cape Town

In Memory

University of Cape Town

Although I do not directly reference Nguni cultural practice in my work, I am conscious that my experience and heritage is present. Through the medium of cowhide I have investigated notions of personal and cultural memory. My subconscious²⁷ thoughts and how these translate into dreams that in turn influence the artwork I create has become an important aspect of my process. My first body of work began from the residue of a dream: something that had come to me in my conscious state and relayed itself through my unconscious. This dialogue between the dichotomies of my conscious and subconscious makes reference to methods employed by various art practitioners.²⁸ Contemporary artists like South African sculptor, Noria Mabasa have been inspired in similar ways and continue to draw inspiration for their creation in this way. 'If I start to work with clay or wood, I don't see anything. Then as I start it comes to me here (points to her head) and then it's coming and coming and I don't know how, but it is wonderful and the piece becomes something...' (cited in Press(ed) 2003:15).

Subjective views of the significance of cowhide, drawn from the past but with reference to the present impact on both understanding and engagement with the work I create. The cultural and historical memory associated with this material is a continuous element in the interpretation and experience of my work.

According to the model employed by Caldicott and Fuchs (2003) in *Cultural Memory: essays on European literature and history*, individuals of a group rely on the collective to assist them in acquiring memories of their combined past or history. Individual memories of the past, although dependent on collective experience, have a unique reference point to the self as a 'locative system'. Memory is thus not typically an individual attribute but is shaped by the society that an individual emerges from. We therefore, according to this theory, remember the past from the perspective of our contemporary world. This locates our memories in-between the past and the present.

'Memory as a relationship to a meaningful past can therefore change according to the

²⁷ *Subconscious*: Mental activity not directly perceived by your consciousness, from which memories, feelings, or thoughts can influence your behaviour without you realising it (Encarta World English Dictionary).

²⁸ Many Surrealist artists have drawn strong links to unconscious processes and how dreams influence their production. This is true for many works of created in the era of Modern Expressionism as well as the Romantic poetry of 19th century.

emerging needs of an individual or group. Its time-horizon spans the past, the present, and the future: the past is retrieved in the present with a view to providing some orientation for the future. This goes some way towards explaining why we forget, rediscover, and revise aspects of our personal and collective pasts. Thus memories are not static representations of past events but "advancing stories" through which individuals and communities forge their sense of identity' (2003: 12).

Therefore, it can be said that history, memory, narrative and fiction are fused in the collective or individual response to a prevailing situation or opinion, which we may choose to call 'culture'. Just as memory can be individual or collective, the concept of culture may be objective or subjective. Culture as it is understood, is influenced by a measure of fact (based on fact rather than thought or opinion) and fiction (based on opinion rather than facts or evidence).

My individual encounters with Nguni history through both my family and immediate community have influenced my understanding of this cultural practice. The forgotten, rediscovered and revised aspects of the collective experience of belonging to this group have influenced the position of my individual location within the present. My experiences of the significance of cows and their role as sacrifices in rituals of birth, initiation, marriage, thanksgiving, *Ukungxengxeza*²⁹ and death, have fuelled my interest in the material of cowhide. The cow as a primary producer, both in life and death, of many valuable products useful to humans has become a focal point of the significance of this material within my art creation.

The roles played by both men and women within both Nguni and Western society are defined and based on a patriarchal structure. Within a Nguni cultural context it is seen as particularly inappropriate and taboo for women to involve themselves in rituals or activities reserved only for males within the group. The primary responsibility of the men is in the grazing land; they are assigned with the task of looking after the group's animals.³⁰ Women however are responsible for the agriculture and home keeping for the group and are not encouraged to involve themselves with any activity related to the birth, keeping or death of cattle or any other livestock. 'The cattle kraal is exclusively under the control of males and it is where they slaughter all sacrificial animals' (Mnende 1999:6).

²⁹ *Ukungxengxeza*: appeasement.

³⁰ These include cattle, sheep, chickens and pigs.

The sacrificed animals are then skinned and the meat of the animal is passed onto the women in the group for cooking. Men are in charge of the tanning and preservation of the hide, which is then used for various purposes. Each male within the group is responsible for the making of his own attire. The making of *ibhsehu*³¹, *umgqizo*³², *ihawu*³³ and *isicoco*³⁴ is taught by the older men in the group and passed on through oral and practical teaching to younger and teenage males. Women only use and prepare the hide of an animal to create their own garments (skirts and chest coverings) as well as those worn by their young children. (Informal conversation with Rev. T.V. Mntambo 24 March 2007)

My use of the hide of cows for the creation of my artwork disrupts the binary of assigned male and female roles, both in the contemporary and past. Responses to an installation I recently created have made it clear that being a woman working in this material interrupts expectations of both the role of women within Nguni cultural practices as well as the artwork women create within a contemporary context. A group of older Black men discussing my work had the thought that it had to have been created by a male artist. In their opinion and also as a result of their lived experiences, working in the medium of cowhide was reserved for men and was not women's work. They were very confused and listened in disbelief to the fact that I was the artist.

Through challenging the accepted patriarchal structure as well as perceived divisions of labour within Nguni traditional practice, it can be said that the work I create is a form of subconscious defiance or deviance from these norms. As men would traditionally create shields used for protection, the works I have created are hollow casings and can be interpreted as a protective covering or something that has been shed. The work I have produced is reminiscent of objects such as containers, shells, casings, coverings, shields, armor, and crusts. What viewers see is the absence of the physical body: the illusion and residue of what was. Due to the way I choose to hang my work, I would like for viewers to be given the illusion that they can 'step into' the hide and become part of the artwork or take up a space or position that is not theirs. This is a negative space that only exists

³¹ *Ibeshu*: Cowhide skirt worn by men as a covering for their buttocks.

³² *Umgqizo*: Shin coverings usually made of sheepskin.

³³ *Ihawu*: Shield made from cowhide.

³⁴ *Isicoco*: Head band made from thin strip of cowhide.

between sculptures or between the work and the actual installation space where it is hung. While aspects of my cultural heritage may be present in the conception of the forms I create, it is not implicit in the way in which I hope the viewer will engage with and interpret them.

University of Cape Town

My body

University of Cape Town

The female body is the focus of my practical production and therefore could be associated with Feminism. The interrogation of representations of the female body has been central to aspects of Feminism.³⁵ The umbrella term Feminism does not refer to one but rather several branches of feminist thought. Feminist critic and writer, bell hooks asserts that, 'Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression' (hooks 2000:8). A main concern in much Feminist writing on visual arts has been the gaze or the look. It has been argued that the portrayal of women in images, are constructed in order to be looked at by men (Bonner & Goodman 1992:14). Feminist critics, writers and artists have all worked at challenging this dissymmetry with some success. The term Feminism has most often been defined and used by middle-class White women living predominantly in Europe, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. Much of the earlier writing on this subject did not take into account the experience of Black women within these environments. Although both Black and White women were and continue to be affected by patriarchal systems, Black women found themselves doubly impacted on by patriarchal rule and White supremacy (Cliff 1992:142). Black feminist writing that acknowledges this position is from the perspective of African American women and their views on the oppression and marginalisation they have, and to a degree still encounter.

Since the 1960s women artists in the West have been particularly concerned with asserting control over how their bodies are viewed and understood. Women artists have experimented variously with images of the female body to oppose construction of the feminine, for the (mostly) male gaze. Representations of the female body varied as some of these artists chose to use the images of other women while others opted to use themselves as both object and subject of their creation. Performance artist Elanor Antin presented a work in which she lost ten pounds of her body weight over thirty-six days. During this performance she took a series of one hundred and forty four pictures documenting her transformation. This work titled, *Carving, A Traditional Sculpture* demonstrates the way masculine visual ideology, through its power over women's representations within the media, can make women sculpt themselves to fit this mould.

