

Filling In The Gaps

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Filling In The Gaps

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Fine Art, Faculty of the Humanities, University of Cape Town

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Signature: _____ Date: _____

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Filling in the gaps: Introduction

Location location location:¹

'It has been the special genius of our century to investigate things in relation to their context, to come to see the context as formative of the thing and, finally, to see the context as a thing itself.'
(O'Doherty 1999 [1976]: 7)

In 2007, Brian O'Doherty's words still apply. The art object and its context are intrinsically intertwined.

A variety of contexts make up the mechanisms of the contemporary art world. From established organizations to more informal platforms, each performs a necessary function. Representation in a national museum or a respected public collection bestows a measure of credibility on a piece. Outside of austere exhibition rooms and refined gallery spaces, more informal arenas have their own authority. An independent artistic intervention on a busy pavement or a remote beach can suggest an anti-institutionalist stance. The artist is not bound by the conventions of more traditional structures. Yet, a great deal of interventionist work ultimately makes its way into galleries and collections in the form of residue and documentation. These become marketable and collectable products. Similarly, reputed organizations sometimes orchestrate potentially disruptive insertions into the public sphere in the form of performances or temporary installations. Even when they appear to be at odds, the different forums in which artworks exist rely on each other.

¹ Title taken from a public debate at the New Museum, Cooper Union, New York, entitled *Location, Location, Location! Is provincial a bad word?*, 2006.

This dissertation illustrates such relationships through first hand experience.

During the course of my MFA degree, I have occupied many of the established contexts within the contemporary art world:

- The art competition
- The museum exhibition
- The project space
- The collaborative project
- The independent intervention
- The commercial gallery show
- The international art fair
- The biennale
- The public collection
- The prominent private collection
- The exhibition catalogue
- The artist's book
- The online exhibition
- The multi-disciplined group show
- The public commission
- The artist's studio²

These form the framework of this dissertation.

The different forums listed above are discussed in terms of my contribution within them as a visual practitioner and organiser of

² This is not a definitive list of every possible context in the contemporary art world. Rather, it represents those I have been fortunate enough to participate in during the given time. Organised structures for more established artists, for example the art auction, are not discussed. Less formal modes of working, like the group collaboration or the apprenticeship, are also left out.

projects.³ Each work is introduced through the arena/s in which they were exhibited. The implications of specific sites and relevant aspects of their greater role within the mechanisms of the contemporary art world are brought to the fore. My explication seeks to emphasize the importance of context to my practice.

Some works were conceived for specific exhibitions. I made *Consolation Trophies* for the 2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards. These dealt directly with the context of art competitions. Chapter 1 introduces this forum. Similarly, for *Negotiate: Intervention* at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, my installation *We are relying on your support*, 2004, responded to a general call for proposals for a group event organised by young artist-curators. My response to the brief is discussed in Chapter 2, as is my intervention into another artist's exhibition at Outlet, a project space in Pretoria, in the same year. The form of both pieces and the reactions they garnered allow for a discussion concerning the roles of both the museum and the project space.

Art competitions, project spaces and the variety of group shows described in Chapter 2 are platforms in which inexperienced artists can gain a degree of exposure. While working within these frameworks, I also initiated independent interventions in the city of Cape Town. Chapter 3 introduces these projects and their motivations. My activities garnered sufficient interest to be represented in more established environments.

³ I have also occupied the roles of curator, administrator, critic and lecturer during this period. I have taught part time at: The Ruth Prowse School of Art, City Varsity, the University of Stellenbosch (Fine Art) and the University of Cape Town (Discourse of Art and Historical Studies). My work as a freelance critic has been published in *Art South Africa* and *Artthrob.co.za* (Henceforth referred to as *Artthrob*). Except in the case of my curatorial activities related to the *Trienal de Luanda*, I have concentrated on my role as visual practitioner for the purposes of this dissertation.



Photographic documentation of *Don't Panic* | Cape Town | 2005
Installation view of the João Ferreira Fine Art exhibition space at *Lista '06* Basel | 2006

Chapter 4 discusses the market-driven arenas of the commercial gallery and the international art fair. I re-contextualised interventionist projects from Chapter 3 in a solo show at João Ferreira Fine Art, Cape Town, entitled *When the Inside Stays Inside*, 2005. As a whole, the installation was concerned with making links between the commercial gallery the shop. Projects like *Don't Panic*, 2005, and *Stuffed Pigeons*, 2005, began as insertions into the public sphere. The former was a skywrite across the Cape Town City Bowl and the latter a series of obese taxidermy pigeons temporarily placed in popular tourist destinations in the city centre. These works were represented in the commercial gallery as well as at *Liste 06, the Young Art Fair in Basel*.⁴

In contrast to the art fair, the biennial is not overtly market driven. Similarities and differences between these seemingly opposed international expositions are brought to the fore in Chapter 5. My involvement in both Angola's *Triennial de Luanda* and the *1st Art and Architecture Biennale of the Canary Islands 2006*⁵ provide specific examples to cite in this section.⁶ I address the greater contexts of Africa and Europe in relation to these events.⁷ Sources of funding are a key issue in the case of African expositions.

One of the main partners in the production of the *Triennial de Luanda* is Sindika Dokolo, a prominent Congolese/Angolan

⁴ Henceforth referred to as *Liste '06*.

⁵ Henceforth referred to as the *Canary Islands Biennial*.

⁶ Research and interviews conducted at *T1, Torino Triennale Treimusei, The Pantagruel Syndrome* in Italy, 2005, are also utilised in connection with the triennial's proximity to the art fair *Artissima 12*.

⁷ Proposed projects for *Triennial de Luanda* have not yet been completed and may yet be further postponed or abandoned. They are relevant precisely for this reason, as they tap into key concerns with fictional projects and alternative forms of representation that come to the fore in Chapter 7.

collector. My work has come to be represented in his collection and others. An example like that of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, a public collection, is compared to Pierre Lombart's private one. The corporate collection is also a relevant case in point. My participation in the *ABSA L' Atelier Awards 2006*, another corporate sponsored competition, allows for further observations concerning the implications of available forums in South Africa.



Triennial de Luanda production team preparing new exhibition space SOSO CORREIOS| SONANGALP | Luanda | 2006.

The general context of South Africa is considered marginal to the cultural centres of Europe and America. One of the results of being situated at the tip of Africa is that it is not possible to attend a great deal of important exhibitions and events in person. Interested parties are therefore reliant on texts and images from

printed media and the Internet to remain up to date. Chapter 6 deals with these forums with an awareness that they are never neutral. *I'll stop believing in you if you stop believing in me*⁸ is an exhibition that exists in a book. This collaborative project with Robert Sloon straddles both the artist's book and the catalogue simultaneously. The forum of the online exhibition is also discussed using Sloon's controversial blog-site-cum-tabloid, *Artheat.blogspot.com*⁹ as an example.¹⁰

Although not without structure, *Stop Believing* and *Artheat* are examples of a more alternative way of working. In Chapter 7, I make reference to both informal and established contexts. The discussion centres around three projects which take on the language of memorials. *Couch Thrown*, 2005, was an unauthorised independent intervention in the public space. I threw a couch off a cliff in Hout Bay, Cape Town. In a more organised event, *High Tea at the Plaza* was part of a corporate-sponsored, multi-disciplined group exhibition, which sought to revitalize heritage sites on the campus of the University of Cape Town. This involved temporary performances by a number of practitioners. No evidence remained in the space in which it was performed.

My contribution to the *Sunday Times 100 Years of Stories* project contrasts to the ephemeral elements of the previous projects. The *Cissie Gool Memorial*, 2007, is designed to last as long as possible. As it is a public commission, it was conceived through a process of assessing the needs of the sponsors and the people

⁸ Henceforth referred to as *Stop Believing*.

⁹ Henceforth referred to as *Artheat*.

¹⁰ There is a distinction between online representation, in the form of an article or artist's website and works which exist only in cyberspace. These are explicated in this section.

that frequent the designated site.¹¹ Such projects are disparate in terms of medium and application, but interlinked through a concern with the role of art in public spaces.



Work in progress on the *Cissie Gool Memorial* | Cape Town | 2006

Ties that bind:

Greater central themes bind this body of work together as a whole. My primary preoccupations with issues of value and authority and also authorship, artifice and fictions run throughout the context-based framework of this dissertation.

¹¹ I believe this is also the most suitable manner in which to tackle one of this country's prominent female role models who was also known for her efforts to combat apartheid.

By following the trajectory of works like *Stuffed Pigeons* and *Don't Panic*, I seek to illustrate how the value of an art object can be affected through a change in context. These pieces move from informal public arenas into places of authority and therefore gain credibility. The works come to represent the contexts they have occupied. Their financial value alters, but also their cultural currency. Works that reside in a national museum, for example, is generally seen to be pertinent examples of visual culture by their communities.

The more exposure a work receives, the more likely it is to enter into contemporary discourse. That is, to be written about in reviews, journals, dissertations, catalogues and critical theories as well as academic lectures and informal conversation. Writers and theorists are a crucial voice of authority in the art world. They have effect on the systems that make up the contemporary art world, which in turn influences them. I have noted relevant commentary concerning my projects whenever this is appropriate to unpacking it.

The status of organisational structures is such that having one work in a respected institution gives more credibility to an overall endeavour. I use examples of my own work to illustrate how collections, biennials, art fairs, public commissions, commercial galleries and other forums with authority look to each other to ascertain the value of an artist's work.

Context refers to more than physical location. My preoccupation with modes of production necessitates an exploration of what other artists have done when working in a similar vein. I note these in each project mentioned.

'The intense engagement with context has created many intersections between artists, at times as actual collaborations, far more often involving the creation of works that incorporate a precise response to other works, both earlier and contemporary. Such works indicate both a thorough analysis of the circumstances of context and an equally careful consideration of the nature of authorship— paradoxically made that much more evident by the mechanisms of reference and quotation.'

(Buskirk 2003: 27)

As outlined by Buskirk, a fascination with the work of other practitioners can lead to collaborative practice. *Stop Believing* is a shared project between myself and Robert Sloon. This endeavour seeks to question the notion of authorship. Many of the artists involved, including Sloon, work under a pseudonym. *Stop Believing* also sets out to interrogate the validity of printed media. Specific artists were invited to make works based on their interpretation of the fictions and truths apparent in documentation. It is unclear which projects actually happened and which images are true to their descriptions.

My interest in the artifice of documentation partly stems from the nature of my own projects. Many works, like *High Tea at the Plaza* or *onesizefitsall*, are ephemeral. They therefore rely on visual and written documentation when represented in formal exhibition spaces. Photographs and textual backup can be altered so they are not necessarily true to the actual events. A Photoshopped image can be deceptive. Multiple copies can question the authenticity of the original source. I had this in mind when I focussed on repetitions and different forms of editions for *When the Inside Stays Inside*. I seek to invite the viewer to consider the validity of the visual material in my work.



Work in progress on a communal artist's studio space at 26 Commercial Street, Cape Town, 2006.

Perhaps, as a result, they will consider those they encounter in everyday life with more scrutiny.



Work in progress on *onesizesitsall* at the Piazza Castello | Turin | 2006 (Photograph by Karin Gavassa)

Personal space boundaries:

My body of work consciously straddles a variety of visual languages. When presented without any explanatory framing devices, links to art history and contemporary practice are obvious only to those knowledgeable in such areas. This is also true of the inclusion of fragments of pop songs, movies, fashion trends, novels and other features from my immediate

environment.¹² Prior cultural knowledge is needed in order to decipher these codes. This forms an impersonal exterior that protects a far more private set of signs and symbols. A substratum of deeper concerns that I have not made public is embedded in this body of work. Each project is testament to personal history and emotional states. For the large part, I have omitted giving out any of this information other than in informal conversations and interviews. Identity and personal history can be important factors in defining and evaluating an artist's production. While I acknowledge this, I have chosen to reveal these in very specific forums. For this reason, my explication of this body of work purposefully omits one of the most important themes that tie it together. My personal life is only introduced in Chapter 8.

This degree has been a process of actively engaging with different contemporary codified disciplines. I have not sought to undermine these systems with intentionally controversial work.

My methodology has been to insert intimate personal history into these public spheres, without making this essential to its interpretation. I have introduced versions of my own story into what I understand to be a superficial and impersonal environment. For this reason, my explanation of some of the more intimate stories behind the work takes the form of an interview.

Work in Progress:

The final presentation of this body of work resides in a context where, conventionally, most artworks are initiated. I have used

¹² These are apparent in this dissertation in the titles of sections. Nicholas Bourriaud defines a group of artists working in this manner in the 90s with *Postproduction*, 2000, discussed in Chapter 4.

the artist's studio to represent all of my work discussed in this dissertation. Fake and authentic evidence of my MFA projects has been contrived to appear as if all planning and much of the construction took place there. Areas have been deliberately organised to emphasise links to source material discussed in these pages as well as the various exhibitions in which I have taken part. I have sought to ensure that the linking themes of my overall project are apparent.

Open Studio, 2007, is clearly embedded with artifice and fictions through falsified evidence. I believe this to be a fitting conclusion to an MFA degree. At art schools, the student's studio functions as exhibition space for work in progress. It is also one of the classic locations associated with artists over the ages, used to showcase work on a seemingly more informal level. The studio installation is as manufactured as a stage set. In varying degrees, it could be argued that this is the case for the majority of studio visits, depending on the status of the visitor.

Within this larger suggestion of artifice are also truths. Authentic evidence from my life is included in the form of personal letters, photographs and objects. Thus, fragments of the sentimental value behind this body of work, as revealed in the interview, are partially on display.

The greater context of the installation is a communal studio in Commercial Street, Cape Town, shared by several practitioners. This dissertation repeatedly makes reference to different forums within the art world and how they cater to diverging audiences. For my practice, one of the most important of these is peer group. A good deal of this body of work was created in between and as a result of discussions and arguments with fellow practitioners and Fine Art students. Thus, the final display context in which all works are represented is an artist's studio.

This context does not have the authority of an established exhibition space. If an object is placed there by the artist, it is not necessarily an artwork, although it has the potential to become one. To be read as an artwork, my studio installation requires a form of authentication. This dissertation sets out to fulfil this role. It also seeks to position the practical part of my MFA degree within contemporary discourse. For this reason, my conclusion to this document explains the body of work in terms of how it is presented in the studio.

I do not seek to provide every possible reference to art history, popular culture or autobiographical detail behind each piece in this document. I attempt to fill in some of the gaps.



Studio space at the Michaelis School of Fine Art | Cape Town | 2006.



Opening night of *When the Inside Stays Inside* | João Ferreira Fine Art

1. Don't take it personally: Art competitions

No. 1 in the Recognition Industry:¹³

The *Brett Kebble Art Awards* began with a media explosion in 2003. It provides a good example of how high profile competitions can provide a platform for contemporary work. These specific awards also brought to the fore the critical reception which large scale, corporate-sponsored events can inspire.

I initiated my body of MFA work within this forum.

This particular award ceremony was well known owing to its patron. Businessman Brett Kebble was already a household name in South Africa for being involved in high-powered organisations like the ANC youth league, as well as a number of well-publicised scandals concerning accusations of fraud. He was shot dead on 27 September 2005 (Meldrum 2005). The awards were discontinued.

Whether Kebble's interest in contemporary visual culture was superficial or not, the art world appears to be one of the few areas where he was sincerely mourned.¹⁴ The awards had provided the most lucrative prize for the visual arts in this country. By 2004, the second year of the extravaganza, 6 prizes of R60 000 were awarded for the 6 different categories. The overall winner received R200 000, double the amount of the

¹³ Title taken from the blurb that accompanies the logo of Toker Bros., a Cape Town company that specializes in trophies and plaques.

¹⁴ For example, see Clive van den Berg's online article *Brett Kebble*, 2005, on *Artthrob*

previous year. This was a substantial injection into the South African art world in terms of finance, job creation and the general morale. Comparatively, other long-standing awards with national open calls for submission, like the *ABSA L'Atelier* and *SASOL New Signatures*, offered far lesser spoils.¹⁵

The Brett Kebble Art Awards generated a large amount of media attention and a corresponding flood of bickering. From its lavish prize-giving ceremony to curatorial decisions within the exhibition space, every aspect of the annual exhibition was heavily critiqued in the art press (Murinik 2004: 64).

Predictably, the most contested issue was the choice of winners. Doreen Southwood won the first overall prize at the inaugural awards in 2003. An example of gossip at the time concerned Lucia Berger, a member of the judging panel. It was suggested that her support of the work was based on the fact that Southwood was represented in her collection. Others felt the need to comment on the fact that *The Swimmer*, 2002, had also been exhibited before.¹⁶

Such comments inspired my piece for the following year.

¹⁵ Prize money for these increased subsequent to the advent of the Brett Kebble Art Awards. They are the only other open competitions available to emerging artists in South Africa. Participation in other current awards, like the Daimler Chrysler, Standard Bank Young Artist and more recently the Tollman Award are by invitation only.

¹⁶ She had also won the Sasol Prize for best visual artwork at the 2003 *Klein Karoo National Arts Festival*. Presumably this is what led to competition rules being altered the following year so that only new work could be submitted. The prize-winning piece is a bronze representation of a dumpy, costume-clad feminine figure, primed to jump off a diving board. Closer inspection proves she is doomed to fail. The swimmer has a plughole in her on the side of her rear end. She will start to fill with water as soon as she makes impact. With hindsight, the piece is an unfortunate metaphor for the Brett Kebble Art Awards.



Brett Keble | 2005 (*The Brett Keble Art Awards Launched 2004*)
Doreen Southwood | *Floating Trophies (detail)* | 2002 (*Doreen Southwood 2002*)

I submitted *Consolation Trophies* for the 2004 Brett Keble Art Awards. This piece consists of 237 trophies engraved with alternating captions of: 'I liked yours best', 'Don't take it personally' and 'Better luck next year'. The number of trophies corresponded to the exact amount of competitors who would not win an award that year. They were all displayed alongside the other entries in the Cape Town International Convention Centre's largest exhibition hall. The non-winners each received a small silver cup on the return of their work.

I received my own trophy in the mail a month after the ceremony. The inscription was: 'Better luck next year.'¹⁷

Consolation Trophies was partly a response to the acrimony associated with this specific competition. Using trophies as a medium also has links to a work by previous-winner Southwood. In 2002 she had exhibited *Floating Trophies, 2001*, on the exhibition *Too Close for Comfort* at Bell-Roberts Contemporary. Found silver trophies of varying size and shape make up this work. The inscriptions are dedicated to her insecurities, for example: 'most neurotic' and 'biggest hypochondriac'. In comparison to Southwood's self critique, *Consolation Trophies* is made up of mass produced objects of the same size. The impersonal phrases are of the sort generally heard when one does not achieve high accolades. A phrase like 'I liked yours best' is intended to sound glib because of the repetition. This could also be said of the kind of statement used to advertise the *Brett Keble Art Awards*. Keble described the purpose of the 2004 awards as being:

¹⁷ I had no way of knowing that my own work *Don't Panic, 2005*, would receive first prize at the *ABSA Atelier Awards 2006*. See Chapter 6.

'...to provide a showcase for established artists and to help those less known attain recognition, as well as build a non-racial bridge into the 21st century.'

(Brett Kebble 2003)

This kind of statement would appear to cater to the positive public image Kebble sought at the time.¹⁸ On the surface, the message seems positive and concerned with the greater good of the community. Yet there was no apparent focus on issues of race within the thematic concerns of the exhibition. As is the case with a great deal of repetitive promotional speech, the words seem insincere to me.

My caption for *Consolation Trophies* read as follows:

'I'm concerned for all the artists who are selected for *The Brett Kebble Art Awards* exhibition this year, but who did not win anything. Unfortunately, the number of unsuccessful artists far outweighs the winners, the judges and the event itself. Through the gesture of ensuring that all participants receive an award, I hope to ease some of the tension in the competitive art world.'

(Sacks 2004: 233)

The tone of the gesture was executed with tongue firmly in cheek. Some took the action in the implied spirit of goodwill, as seen in this commentary by Andrew Lamprecht from the time:

¹⁸ A public preoccupation with breaking racial barriers is still important for most major corporations in South Africa. Kebble was in need of positive publicity in light of speculation as to accusations of his alleged fraud and tax evasion, as described in numerous news sources.

'Perhaps the time has come to stop wasting energy on these activities and to celebrate the winners and losers alike. Maybe Ruth Sacks understood this with her entry to this year's "Kebbles."'

(Lamprecht 2004)

I also received a number of emails from artists who appreciated getting something for their efforts. On accepting a merit award for his work in new media, Nathaniel Stern began his speech with:

'I am very grateful for this award, but I am also upset as this means I won't get one of Ruth's trophies.'¹⁹

(Stern 2004. pers. comm. 2 October)

Other participants found the piece more insulting than placatory. On the occasion of driving me home from the 2004 Michaelis Graduate Show prize-giving, Mikhael Subotzky produced his trophy and described how he had wanted to defecate in it for some time (Subotzky 2004. pers. comm. 1 Dec). The young photographer had just received the highest accolade ever to be awarded to an undergraduate student at the institution.²⁰

Consolation Trophies drew attention to a key fact of competitions in general: Only select participants win prizes while others do not. While competitions provide an opportunity to showcase work, they are still a contest. Whether competitive or not, all entrants are aware of the possibility of winning. Those that

¹⁹ Stern was one of the few artists whose production costs had been paid for by the organization. It is unlikely that he was aware of the fact that my own application for funding assistance had been refused.

²⁰ It is not my intention to ridicule the highly respected young photographer with this anecdote. He is one of the rare informal critics of the piece who spoke openly to me and can therefore be cited.



Installation view of *Consolation Trophies* at the 2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards | 2004 | (*The Brett Kebble Art Awards 2004*: 233)

considered themselves in the running for an award may well have taken offence to the impersonal message of *Consolation Trophies* once the individual cups were distributed. Thus, the work makes reference to the underlying structures of this specific forum.



Consolation Trophies (detail) | 2004 (The Brett Kebble Art Awards 2004: 233)

Make a loud noise:

One of the most notorious examples in South Africa of an artist who disrupted the competition forum from within is Kendall Geers. In an early work, Geers threw a handful of coins on the gallery floor as his entry in the *1994 Volkskas Bank Atelier*

Awards.²¹ According to the popular account, the work was borrowed by an unnamed individual in order to buy beer. Apparently, substitute coins were then placed in the same arrangement. Geers proceeded to take legal action against the gallery. He protested that the original objects he had placed in the space were his artwork and not the replacement. His efforts were rewarded with the amount of money he had insured his piece for. He had set this at the maximum the competition allowed, which far exceeded the initial value of the loose change.²²

In this example, Geers protested against a challenge to the idea of an authentic artwork. Once exhibited in the gallery space by the artist, the coins became artworks. The justification for the insurance value was based on its status as an artwork, rather than as a handful of loose change. Similar concerns with value run through my own work.²³

In 1999, Geers was invited to exhibit as one of 4 finalists at the now defunct *FNB Vita Art Prize*. He insisted on a contract being drawn up. This stipulated that the organisers would not interfere with his contribution in any way. The controversial artist submitted *White Man's Burden*, 1999, made up of a looped excerpt from *The Bad Lieutenant* where Harvey Keitel's character repeatedly begs for forgiveness at a church altar. The audio on Geers' video was pumped so high that a high-pitched onslaught of 'I'm sorry, I'm so sorry' and the like could be heard throughout the Sandton Civic Gallery. This jarring audio backdrop affected

²¹ Volkskas later amalgamated with a number of other financial institutions to form ABSA. The name of the competition altered accordingly.