³⁵ *Feminism*: 'Feminism as a "word" has most often and most extensively been defined and employed by middle-class white women, predominantly in Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia. But the larger project of feminism – its implications, its perspectives, its strategies, its possibilities – appeals (albeit in varying degrees) to women of all cultures, ages, races, religions and classes' (Bonner & Goodman 1992:2).

I have chosen not to examine my work in a Feminist context but to consider it in relation to explorations of the female body in recent work by two South African artists. Lolo Veleko and Zanele•Muholi, could be argued to be challenging the roles historically associated with Black women as well as the art they create. Veleko and Muholi use their bodies and those of others to explore various aspects and interpretations of 'Blackness' and the female body. Both women are photographers, which is still a comparatively rare medium for Black women art practitioners, working and living in South Africa.

Lolo Veleko, in her series of photographs entitled *Not Blac [sic] Enough* uses herself as the subject of her exploration and interpretation of 'Blackness'. She uses clothing, makeup and cropping of her photographs to create various guises and disguises. Through creating different versions of herself she problematises the thought that there is a single interpretation of being herself, being Black and being a woman.



Lolo Veleko
Self-portraits (series)
Photographic paper
3 x (36 x 23.5) cm
2003-2004



Zanele Muholi, in her photographs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex individuals within the Johannesburg community confronts expectations on how the Black body has been and should be portrayed. She presents a shift in the dynamics of representation through her use of herself and others as subjects and '...Zanele Muholi ushers in a new language to articulate Black lesbian sexuality creatively and politically at the same time. She visualises it, represents it, captures it, defines it, traces its routes, and imagines its world anew' (Ngcobo 2006 [online]). Through her work she explores aspects of contemporary culture engaging with themes ranging from virginity testing within Zulu culture, homophobia and sexual orientation within the Black community as well as the stereotypes associated with gender. Muholi's work emphasises the importance of looking beyond just the image of her subjects, and so encourages greater engagement with the nuanced meanings of the various layers of Black South African lesbian life. Her work does not present an all-encompassing view of Black lesbian women but forces viewers to respond to what they see (or avoid), thus confronting their own assumptions. Her imagery invites new conversations about how women, specifically Black women are represented and challenges reductive reading of her subject.



Zanele Muholi
Bra
Photographic paper
2003



Zanele Muholi
Tocmyboys
Photographic paper
2004

The people that these artists photograph, including themselves, are 'Black' and yet present a wide spectrum of experiences, which reinforce the fact that there is no single viewpoint or interpretation of 'Blackness' and interfere with expectations of Black experience and representation. Both these women are from vastly different backgrounds and have had individual experiences of the art milieu. They present artwork concerned with very different realities that do not link their subjects in any particular way. It is clear that the work created by both these artists and hopefully the work presented for this degree, challenge prevailing notions of and assumptions about the nature of Black Art or art made by Black people and particularly women, whether it be in the content, medium, interpretation, or all three.

As mentioned, my chosen medium of cowhide has sparked various assumptions about me as an artist as well as the work I create. Many people have and continue to associate my choice to use this organic material with my cultural background, particularly practices such as lobola because of the link between women and cattle. My intention is rather to disrupt expectations and explore possibilities of the representation of the female body. While cowhide may not be a particularly surprising medium for an African woman to use in art making, presenting the life size female body in fragments, a hair covered body that is usually virtually hairless, cast from life and presented in an installation format is not a particularly characteristic method of working for African woman artists in South Africa, or associated with Nguni cultural practice. Like the work created by Muholi and Veleko, which reinforces the fact that there is no single viewpoint or interpretation of 'Blackness' or the Black experience, my intention is that the work presented here encourages new ways of looking at the female body, but not specifically defined as a Black body.

Through the use of myself as object and subject of my art creation, I have investigated the broader themes of interpretations of 'ideal female' and notions of femininity.³⁶ Encounters of what is perceived to be a desirable woman within Western norms is what I have seen portrayed in contemporary popular culture. Magazines and television re-enforce images of thin, tall, usually White (light-skinned if Black) hairless (except for hair on the head, which is usually long and flowing) women as the idyllic female. Within the Nguni cultural context however, the types of references used as signifiers of perceptions of

³⁶ The quality of looking and behaving in the ways conventionally appropriate for a woman or girl (Encarta World English Dictionary).

beauty and desirability are not visually portrayed. Opinions on what the 'ideal female' should look like within this context are passed on orally. Women who are thought to be too thin are said to be unhappy or unhealthy. A more curvaceous figure is perceived to be the ideal as this is an outward reflection of happiness, fertility and living a good life. Most people within Nguni groups are comparatively short; a woman who is too tall (in comparison to the majority of men) is not desirable. Being light-skinned counts in one's favour and women are required to have hair on their heads to allow for them to be distinguishable from the men. There is however no recorded visual references depicting what borders exist between these two opposing looks.

The work I create seeks to challenge and subvert preconceptions regarding representation of the female body with reference to both the above-mentioned views. The hair covered but arguably beautiful female figures I create disrupt perceptions of attraction and repulsion. Being confronted with a hairy life-size woman who is not necessarily unequivocally repulsive causes various reactions, which have encouraged some viewers to re-think their ideas of the desirable. This image does not conform to conventional ideas of female beauty. Initial reactions to my first installations highlighted the almost invisible line between the attractive and repulsive. Some viewers of this work were intrigued by the shiny, soft looking surface of the hair on the sculptures and the form, which suggests a sensual quality and yet were simultaneously disgusted by the residues of the scent of dung and fat that filled the room. A viewer who braved touching one of my sculptures was shocked to discover that what he was inquisitively rubbing was a cast of my breasts. His initial intrigue with what seemed to be unfamiliar (the hairy object), and then the unexpected recognition of form (female breast) seemed to confuse and unsettle him.

This mixed reaction of intrigue and disgust to the work I create parallels my experiences while I am creating each piece. Interest in the chemical process as well as experimenting with my control over organic material and by implication, control over my body, intrigues me enough to compel my continued work in this medium. Being confronted with the repulsive smell and textures of salted fat, half dried cow dung and musty wet hair causes repeated repulsion but also a consciousness of the corporeal.

Through the interpretation of my own and my mother's bodies, I have taken control of their representation, and directed the way in which viewers encounter these forms both in their material realization and installation. I hope in this way to move beyond the defensive

posture and objectification that Tesfagiorgis mentions, as well as the exploitation and oppression to which hooks refers, and to subvert expectations and assumptions about the female body and about the Black female body. The figures although hanging, have assertiveness in their posture and are intended to be sensuous but ambiguous in their presence. The figures in characteristically submissive or vulnerable poses: *Beginning of the Empire* and *Indlovukati* have arguably paradoxically gained an authority through translation into hide. While these fragments of female form may elicit repulsion, it is a repulsion intended to evoke the residue of life and the actual presence of the corporeal rather than the female body as victim, damaged, abused or abject.³⁷

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³⁷ Abjection can be defined as an extension of the idea of female body as 'object', both objectified by male gaze, but also victim of physical violence. Abjection is the passivity of the feminine as 'object' compounded by the failure of the female subject to react.

Locating Me in order to see You

University of Cape Town

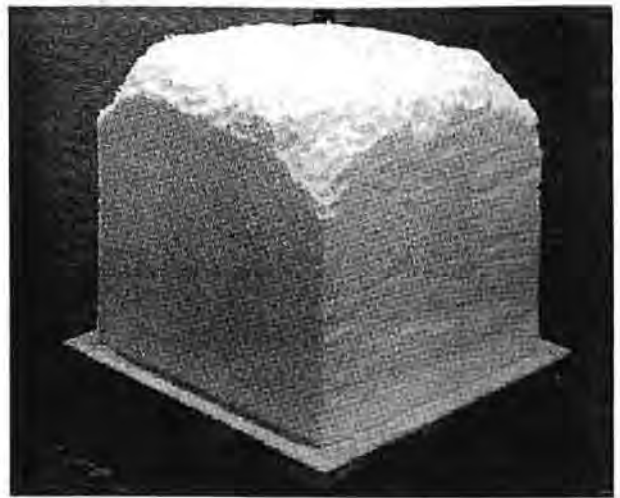
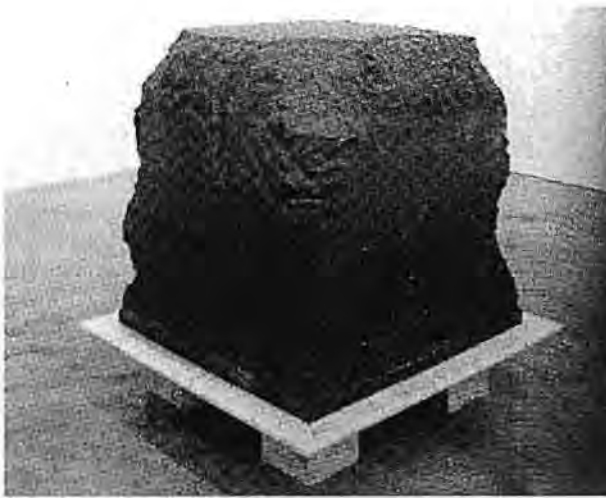
The work I have produced as part of this degree explores aspects of influence and power through the manipulation and shaping of cowhide into the desired form. My artistic creation is always greatly informed by the process leading up to the final art piece. I thus choose to purchase my material as raw as possible in order to fully engage with the amount of influence I have over the final product. The organic nature of cowhide is affected by environmental factors such as humidity, warmth, cold and rain. These factors continuously shift the control and influence I have over my final art piece.³⁸

The material quality of my art pieces is extremely important to my production and prompted my interest in the work of Janine Antoni. She has become acclaimed for the range of unusual materials she uses as well as her unconventional performative modes. Exploring the theme of aesthetic and cultural meaning of sexual difference, she transforms the daily rituals of eating, sleeping, washing and applying makeup into sculptural process. Antoni's preoccupation with material has motivated her exploration of various substances ranging from chocolate, lard, soap, mascara, lipstick and hair dye to produce her work. In her performance *Gnaw* she carves into two similar blocks, one made from chocolate and the other of lard, using her mouth as a tool. Chewing on both blocks (on separate occasions) until she exhausts herself, Antoni comments on a social dynamic based on pleasure and beauty. Antoni's work makes comment on the pushing against the physical limits of the body and the loss of control over one's physicality. She collects the discarded lumps of lard and creates lipsticks and with the chocolate heart-shaped sweet trays which she displays together with the blocks to complete the work.

Antoni also experiments with cowhide and uses it as a medium for art creation in various ways. Her works *Saddle*, *Bridal* and *Naked* all created in 2000, explore this material and the themes of cycles of living and dying, roughness and delicacy, thoughtfulness and absurdity. Gregory Volk describes her installation created for The Wanås Foundation sculpture project 2001;

Nearby, an entire raw cowhide was stretched, spread-eagled across the space from wall to wall (*Bridle*, 2000) It resembled a drying skin at a tannery, until you noticed that parts of it had been cut out to form a leather daypack which remains attached to the hide: if you were to wear the pack, you'd also be draped in the entire skin of the animal. On the floor,

³⁸ My technical methods and understanding were learned from a taxidermist.



Janine Antoni
Gnaw
600lbs of chocolate
gnawed by the artist
240 x 240 x 240 cm
1992

a tanned cowhide was similarly cut to make a pair of attached shoes and a pair of gloves (*Naked*, 2000). Here, practical or fashionable consumer items reverted from the boutique or one's clad body to the dead animal from which they came, but at the same time Antoni's quietly dazzling works were unencumbered by moralizing. Way over at the far end of the room, an entire dried and tanned cowhide (*Saddle*, 2000) took the shape of a person (Antoni, in fact) on all fours on the floor. She knelt on the floor while covered by a wet hide, waiting until it dried and assumed her shape: instead of her riding a cowhide saddle on a horse, a cowhide 'saddle' rides her

(www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag01/janfeb01/wanas/wanas.shtml).

Antoni's work, while commenting on the limits of the human body, makes reference to the use of the body as a tool for art creation as well as the use of unconventional material. Antoni uses her body to create work that engages themes of compulsive activity and repetitive action. She uses hide as a medium to comment on how humans are compulsively consuming and discarding products of our modern day culture. Within the above-mentioned works, she presents consumer products (saddle, shoes, and gloves) in their rawest form (tanned cowhide).

Antoni's use of this medium within her work has interestingly not been interpreted to have links to her cultural background nor to the work created within Inuit cultural



Janine Antoni
Saddle
Full rawhide
270 x 320 x 790 cm
2000

practices. The different reactions to Antoni's and my use of the material of hide seem to highlight that reductive readings of the work I create may be fuelled by the fact that I am a Black woman artist. It is apparent then, that the fact that I am Black and an artist from Africa working in this medium, the work I create is received and understood within a narrow and stereotypical viewpoint.

Although the process that leads to the realisation of my work is very important, unlike Antoni, I do not present it as part of the artwork. To produce the figures, a body cast is taken which is then assembled into a sculpture onto which I stretch the wet cowhide. The hide is treated but not dried between being separated from the animal and stretched on the sculpture where it dries to acquire the form. The smells and textures I experience form part of the interest and curiosity with which I work and the simultaneous repulsion and disgust I experience as I make each artwork. The repeated performance of grinding away the salty layers of fat on the inside of each hide before applying tanning chemicals, washing sand and dung from the hair which is done by myself, is both punishment and reward. Through pushing the boundaries of what the material itself can withstand and what I can endure, I seek to examine the power I have over myself and over the material as I work. This process, like the repeated compulsive actions employed by Antoni, is

part of explorations of how much my body and mind can tolerate and the reward that comes from completing each piece.

An aspect of my choice of cowhide as a medium is the exploration of skin as a sight of memory, a store of genetic material and protective membrane. This is important to my understanding and interpretation of the body generally and more specifically, my own body. Most of the works are cast from my body, but *Beginning of the Empire* is cast from that of my mother. Our bodies share genetic material and physiological and ancestral memory. Her body and her skin, has been the protective membrane for my gestation.

By experimenting with the process of tanning and casting cowhide into a shape, allowing drying, then re-wetting it, I have discovered that the hide also remembers the shape it was previously moulded onto and retains elements of this even in its new shape. This 'material memory' that seems to live within the skin cells of the animals I use means that the medium itself can be seen as one that physically engages the concept of recollection, both on a cellular and physical level

The process of working with a sculpted mould (positive) that is discarded after being used to create an end product that is a cast (negative) is a continuation of my interest in the residue. Just as the skins of the animals I use are the residues of an animal that was once alive, the final art pieces I create are the residues of the replication of my or my mother's body. What viewers see is the absence of the physical body of both our bodies as well as the animal I have used. This implied body needs the viewer to complete the picture. Individual observations of the work enable the sculptures to be completed and interpreted in different ways through the way in which the viewer encounters them. The viewer forms a relationship to the suspended life size 'spaces' the sculptures provide both within the hollows of the figures, and the negative space between them.

The continuous thread of control is a significant element of the work I have produced to date. I choose to take ownership of my body / my mother's body through controlling how it is represented through a number of processes. The tanning process I have employed has been an exploration of the 'tried and tested' techniques that exist to control the end result. Through experimentation, I have discovered that by using various chemicals, I can control the texture and appearance of the hide I tan. The success of the moulds I create is highly dependant on the control I maintain over my body as the plaster of the

body cast process dries. Through monitoring what I eat, how much I exercise, I have fashioned my body shape to fit the mould that is ideal in my minds eye. As a result of monitoring how my physical body looks and then how I produce my sculptures, I control physical and figurative representations of myself and the translation of my body into the hide.