²² At the press lunch for the ABSA L'Atelier Awards 2006, Cecille Loedoff reminisced about Geers' unorthodox antics of that year in her opening speech. She made no mention of the winner, Jonathan Comerford (Loedoff 2006. pers. comm. 18 July).

²³ See examples discussed in the following chapter.

all the works on display. Jo Ractliffe, the winner for that year, complained on behalf of all the artists. According to Geers, Ractliffe had threatened to remove her prize-winning work if his audio was not turned down. He claimed that the audio was integral to the work. If it had to be altered, it would not be his authentic piece (Geers 1999). On the basis of this argument, the artist withdrew the piece rather than lower the volume. He left graffiti in its place and a string of commentary in the press and informal conversations.

The aim of Geers' work was to dominate the entire exhibition space. While this strategy could have been employed in any exhibition, the fact that it took place in a competitive forum heightened the effect of aural contamination. Even if the piece does not win, it steals all the limelight by demanding the viewers' attention.

Judging by media coverage of the event, it did so despite being removed.

While *Consolation Trophies* is by no means as inflammatory as Geers' 1999 *FNB Vita Awards* entry, they have similarities. Both break out of the exhibition space allocated to them. That is, the audio from Geers' video had to dominate and the silver cups had to be disseminated. Without these activations, the message of the works would remain in the realm of suggestion. Repeated sentiments of encouragement in the trophies and of apology in the video can be read as artificial. Both pieces expose some of the heated feelings that can simmer below the surface of such events, in greater and lesser degrees.

Other artists have used humour when tackling the topic of the art competition. South African artist Thomas Barry parodied the *ABSA L' Atelier Awards* at Outlet, a project space in Pretoria. For

ABSA Atelier 1st Prize, the Durban-based practitioner staged a prize-giving ceremony and gave away awards to his friends. It is significant that he chose a project space for his parody to take place, thus separating his activities from the arena of the competition itself.²⁴



Kendell Geers | *White Man's Burden* | 1999 ('Kendell Geers Replies' 1999)

Barry's mock competition plays on the widely-held view that art competition judges are guilty of nepotism or at the very least favouring a particular style of working. In Britain, the Stuckists accused the Turner Prize of similar bias (Collings 2001: 47). Such

²⁴ See Chapter 2 concerning the role played by the project space with specific reference to Outlet.

accusations can be unrealistic generalizations and are open to debate. However, it does seem important to note that corporate sponsors back art competitions. Large companies invest a lot of money in order to have their logo associated with what takes place within that arena. Different sponsors promote distinct public profiles.

In the United Kingdom, the Turner Prize is associated with controversy and anti-traditionalist art. Previous winners have included Martin Creed, who displayed an empty room with the lights going on and off in *Work no. 227: The Lights Go On and Off*, 2000, and Grayson Perry who is both a ceramicist and cross dresser. The selectors have been accused of sensationalism (*Creed Lights Up Turner Prize* 2001). Media hype is further accentuated by the fact that a celebrity guest usually presents the award. Yoko Ono, 2006 and Madonna, 2001, draw crowds in their own right. The fact that the 2006 first prize went to female abstract painter Tomma Abts came as a shock to many. In 2001, Mathew Collings argued that the organization is not biased towards contentious or overly conceptual work. According to the British critic, choices reflect the most fashionable contemporary discourse at the time. Prevalent themes like 'Is painting dead?' or 'Are photos art?' are the kind of preoccupations affecting the decision-making process (Collings 2001: 47).

Previous sponsors of the Turner Prize have been Gordon's Gin and Channel 4. These have vastly different concerns to those of the banks FNB and ABSA that supported the South African examples of competitions discussed above.²⁵

Brett Kebble had no need to encourage further notoriety in the media. Publicity statements surrounding the *Brett Kebble Art Awards* make it clear that he wished to be seen as a true patron of the arts, concerned with greater issues within the art world and seeking to improve it. For the *2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards*, the patron and exhibition curators repeatedly made public statements concerning the fact that one of their primary aims was to encourage craft and alter the popular perception of it as a lower form of art (Kebble 2004: 19). Emphasis on genre was clearly a key curatorial concern from the start. Despite a general trend towards the collapse of such categorizations internationally, each entry had to be submitted under the label of 'painting', 'new media', 'sculpture', 'printmaking' or 'craft'. It is still standard practice to differentiate between different mediums when submitting work for competitions in South Africa and other parts of the world. The term 'craft', however, suggests a mode of production that incorporates many different media, for example, beadwork.

The first prize of the *2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards* was shared between two practitioners. New media artist Tanya Poole received her top prize for *Missing*, 2004. This consists of animated oil paintings. 60-year-old Vandan practitioner Phillip Rikhotso also received the top honour for his untitled hand-carved wooden figures based on time-honoured folk stories from his community. His medium is more traditional than Poole's, whose work could be read as bringing the classical medium of oil painting up to date. Thus, both innovative and more traditional forms of art-making were honoured side by side.

²⁵ It is interesting to consider that many of the major South African sponsorships emanate from banks, for example the *ABSA L'Atelier Awards*, *FNB Vita* and *Standard Bank Young Artist Award*.



It could be said that this joint win reflected the needs of the sponsor at the time. This gave rise to speculation in informal conversations that the split prize might not have been because the works were of equal significance. Such commentary serves to highlight that public perception of an art award can be strongly affected by the interests of the sponsor.

I do not discuss the issues around the winners of the *2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards* in order to suggest that the judges' decision was unduly influenced by its patron. As is generally the case, these were respected members of the arts community, hailing from reputable institutions like the University of the Witwaterstrand. They lend a sense of authority to the selection process. As seen in the example of Doreen Southwood's first prize the previous year, motivations behind judging decisions are usually a topic for critique. I have highlighted the negative associations that surround art competitions as these formed part of the impetus for my own contribution to the *2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards*.



The *Brett Kebble Art Awards* were extravagant shows with ostentatious prizes and a large presence in the media. Nevertheless, it had also provided much-needed exposure for artists, with a respectable catalogue. Despite the doubt thrown on its patron, a large amount of respected members of the South African art community participated. 243 artists were able to exhibit their work. Furthermore, public interest was so high, even unprecedented, that 1600 people passed through its doors on one Sunday alone (Gurney 2004).

Lice Phillip Rikhotso | *Untitled* | 2004 (*The 2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards* 2004)

My own work benefited from exposure in this arena. *Consolation Trophies* garnered feedback in the press and also became distributed to a wide audience across the country when the silver cups were sent to the non-winning participants. Owing to the high profile nature of the show, many interested parties became aware of my work. This demonstrates how art competitions can be important forums for artists at the beginning of their careers. They often serve as their first engagement with the public and are seen as an arena for gaining more recognition. Other events with open calls for submissions can provide a similar service.

I was able to occupy a space within the context of a national museum as a result of responding to a request for submissions for a group exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. This is introduced in the following chapter.

University of Cape Town

2. We are relying on your support: Museum shows and project spaces.

Negotiating museums:

'The very nature of museums as repositories for knowledge and objects of value and visual interest makes them key institutions in the production of social ideas in many nations. Museum collections and activities are intimately tied to ideas about art, science, taste and heritage.'

(Karp 1992: 6)

As described by Karp in the above quote, it is accepted that museums fulfil the role of established authority on the state of art for their communities. National art museums are seen to be the safe-keepers of a nation's visual cultural heritage (Karp 1992: 2). Selection committees of individuals believed to be experts in their field, act as the arbitrators of culture. If an object is placed within a museum, it is assumed to have a sanctioned stature. In South Africa, the Johannesburg Art Gallery²⁶ dominates as much as the IZIKO South African National Gallery²⁷ in Cape Town. JAG is the biggest institution of its kind in the sub-continent, with a collection larger than that of ISANG. Rochelle Keene, the previous chief curator, explains her understanding of the museum as follows:

'What sets us apart is the quality of our collection. We have a trust fund which enables us to keep on collecting new works. Such is the size of the museum's collection that, at any one time, only about 10% of the works are

²⁶ Henceforth referred to as JAG.

²⁷ Henceforth referred to as ISANG.

exhibited, with the rest being stored away. The museum has managed to procure these artefacts, thanks largely to a generous sponsorship from Anglo American and the City of Johannesburg.'

(Keene in Thale 2002)

Institutions like JAG are collections based and therefore rely on a bureaucratic infrastructure. Large public collections funded by government and corporate bodies necessitate committees, discussions and negotiations before any decisions are made.

Clive Kellner took over from Keene in 2004.²⁸ Unlike Keene, Kellner is perceived to have a far more contemporary outlook. Amongst other reasons for his more independent vision, his training included the internationally respected curatorial training program at De Appel in Amsterdam. The gallery was in great need of revitalization. The surrounding area was (and still is) no longer considered safe. Even the outdoor sculptures in the vicinity have been subject to vandalism and theft. On top of this, the infrastructure of the institution needed revamping, both literally and figuratively. The building and administrative infrastructure were in need of repairs.

In what appeared to be a bid to inject some fresh energy into the space, Kellner invited young artists to take over the exhibition space.

Multi-disciplined art events organised by young artist-curators can attract a good deal of attention. *Soft Serve*, 1999, at SANG focussed on throwing a good party. Guided by Andrew Putter

²⁸ This was a significant year as it was also the tenth year anniversary of democracy in South Africa.

and Sue Williamson,²⁹ the first event featured a variety of popular DJs and prominent musicians of that time alongside artists and performers. Specific invitations for submission were issued, but so was an open call for submission. The gallery halls were open till late into the night and packed with people.³⁰

Occasions like *Soft Serve* also provide its fledgling participants with an opportunity to make an impact at an established institution. A brief look at the line up for the first and second *Soft Serve* events reveal names, like Robin Rhode, Ed Young and Cameron Platter, who subsequently went on to participate in the international art arena.

Less one night stand and more prolonged occupation, *24.7* took place at JAG in 2003. Christian Nerf facilitated this residency program within the gallery over a period of 7 weeks. The binding concept was that artists had to work in the space for 24 hours. Participants were free to fulfil these in whatever sequence they chose. A lack of strict curatorial direction allowed for work in progress, temporary performances, open-ended installations and members of Gallerie Puta taking advantage of previously uninhabited gallery corners to catch up on sleep.³¹ Despite having been invited into the space on the basis of the same project having taken place in his City Suburban Studios, Nerf's endeavour did not meet with approval from all areas

²⁹ Both artists are prominent members of the South African art world. Putter was already known for initiating the *Mother City Queer Project*, 1993. Williamson is the editor of online contemporary art publication *Artthrob*.

³⁰ The second version of *Soft Serve*, entitled *YDETAG*, followed the structure of the first, with Andrew Putter continuing to lead the project. Ironically, the theme was branding. The nature of the event subsequently altered considerably owing to negotiations with their corporate sponsor, Young Designers Emporium.

³¹ The Cape Town based collective consisting of Andrew Lamprecht and the aforementioned Platter and Young chose to fulfil their 24 hours straight through.

(Smith 2004: 266).³² Nevertheless, it brought a sustained influx of artists and audience through the museum. Nerf further invigorated the space by making use of parts of the collection that had not been aired for years. Works by Salvador Dali, Marcel Duchamp and Kendell Geers were removed from storage and used in constantly changing temporary exhibits.

I participated in a more conservative version of the museum-hosted multidisciplinary group exhibition. In 2004, Kellner invited a group of Wits MFA students, collectively known as 'aThirdparty' to take part in JAG's 10 Years of Democracy Program. They were given a budget and free reign to experiment with the gallery space over a period of 4 months. The curatorial focus of *Negotiate* was to showcase the work of young artists who had developed during the previous 10 years of democracy. It did not attempt to create the informal and sometimes irreverent atmosphere of the large art party as seen in *Soft Serve* or the ongoing residency of *24.7*. The exhibition was made up of 4 separate exhibitions entitled: *Intercession*, *Intervention*, *Arbitration* and *Conciliation*. Mixed media, performed artworks and installations were encouraged (*Johannesburg Listings* 2004).³³

³² Vocal critics of the project like the museum's exhibition curator Brenton Maart, publicly complained that Nerf had not fulfilled the promise of his initial project brief. Amongst other grievances, he disapproved of the content of the closing exhibition..Maart felt did not display sufficient evidence of artworks created during the time of the interdisciplinary residency (Maart 2003).

³³ There were numerous exhibitions celebrating 10 years of democracy in South Africa during 2004. ISANG chose to present *A Decade of Democracy*, a showcase of work collected during the previous 10 years. In contrast to this, *Negotiate* chose to focus on artists who had developed during the years of democracy but were not in the gallery's collection.

We are relying on your support:

For my contribution to the *Negotiate: Intervention* exhibition, I instructed the curators to display the museum's cleaning paraphernalia on a low-standing plinth. I requested an official-looking sign be made to read:

'Please assist with cleaning using the materials and equipment provided. We are relying on your support. Thank you.'



We are relying on your support. Thank you | JAG | 2004

While the curatorial team had been enthusiastic about my more ambitious suggestions like allowing food stalls from the street into the space, this was the only option they could afford. Finances had clearly been problematic from the start with this exhibition. This makes the wording of the sign more appropriate. I hoped some viewers would apply the request for assistance to the greater state of financial support for fine arts in South Africa.

The title of the piece, taken from its placard, continues the general polite and helpful tone that runs through this body of work.³⁴ Cleaning in general seemed a solid if somewhat literal interpretation of the theme of the exhibition and also to the greater context of a museum striving towards a new image. Kellner commented that the installation had a particularly apt significance for his situation. He had been engaged in strained negotiations with the cleaning staff at the time (Kellner 2004. pers. comm. 4 September).

I intended the placard to be as banal as any sign found nearby wet floors or difficult doors in communal spaces.³⁵ For the duration of the exhibition, members of the audience did not take up the invitation to action.

Other artists who have exposed previously unseen parts of the gallery space include Rirkrit Tiravanija. For *Untitled (Free)*, 1992,

³⁴ For example, *Don't Panic*, 2005, *Please don't*, 2004/5 and *Consolation Trophies*, 2004.

³⁵ Instructions in artworks could be seen to relate back to early conceptual works by artists like Marina Abramovic, Vito Acconci and Bruce Nauman from the 1960s and 1970s. For example, Nauman's *Body Pressure*, 1974, includes a set of instructions describing how the piece can be re-enacted so that it is possible for anyone to recreate the piece.

at the 303 Gallery in New York, the Thai artist moved the contents of the gallery's offices, including its director, into the main exhibition space and served food to visitors. Everything in the display area became the artwork, including audience interaction. Thus, the distinction between institutional and social space became blurred (Bishop 2004: 56). My contribution to *Negotiate* did not necessitate physical interaction.³⁶ What was required of the audience was an understanding of the dynamics of exhibition spaces in order to understand the implications of the piece. Objects normally confined to cupboards and storerooms were displayed on the same stands usually reserved for large, valuable sculptural works. Thus, the authority of the museum stand was utilised to draw attention to otherwise unremarkable, utilitarian items.³⁷

As a whole, the *Negotiate* exhibition program drew on the stature of the institution in which it took place. Young artists were able to gain exposure and also have a reputed museum on their list of exhibition venues. In turn, JAG was seen to be supportive of the upcoming generation of artists.

The museum's support of practitioners at the early stage of their careers extends further than projects like *Negotiate*. A room in the basement of the institution has been dedicated to emerging talent. The Project Room functions more like a project space, that is, it is a more informal area, where smaller, more experimental projects can take place. Unlike a project space, all activities still have to be sanctioned through committee.

³⁶ This manner of working is referred to as 'relational' by French theorist Nicholas Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics*, 1998.

³⁷ This links back to the example of Kendell Geers' lawsuit against the replacement of his artworks in the 1993 *Volkswagen Bank Atelier Awards*.



Installation view of *We are relying on your support. Thank you* | JAG | 2004

Cheap Tricks:

In contrast to major public institutions, artist-run initiatives act as experimental, Do It Yourself spaces where projects can be implemented without a great deal of red tape or fundraising (Griffiths 2006: 78). This formula allows for displays of work in progress, collaborations and one-liners. Catherine Griffiths, who researched this phenomenon in Berlin, comments that:

'The great loss is the free drinks.' (Griffiths 2006: 78)

There are many different models for such spaces, but they generally do as much as they can with very little money. For many, the only source of income is the cash bar. The Kunst en Technich space in Berlin supported itself through the efficient running of a bar at night.³⁸ The majority of project spaces do not sell work, but would probably do so given the chance. The project space seldom has an official board to make decisions well in advance, but is nevertheless a recognized forum for more experimental work. Sometimes these informal spaces lead on to becoming commercial galleries. Artists and curators make their name within experimental forums and proceed to move on to more established arenas. For example, Swiss curator Jean-Claude Freymond-Guth started out running a project space and has recently opened his own commercial gallery, Freymond-Guth and Co Fine Arts.

In South Africa, few of these have existed and fewer yet continue to function. Those that have managed to survive tend to perform multiple services for a variety of needs.

³⁸ One of the founding members was South African Jonathan Garnham, who subsequently initiated Blank Projects in Cape Town.

Cape Town's Blank Projects provides an alternative to the city's institutions and commercial galleries. It is here that Andrew Lamprecht hosted *The Cape Town Biennale, 2006*. The Capetonian theorist was the self-appointed: '...artistic director, chairperson of the board and artiste...' of the endeavour while Kathy Coates was the curator (*Cape Town Listings 2006*).³⁹



Ed Young | *It was only a blowjob* press release |
Blank Projects | 2006

Local artists Ralph Borland and Ed Young, who regularly exhibit on the international circuit, have used the space as a cheap and simple way to beef up their portfolios with solo shows.⁴⁰ These are often required for funding applications and study grants. The

³⁹ The original *TransCape* exposition of that year had been postponed. Lamprecht proceeded to organise that local artists bring as much works as possible into the exhibition space

⁴⁰ Both were held in 2006, with Young's entitled *It was only a blowjob* and Borland's *Promised Land*. While they had other reasons for exhibiting, both commented on the fact that they needed solo exhibitions on their CVs for 2006 and that the project space allowed for small, inexpensive installations (Young 2006. pers. comm. 4 October).

exhibition room is a small one and therefore easily filled. Young's show was, quite literally, a one-liner. He exhibited a magenta wall with the words 'it was only a blowjob' painted in white.



The Cape Town Biennale (detail) | Blank Projects | 2006

Something to match the furniture:

In Pretoria, Outlet functions on a similar level to Blank Projects. Photographer Abrie Fourie, who also lectures at Tshwane University of Technology, facilitates this artist run space. Outlet consists of a small white cube on top of one of the campus buildings (just above the art shop).⁴¹ I was invited to make a contribution to an exhibition of paintings by fellow artist Asha Zero entitled *A Winner in Hawaii II* in 2004. The show had initially been planned as a collaboration involving an intricate system for watering pot plants. At the last minute, Zero opted to exhibit his recent paintings. He reasoned these were easier to sell. As he seemed set on creating artwork that went directly from the project space walls into bourgeois living rooms, I saved him the bother of going through the inelegant matter of sales. I asked Zero and the project space facilitator and artist, Abrie Fourie, to bring a van to the home of my aunt, Yvonne Cohen and fill it with the contents of her lounge. The furniture, pot plants and bric-a-brac were then reinstalled in the showroom.⁴²

Zero chose a comfortable option. I responded by providing an environment that to many would appear to be so. The objects displayed an eclectic sense of style from the 1970s. Items of furniture do not match and the furnishings are largely brown and augmented with chunky embroidered cloths. What to many was a bizarre sense of style suited Zero's surreal cut-and-paste aesthetic evident in his paintings.

⁴¹ The fact that it exists on a university campus ensures that there is usually an available audience of students to attend exhibitions.

⁴² The clutter in this home is so extreme that this intervention had little effect on the space.

Because of the complete occupation of space, projects like *A Winner in Hawaii II* remind me of film sets and museum dioramas. In the latter, homes of past times are recreated. Those at the District 6 Museum in Cape Town recreate daily interiors of homes that will never again exist.⁴³ Such links could be further accentuated through placement in a museum. A great deal of patience and diplomatic skill is required to secure a solo intervention in a history museum.⁴⁴ In comparison, the project space can provide a quick solution to venue problems. They can also allow for testing out ideas at very low cost.

For the space of a week, the well-used backdrop to a specific family's life was in the spotlight. Visitors to the project space commented that I had gone to a lot of trouble to source such an ensemble. They assumed that every object had special meaning and scanned for clues towards further interpretation (Fourie 2004, pers. comm. 32 Oct). As in the example of the cleaning materials displayed at JAG for the *Negotiate* exhibition, the particular context of the project room imbued the objects with the aura of high art. They were therefore worthy of contemplation. The walls of the project space fulfilled the same function as the museum's sculpture plinth. It demarcated the boundaries of my installation. Visitors to Outlet sat on the furniture and pored over old family photo albums. More than likely, this is because the exhibition room is small and my installation filled the space. Within the impersonal halls at JAG, visitors would have had to stand on a plinth in order to utilise the

⁴³ District 6 was a vibrant community close to the centre of Cape Town. It was declared a white area under the Group Areas Act of 1950. By 1982, 60 000 people were forcibly removed to barren outlying areas and the houses of District Six were flattened. See Chapter 7 for further discussion concerning 'The Joan of Arc of District 6'.

⁴⁴ The Iziko South African Museum is a relevant example to cite here. I attempted to negotiate with them for a period of over eight months before abandoning it as an exhibition option. See Chapter 9 for further links to the exhibition as film set.



A Winner in Hawaii II (detail) | Outlet | 2004



A Winner in Hawaii II (detail) | Outlet | 2004

cleaning materials. This would not be suitable decorum for such an establishment.⁴⁵

Duchamp Duchamp Duchamp:

Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, 1917, is the cornerstone of the countless works that deal with the phenomenon of placing found objects in the gallery space. In the canon of history, he is the first on record to place a mundane article inside an art exhibition.

Arthur Danto summarizes Duchamp's contribution to contemporary practice:

'Duchamp did not merely raise the question "What is art," but rather, "Why is something a work of art when something exactly like it is not?"'

(Danto 1986: 15)

One way to answer the questions posed above is to refer to the context in which the objects under discussion are positioned. If an artist places an item within an accepted exhibition space of the contemporary art system, it is generally considered an artwork.

For the duration of *A Winner in Hawaii II*, the domestic objects that resided in Outlet were analyzed as art.⁴⁶ After this initial intervention into Zero's show, I sought to continue experimenting with the displacement of everyday objects within different

⁴⁵ I am aware of the fact that it is also a lot less taxing to relax in a well-used domestic setting than to clean a museum.

⁴⁶ The credibility of other artists who have shown at the Outlet adds to its authority as a relevant space. These include artists like Kay Hassan and Nathaniel Stern who are respected artists in their fields.

contexts. Testing ideas in more informal public spaces like pavements, parks and nightclubs followed.



Marcel Duchamp | *Fountain* | 1917
(Dadaism 2007)

All works introduced thus far were negotiated. I supplied initial proposals, which were then realised according to the limitations of curatorial and administrative infrastructure. Even the project space installation was a result of conversations with the artists involved. Concurrent to these endeavours, I developed a number of projects that existed outside of any organised institutions. They were neither developed in the studio, nor conceived of with a museum, project or gallery space in mind.