Unlike the control I have over my body, I do not control the form of my mother or how she maintains her position as I am making the mould of her body. Just as the environmental factors that influence how the hide dries are out of my control, I have no direct influence over corporeal aspects of my mother. The control I relent is then regained through the way I cast the hide over her mould, how much of the sculpted form I choose to cover, and then through the way I display the sculptures I create. The shift of being in a position of power, then allowing myself to become powerless parallels the control and lack of control I have over my material

The intention of the work I create is to evoke both presence and absence. This is achieved through the very literal absence of the mould I use to create each work as well as the physical form of the animal I have used. This work highlights both the presence and simultaneous absence of my Nguni heritage within my personal context. As mentioned previously, the information I have received about Nguni cultural practices has been a combination of oral accounts and brief encounters. I have not personally experienced a large portion of the elements of Nguni cultural life that may have informed some of the decisions I have made within my art making. The figures I have created are residual. They are residues of my process, the body of the cows I have used, the bodies of myself and my mother: a repository for experience and memory.

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Conclusion

Within the context of South Africa, art produced by women has been extremely limited and often confined to what is identified as craft (i.e. basketry, embroidery, ceramics, and tapestry). This disparity is most evident when looking at the history of art created by Black women throughout the colonial and Apartheid periods. There is however, an indication that more Black women are entering and occupying significant positions within the contemporary art milieu allowing for the chasm that occurred as a result of the country's past to slowly be repaired. A new Post Apartheid generation of South African women artists are emerging, albeit still small, who actively challenge this position through their conceptual choices and media of creation.

The body of work presented for this degree, is part of my challenging not only the above mentioned stereotypes but also the stereotype of Black women's creative expression being associated with Apartheid, and/or illustrating, evoking or representing oppression, marginalisation and abuse. Through the use of my own body as well as that of my mother I have hopefully influenced how viewers of my installations engage with the female form. It is not my intention to present my work and experience in the context of oppression and marginalisation, or the female body victimised or object. I have chosen to work with the female body, to acknowledge and interfere with the sensual qualities of this form in an assertive and at times confrontational interpretation.

My aim has been to produce work that presents an alternative position through challenging perceptions of material and assigned male and female roles within both Western and Nguni society. Although my experiences of the significance of cows and cowhide within Nguni cultural practices have informed my choice of this medium, my intention has not been to present work engaged solely with this theme. The basis of my engagement with cowhide is for its malleability, the ability to exercise control over it as well as its analogy to the actual body (both mine and my mother's, and that of the animal). This material emulates armour and defence through its capacity to sustain and overcome damage, to heal and protect. Further interest in this material is fuelled by its ability to be sensual, its ability to transform the female body as well as its inherent organic and genetic history as the residue of a living creature. Its symbolic capacity to represent experience and evoke absence and presence is of particular importance.

In this document I have indicated that particular criteria and preconceived ideas have and are being applied to the interpretation of contemporary art from Africa, and that these are primarily dictated from a Western perspective. It has also been shown that

artwork produced by Black artists is very often approached in a reductive and generalised manner by authoritative figures within the historical and contemporary art world.

It has been made clear that certain unsubstantiated assumptions are associated with my cultural background as well as my choice of material and are being applied to the understanding of my artwork. My use of cowhide is misunderstood as a result of reductive reading and limited understanding of my choice of art material in relation to my cultural heritage. Despite my best intentions, I am aware that my work may and probably still will be read by some in the context of stereotypes associated with women, Africa as well as being Black.

The sculptures I have created are not about Black women or Black experience nor do they directly reference Nguni cultural practices. My intention is to challenge prevailing notions of and assumptions about the art created by Black women in particular, I have hopefully proposed an expanded and more complex approach to the reading and engagement with the work I have presented as part of this degree.

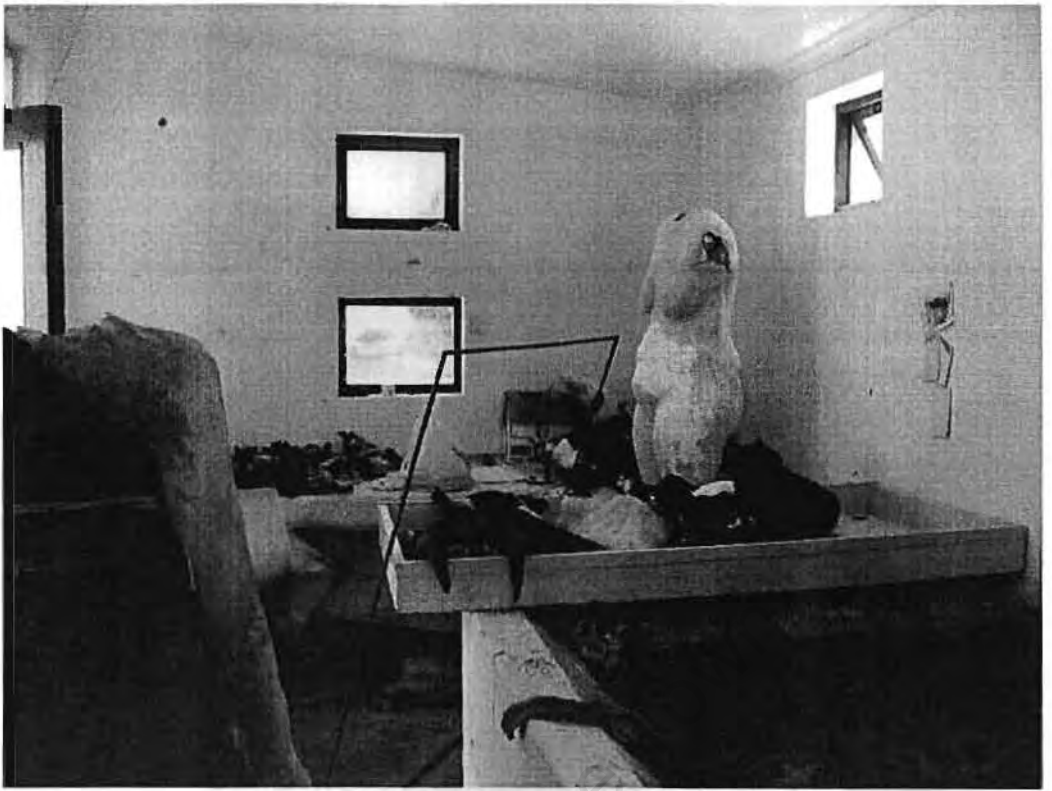
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Catalogue

In the section that follows, I discuss the individual works I have created as part of my Master's degree. These works have all been cast from my body except for *Beginning of the Empire*, Which is cast from the body of my mother and *Untitled*, which is a pillar made of cow ears. These works have mainly been made from the hides of cattle except for *Untitled*, constructed of actual ears, *Uhambo*, molded from the faces of the animals, and *Lelive Lami*, that includes approximately 800 cow tails. I have chosen not to translate the titles of some of these works.









This work, as the title suggests, makes reference to a mass expedition from one place to another. Like *Balandzeli*, which was part of the 'Olvida Quein Soy - Erase me from who I am' exhibition, this work suggests an unquestioning conformity and 'following' towards an unknown destination: a migration, relocation, exodus, movement, stampede, or herding.