3.Public displays of affection: Independent Activities

Sticky Labels:

For my initial experiments outside of physical organizational structures in the art world, I utilised rubber stamps, t-shirts, taxidermy birds and skywriting. These were inserted into the public space for a short period of time. In each case, I worked with artisans to alter the objects before I temporarily disseminated them.

The accepted category in which such projects fall under is 'interventionist'. In what follows, I do not draw on a popular meaning of the word that sees an intervention as referring to an action that alters a negative situation (for example, insisting that an individual joins Alcoholics Anonymous). I use the term as it is frequently encountered in relation to contemporary art. That is, the term can generally be applied to any interaction with a previously existing artwork, audience or venue. *A Winner in Hawaii II* is a pertinent example of an intervention into another artist's exhibition.⁴⁷ This form of working is now common practice, especially in major centres in Europe and the US.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The assumption being that even if the artwork has been removed, something of import had occurred in the space.

⁴⁸ O'Doherty cites Duchamp as being the first to break out of the conventional gallery space and begin working in this manner (O'Doherty 1999 [1976]: 66). The conceptual artists working in New York like Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Gordon Matta Clarke and Laurence Weiner referenced Duchamp who had been relatively underappreciated before the 1970s. Renewed interest in the conceptual occurred in the 1990s with the huge financial success of the Young British Artists (YBAs) in Britain and later with European artists like Maurizio Cattelan.

One of the most appropriate examples of interventionist work to mention in connection with these early projects is that of Jenny Holzer. The American artist utilises text pieces a great deal. She posted these anonymously in public parts of New York. Other projects include making T-shirt works, with slogans like 'Abuse of power comes as no surprise' in her series of *Truisms T-shirts*, 1980. Other mediums have included electronic signs, posters, marble floors, bronze plaques, billboards and websites.

Interventionist work can take on a vast number of forms. The work of Lucy Orta, for example, initially seemed to have similar motivations to my own concerns. However, a closer inspection of the underpinnings of her interventionist projects led me to clarify issues of authorship in the creation of artists' projects.⁴⁹

On the occasion of the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale in 1997, Orta created *Nexus Architecture* with women from the Usindiso Women's Hostel. She initially wanted skilled workers, but, as the women were desperate for work, she employed them as seamstresses. Orta is proud of the fact that her employees acquired a skill during the project, with each being able to produce her own *Nexus* suit. She stresses that the women were free and inspired enough to make their own decisions and mentions that, in the production of the work, they spontaneously burst into *Nkosi Sikelele' iAfrica* while working (Orta in Bourriaud 2003: 18-19). While the Usindiso Hostel residents clearly gained some skills and possibly confidence from working with Orta, they catered to the artist's overall functional aesthetic. The women made suggestions, but were not collaborators. Despite her philanthropic ideals, Orta's role was that of teacher and manager

⁴⁹ Orta is my focus here, above other contemporary artists who work in a similar vein, due to the fact that I took an interest in her crossover from fashion designer to artist. My early research was concerned with the boundaries between the clothing industry and high art.

and the power structures inherent in these roles were still present.

Orta makes clear definitions between different arenas in which to exhibit. Her initial projects took place as interventions in the streets or abandoned outskirts of Paris in 1993 during Paris Fashion Week. She had the support of people like the director of the Cite de Refuge, Le Corbusier. However, this was not sufficient affirmation. The artist states her concern that these actions failed to attract any real interest from the art network:

'I came to the conclusion that I would have to be active in both camps: both "inside", in the museum and art centres – vitrines where I could confront and debate ideas – and "outside" on the street.'

(Orta in Bourriaud 2003: 9)

It would appear to be important to Orta that her work be represented within the art system. This is the context in which her projects, which are usually concerned with philanthropic motivations, become a form of self-promotion. Once Orta's interventions are represented as art projects in galleries and museums, the artist is given credit and publicity. Thus, despite her good intentions, once inside the gallery space, her endeavour is not without self-promotion. Orta was not content to restrict her work to the general public. She makes it clear that her aim was to exhibit the work in organizational structures within the contemporary art world. The audience in these forums is generally the cultural elite.

I believe that working with members of the public can enrich the realisation of individual artistic projects. However, the only collaborations I have engaged with during the course of this

body of work have been with other artists.⁵⁰ I have worked with artisans and assistants on a number of projects. Sometimes a training process is involved and in others, specialists have advised me on how to realise projects.

Hanging with the fat chicks:⁵¹

In later 2004, I employed taxidermist Michelle Pretorius, who specialises in birds, to work on a project involving dead pigeons. I asked her to reconstitute the bodies of the birds so that they appear obese.⁵² The disproportionate results were then temporarily placed in popular tourist spots, in the vicinity of public monuments and memorials. The work is entitled *Stuffed Pigeons*.

Capetonians are constantly reminded of the necessity of tourism as a main source of income. Overseas sight-seekers flock to the Mother City in order to experience her natural beauty as well as her man-made monuments.⁵³ I inserted *Stuffed Pigeons* into the latter.

Monuments, Galleries and museums all exist within a public forum. A museum like JAG is open to all members of the public but is seldom a frequent stopover point for the daily human

⁵⁰ See Chapter 6.

⁵¹ Line from the 1997 hit single *No Diggity No Doubt* by Blackstreet. Fellow-artist Christian Nef often says this when he encounters someone in close proximity to *Stuffed Pigeons*.

⁵² Some of the birds' stomachs were made from up to three carcasses being joined together.

⁵³ According to the statistics on the official Western Cape Tourism website, 1, 591, 658 international visitors came to the Western Cape in 2005. The income from this is said to be R14.9b. The number of recorded nights spent by internationals 16, 875, 193. This figure in terms of domestic visitors extends to 16.5 million (*Statistics for the Western Cape* 2007).

traffic that frequents the area. In contrast to this, monuments are an unavoidable feature of everyday urban life. They are also



Stuffed Pigeons | Castle of Good Hope and Michaelis School of Fine art| 2007

commonly associated with pigeons.⁵⁴ My project took place in the Company Gardens and also the Castle of Good Hope.⁵⁵ Both of these locations and the majority of permanent outdoor sculptures within them are testament to earlier regimes in this country, especially those of the British and the Dutch.

My grotesquely distorted birds attracted a good deal of attention from members of the public. While my original intention was to colonise these spaces for the period of a photo shoot, I let the interventions stretch into increasingly longer periods of time. A pigeon on a monument is an unremarkable sight. *Stuffed Pigeons* create a spectacle.⁵⁶

My use of taxidermy pigeons has similarities to Maurizio Cattelan's *Tourists*, 1997. Cattelan filled the rafters of the Italian Pavillion at the 47th Venice Biennale with hundreds of stuffed birds. He claims to have based the work on the experience of visiting the hall prior to the event and seeing it filled with pigeons. He recreated the scene, complete with fake bird shit (Cattelan in Spector 2003:19). My own, grounded birds are constipated and fit to burst. In the provincial setting of sleepy Cape Town, the hundreds of feathered 'tourists' that inhabited the rafters of the 1997 Venice Biennale turn into a handful of monsters that look more like the bastard offspring of a sitting duck and a pumpkin than part of the natural world.

⁵⁴ British Artist Sarah Lucas illustrates this well with *This One's For The Pigeons (Oil Pigeons, Over Here!)*, 2003. This was a proposed project for London's 4th Plinth Project, whereby an empty plinth in Trafalgar Square is regularly adorned with a new piece of contemporary art. Lucas suggested a resin model of a Ford Fiesta coated in pigeon excrement.

⁵⁵ ISANG is also located in the Company gardens and the Castle of Good Hope has hosted major art exhibitions like *Democracy X*, 2004.

⁵⁶ A discussion concerning interventionist activities surrounding monuments can be found in Chapter 7.



Tourists engaging with a *Stuffed Pigeon* | Cape Town Company Gardens | 2005

Stuffed Pigeons is intended to suggest that something in the self-referential art world is unhealthy, bloated and wrong. They have these associations whatever environment they are placed in.

At the time of making the pigeons, I was also amused by Erwin Wurm's distorted sense of proportion in *Fat Car*, 2001. The Austrian artist continues his sense of absurdity in projects like *Jakob/Jakob Fat*, 1994. In this piece, an associate of the artist follows instructions as to how to become overweight. In earlier works this was done purely through using layers of clothing, as in earlier pieces like *Instructional Drawings (Wearing the entire wardrobe)*, 1992.

I went to art school and all I got is this lousy T-shirt:

Clothing can play a large role in how people choose to present themselves:

'Fabrications have ceased to carry the onus of dishonesty, affectation or duplicity. Some people even use T-shirt selection as an opportunity to proclaim past achievements never earned (sports team affiliation), journeys never taken (remote and glamorous), associations never realized (Ivy league education or blue-collar employment) or even events never attended (renowned concerts).'

(Weintraub 2003: 194)

Weintraub explains the immediate communication apparent in T-shirts to those who recognize the information on them. The relationship between T-shirts and tourism specifically is mutually beneficial. The wearer can publicize where he/she has been or aspires to. Bodies become advertising space for possible future visitors. The curio T-shirt is also popular for those involved in large art events and at museum stores.

Engaging with the idea of locale, I sought to advertise places that would not usually be considered popular tourist destinations. This took the form of *T-shirt project*, 2004/5./ I designed logos for unfashionable towns and suburbs across South Africa. These were all glitter prints and based on fonts from MTV and other consumer-based packages. The *Benoni* sign is based on an old Mattel *Barbie* label. *Klerksdorp* uses an intricate gothic font

Benoni



Ashleigh MacClean and artist Ed Young wearing *Benoni* and *De Aar* T-shirts | Marvel Bar | 2005

popular on hip-hop albums and labels. *Milnerton* was developed from an Ali G DVD cover.

I gave a selection of t-shirts to minor celebrities from Cape Town's inner city club scene on condition they wore them extensively. Good examples of this experiment were gifts to punk rocker Ashley MacClean or barman Chad Rossouw, both of whom attended the Michaelis School of Fine Arts. These are well known personalities perceived to be trendsetters within the small cliques that make up Long Street night-life. Ironically, many of the more prominent figures within inner circles for promoting specific style stereotypes are in fact from out of town originally. The t-shirts are meaningless unless one is aware of the hierarchy of tourist destinations within South Africa. An outsider would be unaware that 'Benoni', 'Virginia', 'Milnerton', 'Klerksdorp' and 'De Aar' are not the sort of places one would normally choose to emblazon across one's chest. When isolated, the words take on a special significance. These text pieces rely on the language of the fonts developed for them as well as that of the connotations behind the names of geographical locations.

I heard you the first time.

The proper nouns utilised in *T-shirt project* gave careful thought to the use of font style, positioning and size of text-based work. I began to experiment with different media in which to disseminate text messages.

In 2004, I began a series of text pieces made from rubber stamps. The project had started as an invitation for *Don't Panic*, a skywrite that took place in March 2005. As a subtle form of guerrilla marketing, I liberally stamped other people's posters,

bodies and any available surface with the words 'Don't Panic'. I passed these on to friends to use as they pleased.

The other stamps were only invitations in the sense that they promoted their own content, rather than an event. 'Are we going to be okay?' was taken from pseudo-depression photographs used in an advertising campaign (Klein 2000: 37). The phrases 'One Night Stand Forever' and 'We are ships at sea not ducks on a pond' are taken from the work of Ed Rushka and Laurence Weiner respectively. 'It's boring without you', 'Damn those vodka martinis' and 'sorry' were much-repeated phrases amongst a specific circle of friends at the time. The sentiment becomes mechanical through constant repetition through an impersonal medium. This links to the repeated messages of *Consolation Trophies* from the 2004 Brett Kebble Art Awards.⁵⁷

Like promotional T-shirts, the stamps integrated into the variety of marketing languages inherent on the streets.

'Ads are designed to attract attention, and are contoured to fit the audience and elicit desire, whereas art is contoured to probe and question our desire and get the audience to see itself.'

(Rian 1996: 69)

Rian's view of art's function, as opposed to that of advertising, seems valid. His reference to 'audience', however, is not specific. It is not clear whether he is referring to gallery goers or society at large. It was only through placement in the gallery space that the stamps became separate entities open to contemplation rather than a quick conversation piece and plug for a friend's show or label before ordering the next drink.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 8 for further explanation concerning the messages in *Stamp Project*.

Rubber stamps are mundane objects. They are used for administrative purposes to communicate that a document has been through an official process. After office hours, they are common at the entrance to nightclubs and parties. An ink mark from a rubber stamp on one's wrist serves as affirmation of permission to enter the building. These take a while to wash off. Thus, if the party was a success, the mark is good press for both the consumer and supplier. Both uses for rubber stamps can be applied to the art world. If the gallery is a respected one, a show there generally suggests a stamp of approval, or at least a measure of legitimacy. From many an informal conversation with artists who operate on the periphery of main exhibition circuits, I gather that many perceive the art world to be separated into those people who are invited to the party and those who are not.



Don't Panic stamps | Cape Town | 2005

Slippery words:⁵⁸

Stamps and T-shirt designs can infiltrate a lot of forums, but, much like graffiti, they are easily forgotten after the first glance. I felt the need to make a grand public gesture alongside these more subtle ones.

On 21 March 2005, I hired an aeroplane to write the words 'Don't Panic' in the sky. One of the most well known places where this phrase is repeated is in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, 1986, by Douglas Adams. In Adams' cult novel, a travellers' guidebook for intergalactic trips has the words 'Don't Panic' on its cover.⁵⁹

The work also has links to the work of other artists. The general sentiment and large-scale public prominence of the work displayed similar concerns to that of Martin Creed's *Everything is Going to be All Right*, 2000, in London.

Many years prior to this, Yves Klein claimed the sky as his 'first and biggest monochrome' by signing it. Klein claimed to have signed it on the back and took issue with birds puncturing holes in his artwork:

⁵⁸ Title taken from the *Mail & Guardian* article on 'When the Inside Stays Inside' by Miles Keylock, 9 September 2005

⁵⁹ In the book it transpires that the earth is actually a custom made planet. An intergalactic corporate created it for a client to be used as a scientific experiment. The fact that the world as we know it is, in fact, a fake in Adams' novel is not inappropriate to my own endeavour. The movie of the novel was released shortly after the event of the skywrite. I speculated whether some members of the public might mistake *Don't Panic* as a promotion for the movie.

One Night Stand Forever

Damn those vodka martinis.

DONT PANIC

It's boring without you

DONT PANIC

Sorry

Are we going to be okay?

Sorry

Sorry

Sorry

Sorry

Sorry



Photographic documentation of *Don't Panic* | Cape Town Company Gardens | 2005 (Photograph by Mario Todeschini)

'Once, in 1946, while still an adolescent, I was to sign my name on the other side of the sky during a fantastic "realistico-imaginary" journey. That day, as I lay stretched upon the beach of Nice, I began to feel hatred for birds which flew back and forth across my blue, cloudless sky, because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work.'

(Klein in Sich 1995)

While *Don't Panic* had no artist's signature, I have received a couple of phone calls subsequently asking if other sky-writings above Cape Town were my new artworks. The piece took on a life of its own. Because the event occurred on Human Right's Day in South Africa, many presumed that the piece referred to terrorism.⁶⁰ Additional layers of meaning were imposed on *Don't Panic*. These are traced throughout the course of this dissertation. Kendell Geers notes that:

'There is a difference between finding a meaning for an object and finding an object to express a meaning'

(Geers 1995)

Don't Panic became an artwork that has a variety of meanings when displayed in different forums.

Cut and paste:

While introducing these projects, I have noted the points where they link to popular culture as well as to the work of other visual

⁶⁰ Informal conversation with Kwezi Gule, curator at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. In his original draft of a news article for Artthrob, Charles Maggs also made this observation (Maggs 2005).



Photographic documentation of *Don't Panic* | Cape Town | 2005
(Photographs by Doreen Southwood)

practitioners. French theorist Nicholas Bourriaud suggests that this manner of working is appropriate to the Internet age in which we live. In *Postproduction*, 2000, he contextualises the use of quotation and sampling in the work of a group of artists from the 1990s with whom he works closely.⁶¹ He compares the mode of production of artists such as Maurizio Cattelan, Pierre Huyghe and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster to the DJ and the programmer.

'It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects *informed* by other objects. Notions of originality (being at the origin of) and even of creation (making something from nothing) are slowly blurred in this new cultural landscape marked by the twin figures of the DJ and the programmer, both of whom have the task of selecting cultural objects and inserting them into contexts.'

(Bourriaud 2000: 7)

One of the problems with Bourriaud's interpretation of such practice is his suggestion that the incorporation of borrowed excerpts from a network of signs from everyday life is an inclusive, even democratic way of working. He quotes featured artist Gonzalez-Foerster explaining her work as:

'...introducing a sort of equality, assuming the same capacities, the possibilities of an equal relationship, between me – at the origins of an arrangement, a system – and others.'

(Gonzalez-Foerster in Bourriaud 2000: 13).

Thus the artist is placed on the same level as that of the DJ. Bourriaud suggests that visual practitioners of fine art need not be separated from society. They can be on a par with samplers who reference both high and low culture. Critics like Claire Bishop have taken issue with such assumptions. These ideals are contradicted by the fact that the ultimate destination of these projects is the gallery space. Participants are therefore always the cultural elite who frequent galleries (Bishop 2004: 54).⁶²

While this way of working implies the inclusion of a significantly broader audience, the language used does not equate to its becoming universal. That is to say, referencing sub-cultural capital⁶³ (for example a fashionable trend in clothing as in the case of *T-shirt project* or a popular novel as is evident in *Don't Panic*) does not necessarily make the work more accessible to the general masses.

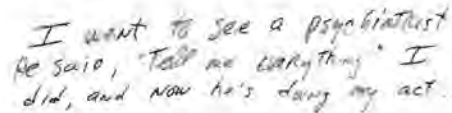
My body of work consciously functions within a variety of signs and symbols for different audiences. As is evident in the stamp project, some of my works refer directly to conversations between artist-friends. Other works like *Stuffed pigeons* relate to the work of prominent international contemporary artists. These could all be seen as 'inside' jokes. They are not necessarily funny without an awareness of context.

⁶¹ Cliques of artists, writers and curators who share similar concerns have long been a feature of art history. The Dadaists and Surrealists are good examples of this. In cases where these groups create an atmosphere of mutual respect, public critique and debate, I believe these have aided discourse and helped to enrich new genres.

⁶² Bishop's critiques are aimed at Bourriaud's first book, *Relational Aesthetics*, 1998 and primarily at artists Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick. I have applied them to *Postproduction* as the comment is apt to both texts.

⁶³ See Dick Hebdidge's *The Meaning of Style: Subculture*, 1981, in this regard.

4. When the Inside Stays Inside: Commercial galleries and international art fairs



Richard Prince | *Untitled* | 1986 (Richard Prince 2006)

That joke isn't funny anymore:⁶⁴

'I went to see a psychiatrist. He said, "Tell me everything." I did and now he's doing my act.'⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Title taken from a song on The Smiths album *Meat is Murder*, 1985.

⁶⁵ This text first appeared in Prince's *Hand Written Joke*, 1986. This was his first 'joke' work of art and was hand drawn on paper (*Like a Beautiful Scar on Your Head* 2002). The specific joke seen above was used again in the *Tell Me Everything* series, 1986, as ektacolour photographs. These are also seen in the painting *Tell Me Everything*, 1988, silkscreen and acrylic on canvas. Prince stresses that the jokes had to be presented in a traditional Fine Art medium in order to 'normalize' the object into art (Prince in Rian 2003: 20).

Richard Prince elevated the above joke into art. He repeatedly transcribed these words and those of other jokes onto different canvasses (Brehm 2002: 11). The jokes, quite literally, wore thin. In doing so, Prince touched on what I see as being an essential mechanism of the art machine: more often than not, the work of art is an inside joke.⁶⁶

*When the Inside Stays Inside*⁶⁷ was hosted by João Ferreira Fine Art in September 2005.

The title of my solo show in this commercial gallery refers to keeping work on the 'inside', within the confines of the white cube, as opposed to informal interventions.⁶⁸ Cape Times critic Melvyn Minnaar recognized the show as a "...cleverish in-joke...according to the warning of the title." (Minnaar 2005) Many of the pieces were removed from their original contexts and consciously packaged as products for what is essentially a shop in which to buy art.

Jokes become stale when repeated too often. So too does art jargon. Notions of 'when the inside becomes the outside' is a recurring phrase within local discourse, used to describe both work that has moved from within the gallery into the broader public and also when internal states are brought out into the open. Notions of 'the inside' and 'the outside' are frequently to be found in press releases, seminars and workshops in Cape Town. The title *When the Inside Stays Inside* sought to separate this exhibition from such arenas. All of the works on the show

⁶⁶ In this particular case, the joke is on Prince himself. In the art world, he plays the role of the psychiatrist in the joke, constantly appropriating material from other sources and using it for his own work (Collings 1998: 166).

⁶⁷ Henceforth referred to as *Inside*.

⁶⁸ See Lucy Orta references to the 'inside' as being museums and art centres as opposed to her interventional work discussed in previous chapter (Orta in Bourriaud 2003: 8).

were originally activated in parts of the public sphere, where they were visible in greater and lesser degrees to a wide audience. When represented within the commercial gallery space, I made no attempt to engage with a greater audience other than those that attend gallery exhibitions. I also refrained from exposing my private life through my artwork.

Like Prince, who appropriated images and texts to create his own 'original' work, I also frequently do 'other people's acts'. This exhibition provided a specific framework in which to re-contextualize my found objects and texts. The installation is made up of carefully packaged repetitions and references.

Less art more people:⁶⁹

Given my previous explication of the work, it is clear what was shown on *Inside* was embedded with reference and quotation. One of the most recognized examples of the exhibition-as-artwork in its entirety originated from Yves Klein's *The Void*, 1958. The self-appointed spiritual-guide-cum-court-jester of the art world presented an exhibition at the Iris Clert gallery that celebrated 'nothingness and sensibility' (Stich: 1995: 137). There were no recognizable traditional art objects in the room. This meant that the aura of the space and the audience itself became the artwork.

'Klein's Void was revolutionary in achieving the effect of the white cube as it is understood today,⁷⁰ whereby, the gallery's implicit content can be forced to declare itself through gestures that use it as a whole.'

⁶⁹ My father's description of *Inside* as compared to a previous solo show at the same gallery.

⁷⁰ This is the format of the gallery that emerged between the 1920s and 1970s, along with the Modernist movement.

(O'Doherty 1999 [1976]: 87)

Inside had little to do with Klein's spirituality and a lot to do with his focus on the white cube. The exhibition, as a whole, dealt with the gallery as commercial space. Slickly packaged products originating from fluid interventionist activities were presented with price tags. The exhibition was littered with all the typical elements of a store, including a billboard-sized logo (*Chanel no. 5*), advertising, marketing package (logos on T-shirts), different brands, packaging, various forms of merchandise, a lot of which was mass-produced, albeit in small editions.

While the show accentuated the white cube, it was no void. I did not seek to break any new ground, or awaken my audience to a new state of consciousness. For me, the show was more about banality inside the gallery space. There were repetitions and copies in every part of the installation. The music was canned. Much was artificial and the only elements of the natural world, the *Stuffed Pigeons*, were dead and undignified.

Party invitations in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction:

"Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in ownership."

(Benjamin 1999 [1936]: 214)

Benjamin's definitive quote could be said to be illustrated with works from *Inside*. In the gallery space, for the month of September, the ephemeral intervention *Don't Panic* was

represented in the form of three large lambda prints mounted on aluminium, a series of postcard-sized inkjet prints and a 2-channel video projection. Benjamin states above that, had the original artwork, in this case the event that took place on 21 March 2005, not occurred, these reproductions would have little value as artworks, even within the authority of the white cube.