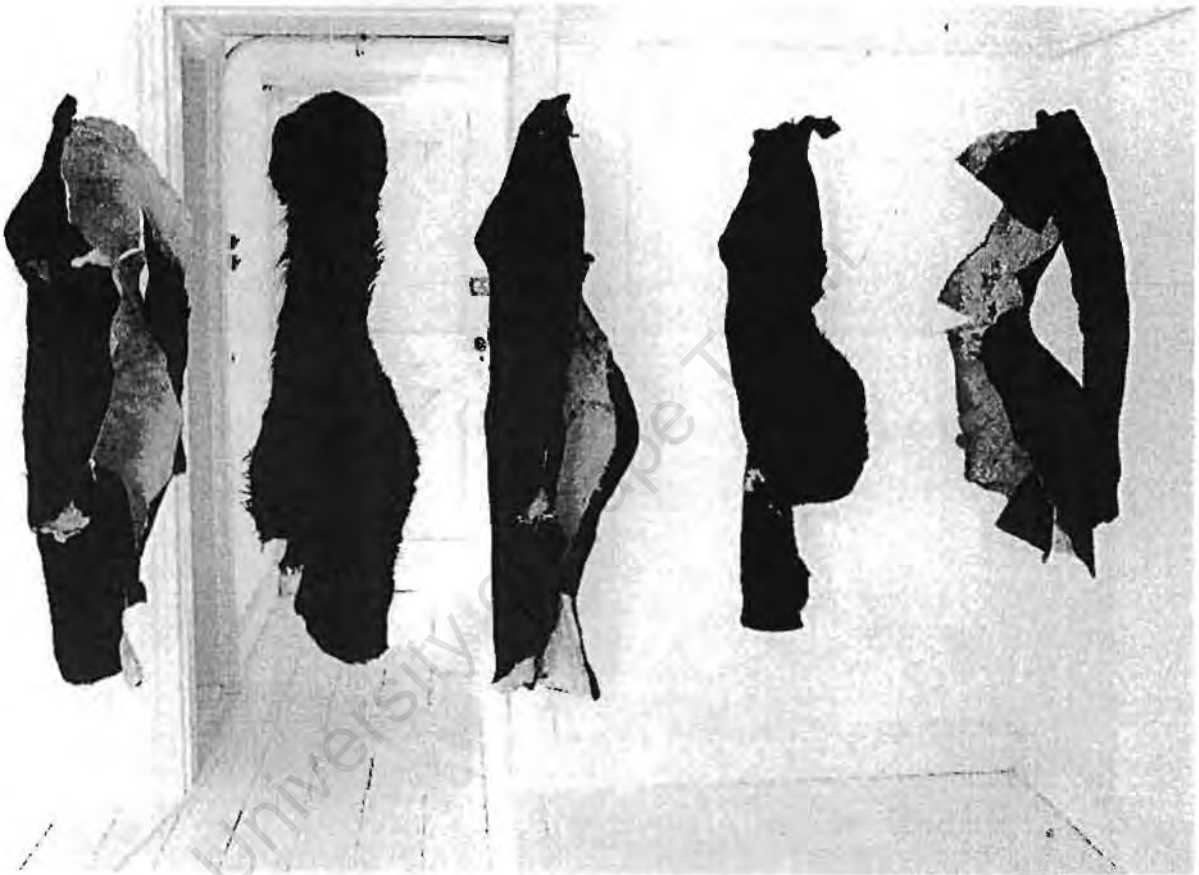
These sculptures, resembling women's/my breasts have been created from the faces of cows and positioned just above eye-level of potential viewers. These 'women' represent a march or stampede in a triangular shaped formation, guided by a leader (the first bust in the formation). Traditionally women do not fight wars, their role has always been a supportive or domestic one (nurses, cooks, making/repairing weapons). Within this work however, women are the ones in implied combat. This work presents women as stronger, more dominant and determined than is 'traditionally' perceived. Through this work I have made direct reference to women using their bodies as a form of protest and protection, as did the women of Dobsonville, South Africa³⁹ and Manipur, India⁴⁰, who instinctually used their exposed bodies as a form of demonstration.

The faces of the cows are at eye level with the viewers, they are 'face to face'. I have used this part of the cow's body to create a part of my own body and positioned them in a

³⁹ In 1990, a group of Soweto women protested against the unlawful destruction of their homes in an informal settlement near Dobsonville by the Afrikaner National Government police. These women chanted, 'We want houses now!' stripped naked and chased after the police, who fled in shock – this event brought the South African media to a halt. Three of the women involved in this protest reflected on their experiences of liberation politics and the social stigma brought on by this method of protest. These women's first instinct for survival was to protect their territory with the tool that was most accessible to them, their bodies. 'We were not prepared to be intimidated by the police' Thandi Mthupa (Maingard, Meintjies and Thomson 1995 [video]). They felt powerful at the time and were not thinking about the stigma that would come with their actions but thinking of how to fight the police. They were collectively fighting for the future of their children and were thinking of nothing else. 'It is really embarrassing to see a woman naked, but through my nakedness I got my reward' Thandeka Ndudula (Maingard, Meintjies and Thomson 1995 [video]).

⁴⁰ 'The photograph was riveting. Manipuri women holding up a banner that read: "Indian Army: Rape us". The women, all middle-aged, were naked, masking their state of undress behind the banner. Altogether there were 40 women, with 12 of them using this dramatic gesture to protest the action of the Assam Rifles in killing Thanglam Manorama, a woman in her early thirties who the army claims was a member of the banned People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the women insist was innocent' (www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/thscrip/print.pl?file=2004072500420300.htm&date=2004/07/25/&prd=mag&).

confrontational display. Challenged by the smells, textures and confinement within this space, the viewer may be intimidated or even claustrophobic with just enough space to be able to walk around and in-between the sculptures.