Invitation image for *When the Inside Stays Inside* |,2005

On the day of the skywrite, the word 'don't' blew away long before the 'panic' did. The invitation image was Photoshopped. It is blended to appear as if the words 'Don't' and 'Panic' had remained in the sky together. Proof that the image had been doctored could be found in video footage of the event that was also present on the show. As an invitation is promotional material, one expects it to exaggerate reality and blot out uncomfortable details. Three identical versions of this particular advert were blown up in large lambda prints were displayed side

by side as an edition of three. Thus, the repetition became an object in its own right.

'In principle a work of art has always been reproducible. Man-made artefacts could always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain. Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new. Historically, it advanced intermittently and in leaps at long intervals, but with accelerated intensity.'

(Benjamin 1972 [1936]: 212)

Benjamin explains that while art has always been reproduced, it is now being copied through increasingly more sophisticated processes.⁷¹ This has irrevocably altered the function and value of the work of art and its role in society. The reproduction of an object breaks with tradition, but also reactivates the object reproduced, by promoting it and making it more accessible to a mass audience.⁷²

The form may remain the same but the alteration in context affects it. Copies of important art works are readily available in the form of mass-reproduced posters, postcards and books. These have no value as artworks.⁷³ In comparison, an edition of

⁷¹ Benjamin wrote this in 1936, yet his point is still highly relevant. Acceleration of technological processes make this all the more so.

⁷² Benjamin relates this idea to film, stating that, due to the nature of the medium, mass accessibility has come to be what society craves since its advent (Benjamin 1972 [1936]: 212). The art world is by no means separate to this and frequently advertises events to as many people as possible. One need look no further than the advertising in the public press for the 2006 exhibition of Picasso in Africa, hosted by Iziko Museums of Cape Town as an example.

⁷³ This is not true in the case of a limited edition artist's book.

artist's prints, signed and numbered by the artist, are accepted as original work that exists as a multiple. Because of a practitioner's control over an edition, its uniqueness, or, in Benjamin's words, 'aura', is maintained (Benjamin 1972 [1955]: 212).



Stamp Project | João Ferreira Fine Art | 2005 (Photograph by Mario Todeschini)

In a work like *Stamp Project*, I set out to confuse the idea of authorship in the artist's print. The texts on the rubber stamps are all taken from other sources and are not my own original material. Furthermore, for the gallery show at João Ferreira Fine Art, I displayed the rubber stamps themselves. These were sold as sculptures in their own right. The buyers who purchased these objects did so despite the fact that identical examples could have been ordered directly from a supplier at a fraction of the

price. Owing to the authority imbued on the objects through the gallery space, they purchased the right to use the rubber stamps wherever they see fit. The plastic stamp now has value. The print has none.

The work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres ties in to these concerns. The artist consciously devalued his prints through mass production and distribution. Because free posters like *Untitled (Death by Gun)*, 1991, were unlimited and freely distributed, they lost their rarity and therefore commercial value.

Within the gallery space, I sought to draw attention away from the print itself and, therefore, traditional associations with the art object. I emphasised the mechanism used to create prints. Their inclusion on *Inside* highlighted the constant use of repetition and reproduction present in the installation.

Other mechanically mass-produced items on the show were the small books that were given free to visitors. Catalogues could be seen as another form of spin-off product from an exhibition. The little books that were handed out to guests at *Inside* were more like a promotional gimmick than a more traditional publication with images of the work on display and contextualising essays. The booklets were small and contained only photographs of the making of the work on the show, alongside related visual material and references.

Post Postcards:

While the exhibition catalogue was a free gift, there were also curios on sale. Objects like the stamps, postcard prints and T-shirts resembled the kind of item found in the gift shops of big museums. These can be as banal as postcards and T-shirts with pictures of the Mona Lisa on them, to the Tate Modern's more innovative curios like the packets of seeds with Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, 1888, and the words 'grow your own still life' on the outside; or the floppy cloth Frisbees fashioned to look like the clocks from Salvador Dali's *Persistence of Memory*, 1931.

'...in the Metropolitan Museum, the first thing you hear when you cross the threshold is the whirr of cash-registers, evidence of a mighty commercial machine running at considerable speed. Shops and museums have a great deal in common. Urban, predominantly middle class, dedicated to consumption, either to images, ideas or goods. Once separated only by the availability of their contents (for sale in the stores, only for display in museums), new attitudes and new technologies tend to erode this distinction between merchandise and collections.'

(Bailey 1989: 5)

The fact that museums do not have visible price tags in their displays does not mean that they are excluded from the system of capitalist consumption. The museum shop is a constant reminder of this reality.⁷⁴ Souvenirs from the museum shop and

⁷⁴ In South Africa, galleries like the KZNSA in Durban, in fact fund themselves almost entirely on the earnings from the gallery shop, as opposed to from the sale of artworks (Janse Van Rensburg 2004. pers comm. 28 April).

the tourist industry go hand in hand. I sought to link the museum shop and the commercial gallery space through this exhibition. Taking the greater context of the city of Cape Town into account, links to tourism were evident throughout *Inside*. The postcards specifically took on the fact that we are inundated with idyllic vistas of what Cape Town should look like.

Large cultural events, like *TransCape*,⁷⁵ utilise the fact that Cape Town is a desirable tourist destination to lure international curators and artists into our galleries.⁷⁶ I have never seen any evidence that living near Table Mountain makes life any easier, other than making a pretty backdrop. Hence the postcard-sized inkjet prints of the skywrite. Idyllic landscape scenes don't usually have scruffy writing in the sky. Like their counterparts in less exclusive stores, these cards come in handy packs of three. Aping the layout of big museums and supermarkets, they were shelved just before the exit, to encourage a quick purchase before leaving.

Another series of postcard-sized prints on sale in the gallery space depicted the outdoor adventures of the *Stuffed Pigeons*. One of these was recognizably of Cape Town, with Lion's Head mountain in the background.

The pigeons themselves sat uncomfortably in the gallery space. Reviewer Linda Stupart comments that:

'Clearly they don't belong in the gallery, or in the city (the Gardens pigeons apparently hate them) nor back in the wild with their comparatively svelte pigeon friends.'

⁷⁵ The large scale Cape Town exposition is now set to take place in March 2007.

⁷⁶ Susan Glanville, when speaking at SESSIONS eKapa in December 2005, stated that this was one of the reasons why the city was a good place to host a major art event.

(Stupart 2005)

In contrast to the rhythm of the rest of the show, the objects were not presented in a store-like straight line. This display technique had its roots in the work of Haim Steinbach who

'...sustains the delight of a tourist encountering the glittering sights of a great bazaar. He avidly searches for souvenirs of his journeys, perpetually eager to re-enact the rite of impulse buying [...] museum-goers see their own lives reflected in his efforts.'

(Weintraub 1996: 136)

Another piece that suggested that all was not well within the space was *Please don't*, 2004/5. This installation had not been exhibited previously, either as an intervention in the public sphere or another form of accepted arena for contemporary art. I had repeatedly engraved stolen school stools with the title phrase. The scratched entreaties were not unlike a defiled door in a public toilet. This association is intended to emphasize the desperate message of the words.⁷⁷ As with the other previously utilitarian objects on the exhibition, the stools' presence in the gallery space elevated them to the position of noteworthy objects. Unlike the furniture installed in the Outlet for *A Winner in Hawaii II*, 2004, the pieces of furniture that made up *Please don't* were lined up on a pristine stage. They were also lit with spotlights. None of the visitors to the gallery attempted to sit on them. The context of the established gallery space affected these objects.



Please don't | João Ferreira Fine Art | 2005

⁷⁷ See Chapter 8 for further explanation concerning the motivations behind this piece.

Designer monuments:

'Increasingly, context is content itself and our interpretation of all forms of culture depends on the where and the why of how we come across it.'

(Dannat 2000: 76)



T-shirt project | João Ferreira Fine Art | 2005

Within the gallery space, without bodies inside them, the T-shirts became a glittering, static installation. As is the case in both galleries and department stores, a variety of merchandise was presented in a clean space that was well lit and carefully staged. Should someone choose to purchase a product from this environment and remove it, they are buying a part of a whole that retains the aura of the original installation (Hollein 2002:14). As the gallery is an expensive shop, I deliberately kept the pricing higher than that of a normal T-shirt in an average boutique. Even

though T-shirts are a cheap, mass-produced commodity, to make a small run can be as expensive as making a set of traditional fine art prints on Fabriano paper. This is not at all dissimilar to the way clothing brands function, whereby a simple white t-shirt will alter radically in price range, according to the label inside. The commercial gallery is not dissimilar to a designer store for high-end goods and the inclusion of designer wear seemed logical.⁷⁸

Comparing artworks and brands is by no means an original idea.⁷⁹ A recent example is *Prada Marfa*, 2005, an architectural intervention in Valentine, Texas, by Elmgreen and Dragset. The project involved the construction of a non-functional Prada store in the middle of the desert. Obviously, if the upmarket outlet were functioning in the middle of the High Street of a busy metropolis, it may be unremarkable (although it would only be found in areas where moneyed people frequent). Dragset and Elmgreen got their inspiration for *Prada Marfa* when they covered the windows of the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in Chelsea with the words, 'Opening soon: PRADA'. The amount of public response garnered from this, made the artists keen to further explore links between the public's response to art and a designer label. They wished to displace it and "see what it looked like without its urban environment" (Haq 2005: 67). The meaning of this sophisticated mirage is intrinsically linked to its proximity to Marfa, the village where Minimalist giant Donald Judd finally settled and worked. Nav Haq points out that the creation of this piece juxtaposes two major cultural icons with abrasive results

⁷⁸ The T-shirts were also on a group show, entitled *Printtttt*, curated by Andrew Lamprecht, at the Association for Visual Arts, 2005. For this exhibition, alternative techniques and versions of the artist's print edition were emphasised, alongside more traditional etchings and woodcarvings.

⁷⁹ The work of Sylvie Fleury from the 90s is an excellent example of this. She appropriates and reworks consumer items like luxury cars and perfume bottles and places them into the gallery space.

(Haq 2005: 67). The slick, clean aesthetic of the international fashion house is clearly similar to Judd's. This keeps *Prada Marfa* well within the self-referential discourse of art history.⁸⁰ Aesthetics aside, Prada is a corporate, money-making, mass produced commodity. It is also highly exclusive and available only to the wealthy. So are artworks.



Elmgreen and Dragset | *Prada Marfa* | 2005 (Pop Art Stores 2006)

'Today, visual advertising has become a commodity in its own right. With a quasi-autonomous aesthetic: it sells

⁸⁰ Vandalism to the piece occurred several hours after its opening (int. news), with 'dumb' spray painted over it. (Renteria 2005).

itself; the market success of Calvin Klein proves this sufficiently. As a mass product, advertising blinds the consumer's eyes to the thing itself and hides the illusion, its true nature, behind the ostensible effect of the product it touts. In this 'trompe l'oeil', it has become an unwelcome rival of art. By aestheticizing our environment, it is seizing control of some of art's public realms.'

(Belting 2003: 79)

If a brand is big enough, its adverts do not necessarily have to contain images of the product itself, the logo is self-sufficient. The actual merchandise is secondary to the lifestyle that is being associated with the product. Brands themselves are powerful symbols in their own right. They are highly sophisticated, prominent codes that are recognised across language and cultural barriers. This is the kind of visual power that most artists aspire to achieve in their practice.⁸¹

For *Inside*, I co-opted the logo of Chanel No 5. to become part of the installation. The perfume label was traced and blown up in large vinyl lettering that took up a full wall in the space. Had the lettering been on a billboard outside, few people would have thought twice about the sign. Within the white cube, it raised questions as to the possible meaning behind its inclusion.

At the time of conceptualising *Chanel No. 5*, I had been researching text pieces from the 1970s, especially the work of Lawrence Weiner, where the artwork is described in words rather than existing as objects.⁸² Working along the same principle, I

⁸¹ Danto points out that this is something that Warhol understood implicitly when he utilised these loaded symbols in his own work (Danto 1998: 181)

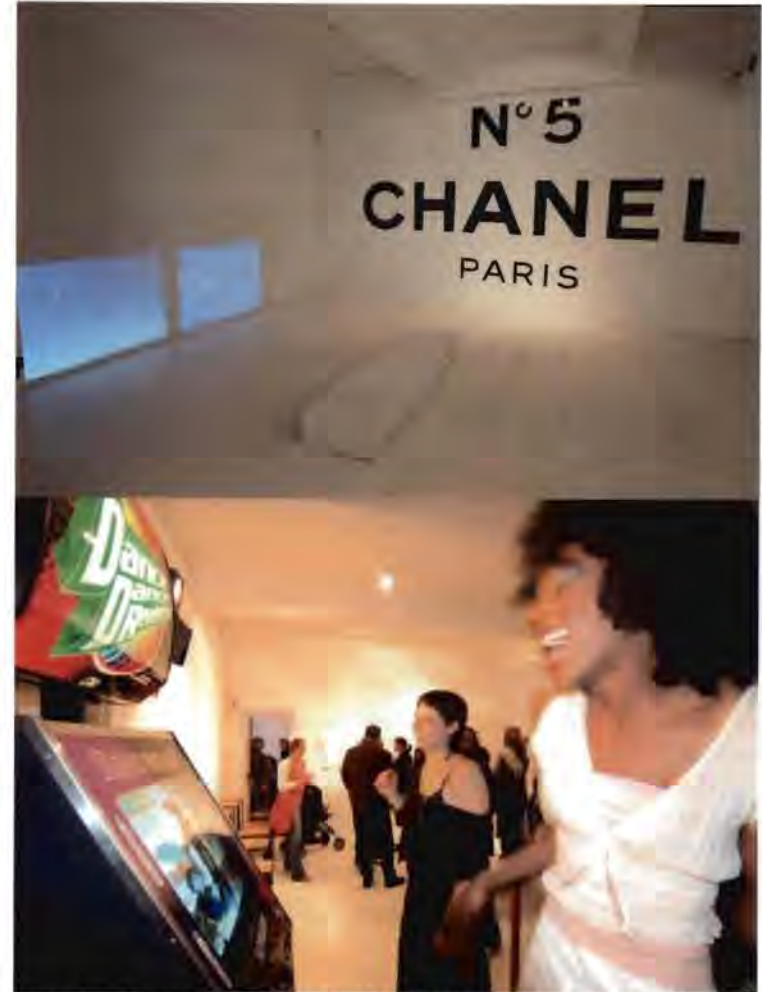
⁸² For example, in *ONE QUART GREEN EXTERIOR INDUSTRIAL ENAMEL THROWN ON A BRICK WALL*, 1968, the work consisted of the text.

wanted to utilise the 'glamorous provocations' (Fleury in Halley 2002) of the Chanel brand to suggest a set of associations. The Chanel advertising machine had been running for over half a century, promoting the idea that a single scent represented Monroe chic, Parisian fashion and elegant couture.

Usually, a prominently situated company name within a commercial gallery space is used only in exchange for money, that is, to provide advertising space in exchange for sponsorship.⁸³ I used *Chanel No. 5* as one of the many clues within the show that the gallery space is still imbued with an overriding capitalist concern. Those that don't know the work of Fleury or Weiner are possibly alienated and mystified by the piece (Reagon 2005: 37), but immediately recognise the logo. The brand was more accessible than the art. Its use of branding contrasts to that found in *T-shirt Project*, whereby the logos were amalgamations of well-known brands. Thus they were familiar, but not instantly identifiable.

Chanel No. 5 was made specifically for the commercial gallery show. So, too, was *Dance Dance Revolution*, 2005. For this piece, I installed an arcade dance machine in the exhibition space for the opening night of *Inside*.

⁸³ Sponsorship of art events by big labels does necessitate the use of a logo. At one of the after parties of the *Biennale de Lyon 2005* curators Nicholas Bourriaud and Jerome Sans were seen modelling designer clothes at a fashion show. Surprisingly, artist Wang Du, whose work on the biennial was an anti-media missile, also took part (Trembley 2005).



Chanel No. 5 and Dance Dance Revolution (Installation views) | João Ferreira Fine Art | 2005

Dance Dance Revolution is an arcade game usually found in shopping malls. Two players at a time dance side-by-side, amidst flashing lights and loud automated electronic music. The aim is to follow the dance moves prescribed by the machine as accurately as possible. It is a garish presence in any environment. The Dance Dance Revolution machine was especially intrusive in a space usually associated with quiet contemplation of art works. Its repetitive beats pervaded the exhibition area, as did shouts of encouragement extended towards participants from spectators in the audience.

My intention behind the intervention was to create an attention-grabbing diversion. I wished to link the exhibition opening to promotional events that are staged to coincide with the launch of new commercial ventures. *Inside* succeeded in drawing an unusually large crowd for the gallery.⁸⁴

I also set out to highlight the fact that the crowd at openings tend to go there to interact with and observe each other. '...Social events are athletic events...', comments Robert Storr in a recent article discussing a spate of openings he was obliged to attend (Storr 2006: 27). The director of the upcoming *Biennale di Venezia 2007* emphasizes that social interaction at art functions tends to become repetitive and artificial. *Dance Dance Revolution* sought to highlight this.

Inside made a variety of links between consumer culture and the exhibition space. Major international artists Maurizio Cattelan and

⁸⁴ The guests at Joao Ferreira Gallery that night not only set a record for the highest attendance on an opening night, with approximately 300 present, but also for their unwillingness to leave after closing time (Ferreira 2005. pers. comm. 3 August).

Takashi Murakami are relevant artists to discuss within this theme.

Mirror Worlds

'We are building a religion
We are building it bigger
We are widening the corridors
And adding more lanes

We are building a religion
A limited edition
We are now accepting callers
For the pendant key chains

To resist it is useless
It is useless to resist it
His cigarette is burning
But he never seems to ash

He is grooming his poodle
He is living comfort eagle
You can meet at his location
But you better come with cash'

(*Cake Comfort Eagle*)⁸⁵

Key artists have built up their practice on the model of big brands. It is not uncommon for artists to create spin-off merchandising that runs alongside their production for galleries. A prominent example of the phenomenon is Takashi Murakami. He has become so successful in his production of customised pendant key chains, bubblegum, handbags, soccer balls, clips

⁸⁵ Lyrics from the title track to the 2001 album '*Comfort Eagle*'.

and more that he has created a brand that comes close to competing with those of high fashion.⁸⁶ This is the Murakami religion, whereby the whole package, including the merchandising is his overall artwork. On being queried as to which of his products he considered to be high art, he stated the following:

'I have worked to break down the borders between what people conceive of as "high" and "low" pastimes. However, I do maintain that "art" exists, and what distinguishes it from pure commercialism is probably the facility for cultural commentary. If an object can, for some reason, feed intellectual discourse, it will be talked about in a different way from an object that is purely commercial. It has to do with the thought and consideration that flows through the object from creation to consumption.'

(Murakami 2005. pers comm. 9 December)

Cattelan too has become a consumer giant with his *Cerealart* franchise. Along with partners Ali Subotnick and Massimiliano Gioni, the company not only offers a selection of artist made products like shower curtains, but they also have created a small version of their physical gallery, whereby 'anyone can now be an art dealer.' (*Cerealart* 2006) The press release for the endeavour clearly sets out their motivations as blurring the boundaries between high and low culture (*Cerealart* 2006). The company provides multiples of work by critically acclaimed, internationally recognized contemporary artists like Laurie Simmons and Yayoi Kusama. This high profile example of an online shop for art works serves to emphasize the connection between contemporary practice and the sale of goods. As pioneer Pop artist Andy Warhol predicted,

⁸⁶ All of the above are available online at: <http://www.kidrobot.com>

'All department stores will become museums and all museums will become department stores.' (Warhol in Taylor 2002: 48)



Andy Warhol | *Brillo Box* | 1964 (*Famous Misquote of the Day* 2007)

Tom Wolfe believes that artists who borrow from popular culture often fail to be as effective as the very things they are copying. He mentions an exhibition by Warhol called *Supermarket*, 1964, where the artists attempted to recreate the sophisticated repetition and fluorescent glow of the supermarket within the Bianchini Gallery in New York. Wolfe feels that the exhibition failed to even compete with the supermarket as by that time supermarkets were far better at what they did than the artists were (Wolfe 1989 [1976]: 40). While this may well have been true of the exhibition itself, Warhol's entire career, including all of his commercial endeavours made up his art work. Like Cattelan and

Murakami, he established a highly successful commercial machine.

These artists have become the supermarket. They do not vie for attention with it or merely borrow its symbols.

It should be noted that Murakami's standpoint is fundamentally different to Cattelan's because of his cultural milieu. While both operate with a substantial knowledge of Western systems, the cult of the hero as well as the role of visual arts is fundamentally different in Japan. Bonami points out that the term 'fine art' is a relatively new concept which only entered the Japanese language in 1868, when the country was allowed contact with the West (Bonami 2005:117). Murakami's style, as explained in his Superflat theory, which links Japanese woodcuts to popular Manga culture, is quintessentially of his culture. So too is his business strategy of selling spin-off merchandise.⁸⁷

Inside was not the start of a launch of a massive commercial venture in the style of Cattelan or Murakami. I do not foresee myself mass marketing Ruth Sacks art-products over the internet in the near future, nor have I sought to formulate some kind of far-reaching marketing strategy. The exhibition made reference to consumerism in the commercial gallery space. I occupied this arena with an awareness of what that space implies, for myself as well as the larger context of the contemporary art system.

To me, commercial shows are embedded with formulas. As mentioned before, the work of art is often an inside joke. But this is not all it entails.

⁸⁷ Once a brand reaches cult status, the Japanese demand mass-produced consumption. For example, when clothing label Bathing Ape held a recent fashion show, a stadium for up to thousands of people was rented for the occasion (*Bathing Ape* 2006).

Beauty, terror and economic reality:⁸⁸



Carsten Höller | *Mirror Carousel* | Art37Basel | 2005 (*Basel Art Diary* 2006)

Many games are played in the greater context of working with galleries. This becomes more apparent within international art arenas.

If the commercial gallery is a kind of shop, it is a corner shop, catering to local needs. The art fair, in comparison, is the hypermarket where a myriad of galleries are represented as small stalls. The art fair is unashamedly commercial. It is entirely the realm of the gallerist and his / her customers. There is art

⁸⁸ Title taken from an article by Edmund Pieterse in *Art South Africa*, Volume 4, Issue 3, 2006

involved but any discourse or serious artistic breakthroughs appear to occur as a sideline to the actual business of the display and sale of wares. Over a short period of time, hundreds of thousands of people stream in to look at and purchase works.⁸⁹

Several months after *Inside*, some of my work was featured on *Liste '06: The Young Art Fair in Basel*⁹⁰ in June, 2006. This is one of the three subsidiary art fairs that ran in conjunction to what is currently the largest art fair in the world, *Art 37 Basel*. The idea behind *Liste '06* and also the *VOLTAshow 02* is to provide a fresh alternative to the established spectacles one is assured of finding at the main Art Basel show.⁹¹ The less recognized galleries in the alternative fairs take part with a mind to generate enough interest and repute to be able to move into the main fair in the future. Platforms are created to expose younger galleries and artists. The general understanding is that these alternative forums do not seek to overthrow the main system in place, but rather graduate to join them.⁹² This money-infused forum of an art fair seemed an appropriate coda to the commercial concerns of *Inside*.

'World exhibitions are places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish. The first world exhibition was in 1798 at Champs de Mars and predated the framework of entertainment industry... World exhibitions glorify the exchange value of the commodity. They create a

⁸⁹ I refer here to the major fairs, for example London's *Frieze*, *Art Basel* in Switzerland and *Art Basel Miami* in America.

⁹⁰ Henceforth referred to as *Liste '06*.

⁹¹ Art Basel is such a phenomena that *Art News* puts out a daily paper to keep the city up to date on the latest developments (Robinson 2006).

⁹² The location of the *Liste* show in the Warteck Brewery adds to the effect of it being an informal alternative. The nature of the building is such that spaces are irregular and walls are often left rough. This contrasts strongly to the slick surfaces of the main *Art Basel* stalls.

framework in which its use value recedes into the background. They open a phantasmagoria in which a person enters in order to be distracted. The entertainment industry makes this easier by elevating the person to the level of the commodity. He surrenders to its manipulations while enjoying his alienation from himself and others.'

(Benjamin 1999 [1939]: 7)

The above description explains a phenomenon dating back to 1798, yet can still be applied to what takes place in Basel every year. The *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* at Crystal Palace in London, 1851, is usually cited as the definitive example of an international exposition. Benjamin provides an even earlier example.⁹³

The element of entertaining distraction, as described by Benjamin above, was evident at *Art Basel 06*. Even though this is an event within the realm of 'high art', the spectacle that is provided could be seen to dwarf the average commercial entertainment park. *Art Unlimited* takes up an entire hangar in the *Art 37 Basel* exposition. It is made up of 70 ambitious, large-scale projects, which range from video projections, installations, murals, sculptural works and more. The artists' representing galleries fund these. An artwork like Carsten Holler's *Mirror Carousel*, 2005, would appear to both cater to and comment on the atmosphere of spectacle and entertainment.⁹⁴ Art critic Walter Robinson notes that the carousel moves slowly enough for members of the public to get on and off, but also not fast

⁹³ Biennials also have their roots in this phenomenon. See Chapter 5.

⁹⁴ On a very small scale, my own *Dance Dance Revolution* from *Inside* attempted to have a similar effect. It was intended to bring the irreverent spirit of the amusement arcade into the gallery.

enough to give any of the 'thrilling abandon' of a joyride (Robinson 2006).⁹⁵

Discussion groups and conferences with reputed academics and theorists also appear to help attract members of the public and scholars into the space. At the smaller sessions of these I attended, it appeared to be quite common practice for speakers to advertise the product they were speaking about. This was the case with Hans Ulrich Obrist, who promoted the revamped art magazine, *Janus*, of which he is the editor.

Identity has currency⁹⁶

Within the temporary ecosystem that exists for the duration of the Art Fair, the market is brazenly on display. Different attitudes are projected. The Goodman Gallery was the only South African representative in the stalls on *Art 37 Basel*. Works by David Goldblatt, William Kentridge and Mikhael Subotzky maintained centre stage in the gallery's stall. Goldblatt and Kentridge are two of the most highly acclaimed South African practitioners and thus commercially desirable, with the added perk of intellectual depth. Subotzky is a young artist in comparison and the work of the more established practitioners served as a fortuitous vehicle to promote his work. The work of all three artists is political in content. In the context of the mega art fair, political standpoints and moral judgements are easily subsumed by hundreds of voices and opinions vying for attention.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ The works in *Art Unlimited* are not merely promotional features to garner attention to gallery stalls in a separate building. Although they do fulfil this function, they are very much for sale. Höller's aluminium merry-go-round was priced at \$400, 000.00 at the time of the exposition.

⁹⁶ Title taken from outspoken artist and PhD student at Cornell, Thembinkosi Goniwe (Goniwe 2006, pers. comm. 3 September).

⁹⁷ Interestingly enough, the de-politicized work of Francis Goodman, hung on the back wall, separate to the main passage completely sold out.

In my opinion, the gallery space can also be a commercial venture where price tags are placed on politically loaded messages. The sheer volume of product in the context of the art fair accentuates the fact that it is a market and about commerce.

When the inside becomes the art fair:

At *Liste 06*, the João Ferreira Gallery was the only African gallery represented. I was pleased to be included on the show, as it expanded my project as a whole. However, I had difficulty ascertaining what work would be most appropriate. My initial plan of making a large red vinyl SALE sign was not met with much enthusiasm. The gallerist was not eager to ridicule the system in which he was participating. Due to the nature of the art fair system, I was pressurised into presenting a more marketable product.



Signage for *Liste '06* | Basel | 2006



The exterior of the Warteck Brewery which houses *Liste '06: The Young Art Fair in Basel* | 2006

The two works from *Inside* that made it into this arena were *Stuffed Pigeons* and *Don't Panic*. The pigeons seemed an obvious choice due to my anticipation of the saturated environment of an art fair. The skywrite had been a grand spectacle at the time, so also seemed like a good option. Due to lighting conditions, the split screen projection was presented on two plasma screens. I opted to place the taxidermy pigeons on the floor to accentuate their lack of flight.

In South Africa, interpretations of the piece had been based around the date of the event, that is, Human Rights Day.⁹⁸ An article in the *Basler Zeitung*, the daily paper in Basel, revealed the importance of a change in environment. In Marzahn's report on *Liste '06* the work is reviewed in the context of the heated conditions of the converted Warteck factory. He describes the confusion of making his way through the many distractions of the young art fair, through badly ventilated rooms in blistering heat. On reaching the João Ferreira space, he found the *Don't Panic* video to have a soothing effect. Instead of demanding attention, it allowed for a moment of quiet contemplation. He promoted the work for its aesthetic rather than the ambiguous message of its words (Marzahn 2006: 4).

In the above example, the temperature of the exhibition space affected the reception of the art work (and possibly absolutely no knowledge of the context in which it had originally appeared). This illustrates that practical concerns can play a big part in how a work is contextualised. Subsequent to the article, several interested parties sought out the piece.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ This was discussed in Chapter 3.

⁹⁹ A bad review can have the same effect. In the majority of cases, any attention given to an artwork in a mainstream periodical is in the work's favour. Further contexts in which the skywrite was presented are discussed in the following chapter.



Installation view of the João Ferreira Gallery stall | *Liste '06* | 2006

In South Africa, *Stuffed Pigeons* was associated with outdated monuments and artificial proportions (Williamson 2006). In Basel, many commented on the connection to Cattelan's *Tourists*. The recent sale of the same piece had pushed up its price by substantial amounts. It seemed to me that I had unwittingly tapped into one of the many popular gossip topics at the time. Several visitors were eager to hear about my motivations for *Stuffed Pigeons*. I only discovered afterwards that they were wondering if the obesity of the birds was a literal illustration of the inflated prices.

My work did not seek to demand attention through notoriety. Even if this had been my aim, it is doubtful the gallery would allow me to do so. Possibly, more than any other forum, at art fairs the gallerist is in control.

'Once a work of art is within a museum or gallery, it does not necessarily represent itself, it represents the artist'
(Malraux 1989 [1949]: 13).

This is evidently true of work shown within the commercial gallery space as well as the museum, as demonstrated in works like *Please don't* or *We are relying on your support*. If an object in a gallery space represents the artist rather than itself, as explained above by Malraux, an object in an art fair represents the gallery.

At art fairs, floor plans list the names of galleries, not the names of artists.¹⁰⁰ Exhibitions are temporary stalls. They do not have themes, titles or press releases. In this context, the artists also become commodities. This is a fact of the market. While an established name can up the ante of a gallery, the reverse is also

¹⁰⁰ *Art Unlimited* at Art Basel does this, but the individual artists' work serve primarily as an advertising mechanism for their representative dealer.

true. On a website like *Artfacts.net*, artists ratings can increase and decrease according to representation by a commercial gallery.

This time I mean it:

Participating in *Liste '06* made me more sensitive to the reception of work that has travelled. Once the exposition was over, it became clear that the gallery's feelings of rights over the work increased. Long after my contract concerning *Liste 06* with João Ferreira Fine Art was over, I had extreme difficulty getting the remaining works returned. The same response could have been elicited in the case of any art world affirmation, that is, an award, gossip, commissions or interest from other dealers. In the example of the pigeons, the gallery's investment in their being at the fair may well have confused issues of ownership.

Christian Nerf's *Polite Force* gallantly stepped in to help escort the crate containing *Stuffed Pigeons* out of the gallery storeroom. This intervention served as the final performance piece to be executed under the banner of *Polite Force*.

Nerf's project is an interactive mechanism that utilises uniform as a framing device. Standard police gear was altered to read 'polite' instead of 'police' in appropriate places. Once donned, wearers take on the responsibility of an exaggerated sense of etiquette. They proceed to interact with members of the public, performing positive actions and negotiating potentially explosive situations within urban spaces. The intervention at João Ferreira, complete with police dog, large, strong men and hidden video cameras was successful in the sense that a highly volatile situation was peacefully resolved.

My altercation with João Ferreira was highlighted through *Polite Force's* intervention. For myself, the performance piece served to bring to the fore what Tom Wolfe refers to as 'mating rituals' inherent in artist / gallerist relations (Wolfe 1975: 19).¹⁰¹ The removal of art works was not dissimilar to actions taken after a romantic disengagement.

Much repeated statements like 'This time we'll make it work' or 'I'm never going back to him/her' are common in art world circles. When a gallery shows interest in an artist, the process is not unlike courtship. There would appear to be a protocol. Acting overly eager makes a prospective partner appear desperate. Correspondingly, it is not in an artist's favour to have a promiscuous reputation. In a darker version of this analogy, many compare the relationship of artist to the market as outright prostitution. Andrea Fraser illustrated this in a literal manner by having sex with an unidentified American collector in *Untitled*, 2003. This 60 minute performance cost the client \$20 000 (Trebay 2004). Marina Abramovic gave the definitive performance along this theme in 1975. She exchanged places with a prostitute. The piece took place for the duration of the opening of her retrospective at the De Appel gallery in Amsterdam.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ It should be noted that the art world has altered substantially since Wolfe described his 'Apache War Dance', whereby the artist coyly pretends to refuse advances (Wolfe 1975: 19). After the 1980s and the YBA phenomenon, blatant acceptance of the gallery system no longer has such a stigma.

¹⁰² In *The Kiss*, 2001, South African artist Tracey Rose turns this into a race issue by mimicking the pose of Rodin's iconic sculpture of the same name. She poses with her American dealer, Christian Hays, who is black. In the photograph Rose gives the illusion of being a white woman.



Tracey Rose | *The Kiss* | 2002 (*News* 2002) Andrea Fraser | *Untitled* | 2003 (*Super Theory Woman* 2004)

Temple rituals:

Nerf's performance appears tame in comparison to the daring actions taken by female artists described above. Nevertheless, the intervention further adds to the history of the artworks that travelled to Switzerland. Once the birds returned to the studio space, they will represent the stories that build up around them as much as their original function as artworks. They become fetish objects:

'The fetish is not only a denial of loss, it is also a repository of value, whether the investment is sexual, economic or aesthetic.'

(Weibel 2002: 213)

Brian O'Doherty (amongst many others) points out that the gallery space is not unlike a place of worship. Rituals and rules are entrenched in our negotiation of this forum. It is clean, supposedly pure, space in which we speak in hushed voices. (O'Doherty 1999 [1976]: 95).

The value of the works on display at an international forum is increased through prestige, but also via anecdote. Both *Stuffed Pigeons* and *Don't Panic* now represent the exhibitions they have been on. Like ritual objects used in religious ceremonies, their association with a 'sacred' space alters their meaning. The *Don't Panic* videos represent an action that took place in the past. This documentation now also stands for exhibitions like *Liste '06*. After having to be rescued (and also certified dead in order to travel according to Swiss regulations), the taxidermy birds developed a colourful history. These factors add to their cultural capital.



Polite Force performing an intervention | 2006 (Photograph by Christian Nerf)

5. Absent curators and invisible price tags: Biennales and collections.

The market is a fact:

'Q. Why do you go to art fairs and biennales?'

'A. Art fairs: For the social/professional exchange.
Biennales: For the art and the social/professional exchange.'

(Nilsson 2005: 11)

'A. Art fairs: Because I am a sadist.
Biennales: Because I live in hope.'

(Sadotti 2005:11)

'A. Taytou go to art fairs to pick up loose lady but to biennales to find a love wife.'

(Taytou et Taytou 2005: 4)

As is evident in the above quotations, made for a publication for a fringe event running alongside the UK *Frieze Art Fair 2005*,¹⁰³ the art fair is perceived to be money-orientated, while the biennale is not.

The principle of a biennale is to present an international exposition of contemporary work. Pieces are commissioned or requested by curatorial teams. What is displayed is not overtly for sale. It is chosen to cater to the central theme of the

¹⁰³ *Frieze* is another major art fair. It is known to represent only more established galleries. The principle of *Pilot* is to create a fringe forum whereby artists who have no gallery (whether by choice or circumstance) get some exposure.

exhibition. The bi or tri yearly timeframe provides a focus, as do the specifics of the geographical location.

Art fairs and biennales feed off each other. On a purely practical level, they both attract the collectors, curators, gallerists, journalists, publishers and academics to a locality. The artists are there too.¹⁰⁴ A good illustration of this occurred in Turin in 2005 when the art fair *Artissima, 2005*, was scheduled to coincide with the opening week of *Torino Triennale Treimusei, The Pantagruel Syndrome*,¹⁰⁵ the city's inaugural triennial.

The triennale, dictated by the concerns of the two curators Francesco Bonami and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, displayed a plethora of work, primarily in three main museums and a couple of alternative spaces. It was free to the public, supposedly integrated across the city and open for three months. This suggests more long-term contemplation of the exhibitions was possible. The market-driven fair lasted for three days. As occurs in all art fairs, hundreds of different stalls and an excess of work were crammed into tight spaces. Visitors had to pay an entrance fee. The general feeling at a debate following the opening of *T1* was that the art fair was an unavoidable infestation of capitalism that had to be tolerated in order for the more high-minded business of the museum and gallery exhibitions to continue. When asked what he thought of the art fair in close proximity, Bonami negated this by responding:

'Why do people ask these questions? The market is a fact.'
(Bonami 2005: pers comm. 19 December)

¹⁰⁴ At *Art 37 Basel*, it was a commonly held belief that sales plummet when the *Biennale di Venezia* is not in the same year. There are also increasing suspicions of commercialism entering the *Biennale di Venezia*. This was a criticism specifically levelled at Francesco Bonami, the artistic director in 2003, in his main press conference at that event.

¹⁰⁵ Henceforth referred to as *T1*.

The market is certainly a fact, but it is evident in the biennial as much as the art fair. The latter are shopping malls, but not only for merchandise. They are also a shop for young artists. Curators for large-scale exhibitions tend to go to art fairs to find new talent. Fairs offer a wide range of trends, themes and media all in the same place. They are therefore ideal for planning exhibitions. This is also true of biennials. Gallerists and curators watch biennials closely to see how much exposure artists have garnered through their involvement. Despite the fact that there are no apparent price tags, biennials, are not set apart from the market. On the surface, a biennial can be an opportunity to create a work with no attention paid to commercial viability. In the end, participation makes for a more commercially viable producer. In addition to this, a biennial piece may sell after the fact.

One of the most important differences between the two phenomena would appear to be that art fairs are more to do with gallerists and biennials with curators. Biennial curators are usually far more knowledgeable about current contemporary discourse. Gallerists are not necessarily informed about theory or art history, as their role is to understand the market. Galleries need to sell work. Therefore, production in an art fair or a commercial exhibition may be entirely geared to this end. With regard to projects hosted by gallerists, artists often need to cover high production costs. For this reason they are sometimes persuaded to produce according to the gallerist's previous commercial success. As demonstrated in my experience at *Liste '06*, there is less room for risk or experiment in these arenas. In the case of some biennials, there is sufficient financial support for the artist to produce a work without having to consider its commercial viability and possibly even without the direction of the curator, if this fits the curatorial vision of the exposition.

A biennale in every back yard:¹⁰⁶

Both the art fair and the biennial are based on the late 19th century model of the trade fair. They have practical uses for their host cities in terms of creating a spectacle, bringing foreign and national visitors into the city and creating jobs. Sometimes they also manage to garner the interest of the general public. This applies more to the biennial as it usually requires a prolonged infrastructure and large fundraising drives.

The explosion of expositions in recent years threatens to saturate the art world. While art fairs can afford to be more formulaic, there is pressure on curators to constantly reinvent the biennial. For the duration of *T1* alone, international art extravaganzas in Lyon, Florence and Venice were a short train journey away (Sacks 2006: 78). There are currently more art biennials in the world than any time in the past. The *Biennale di Venezia* is the oldest and most established and sets the traditional model for this form of mega exhibition, with a separate pavilion for each participating country.¹⁰⁷ With so many new large scale international expositions springing up, this standard model cannot be applied to each different city.

Bonami's solution to *T1* was to become an 'absent curator', creating '...a pair of trousers with many legs' (Bonami 2005: 25). That is, he handed over curatorial decisions to a number of different sources. The use of many correspondents and a focus on the youth did not conform to the Venice model. This strategy

¹⁰⁶ Title taken from informal conversation with theorist Andrew Lamprecht (Lamprecht 2006, pers. comm. 21 May).

¹⁰⁷ It is now the only biennial to follow this format. The *Bienal de São Paulo* used to do so, but has changed its structure in recent years.

highlighted the similarity between the biennial and the nearby fair, as did *T1*'s central theme of consumption.

The upcoming international exposition in Cape Town went under the initial slogan of: 'It's not another biennial.' My involvement in a variety of fringe events for *TransCape*, produced under the auspices of the Cape Africa Platform and curated by Gavin Jantjies, would have been a valuable addition to this discussion. Unfortunately, it has been postponed due to unforeseen financial problems.

Over the last two years I have been involved in both the *Trienal de Luanda*¹⁰⁸ and the *1st Art and Architecture Biennale of the Canary Islands*.¹⁰⁹ Both dealt with the biennial model in vastly different ways.

Artificial Moonlight:

Although they are geographically close to the African continent, the Canary Islands are European, under the rule of the Spanish government.¹¹⁰ The biennial sought to activate alternative sites around the islands. Curatorial strategy was strongly geared towards the political:

'The Canary Islands are constantly in the news these days with reports of the continuous illegal, escorted and/ or expected arrival of *pateras*, cayuco boats and canoes to its shores. These small boats, arriving crammed with Africans from the continent, mainly from the neighbouring and closest countries (Senegal, Mali,

Nigeria, Cape Verde) but also from distant nations in the heart of Africa- are entirely inadequate for the service to which they are put by mafia groups operating with impunity in the area. The passengers they carry, who have invested their entire life savings or indebted themselves up to the eyeballs, make the trip with the noble aim of finding work in "paradise" or an apparent "better life". Yet some find quite the opposite as the dramatic crossing unfolds or at journey's end (apt words indeed) on beaches where European tourists relax and enjoy the sun and a decent life to which they too aspire and rightly so.'

(Zaya 2006)



Artificial Moonlight | Los Lavaderos | 2006

¹⁰⁸ Henceforth referred to as *Trienal*.

¹⁰⁹ Henceforth referred to as *Canaries Biennale*

¹¹⁰ In Spain alone there are currently 3 functioning biennials in Valencia, Seville and the Canary Islands.

The above text was emailed to me after the rejection of my fourth proposal.¹¹¹ It seems my previous suggestions lacked sufficient political content or were not within the budget. I had been allocated the Los Lavaderos building in Santa Cruz on the island of Tenerife. This was originally a washhouse. Today it is an art gallery. Every October the Los Lavaderos site hosts a festival commemorating washerwomen. Homage is paid to the Virgin of Fatima, who is believed to have presented herself to a small Portuguese village in 1917 through strange flashes of light in the sky. I combined the above information within the greater context of the concerns of the *Canaries Biennale* by placing powerful searchlights above the entrance to the building. For one week in November 2006 the lights were programmed to revolve and scan the area around the entrance to the art gallery. In an unexplained nightly ritual, access or escape from the building was denied. I titled the piece *Artificial Moonlight* in reference to the military term for the lighting of a battle area through artificial means. Within the greater context of the Canary Islands, there is much that is artificial in a popular tourist city.

Artificial Moonlight is site specific. It refers to the role of the Los Lavaderos gallery and its history. The medium of spotlights makes reference to naval search parties, but also serves to highlight the theatrical nature of big shows. In my work, for a brief period of time, passers-by were under surveillance, but also on a stage of sorts. If at first sight the lights suggested a party to passers-by, they were rudely surprised when the door to the gallery was firmly bolted. As it was the first biennial of the Canary Islands, the use of the type of lights normally associated with movie premiers seemed appropriate.

¹¹¹ See Appendix A for the other proposals.



Testing spotlights for *Artificial Moonlight* and view of *Artificial Moonlight* from a nearby hillside | Los Lavaderos, Tenerife | 2006 (Photographs by Teresa Arozena)

A work like *Consolation Trophies* is context specific. That is, it could only take place in an art competition. In contrast to this, *Artificial Moonlight* is site specific, relying on its specific location. Without any prior knowledge of the role of the Los Lavaderos building, the work would have little impact.

Artificial Moonlight was discussed at length within the small area in which it took place. The gallery received a number of queries during the day because the revolving lights interrupted a well-frequented walkway as well as the balconies of a nearby 5-star hotel (Botella 2006. pers comm. 1 December).



Peter Regli | *Reality Hacking 208* | 2003 (*Reality Hacking 208* 2007)

My site specific intervention in the Canary Islands has links to the work of Peter Regli. The Swiss artist developed a system of working which he refers to as 'Reality Hacking'. His practice usually involves placing inconsistencies into the public sphere. For example, in *Reality Hacking 208*, 2003, on the occasion of *Experiencia de Accion*, Habana, Cuba, he also made use of lights to create his work. He attached two signal lamps to the back wheels of fifty 'Bicitaxis' around the Capitolio of Habana. In

exchange for the lamps, the drivers agreed to leave the lights on the back wheels for one night (Regli 2007). In both *Artificial Moonlight* and *Reality Hacking 208*, temporary insertions were made with lights. Regli's piece drew attention to an informal mode of transportation normally taken for granted. In both cases, a previously unlit area was illuminated.

The Neverending Triennial:

My participation in *The Trienal de Luanda* did not take the form of a single intervention.¹¹² I was invited to spend time with the team in Angola to get a sense of how they operated. My role was to act as a contact point between South Africa and Angola. The aim was to set up an artist-run gallery in Cape Town that would function as a satellite space for the *Trienal*. This would have been funded by the Angolan endeavour and host projects from across Sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, the sponsors were forced to retract from this project. Subsequent to this, I researched, advised and planned for the South African participation in the international exposition. Initially, these were both set to start in March 2006. By May of the same year, it had become quite clear that these dates were simply not possible to fulfil.

My exposure to both an African and European exposition reveals the extent to which context affects contemporary art structures. The form of *Trienal* followed necessity. The organization acts as a production company, primary gallery (under the name of SOSO-LAX) and international exposition forum (*Trienal de Luanda*) all

¹¹² A more concrete example of artwork made as a result of *Trienal* is *I'll Stop believing in you if you stop believing in me*. This is more fully explicated in Chapter 6.



N'Dilu Mutima takes photographs of a billboard project orchestrated by *Trienal de Luanda* | Luanda | 2006

rolled into one. As Angola is still reeling from 26 years of warfare, it is necessary for an infrastructure to be laid down.