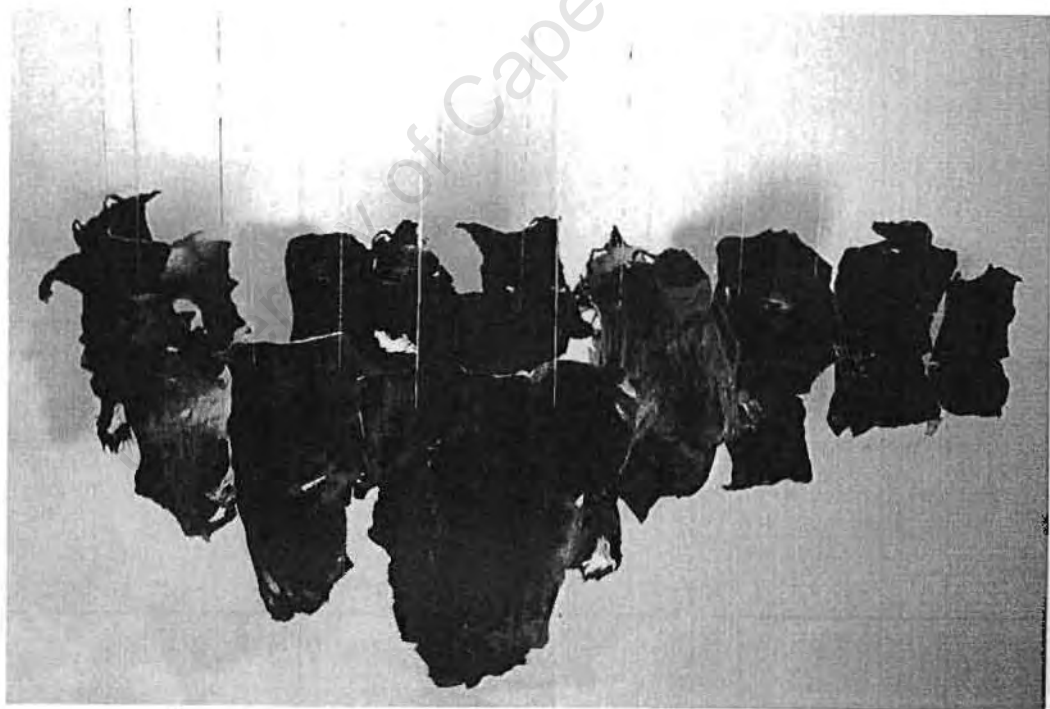
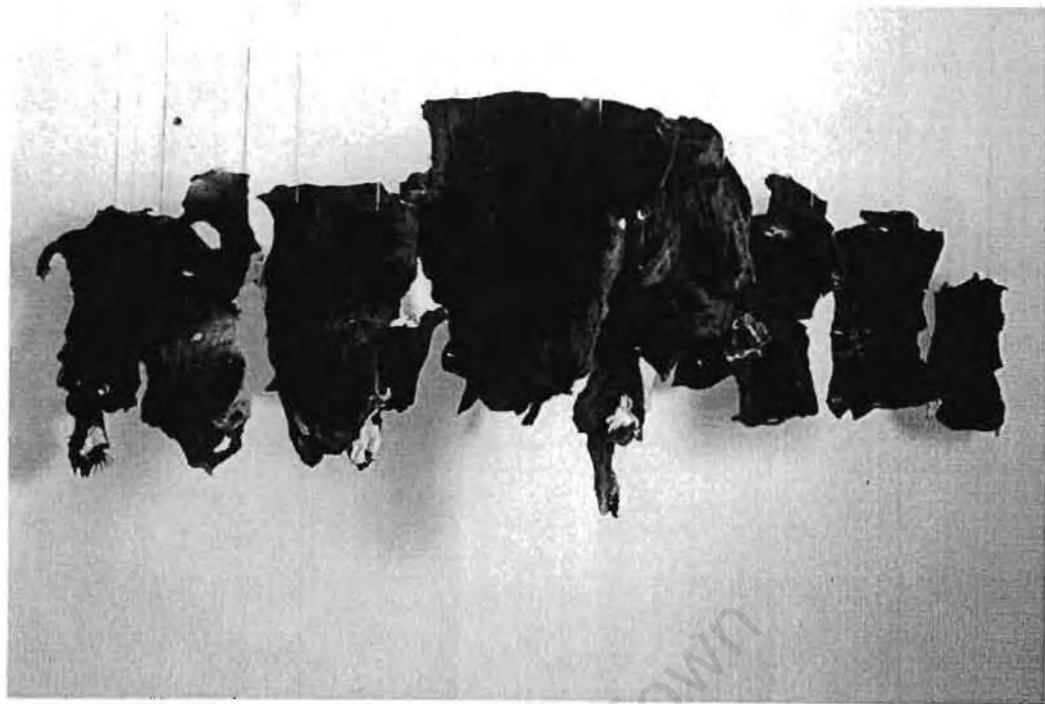


Balandzeli (The Followers)

Cowhide, waxed cord, polyester resin and fiberglass

1370 x 3600 x 700 cm

2004



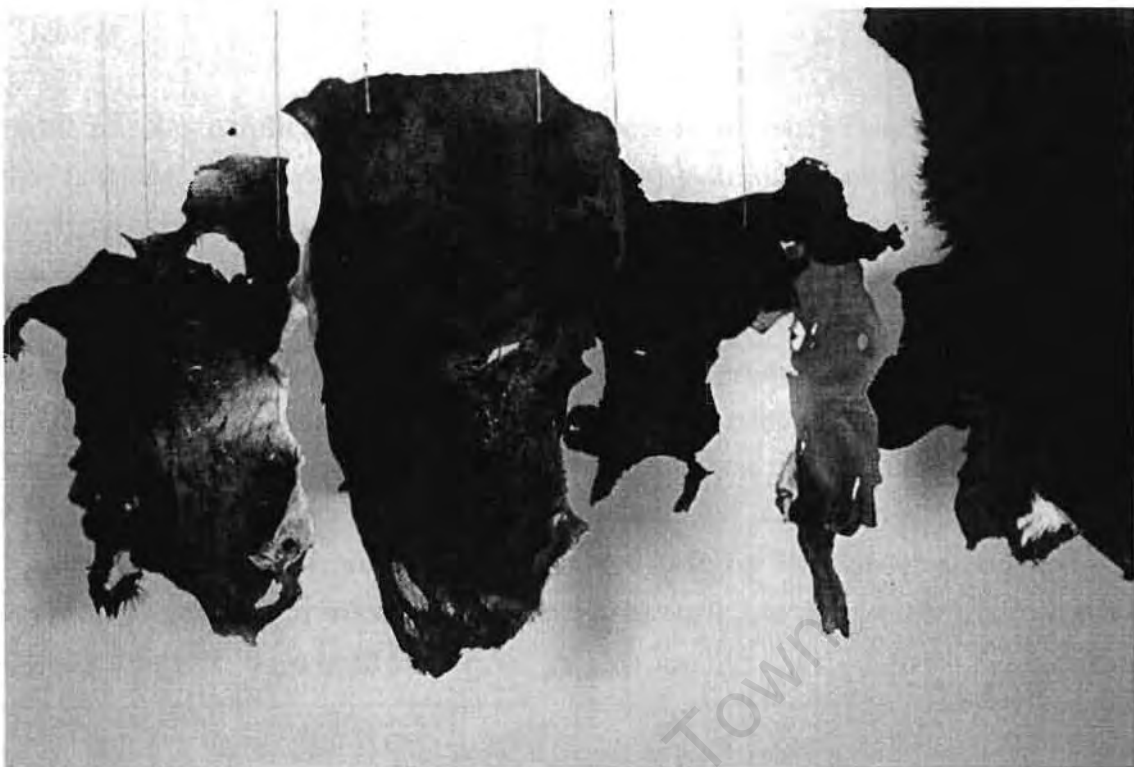
Uhambo

Cow faces, waxed chord, polyester resin and fiberglass

330 x 390 x 150 cm

2006





The Fighters

A 'fight' implies conflict and force and one person or party overthrowing the other. Unlike *Uhambo*, these women seem to be in opposition to one another, the struggle between them is emphasized by their close proximity. Made with molds of my own body, I have placed these two sculptures in a position that suggests them 'bumping chests' with one another. These works, created from the same mold are very different from each other. They are created with the same material but are in opposition or tension with one another. The space in between the two sculptures give the impression that if one tried and was really careful, one could walk between the sculptures to disrupt the fight. As a viewer of this work one might be confused about the relationship between these two sculptures, they seem to want to embrace, dance or fight. They are close enough to each other to do any of these things but also seem to be trying to repel each other, which is an ambiguity I choose to leave in play.



The Fighters

Cowhide, waxed chord, polyester resin and fiberglass

Sizes variable

2006

A dress is a garment that has been accepted as the costume worn by only women. Although males within various cultures and civilizations have worn dress/skirt-like garments, this attire is now seen to be appropriate only for women. This garment could be symbolic of conformity, restraint, a status of sorts and a perceived beauty, embellishment, sexuality and femininity.

This garment is meant to seem restricting, only a woman/person of a certain size can fit into it. The status and strain that simultaneously come with being able to fit into this 'mold' act in opposition with one another here. I would like viewers to be aware of the restriction that would be faced by the wearer of this garment. Like a corset, this stiffened garment shapes and supports but also controls the body of the potential wearer.

The tail of an animal is the last point of its body. Animals use tails as a communicative device, a fly swatter and as an aid for the judging of distances. The cow tails that form the train of this garment 'spill out' in procession behind the dress. These tails become the last point of the garment, but are severed, immobile and useless: something that had function/purpose that has now transformed into a decorative embellishment.