The current plan for the international exposition is to have a separate event for each participating country, staggered over a period of time. The United States of America was the first to participate in December 2006. Whether this continues intensively for a year or remains a drawn out process does not appear to be a primary concern of the team. What is important is that the city of Luanda can continue to sustain functioning artistic activity. Thus far, 12 new spaces have been opened and form a continuing network of competently staffed art locations, each with its own specially trained team. With every new opening, a citywide exhibition is held.

Contemporary art-making practice is slowly being introduced to a community that has experienced very little of such luxuries. In contrast to this, the Canary Islands has an established infrastructure of galleries, museums, universities and an art press to rely on. Despite this, very few members of the public were visible during opening week. Two large buses shuttled members of the press and artists to the different sites. At the majority of these openings, the audience was largely made up of those involved with the exposition as well as the local press. As the biennial was spread over all of the islands, sometimes in remote locations, accessibility was a logistical problem or impossibility. There appeared to be little effort to engage with the locals in each location. No mention was made of tours for members of the public at a later date. My impression was that this compounded the inherent elitism of the event.

The same was true for a conference concerning the Canary Islands' relation to Sub-Saharan Africa at the University of La Laguna. Except for a few exceptions, the audience was entirely

made up of artists and speakers flown in by the biennial administration.¹¹³

In contrast to this, *Trienal* aims to ensure that each event is accessible, with mini-buses available to as many guests as possible. This despite the fact that the galleries are all located in the Central Business District and in easy walking distance from each other. More important to future issues of access, is the primary focus on a functioning education program to go with each instalment of the greater project. As there is no art education in Angola at present, the organization makes an effort to fulfil this role. I have witnessed large amounts of school groups being transported to gallery spaces, receiving instruction, transportation and food packages while attending such events as the exhibition *Dipanda Forever* in 2005.

For the *Canaries Biennale*, organizational hierarchy was firmly in place, with a curator, director and administrative staff. These roles were not deviated from and correct protocol had to be followed. At this event, my role was the typical one of a participating artist. Unlike *Trienal*, I made no input into curatorial strategy or planning for future projects.

The situation in Angola is vastly different to the European *Canaries Biennale*. There are simply not enough skilled people involved for a conventional structure. Each part of the project involves training new members of the team as to how exhibitions are conceptualised, curated and installed. This necessitates that members of the core planning team who have experience in the international art world take on multiple roles. For example,

¹¹³ I only attended one session of the *1st International Symposium. Africa, America & Europe. Art and Social Landscape: On sustainable culture*. Apparently attendance had been better at the first day of the conference, but the university students who had been there went on strike.

photographer N'Dilo Mutima has been represented internationally on exhibitions like *Looking Both Ways*, 2004, at the Museum for African Art in New York and *Africa Remix*, curated by Simon Njami.¹¹⁴ In Angola, he is head of production for the team, performing menial tasks of driver and host to visiting artists, alongside working on his own practice.¹¹⁵



N'dilo Mutima wearing a *Milnerton* T-shirt | Luanda | 2006

¹¹⁴ *Africa Remix* is a travelling exhibition that has been hosted by institutions like the Hayward Gallery in 2005 and also the Mori Art museum in Tokyo in 2006.

¹¹⁵ The same can be said for the artistic director of *Trienal*, Fernando Alvim. Alvim masterminds most aspects of *Trienal*, from concept and fundraising, to invitation design. The artist-cum-curator uses his experience of participation in numerous international exhibitions to develop a working model for one in his own country. Alvim does not differentiate between curatorial work and his own practice.

Similarly, my role in *Trienal* was partially as the potential facilitator of a project space. This entailed meeting with Angolan practitioners and discussing their aspirations and ideas concerning future collaborations. However, the needs of the team were also for an administrator and researcher, which I fulfilled. It became immediately apparent that my role as a member of a broader organizing team was far more important than that of an individual participating artist. Aside from *I'll stop believing in you if you stop believing in me*, produced chiefly in Cape Town, no other proposed work for the *Trienal* was ever realised.¹¹⁶

Trienal is a shifting, fluid concept whose form constantly alters. This is probably the only way it can survive. The African biennial has always had a precarious existence:

'Biennales in Africa seem like bush fires: they are ignited, they flare up and light the scene briefly, sometimes memorably and unforgettably, and then they die. Or if they survive, it is only as a dull glow, which lights little beyond the immediate surroundings.'

(Williamson 2004)

In comparison to the apparent success of the European phenomenon in terms of longevity, African biennials do not have a good track record. For example, in South Africa, the Johannesburg Biennials only lasted for two events: 1995 and 1997. This is believed to be largely due to administrative and financial problems. The venture failed to capture the attention of the general public, although it gained recognition internationally and the second one secured director Okwui Enwezor his post as

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 6.

Artistic Director of *Documenta 11*.¹¹⁷ The Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, the city's local government and the primary sponsor of the endeavour, felt that not enough had been done to serve all of the city's residents and withdrew its support (Duncan 285: 301). Furthermore, the fact that Cape Town's *TransCape* exposition had to be postponed and reinvented does not bode well.¹¹⁸ However, as illustrated in the example of Luanda, any structure is preferable to none at all.

The Important African Collection of Contemporary Art:

Sindika Dokolo is an important element to the development of culture in Angola. As the son of prominent Congolese banker and husband of the President of Angola's daughter, he also owns one of the biggest African collections of contemporary art in the world. Key works by prominent artists like El Annatsui, Marlene Dumas, Olu Oguibe, Chris Offili and Yinka Shonibare are represented. These have been made available to the general public at exhibitions in Luanda. The collection is founded on that of Belgian collector Hans Bogatzke. Dokolo stresses that he has built on the previous collection, but through additions and subtractions, the collection is undoubtedly his own (Williamson 2006: 48). Dokolo also brought this extensive accumulation of work from Europe to the African the continent. *Trienal* artistic

¹¹⁷ *Documenta* is not a biennial, but is considered one of the world's most important large-scale international exhibitions. It occurs every 5 years in Kassel, Germany. A small number of artists like Candice Breitz, Tracy Rose, Kendell Geers and Sue Williamson are thought to have launched their international careers as a result of the Johannesburg biennials.

¹¹⁸ Other examples of African endeavours include the Dakar Biennial. This has been running since 1992. It has been dogged by administrative problems from the start, yet, to its credit, continues to exist with wide engagement, such as good local visitor demographics and international curators 'looking for fresh talent.'

director Fernando Alvim acted as advisor for Bogatzke and now does so for Dokolo.



Ruth Noack, curator of *Documenta 12*, visiting the studio of Angolan artists and an installation view of a showcase of selected works from the collection of Sindika Dokolo at SOSO CORREIOS|SONANGALP Luanda | 2006

Dokolo stresses that this is an African collection of contemporary art, rather than a collection of contemporary African art. For example, it includes a portrait of Mohammed Ali by Andy Warhol. As a major sponsor of the *Trienal*, Dokolo argues that he is a supporter of independent platforms in Africa. Through a partnership with SOSO|LAX, mechanisms have been created to support young African artists. Studio residencies and production costs are supplied alongside all-important exposure. I was the recipient of such support when he acquired one of the 5 copies of the *Don't Panic* DVD.

In 2006, for the first time ever, an open call was put out asking for submissions for a new African at the 2007 *Biennale di Venezia*. This has been awarded to a proposal by Fernando Alvim and Simon Njami. They are to curate an exhibition using work from the Sindika Dokolo collection.

A useful comparison may be made with Charles Saatchi in Britain. Saatchi's buying up of the work of Young British Artists was one of the factors adding to the prominence of artists like Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst. Collectors have always been fundamental in shaping art history. From the above information, one is driven to categorize Dokolo as the big international collector with a highly public profile and an open policy of bringing his work to the public, much like Charles Saatchi. Like Saatchi, he is no stranger to drawing hostile criticism and becoming the subject of international investigative journalism as a result.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ For example, see accusations of corruption from Ben Davis in his article *Art and Corruption in Venice*, 23 February 2007, on *Artnet.com*.

Point of Purchase:

Dokolo's collecting policy has far-reaching concerns that are set to influence international discourse and debate concerning contemporary African art. A far more personal private collection has been instrumental in assisting a smaller group of artists in South Africa to continue working.

Pierre Lombart's focus leans more towards what he understands to be conceptual work. The Belgian architect's patronage of the work of artists like Minette Vári, Pat Mautloa and Kendell Geers in the early 1990s helped them to pursue their careers prior to becoming well known.

Linda Weintraub notes that: 'Commerce is a form of ritual.' (Weintraub 1996: 136) For me, this was certainly true in the case of Lombart. My first introduction to the collector was a dinner invitation.¹²⁰ I was asked to bring my portfolio along. Some collectors, including major European players like Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo,¹²¹ wish to collect the work of artists with whom they have a more personal relationship. Both collectors have expressed that this adds extra insight into their pieces. Such relationships can also influence the final form an artwork takes on.

After a good deal of discussion, Lombart expressed interest in one of my projects that has never been formally displayed within an organised system of contemporary art. *onesizefitsall* was a

¹²⁰ To date, the three collections in which my work currently resides in began with dinner invitations.

¹²¹ Key works by Maurizio Cattelan and Richard Prince, to name a few, hang in her home. Sandretto also caters to the larger community through her support of the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo.

temporary insertion into the city of Turin. I was there at the same time as *T1*, Turin's inaugural triennial. In the face of the overload of visual and verbal information that saturated the city's art galleries at the time, I set out to make a quiet and reflective piece. I attached the top of plastic slippers to the ground in a variety of public spaces, using superglue.

In contrast to works presented on *Inside*, my solo show at João Ferreira in 2005, *onesizefitsall* had no finite form of presentation subsequent to the initial intervention. For the commercial gallery show, I had worked with the idea of the artwork as product. I had therefore developed editions of DVDs and prints from past interventions. Due to the simplicity of the *onesizefitsall*, I had avoided overproducing various versions of it. Lombart wished to own something that no longer existed in the realm of the physical. He therefore bought the concept. This was made official with a certificate of authenticity.

Conceptual artists such as Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni set the example for the use of such certificates. For example, in 25 February 1962, Manzoni issued a certificate of authenticity declaring Marcel Broodthaers a poet. These documents can also stand in place of the artist's signature. That is, if an artist is not able to sign his/her art object due to the nature of the medium, its accompanying certificate can contain the signature and also define the parameters of the work. These official documents become important markers of authority and authenticity when the value of a work is evaluated.



onesizefitsall | Turin | 2005

In the case of *onesizefitsall*, Lombart also wanted one of the photographic images of the piece for contemplation. He selected a specific location and 3 images of it. For myself, the visual representation was of little importance. The purpose of the intervention was not to produce a carefully staged edition of stills. If this were the case, their aesthetic would have been more carefully considered. The photographic prints represent the idea behind the piece.¹²² A similar process occurred with *Artificial Moonlight*, my work for the *Canaries Biennale*, whereby Lombart purchased a photograph of the intervention. In both cases, the edition does not extend further than one print (and an artist's proof). The rarity of the edition increases its value.¹²³

In contradistinction to Dokolo, Lombart is his own advisor. His carefully considered collection consists of work, which he believes to be of specifically illustrative of contemporary production in South Africa. For example, an iconic work like *Self Portrait, 1995 (original destroyed on flight TW800)* by Kendell Geers is to be found there. Lombart's collection is essentially a personal and private one and so far he has not made it available for broader public viewing.

As opposed to the private collection, whether inaccessible, as in the case of Lombart or public, as in the case of Dokolo, the institutional collection is by its very nature predicated on a different set of concerns. Decisions to acquire new work are generally made by committee. In many cases, however, budgets rely on the patronage of donors, who can extend influence in this regard.

¹²² This motivations behind the piece are more fully explicated in Chapter 7.

¹²³ This is also true of the context of the *Canaries Biennale*. Lombart purchased work made for the exposition from the 3 South African artists who had participated. The other 2 artists were Kendell Geers and Johan Thom.

It was through a process such as this that the *JAG acquired the Don't Panic DVD*. Director Clive Kellner cites having been introduced to the piece through the news section of *Art South Africa*. This could be seen to have given the piece a certain legitimacy.¹²⁴

Whilst these three examples of modes of contemporary acquisition demonstrate a certain arbitrariness in the process of acquisition it should be born in mind that the objects acquired are not similarly arbitrary. That is to say, my entrance into these collections was predicated upon a set of circumstances over which I had little or no control. Once the collectors elected to include me in their collections, each in their own way performed different but highly specific assessments of value. It is perhaps worth noting in this regard that two of the choices were for *Don't Panic*. In both cases before this work won the *ABSA L'Atelier Award*. In all these processes I had little control, given the different sets of pre-existing authorities that came into play.

Corporate ends:

The installation of my piece at *ABSA L'Atelier Awards 2006* functioned more in the manner of a 'salon' than a contemporary showcase of work. That is, its display mechanisms do not take into account the entire space as an installation (O'Doherty 1999 [1976]: 16). Artworks were hung against short white walls or placed on plinths. The work exists within their framing mechanisms, rather than fill the space as a whole. The audience

¹²⁴ Critics of the choice of winner for the *ABSA Atelier Awards 2006* have pointed out the fact that the director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery, Clive Kellner, was also on the board of judges. His opinion might therefore be biased as the work is in the museum's collection. This seems an unlikely proposition in light of the disconnection between museum collections and individual members of staff. The fact that Kellner had urged JAG's selection panel to purchase the work suggests that he was genuinely supportive from the start.

is forced to shift its focus accordingly. Due to a series of logistical problems, *Don't Panic* was presented on a small-screened television. The screening copy with both channels on one monitor had to be used as opposed to the intended installation, which would be seen on two separate screens. In retrospect, the form of the piece was as unimportant as those images Lombart chose to represent *onesizefitsall*. Once again, the concept of the piece is what was most important. Helen Weldrick, co-ordinator of the national selection panel had explained to me that she cast her vote for this piece on the basis of the overall concept. She had been present in Cape Town on 21 March 2005 and witnessed the event which the video referenced. In her eyes, these objects served as records and were not artworks in themselves (Weldrick 2006. pers comm. 18 July).

While *Don't Panic* won first prize in the competition, it was not purchased for the ABSA collection. The forum of the competition is not necessarily the same as that of the collection. The authority that selects the winning work for the *ABSA L'Atelier Competition* is not the same as that which chooses work for the *ABSA Corporate Collection*, nor does it have the same set of criteria in its assessment procedures.

This chapter has focussed on systems of authority within the contemporary art world. It serves to illustrate that both private and public collections as well as competitions are essential to a functioning art system. Whatever the motivations of the institution, individual patron or selection panel might be, these are necessary platforms. This is also true of biennials and art fairs. While many may critique the decisions of a curatorial board, artistic director or that of the more commercially-orientated gallerist, all of these mechanisms allow for the contemporary art world to continue to function.

I believe that one of the most productive forms of critique takes place within the practical participation in projects. The nature of the art world allows for alternative forums to be created and more traditional ones reinvented. The following chapter describes such an endeavour. *I'll stop believing in you if you stop believing in me* attempts to interrogate the authoritative exhibition catalogue by combining it with the artist's book.



Installation view of *Don't Panic* at the ABSA L'Atelier Awards 2006

6. I'll stop believing in you if you stop believing in me: The published book, the online exhibition and the collaborative project:

Fabulous Monsters:

*I'll stop believing in you if you stop believing in me*¹²⁵ is an exhibition that exists in a book. The title has its origin in a song lyric from *I was born (a unicorn)* by the Unicorns from the 2003 album: *Who will cut our hair when we're gone*. The purpose of appropriating the lyric for an art project is to link this sentiment to relations in the art world.¹²⁶ The song lyrics appear to make reference to Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. When Alice meets the unicorn, he is most perturbed that she exists. Following looking glass logic, where everything is opposite to normal life, he had assumed human children to be fabulous monsters:

'Well, now that we have seen each other,' said the Unicorn, 'if you'll believe in me, I'll believe in you. Is that a bargain?'

Alice agrees and the Unicorn promptly breaks his word (Carroll 1975 [1872]: 212).

Books in the art ecosystem:

Curators, collectors and writers would appear to need artists as much as artists need them. An important link in this system is contextualising information. Such information never carries as much authority as when it is in print. While a website may be instant and serve an immediate aim, it can be argued that for the majority, it is still to printed matter that we look to for ultimate authority. Journals, catalogues, monographs, coffee table editions, etc, all fulfil a necessary role. They do not have a transitory nature.

Stop Believing is expected to be in print later this year. A forerunner to this exhibition-in-a-book was a series of artworks that existed in the form of bibliographies. I asked people close to me to compile a list of books that they felt were necessary to read if one were to completely understand them. These bibliographies were self-portraits of a sort. The project sought to further highlight the importance of books for myself as well as those around me.

In an artist's Curriculum Vitae, a bibliography of everything written about the artist (or the most relevant in the case of established artists) is customarily included. Exhibitions are listed according to whether a catalogue was produced for them. To a certain degree, a catalogue is often seen to substantiate an exhibition. The catalogue also acts as a primary conduit for linking curators and artists. Hence numerous international shows use works by artists who appear in a number of catalogues.

¹²⁵ Henceforth referred to as *Stop Believing*.

¹²⁶ See Appendix for lyrics.

'If we treat catalogues as objects, objectifying exhibitions, can we think of the exhibition itself as an object in time? As something, which can be shown more than once, in the same way that paintings, photographs and sculptures are shown time and time again? Can we remake an exhibition in the same way that plays are routinely restaged? Can we talk about the gallery as a stage, as a theatrical space? Is there a reason why we commonly refer to what happens there as a show than as an exhibition?'

(Nickas 1990: 11)

As described above, the role of the catalogue is largely to represent an event that has passed. It lasts for far longer than the exhibition. It is this situation in the contemporary art world which myself and fellow-artist, Robert Sloon¹²⁷ addressed in the project under discussion.

There are many references to other artists in this dissertation. Almost without exception, I have never seen these works in real life. This is the case for the majority of people who live outside of major centres.

This is particularly relevant in a country like Angola where this exhibition was conceptualised. Angola needs to build-up educational resources in order for a new generation of artists to emerge. *Trienal* creative director Fernando Alvim felt that one of

¹²⁷ Sloon is best known as the editor of a blog-site that doubles as a tabloid. His practise thus far has relied on falsifying visual information in order to address central themes like fictional masculine identity and stereotypes. For example, he held two exhibitions on 13 October 2006. One was in Johannesburg at the Parking Gallery and the other at Blank Projects in Cape Town. He claimed to be at both exhibitions. The theme of the show was his own identity. His name is a pseudonym.

the most impressive things about South African art is the number of publications through which it is presented. Thus, one of his proposed projects for the South African representation in Luanda was is *Metadata_Africa_du_Sul*. The project, curated by Andrew Lamprecht, will be a physical bibliography of South African art. Lamprecht is currently in the process of gathering all publications concerning the art of this country since 1994.

In light of these potential projects, *Stop Believing* seemed an ideal endeavour to slot into the South African participation program. Not least because much of the initial correspondence and planning for the book was done online, while I was in Angola. The exhibition-in-a-book is in the format of catalogue. In this case, each artist was given 4 pages in which to present his or her work as if it were documentation of a physical show. However, there will never be a conventional physical show to complement it. *Stop believing* also sits in the realm of the artist's book. One of the more reassuring factors of the artist's book is that it has few boundaries. It is also an alternative to the gallery space (Drucker 1995: 70).¹²⁸

Unlike the well-known series of *Cream* books, all the projects described in *Stop Believing* are fictional. *Cream* is an international publication that works on the principle of a curated exhibition. 10 curators are called on to nominate 10 artists whom they consider to be at the top of their game.

¹²⁸ There are many examples of artists' books which are exhibitions in their own right. In Lucy Lippard's book, *Six Years*, 1973, at least three examples are cited. The publication in itself is an excellent example of the book as record. It simply lists every event that occurred within six years that Lippard saw as being relevant.

Don't judge a cover by its book:

The participating artists in *Stop believing* are all known to have dealt with themes of authenticity and fictionality.¹²⁹ Each was allotted four pages in the A5 book. Within this space, the practitioners were free to explore projects that might not be possible in real time or space.

Artists were invited to specially make works, following their own styles and concerns, but with this concept as a starting point. While the exhibitors had some control over how their work was displayed within this forum, the overall decisions lay in the hands of the curators, Sloan and myself.

One of the featured artists in the exhibition-in-a-book is William Scarborough who often works under other people's names. He and Kathryn Smith, whose area of research are the links between crime and art, actually acted out their proposed projects (or claim to). Scarborough apparently infiltrated an exclusive Internet sex chat line under several pseudonyms. He proceeded to stage a mock exhibition in which he supposedly surfed the net in an exhibition space. Smith went to a regression therapist to investigate her past lives. She then had her DNA tested. The results of these are displayed in the book's pages.

Angolan photographer Kiluanji Kia Henda, in comparison, describes what is obviously a spurious endeavour. He introduces the first African trip to the sun on board *Icarus 13*, using the overblown political rhetoric commonly heard in his home country. He photographs buildings and ruins in Luanda that resemble space equipment and presents them in the book as if they were

¹²⁹ My own interest in these themes can be seen in works on *Inside*. All of these culminate in my final installation *Open Studio*, 2007, which is fully explicated in Chapter 9.

documentation. In another fictional project, Cesare Pietroiusti and Gioncarlo Norese selected random photographs online. They display these alongside descriptions of imaginary contemporary art projects that the images could conceivably be illustrating.



Kiluanji Kia Henda | *Icarus 13* | 2006



Creating photographic evidence of William Scarborough's *Secure Socket* | Cape Town | 2006

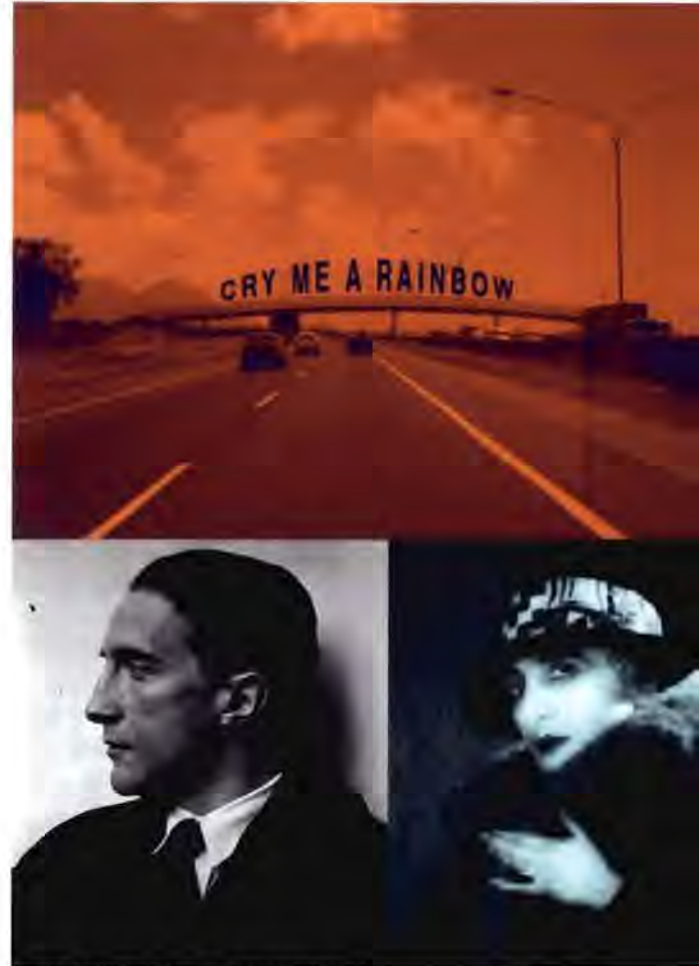
Zama Kubu presents only one image. It depicts a bridge along the N2, the road to the airport outside of Cape Town. The words 'cry me a rainbow' have been tacked onto it. Closer inspection reveals that the words are Photoshopped. It is unclear whether the image is a proposition or an attempt at falsifying evidence. This is in keeping with the tone of the exhibition. The artist has further responded to the overreaching concerns of *Stop Believing* by working under a pseudonym. As a visitor to South Africa, the artist was struck by sensitivities to issues of race that he experienced.¹³⁰ This could be in response to working with Robert Sloon. The latter is both a false name and an anagram. *Stop Believing* is riddled with these.¹³¹

An important alter ego in the context of this body of research was Duchamp's feminine persona, Rose Sélavie. Coincidentally, she had the same initials as both the curators on the project. I have used this factor to confuse issues of authorship in discussions around the *Stop Believing* project.