Lelive Lami

Cowhide, cow tails, waxed chord, polyester resin and fiberglass

180 x 290 x 200 cm

2007





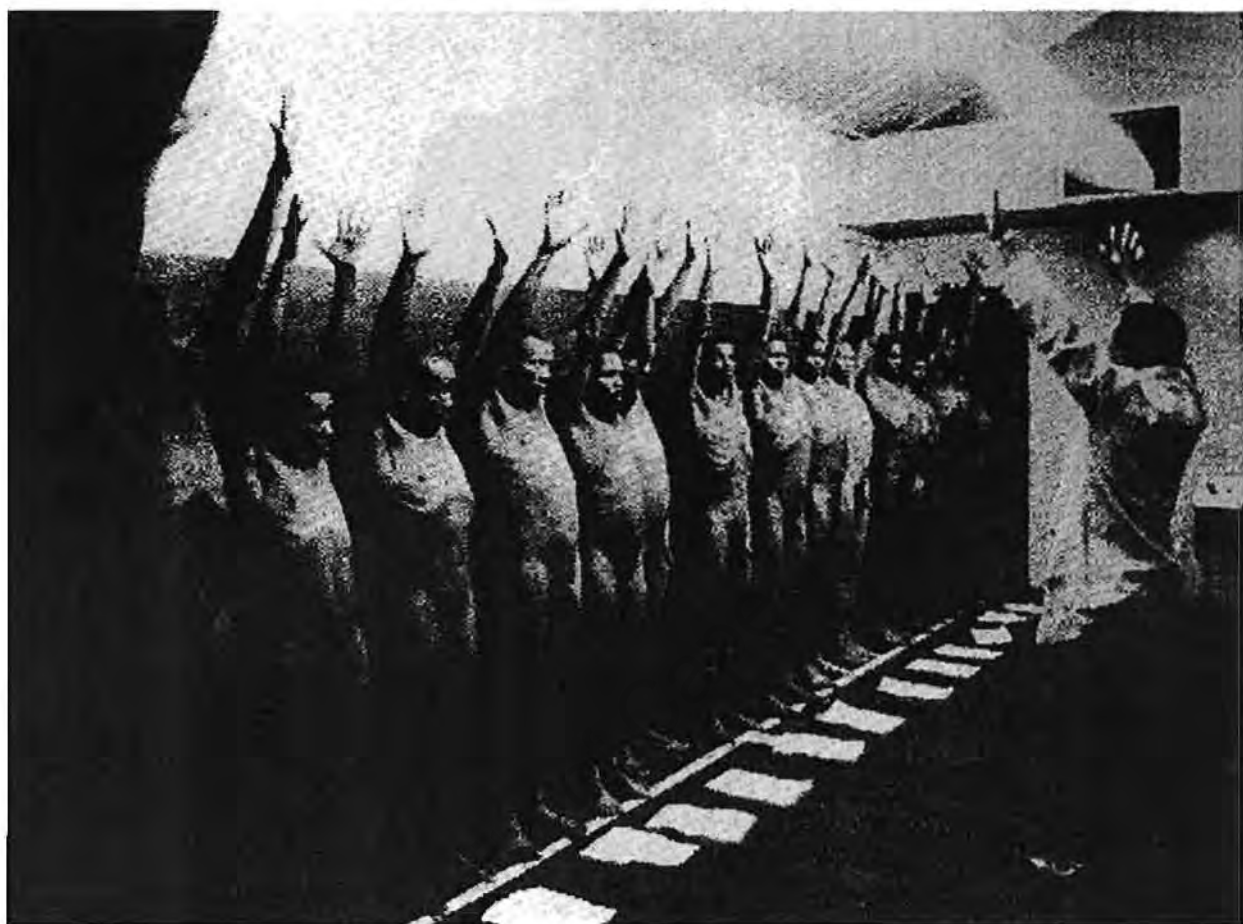


A photograph taken by South African photographer, Peter Magubane of Black South African mine workers having a physical inspection during the Apartheid era inspired this work. These men, who were all naked, with their arms up, are lined up in front of a long wall. At a glance one cannot tell them apart, one barely notices differing heights, they seem to be the same age and they all seem to have a similar expression on their faces. They are vulnerable in their nakedness, their position and without their individuality.

This work consists of eleven casts of my mother in a similar stance. This seemingly submissive action of standing with ones hands raised, exposing ones body, is disrupted by the way the 'performance' is decoded through the cow hide. The figures that are produced from the moulds of my mother, instead of looking passive have the capacity to become confrontational and threatening in their monumental presence.

The legacy of Apartheid cannot be divorced from South Africa's present. It is expected that because of my mother's age, her race and her present situation of living in South Africa, that she would have experienced Apartheid. My mother however, did not grow up in South Africa and so did not experience the situation that many people of her age who were born, brought up and continue to live in South Africa have. Many people who encounter her expect her to identify with a 'collective' experience that she cannot. Both my social and educational experiences are not typical of those experienced by many of my Black South African peers. As in my mother's case, there has been the expectation that I would have familiarity with a collective Black experience. This work serves to reflect on both my mother's experience as well as my own within contemporary South Africa, not as victims of Apartheid but as women.

The use of my mother's body highlights the biological and social exchanges that have occurred between us. I developed both inside and apart from her physical body and carry traces of her genetic material within the cells of my body. I have increasingly become aware of the relationship that exists between what I have inherited and learned from her – with regard to personality and certain behavioral aspects and the way in which I that I have in turn influenced her.



Peter Magubane

Untitled photograph of Wenena Private Organisation medical Check-up
1968



Beginning of the Empire

Cowhide, waxed chord, polyester resin and fiberglass

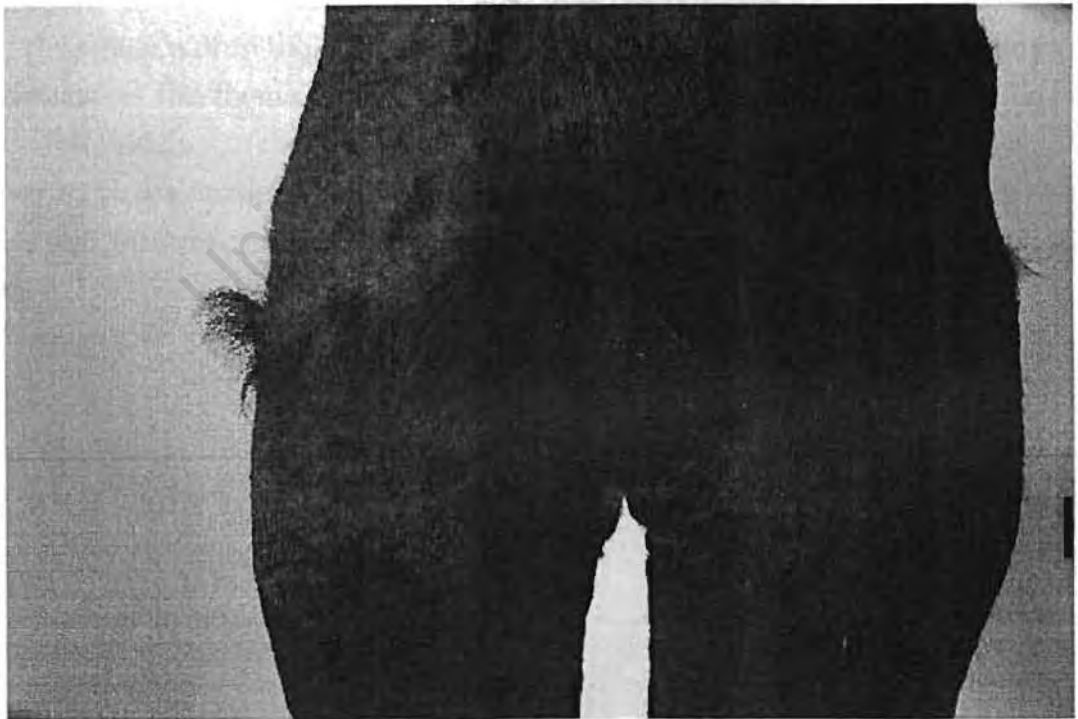
860 x 110 x 180 cm

2007



University ©





Untitled

Hearing is a very important sensory function for both animals and man. The perception of sound is made possible by the vibratory changes in air pressure on the eardrums, which in the case of the ears I have used within this work are rendered useless. This pillar/chandelier of ears makes reference to the boundary of the functional and the decorative. Unlike the other works I have created as part of my degree, this one is not figurative and makes no direct reference to the representation of the female body. I have used a large amount of ears of different shapes, colours and sizes to create a work that allows viewers to look through but only be able to walk around.

At first glance, it is not possible to tell the ears apart. If one looks carefully however, one can identify possible 'pairs' of ears, each with their specific colours, sizes and shapes. This seemingly unrecognizable/indistinguishable crowd stands as a monument to and 'trophy' of the individual animals that have been killed.

I have created a square shaped frame from which the ears are hung. This four-cornered structure makes reference to a room, a box or a boundary that separates the outside from the inside of the shape. One can look into and through the sculpture but cannot enter into it. Unlike the other work I have created, it is not possible for viewers to step into or occupy the space within the boundary of the square shape. This denied access parallels and emphasizes the theme of control, not only of the material and process, but of the viewer's relationship to the work.

Along with the dislocation of the ears from their usual sensory function and its status as untitled, this work explores the tension between communication and control, voice and silence.



Untitled

Cow ears, metal rod, waxed cord and polyester resin

80 x 80 x 400 cm

2006



Indlovukati

The seemingly submissive stance of being on all fours is subverted through this sculpture. Like *Deity*, created in 2004 and *Stepping Into Self*, 2005 *Indlovukati* invites new readings of this position. Although this figure looks as though she is in surrender unlike Antoni's *Saddle*, she is actually positioned in a manner that suggests that she is readying herself to pounce or charge. This possible confrontation is challenged and subverted because of the way I have chosen to cast this sculpture. The seemingly soft folds that drape like a train behind the figure accentuate the garment-like features of this work. The light coloured, soft looking hide I have used invites closer interaction from a viewer and distracts attention from the underlying hostility in the stance of the figure.

As in the case of the other figurative work I have created, this piece invites the possibility of viewer participation and gives the illusion that one can occupy the negative space present. This work makes reference to and becomes a metaphor for the assigned male and female roles within society and disrupts the binary oppositions of the submissive/victim and the dominant/victor.

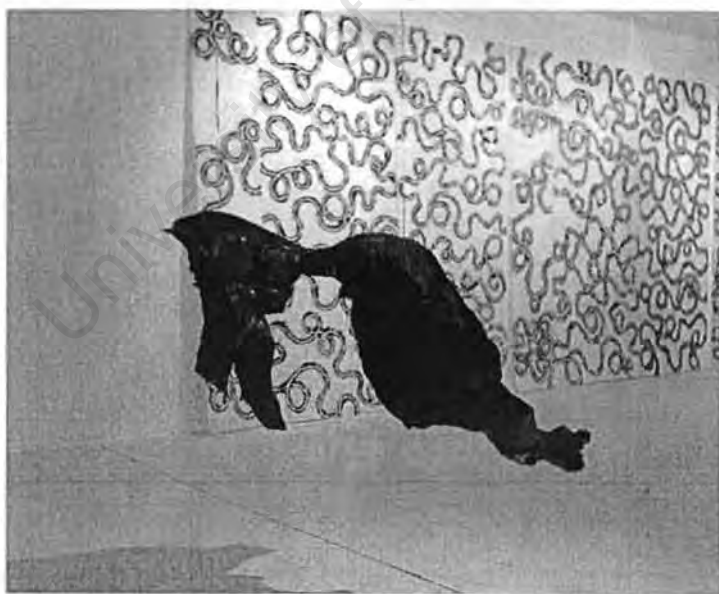


Deity

Cowhide, bone, bronze, waxed cord, polyester resin and fiberglass

600 x 1140 x 470 cm

2004



Stepping into Self

Cowhide, waxed cord, polyester resin and fiberglass

740 x 116 x 920 cm

2005



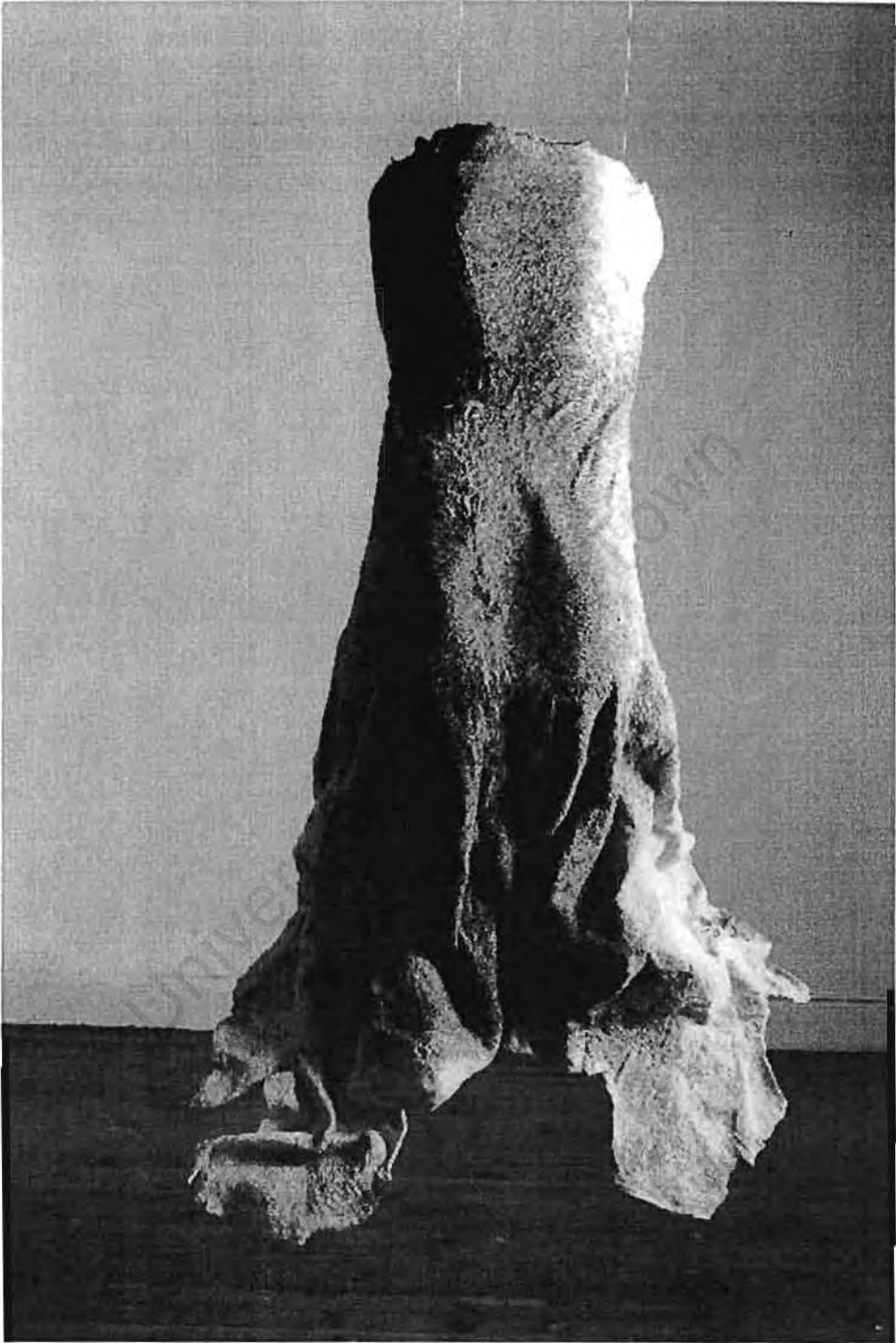
Indlovukati

Cowhide, waxed chord, polyester resin and fiberglass

153 x 89 x 70 cm

2007





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