The overall tone of the Stop Believing project links to pranks played by Duchamp. Several scholars do not believe that he was the sole author of *Fountain*, 1917 (Godfrey 1998: 29). Others maintain that it never existed at all (Shearer 2000: 6).

¹³⁰ Beezy Bailey exhibited under the pseudonym of Joyce Ntobe at the 1992 *Cape Town Triennial*. Joyce's linocuts were bought by the SANG permanent collection while Bailey's were not. As Bailey had intended, a large fracas ensued when the institution was made aware that the artist was not a black woman. He has exhibited under both his name and his alter ego's for later exhibitions, with less impact.

¹³¹ Fictional names and hidden identities link back to Lewis Carroll. Carroll was Charles Dodgson in his daily life. The Alice books are said to present caricatures of his acquaintances veiled through anagrams and codes.



Zama Kubu | *Cry me a rainbow* | 2006

Marcel Duchamp | Marcel Duchamp as Rose Selavie | 1920/21

Alfred Sieglitz | Portrait of Marcel Duchamp | c.1923 (*Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* 2007)

Not one single statement or image in the pages of the book is to be trusted. I emphasize this by claiming that every part of the project was, in fact, all my own doing. Despite this, the project retains a measure of respectability through the inclusion of established artists like Cesare Pietroiusti, Peter Regli and William Scarborough, alongside comparative newcomers Daniel Halter, Chad Rossouw and Robert Sloon.

Robert Sloon and the vicious circle:

Stop Believing is an internet-based project in the sense that it was conceived and curated via online discussion. Certain artists from other countries contributed without ever physically meeting the curatorial staff or utilizing the postal service. This is an important factor for artists located in South Africa.

Prominent artist, writer, theorist and curator Olu Oguibe, explains how the internet fundamentally alters the scope for artist's forums.¹³²

'More than anything before it, including photography and the adoption of the found object, digitization loosens every column upon which the art historical canon is erected. Such traditional questions as authenticity, authorship, provenance and patronage, seem to be losing their relevance. Even fundamental issues of form and dimension, and of the very nature of art, have come under crisis. The museum has been overtaken by a new cultural and spectacular site, one whose architecture avoids the overbearing stolidity of the museum and takes the radical, new shape of an infinite web of hardware

spread across the globe, and within these a most elaborate labyrinth of *locations* and *sites* that constitute in all the most complex and actively utilised architectural structure ever erected.'

(Oguibe 1996)

Oguibe's statement serves to emphasize the freedom associated with the forum of the Internet. Whereas strict hierarchies are entrenched when exhibiting in physical organizational structures in the contemporary art world, the forum of the online exhibition can provide more informal and immediate options. That is, web space can be easily obtained and sites utilised. Artists working independently on the web, however, do not necessarily have the authority that institutional organizations can provide. That is, cyber space can be occupied, but the artist/curator still needs to build up an audience.



Robert Sloon | *Artheat* logo | 2006

Stop Believing co-curator Robert Sloon provides a good example of an online artwork with *Artheat* which he edits. This purports to be an art gossip column with critical reviews running alongside. Since its inception, its focus has shifted between the former and the latter. Nevertheless, the site has been taken seriously by established local critics like *Artthrob's* Gauteng-editor Michael Smith who describes it as having a '...sense of responsibility to the underground' (Smith 2006).

¹³² <http://www.bombsite.com/oguibe/oguibe.html>

Other South African based artists who have utilised the medium of the blog have done so in a more conventional manner. New media artist Nathaniel Stern¹³³ and his contributors treat the space as a kind of personal diary, discussing their activities alongside art-related news and useful information. Sloon has enlivened this forum by parodying elements of established website *Artthrob.co.za* in format. He also does not censor anonymous contributions, protecting neither himself nor his friends. As a result, the comments alongside each post tend towards unfounded critical opinion and vicious personal insults towards members of the art world. Anybody is free to express whatever they choose without ever having to own up to it.¹³⁴ As a result, the kind of gossip mongering generally reserved for private conversation can be aired in public. This lack of control means that the quality of debate is defined by the limitations of lowest common denominator participants.

Artheat is not a serious critical forum, nor did it set out to be. Sloon's project has been to create an online community that discusses the Cape Town art world. His use of the medium of blogs could be seen to subvert more established forums through notoriety. Sloon also encourages submissions of artworks to be exhibited online in examples like his *Artheat Residency* program and *Artwork of the Week*. I have contributed a number of artworks to *Artheat* under Sloon's pseudonym. These are generally throwaway pieces developed specifically for this forum. They are important in the context of this research project because of the confusing of authorship between myself and Sloon which extends into the *Stop Believing* project. Contributors from his friends and collaborators aside, the entire *Artheat* project could be described as Sloon's ongoing artwork, using the blog as his medium.

¹³³ See: www.nathanielstern.com

¹³⁴ This has a similar premise to Gillian Wearing's *Confess All on Video*, 1994.

Projects like *Artheat* and *Stop Believing* circumvent physical gallery spaces. Practically speaking, both are far easier to host and maintain than an exhibition in a gallery space would normally be. One of the fundamental differences between the online project, the exhibition-in-a-book and a more conventional exhibition structure is that the former necessitates a personal experience from the viewer. This contrasts starkly to my work made in relation to public monuments in the city space. In order to engage with a book, a reader generally has to make the choice to do so. In comparison, the public works discussed in the following chapter are imposed on members of the public who encountered them.



Your Child, an Artwork of the Week | *Artheat* | 2007

7. What will we tell the children?: Public commissions and Interactive group shows.

Art made in public is not necessarily public art:

My activities concerning public art have been both illegal and officially authorized, according to the specifics of the project concerned. In each case, the role of the memorial is explored.

'Public art' usually refers to artworks that are government sponsored, or, at the least, approved by some form of civic authority (and sometimes also powerful private corporations). The form of these public works usually follows conventional ideas about sculpture (Matzner 2001: 16).¹³⁵

That is, they are made from permanent, traditional materials, like stone, bronze or wood and are designed to last. Often, they become landmarks and tourist attractions that define the city as a whole. New York's Statue of Liberty or the Eiffel Tower in Paris are good examples of this. The decision-making process surrounding the realization of works of this nature usually sits in the hands of people who do not necessarily spend time in these spaces (Finkelpearl 2000: 44).¹³⁶ Problems can arise with permanent public art if an artist works autonomously imposing his/her own vision on an unwilling audience.

¹³⁵ Matzner notes that this separation of architecture, painting and sculpture was a bourgeois notion from the late 19th century (Matzner 2001: 16)

¹³⁶ Vito Acconci points out that public space is a contract between 'big and small, parent and child, institution and individual'. He describes public space as being 'loaned' to the 'members of the state, potential consumers' (Acconci in Matzner: 2001: 45). The average person has little input into how their urban environment is structured aesthetically.



Gustave Eiffel | *The Eiffel Tower* | Paris | 1889 (*Geography Tourism Association* 2007) Frederick A. Bartholdi | *The Statue of Liberty* | New York | 1884 (*The Statue of Liberty* 2007)

Well of course you're a bore, babe. But at that you're not charmless:¹³⁷

Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, built in 1981, seems a pertinent case to cite here. Cutting across Federal Plaza in New York City, this raw steel wall, 120 feet long and 12 feet high, obstructed the path of anyone who wished to walk across the space. Individuals within a public sphere normally have a certain amount of freedom in terms of the choices they can make. These include decisions like what to wear and what route to take to work (as long as they are within the parameters of the law.) Creation of an alternative route is usually due to practical reasons, like construction work. It is not often that the public is forced to make a detour for the sake of art. The piece was intended to heighten the awareness of

¹³⁷ Title taken from the lyrics to *Some Kinds of Love*, a song on the Velvet Underground album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, 1969.

the audience to their environment. However, the artist's aims in this case do not cater for its intended audience. Public outcry, in the form of letters and petitions followed the installation of the piece. In 1989, the sculpture was controversially dismantled and destroyed.

While *Tilted Arc* failed to communicate sufficiently with its audience, it sparked off heated debate and discussions. The audience became activated, but not in the manner the artist intended. Suzi Gablik, for example, is highly critical of the Modernist manifesto of art for art's sake, see the work as the epitome of problems that are brought to the fore by a Modernist way of thinking (Gablik 1991: 63). She points out that most artists see art as a space where one can pursue 'individual freedom of expression'. The Modernist way of thinking, however, meant that this also became a freedom from obligation to social issues and community (Gablik 1991: 7). Writers like Finkelpearl trace the history of monuments and large scale public projects, coming to the conclusion that this form of practice is most successful when the community is involved in its making. Artists should not impose their vision without careful consideration of who will be living with it on a day-to-day basis (Finkelpearl 2000: 43). In the case of *Tilted Arc*, the artist failed to have a conversation with the public.

Tilted Arc takes site specificity to extreme lengths. On being asked to relocate the sculpture, Serra insisted that it could only exist in that specific location (Eccles 2003: 10). The defunct piece is still topical even though, by Serra's own definition, it no longer exists. Thus, the power of the sculpture could be seen to retain resonance, despite having been removed.

In contemporary South Africa, many of the monuments cater even less to the general public. This is because our government

is relatively new and during the years of the apartheid regime, only a tiny part of the population was catered for. The public art from that time reflects this. Under the new regime, a number of projects have been launched to rectify this situation. The Sunday Times 100 Years of Stories program is one of these.



Richard Serra | *Tilted Arc* | 1981 (A Modest Proposal 2003)

An excellent example of a more informal, temporary set of interventions staged around monuments in South Africa was run by Public Eye in 1999. This was the *One City Many Cultures* festival. Through this project, local artists made monuments vulnerable to interference and parody. Brendhan Dickerson, for example erected a cage around the sculptural lions at Rhodes Memorial in Rondebosch, Cape Town. He included a huge banner reading: 'From Rape to Curio'.¹³⁸ This was one of many of the critical insertions into public space. Such interventions lead back to earlier work by human rights activists like Krzysztof Wodiczko's *Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch*, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, New York, 1984-1985, where projections are shone on monuments in order to both draw attention to them and interfere with their message and symbolisms.

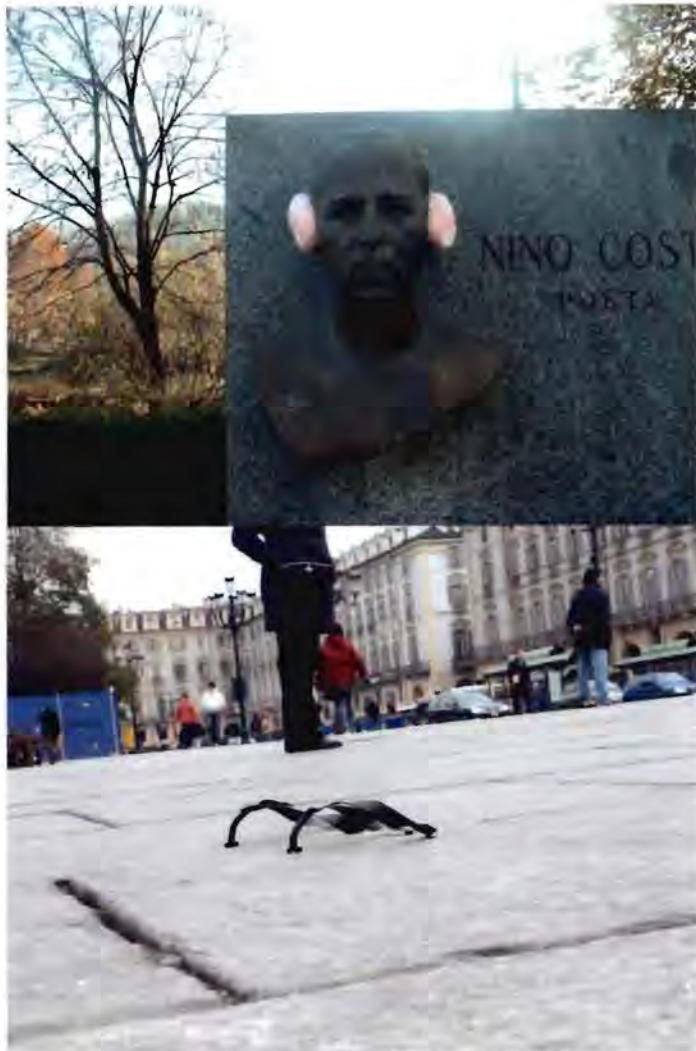
Tagging:

Following the kind of interventions outlined above, I dealt with existing monuments in a number of ways. The *Stuffed Pigeons* postcards began this idea. I also began an ongoing series of interventions entitled *Terms of Endearment*. This simply involves placing pink earmuffs on figurative monuments. This simple gesture is intended to emphasize the separation between the figures in the permanent sculptures (all of which are either stone or bronze) and the people who walk past them.



Terms of Endearment | Tenerife | 2006

¹³⁸ This is a play on the 'Cape to Cairo Railway' which Rhodes was intent on completing during his life. The plan was initiated at the end of the 19th century, during the time of colonial rule in the attempt to connect African colonies of the British Empire.



Terms of Endearment and onesizefitsall | Turin | 2005

While *onesizefitsall* was not positioned directly on top of monuments, the piece has been seen to take on their function. Sue Williamson describes the insertions as 'humble monuments to daily human traffic' (Williamson 2006). I also intended the fragmented slip-slops to remind passers-by of summertime, when such footwear would be appropriate. It was the middle of a bitterly cold European winter at the time I made them. *onesizefitsall* presents a futile situation. The sandals can no longer be worn. To stand in them means to be stationary and also to don the world as footwear.¹³⁹

Destroy all idles:

In comparison to the ephemeral nature of *onesizefitsall* and *Terms of Endearment*, *Couch Thrown* was a more enduring project in the sense that I felt the need to leave a permanent marker at the spot. On 7 October 2005, I threw a couch off a cliff along Chapman's peak drive, a popular tourist route just outside of Cape Town.

Furniture has long been used as a symbol for complacent bourgeoisie principles in the art world. O'Doherty uses it as a metaphor for the middle class when describing the work of Yves Klein:

'Klein's work had a generosity, utopian wit, obsession and its share of transcendence. In that apotheosis of communication that becomes communion, he offered himself to others and others consumed him. But ... he was a prime mover, very European, rife with

¹³⁹ David Shrigley produced a similar message with a pair of slip-slops made of lead. These were displayed at the Stephen Friedman Gallery stall at *Art 37 Basel*, 2006.

metaphysical disgust at the ultimate bourgeois materialism: the hoarding of life as if it were a possession on the order of a sofa.'

(O'Doherty 1999 [1976]: 89)

A more literal example of an artist publicly repudiating his possessions is Michael Landy. For *Break Down*, 2001, he systematically destroyed every one of his possessions at a C&A store in Oxford Street. The sentiments of this consumerist nightmare is echoed in countless music videos whereby tipping the trappings of middle class comfort off geographical features and tall buildings are standard titillation tactics in rock videos and movies. The clichéd onscreen romantic break-up generally involves belongings being flung from a high place and crashing in slow motion in the street below.

With the above clichés in mind, I attached some gravitas to the piece by permanently attaching a bronze plaque on the rock from which the couch was thrown. It reads: '7 October 2005 / Couch Thrown'. While this action was illegal, the official looking font (Copperplate) and traditional material belies this. Thus, the plaque creates a fiction of authenticity. It could be seen to stand in place of the typical gallery label. Hence it includes the element of a date and a description.

This is a strategy also employed by Erwin Wurm with *Castle Touched*, 1997. He too marks an action with a bronze plaque and a font that would not be out of place on more traditional signage.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ The Austrian artist has often dealt with the idea of a sculpture as an action. In Wurm's *One Minute Sculptures*, 1997/2000, he gives instructions as to how to make very ordinary situations into a work of art through the use of props and a finite length of time.

My work in the public sphere had largely been ephemeral up to this point. I had spent some time working with monuments, but as interventions onto pre-existing ones. Even the bronze plaque in *Couch Thrown* was unobtrusive and unofficial. I had to take into consideration the fact that working within this sphere involved a different audience to that of the art gallery. This became important when I was given the opportunity to be involved in a public commission for a permanent piece.



Work in progress on *Couch Thrown* | Hout Bay | 2006



Couch Thrown (detail) | Hout Bay | 2006

Today's news tomorrow's history:

I was invited to make a permanent memorial. The brief for the 2005/6 *Sunday Times 100 Years of Stories* project described the aim being to '... inspire South Africans to think about our diverse past in new, imaginative ways' (*100 Years of Stories* 2006). While I did not have aspirations of creating a continual source of inspiration, I sought to create a structure which had a utilitarian function and therefore endured as a useful accessory to the city.

The memorial project seeks to resurrect and readdress memorable stories and figures who have been thus far been ignored in permanent public commemoration (*What Heritage?* 2006). Thus, the sponsor, the *Sunday Times* is seen as contributing to the community in a substantial manner. Important

cultural figures like Olive Schreiner and Brenda Fassie as well as political activists like Lilian Ngoyi amongst many others are paid homage to.¹⁴¹

It would appear to be unusual in a project like this for specific artists to be invited to submit proposals. These are usually advertised in an open competition, like the *Third Public Sculpture Competition for the City of Cape Town 2006*. Primarily, relatively established artists were invited to submit proposals. My involvement was unexpected. I assume that prominence gained through the *ABSA L'Atelier Awards* had something to do with this. This provided an important opportunity to further explore the language of a mode of production I had engaged with from the start of my practical project on an informal level. As I had intervened in permanent public spaces like statues in the Cape Town Company Gardens, it seemed appropriate that I take on the responsibility of engaging with the challenge of making a permanent urban artwork.

The Joan of Arc of District 6:

The Sunday Times 100 Years of Stories project was challenging due to its requirement of having to be permanent. To further add pressure, the piece has to pay homage to a public figure who represented a very specific community.

Cissie Gool was a woman of many accolades. She was the first female of colour to serve both in local government, representing Wards 6 and 7, and as an advocate. In her years at Council, 1938 – 1963, Gool had no clear political policy. She has been critiqued for this. But there was a reason she was called the 'jewel' and

¹⁴¹ In all of these, the information on the accompanying plaques clearly gives credence to the sponsor. The *Sunday Times* also included a monument to itself. Artist/designer Teresa Anne Mackintosh was responsible for this.

the 'Joan of Arc' of District 6. She made a difference to individual lives (Paleker 2002: 4).

I followed the example of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's textual portrait pieces, and isolated specific actions in Gool's life. In an example like *Untitled (Portrait of Jennifer Flay)*, 1992, the artist listed the important moments in his subject's life. In contrast to this, I chose to find actions taken by Gool that would not normally be widely remembered. These took place in council and political lobbying and made a difference in the daily life of the common person. I selected those activities that were still on record in the Cape Town City Archives and in newspapers from the time. For example, in 1938 Gool collected enough donations to take 1,700 children to the Star bioscope to see Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* for the first time (... in the *Cape Standard*. 5 November 1938. p. 1). Sentences like this one are incised into concrete bollards of varying sizes. The length of each sentence dictated the girth of the bollard (once the initial size and font of the lettering had been decided). This is a reversal of the conventional process of the text being developed to fit into the design of the sculptural form. The monument to Cissie Gool gives prominence to text. I felt that this seemed most appropriate to the newspaper-based research as well as the nature of the sponsor. It also has links to my use of appropriated text pieces from my early interventions in a work like *Stamp Project* from 2004.

Traditionally, use of figurative sculpture in monuments is believed to be easier for the common person to understand (Miles 1997: 53). Other monuments in the nearby vicinity, like that of King Edward VII opposite Cape Town City Hall illustrate this theory. So too does the 2006 bronze Brenda Fassie recently erected in Johannesburg under the auspices of the same project. The idea is that members of the public can still be photographed next to

the icon. Cissie Gool was known to be a charismatic public speaker, but she was more than just an attractive crowd-puller. Those that knew her, stress her pragmatism as much as her dynamism. I wanted her memorial to be indicative of the former.



Bongani Fassie with *Brenda Fassie Memorial* | Johannesburg | 2006 (*Brenda Fassie Lives in Bronze* 2006)

I designed the bollards that make up the memorial to be used as seats, tables, podiums or stepping-stones. They are also situated in the shade, which encourages passers-by to put them to good use. Whereas, in previous works the use was taken away, I did not seek to reinvent the traditional public memorial with this commission. My intention was to insert a more functional element into the landscape.¹⁴²

¹⁴² According to a variety of sources and my own observations, it has been successful in this regard. Many members of the public spend time there during the day.

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Preparatory work for *Cissie Gool Memorial* | Cape Town | 2006



Cissie Gool Memorial | Cape Town | 2007|

The Politically Cute group exhibition:

The *Cissie Gool Memorial* is, appropriately, located close to District 6 and just behind the Cape Town City Council halls where Gool spent a good deal of her time as a council member. The bollards are to the side of a busy pedestrian walkthrough that links two roads. I am aware of the fact that, after a few months, the bollards are likely to cease to be a novelty and become another feature of the daily landscape. Permanent monuments and memorials in public spaces tend to lose their original message for the human traffic that passes them daily. With his *inHERITAGE* project, playwright and academic Myer Taub¹⁴³ attempted to address this issue. He sought to reactivate heritage sites on the University of Cape Town's Upper campus through interactive performance pieces, stating that:

'Making UCT's Heritage Trail interactive is significant because it energizes an exploration of our contested past by allowing its inhabitants, both performer and spectator, to negotiate their own route along landmarks of the past.'

(Taub 2006: 1)

The endeavour was supported by the David and Elaine Potter Charitable Trust, which allowed for a full colour catalogue and lavish lunch on the day of the event. Thus, the group exhibition provides another example of a sponsored art event.

¹⁴³ Taub is currently completing his PhD through the University of Cape Town entitled *Lessons from the Aftermath*, dealing with society's narratives surrounding trauma.



Marike Williams preparing to perform *High Tea at the Plaza* | Cissie Gool Plaza | 2006

Pretend you're not acting:

I was asked to make a temporary intervention on the Cissie Gool Plaza to coincide with the permanent memorial for the *Sunday Times 100 years of Stories* project. This gave me the opportunity

to explore other elements of Gool's role in the community in a looser manner. I chose to take on the broader political issue of claiming of territory. Gool was known as a fierce fighter against the land acts, as is evident on some of the bollards.

My piece, entitled *High Tea at the Plaza*,¹⁴⁴ did not deal with land issues in South Africa specifically, but that of the globe. I commissioned a metre long rectangular cake to be made. This had an edible map of the world embedded in its icing. Members of the audience were invited to choose which part of the world map they would like to consume. This was then sliced out of the cake and served, along with a glass of champagne. Actress Marike Williams was hired to fulfil the role of waitress. She gave a lively and loquacious performance, which paid tribute to Gool's legacy as an engaging and often humorous public speaker.

I had instructed Williams to 'pretend' to be a waitress. Part of her unscripted patter ran as follows:

'The cake is stealing the spotlight. I am a performer and you tell me to pretend I'm not acting. Well, the competition with the cake is on. Why didn't you tell me the people had arrived?'

(Williams in Taub 2006: 8)

Williams brought to the fore a tension concerning the nature of her performance. Her patter makes it clear that she resented being an accessory to the cake. According to her idea of performance, she felt she should have taken precedence over the 'prop' that was the cake. The actress was not familiar with the convention within contemporary art production of simple actions being billed under the label of 'performance.' For example, Vito Acconci's *Following Piece* of 1969 involved

¹⁴⁴ Henceforth referred to as *High Tea*.

following members of the public until they entered a private space. A more pertinent (and recent) example to cite in the context of *High Tea* would be a piece like Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (From Madrid Airport to Reina)*. In this piece he served food to members of the public from a wheeled contraption (Weintraub 2003: 107).¹⁴⁵



Rirkrit Tiravanija | *Untitled* | 2002 (SOA's Rirkrit Tiravanija Named Finalist 2004)

¹⁴⁵ Bourriaud refers to this manner of working as having a 'performance aspect' rather than 'performance'. That is, all the elements of a performance are present, but there is no formal stage or spotlight (Bourriaud: 11 2000).

Emotional Geography:¹⁴⁶

The world map utilised on the cake from *High Tea* is the Mercator Projection map. This is the most commonly used world map since 1569 and, according to some, gives an inaccurate sense of scale that is biased in favour of the Northern Hemisphere. As the earth is a globe, different projections of it can occur when it is represented on a flat surface. In the Mercator Projection, Northern continents appear larger in comparison to Southern ones. The Peters Projection map, first released in 1983, purports to present all countries and continents according to their actual size (Rosenburg 2006). The representation of the world map as seen on the cake in *High Tea* may be seen to be biased in favour of the Northern Hemisphere. However, the intention behind the piece was to allow for all parts of the map to receive equal treatment. This is also true of the natural world in real life. The horrific tsunamis of 2004 in the Indian Ocean bear witness to the equal treatment of different parts of the globe, regardless of man-made borders. Photographic documentation of the dismembered map emphasizes the fragility of the cake and also the fragility of the planet it represents.

Slicing up the cake was also intended to mimic the straight lines which divide up African countries like Libya, Kenya and Sudan. These do not cater to natural geographical borders or human habitation patterns. The geometric nature of the map of Africa was largely decided by colonising European countries at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 largely decided (Rosenburg 2006). This has been the topic for many artists, including 'post-colonial hybrid' artist Yinka Shonibare (Bongers 2004: 8). A work like *Scramble for Africa*, 2003, utilises a map of Africa as part of the

¹⁴⁶ Title taken from Fernando Alvim (Alvim 2006. pers comm. 3 Jan)



High Tea at the Plaza (detail) | Cissie Gool Plaza | 2006

installation.¹⁴⁷ The world map can also be manipulated to represent emotional responses to parts of the globe. Robert Sloon, whereby he removes the whole of Canada from the map, emphasizes this in an artwork. Apparently the artist was experiencing great difficulty attempting to reside in that country at the time. The piece is entitled *I've stopped Believing in Canada*, 2006, and forms the cover of the exhibition-in-a-book, *Stop Believing..*



Time and place:

inHERITAGE encouraged groups of people to interrogate the role of specific heritage sites in contemporary South African society. A seminar ran alongside the event in which several relevant issues concerning public space in this country were raised by academics Anthony Jackson and Ismail Farouk. Despite a concern with public space, *inHERITAGE* was not open to the

¹⁴⁷ The map of Africa is part of a table top around which headless figurines are placed.

public. The seminar and accompanying luncheon were by invitation only. The event took place on Heritage Day (24 September 2006). While the date was appropriate to the theme, it also meant that very few students were on campus to experience the performances and interventions that took place. In comparison, the *Cissie Gool Memorial* is permanently embedded in the greater context of the city.

concerned with an underlying symbolism relating to my family history. These are alluded to in the following chapter. Chapter 9 takes the form of an interview with myself. I feel that this is the best format in which to present more intimate details about my private life.



Peters Projection map (*Geography 222* 2007) | Robert Sloon | *I've Stopped Believing in Canada* | 2006 (Courtesy of Robert Sloon)

I have engaged in different forms of public art. The examples of projects discussed in this chapter serve to illustrate the vastly different media my work can incorporate. This is indicative of my greater project of tailoring projects to suit specific contexts. The nature of the public commission necessitated that the content of the piece was accessible to a wider audience. In comparison, the more informal intervention *Couch Thrown* allowed me to explore more a more personal form of visual communication. The piece is

9. Please don't: An interview

>Q

In *How today's artists think and work* Linda Weintraub states that looking at an artist '...whose 'self' is not identified can be as unsettling as receiving an anonymous letter or phone call.' She uses the example of an artist who uses a reference to blood in his/her work. The viewer's perception would change dramatically if he or she knew that the artist had suffered from a violent trauma.¹⁴⁸ You have been reticent in supplying your own history when presenting your work. Why is this?

>A

I think I have been fairly forthcoming in informal arenas. In conversations, explanatory lectures and some interviews, I don't mind talking about my deeper motivations. It feels inappropriate to discuss my personal life in certain forums. I also like leaving unfinished sentences for other people to finish. This occurs quite literally with works like *Please don't*.

>Q

Would you agree with Weintraub's statement concerning the importance of identity?

>A

What work of art isn't about identity in some way? Every action we take is somehow linked to our personal history. This includes the art we make. I think that the interpretation of a work is completely affected according to what is known about the artist. If Felix Gonzalez Torres weren't gay and died from AIDS-related diseases we would understand his work in a fundamentally different way. What would happen to the popular legend of Van Gogh, 'the tortured artist' without his severed ear? In this

¹⁴⁸ Weintraub 2003: 194

country, identity issues are taken to such an extreme that situations can become absurd.

>Q

How much of your work is directly related to your personal life?

>A

Pretty much all of it. A lot of my favourite pieces were made when I was extremely angry with specific people who are close to me. Like the couch-throwing expedition.¹⁴⁹ The weekend before *Inside* opened, my father moved house. It had been the family home for over a decade and it would have done Miss Havisham proud.¹⁵⁰ This was frustrating on every level. At the same time there were a number of serious technical problems with getting the show up. The second projector for the *Don't Panic* video blew and as I slowly started coming to the realisation that a new projector was going to have to be purchased and R10 000 needed to magically appear from an as yet unidentified source, my brother started to call repeatedly. A particularly uncomfortable, shell-shaped couch would not fit through the door of my father's new apartment. They were reluctant to leave it for scrap and my brother thought maybe I would want to use it in an installation. I thought I was being amusing when I instructed him to keep the awkward piece of furniture in his garage until I had a chance to chuck it over a cliff. Presumably recalling a variety of liberties taken with his personal belongings for obscure installations when I was an undergrad, he took me quite seriously. Three weeks later, I found myself kicking a couch off a rock precipice on Chapman's Peak. Other works that have

¹⁴⁹ *Couch Thrown*, 2005.

¹⁵⁰ Miss Havisham is from the Charles Dickens novel *Great Expectations*. After being abandoned at the altar, she never changed her clothes and refused to have the wedding décor packed away for the rest of her life.

similar stories behind them are the trophies¹⁵¹ and the stools in *Please don't*. I was absolutely furious when I got the idea to make the pigeons.¹⁵²

>Q

Would you say the making of the work like *Stuffed Pigeons*, *Please don't* or the *Couch Thrown* were cathartic experiences?

>A

I wouldn't push this point too hard. I was hardly suffering alone in my studio at the time. I had fun making the stools after I had calmed down. All sorts of people stole and donated pieces for me to use. The process of making the pigeons gave me enough material to dine out on for weeks. We had to drive out to the taxidermist's place, which is over an hour outside of Cape Town. The first time I went there a three-legged dog and a Maltese poodle were gnawing at the remains of a whale. I knew I was on the right track when Michelle called me early one morning to let me know that she had grown to love the fat pigeons. Previously, she had thought they were an '...abomination of the Lord's work'. Her words, not mine. This would explain the glaring eyes and tortured forms of the earlier birds. As for the couch, it took several days to locate the right sort of cliff to throw it off. It was thoroughly enjoyable to drive along the coast and get reacquainted with that area of the world. The actual event became a bit of a party. A number of friends insisted on coming with to help. I think it did them a lot of good to get out of the city, although they looked very out of place in the middle of all that nature. I think what I am trying to say is that, while this was serious work, the experience of making them was far from solemn.

¹⁵¹ *Consolation Trophies*, 2004.

¹⁵² *Stuffed Pigeons*, 2005.

>Q

And the trophies?¹⁵³

>A

At the time I felt like I was constantly placating my friends at the time and it never had much effect. I kept saying the same things and the cycle kept repeating itself. A lot about the *Brett Kebble Art Awards* reminded me of bickering on the school playground, so I used the kind of trophies I remember from prize-givings. In primary school, I was house captain for a sports team that never won anything. When we got the Spirit award, my father called it the 'boobie' prize. That's probably where it started.

>Q

You mentioned in an interview with the *Big Issue* that the couch piece is to do with a Jewish religious ceremony.¹⁵⁴ Why is this reference to religion included here but not in other works?

>A

I wanted to give the couch a measure of dignity with some sort of ritual. I don't often reference the religion directly, but in this case it seemed highly appropriate. The couch piece occurred at the time of Tashlich, which is when one symbolically throws ones sins into a large mass of flowing water. This is to do with the Day of Atonement and cleansing oneself of sin. In the days of the temple, an animal sacrifice was made in the form of a goat. Once a year a goat would be sent out into the desert to atone for the iniquities committed by the community. On one occasion the goat came back. In future, the goat was thrown off a mountain to ensure that its bones were broken and it died. I confused rituals by erecting a plaque for the couch a year later. This is the

¹⁵³ *Consolation Trophies*, 2005.

¹⁵⁴ Reagon 2005: 36

custom followed with gravestones for human beings. For myself, pieces like *Couch Thrown* are more about my family than Judaism. I always associate a specific kind of furniture with my father's parents. They were strictly orthodox Jews who ran a furniture store in Grahamstown. The lettering is still on the building if you ever go there: Sacks. They escaped Lithuania just in time to avoid the concentration camps. I never really got to know them as they both died of cancer before I turned five.

>Q

You speak of your father's parents. What about your maternal side?

>A

My mother passed away in 2001. Slowly. She battled cancer for 5 years after a tumour in her colon burst. She was a private and dignified person in life and in death.

>Q

Have you made work about that time?

>A

When she was still in hospital, I used to secretly collect her needles and stained cloths and things like that. I would work it into gender specific installations when I was an undergraduate. At the time I was sincere, but to continue that kind of thing seems like a cheap trick now ...Funeral flowers, plastic butterfly needles, penetrated surfaces... it's melodramatic and, quite simply, out of character. An artist like Tracey Emin does direct, knee jerk reaction work to her own life with great success. When I do things like that, it feels self-indulgent.

>Q

What references are there to your mother in more recent work?

>A

Chanel No. 5 was my late mother's favourite scent. I was seeking a way to create a kind of memorial to my memory of her, within the sterility of a commercial gallery space. As with all memorials, it represents absence of memory as much as that which is retained. The content of this memorial, that is, the glamorous brand, is intended to be distracting so that it deflects away from the personal. I wanted the *Chanel No. 5* piece to be a cold one, only describing a scent and not emitting it. Of all the senses, smell is said to be the most evocative of memory.

>Q

Is this why you explore the language of memorials in general?

>A

That is definitely one of the reasons. For *onesizefitall* I was also looking at absent bodies in general. But I think a lot of art is to do with immortality. Not only trying to commemorate those no longer with us, but also artists wanting their work to survive them.

>Q

Does the memorial to Cissie Gool connect to your personal history at all? Is there some kind of embedded personal coding to your mother or an event?

>A

This was one piece that was not about me. I wanted to be as responsible as possible and make something that would be appropriate to the space and the woman being commemorated. While it was not specifically about people I have lost, I did try to make the sort of sculpture someone like my mother would

approve of. She certainly would not have liked *Chanel No. 5*. Or *Couch Thrown*, for that matter. One of the reasons I decided to respond to the proposal was because, the more I researched Cissie Gool, the more I liked her. She made a difference in people's lives, but she also had a great sense of humour. My favourite quote is from when she had been invited to a function in which a women's group were to award her with the 'orchid of the city'. On her way out she allegedly said: 'There will be no men or alcohol for three hours. What will I do with myself?'

>Q

Gool's family was also Muslim, where drinking is forbidden. Such a statement is therefore a rebellious one.

>A

Such a statement is also a witty one and therefore entertaining. Cissie Gool gives no impression of attempting to cater to convention in her private life. Despite this, she did a great deal for her community. I respect the combination of these concerns.

>Q

In your own work, there is some emphasis on parties and drinking. The *T-shirt Project* and *Stamp Project* are seen documented in nightclubs. Sue Williamson notes in an *Artthrob* article that you served martinis in your flat during the skywrite.¹⁵⁵ *Couch Thrown* also seems to have been a party of sorts. Why are these inclusions important to you?

>A

I think that social events at the launch of a work are an important ritual of the art world. Without hosting an opening of sorts, I felt that interventions like *Don't Panic* and *Couch Thrown* would have less sense of occasion. Also, all my references come from day to

¹⁵⁵ *Don't Panic*, 2005

day life. I go through periods which necessitate spending a lot of time at art world events and I like to watch what happens there. I often go on to create my own version of these, formally and informally. Ed Young was a big influence in both regards, with exhibitions like *Muse*, 2003, and *Asshole*, 2003. Also, I spend a lot of time in Long Street when I am in Cape Town. This is an area where there are a number of nightclubs, restaurants, boutiques and a vast array of people and colourful characters. I pick up a lot of ideas in such spaces and have tried to bring elements of them back into some of my projects.

>Q

Is this where your interest in advertising, fashion, and brand-names comes from?:

>A

I certainly like to pick up on new trends that develop on the street. But more than this, I used to work at MTV¹⁵⁶ when I lived in London. I started as an intern, doing research and writing, went on to administrative chores and finally designed one of their back stage sets. During my time there, I had ample opportunity to consider the power of the brand and also how fashion trends are created. Before MTV, I also worked for clothing label *Joe Soap*, but this was a far more enjoyable experience. It was a vibrant team of people who understood their market, not a ruthless, multinational corporate giant.

>Q

Would you say that these experiences have made you investigate the art world with a more cynical attitude, finding parallels between the two?

¹⁵⁶ Music Television.

>A

I am tempted to say that working in the art world made me cynical about the art world, but this would not be entirely true. My jobs in fashion and advertising certainly made me more realistic about issues of the market. MTV actually drove me back to the art world. I wanted to make my own work again after having designed and written for other people for longer than I could manage. I wanted to have my own voice. While I enjoy the relative independence in the art world, I never had huge illusions about it. Prior to MTV and Joe Soap, I had worked as a gallery assistant at João Ferreira Fine Art. So I already had an inkling of the commercial underpinnings of the art world at that point. I did not fully grasp the extent of this until I was invited to go to *Liste '06*. The similarity between an MTV extravaganza and *Art 37 Basel* gave me a huge shock. It still does.

>Q

You mention the importance of peer group fairly often. Who do you define this as being during this body of work.

>A

I have spent a lot of time with friends who attended the Michaelis School of Fine Art at more or less the same time as myself. Ed Young, Cameron Platter, Dan Halter and later, Robert Sloon all roughly fit into the same time frame. Also my fellow MFA students, Renee Holleman and Michael Michael. As the body of work developed, I came into contact with other artists like Christian Nerf, Peter Regli and Cesare Pietroiusti and others involved in the *Stop Believing* book. Collaborators like Regli and Pietroiusti are, however, at far more advanced stages of their careers.

>Q.

There is a clear collaboration with Nerf when *Stuffed Pigeons* were rescued from Joao Ferreira. Can you give an example of projects where conversations between artists can be seen within projects?

>A.

While the stamps used borrowed phrases in a manner that can comfortably be called 'appropriation', the 'sorry' stamp is a blatant theft. Supposedly, the piece first surfaced in a computer-generated scrawl by Cameron Platter. Ed Young stole this for a series of prints, which looked almost identical. The content of the work itself apologises for both the theft and the shoddiness of presentation. I often critique both artists as being in danger of becoming formulaic.¹⁵⁷ My response to this particular spat was to customize the piece into a rubber stamp. I wanted to make the theft seem standardised and mundane. The last word on the series of 'sorry's' came from Kendell Geers. He recently presented me with an old postcard work from 1996, with all of the information blotted out except for the word 'sorry'. It was an ambiguous gift.

¹⁵⁷ See published critiques in *Art South Africa*: (Sacks: 2006: 78) and (Sacks: 2006: 70)

10. Conclusion: The artist's studio and the MFA degree show

Mutual Dependencies:

Throughout the course of this dissertation, I have used the trajectory of my body of work to refer to different contexts within the contemporary art world. I did not set out to occupy as many forums as possible. My initial motivation was to explore the nature of different public forums. Projects that began as informal interventions in the public sphere escalated to be represented in more established forums.

I believe that the invitations I received to participate in a biennial (*Canaries Biennale*), an international art fair, (*Liste '06*) and a public commission (*Cissie Gool Memorial*) were indirectly the result of more informal activities. This could also be said of coming to being represented in a museum collection (JAG) and those of private collectors (Sindika Dokolo and Pierre Lombart). Projects which I instigated myself in the form of independent interventions in the public sphere (*Don't Panic*), a group show with an open call for submissions (*Negotiate* at JAG) a project space (Outlet), high profile competitions (*Brett Kebble Art Awards* and *ABSA L'Atelier*) and creating my own exhibition forum within a book as part of a collaborative project (*Stop Believing*) served to build up my body of work as a whole and allow me to gain experience within different arenas. Organizing to exhibit in a commercial gallery space (João Ferreira Fine Art) was also an important factor that led to a variety of other contexts being explored. By discussing each of these arenas and their implications throughout this body of research, I have sought to illustrate that they are all reliant on each other.

When discussing different contexts in the art world, Daniel Buren notes that:

'There are frames, envelopes and limits that enclose and "make" the work of art, such as the frame, the awning, the pedestal, the castle, the church, the gallery, the museum, power, art history, the market economy, and so on, but they are usually not perceived and certainly never questioned. Among these factors, which determine and condition art, there is one that is never mentioned and even less questioned, although it comes first. It is the artist's studio.'

(Buren 1999: 119)

The final setting in which I have chosen to frame my body of work is the artist's studio. This context, usually associated with the initiation of work, is an equally important forum within the structure of the art world. Buren describes the artist's studio and the gallery/museum as two foundations of the same building (Buren 1999: 120). The implication of this is that what is generated in the studio travels to the museum. Therefore, the spaces are mutually dependent. The artist's studio is an integral part of the infrastructure that makes up the contemporary art world. Evidence of all of my projects that are discussed in this document is evident in the installation *Open Studio*, 2007.

By bringing this body of work back into the context of the artist's studio, I bring my MFA project to a close. Conventionally, an MFA degree begins in the studio and moves out into organizational structures. As my chosen area of research led me to generate my practice within the public sphere, I see it as a fitting gesture to bring the work back into what is commonly perceived to be a site of work in progress. I have set the space up to project the illusion of a functioning studio.



Open Studio (detail) | Cape Town | 2007

Set Design:

Open Studio is a contrived space. I did not conceive of, or produce, the projects discussed in this dissertation in the studio space. I have made this gesture to illustrate an exaggeration of what I believe to be one of the pretences of the art world; that is, that the studio visit is an authentic experience. While, for many artists, the studio is genuinely a site of work in progress, it is also a form of showroom. I see the studio as another forum where gallerists, collectors and curators come to view work. During official studio visits, the majority of artists take the nature of the viewer into consideration. I see this as also being true of the MFA degree, where students present their work to supervisors and peers.¹⁵⁸

All of the central themes which run throughout my practical body of work are apparent in *Open Studio*. Those of artifice and fiction are particularly prevalent. Such concerns first became apparent in work on *Inside*, where I experimented with the falsification of some of the documentation of the *Don't Panic* skywrite. The *Stop Believing* exhibition-in-a-book directly took on notions of fakery and provides 'evidence' of fictional projects. Later projects involving artifice include *Couch Thrown* whereby a bronze plaque gives the appearance of an official public memorial when it is in fact an unauthorised insertion. In works like *Stamp Project I* question the notion of the originality of the art object. This line of thought is continued with *Open Studio*, where copies of artworks, which have come to be of commercial value are displayed alongside the originals.

¹⁵⁸ Prominent South African sculptor Jane Alexander has related an anecdote regarding the fabrication of an artist's studio in someone else's workshop in order to keep the press satisfied (Alexander 2006. pers comm. 5 November)

An example of other practitioners concerned with the falsified studio space can be found in the work of Swiss artists Fischli and Weiss. In *Untitled (Tate)*, 2003 – 2006, they presented an illusion of a work in progress taking place in the halls of the Tate Modern. The installation is made up of realistically carved polyurethane fakes. While the work appears disordered, each speck of dust has been carefully considered.



Peter Fischli and David Weiss | *Untitled (Tate)* | 2006
(*Fischli & Weiss Flowers and Questions* 2006)

Open Studio has links to this manner of working. Every element of the fake environment is carefully arranged in order to project the desired effect. For example, the equipment on the desk gives the impression of interrupted activity. These objects have been specifically arranged to highlight information that I feel to be useful in contextualising my body of work. For example, a slideshow that was made for a mid term review at the Michaelis School of Fine Art is playing on the computer screen that is situated within the space. There are no incidental objects within this space. Each element has been included in order to give a clue as to a motivation behind a work, or supposed evidence of it having existed. In the case of *Stop Believing*, the book itself is available for viewing.

Real artists:

Throughout this body of research, I have made reference to other artists and artworks whose works could be seen to link to my own. The majority of these, amongst other influences, are represented on a large pin-board that takes up a good deal of the studio space. In my representation of a work like *T-shirt Project*, I display the items of clothing themselves alongside those of other artists who are mentioned in this dissertation. Thus, every object that is in the studio space is not necessarily my own original artwork, but the installation as a whole is.

To consciously use the studio as an exhibition space has been a device used by many artists in the past. A pertinent example of this is YBA artist Gavin Turk who did so on the occasion of his Post Graduate degree at the Royal College of Art in London. He displayed a whitewashed studio and a single plaque, in the style

of those used to commemorate buildings where famous people have worked. It read:

Borough of Kensington / GAVIN TURK / Sculptor / worked here / 1989-1991



Gavin Turk | *Cave* (detail) | 1991 (Saatchi Gallery Highlights 2007) Gustav Courbet | *The painter's Studio; a Real Allegory* | 1855 (Courbet, Gustav 1996)

Turk chose to distil two years of work into one single installation for the culmination of his degree. In doing so, the artist appears to have made an intentionally inflammatory gesture which he knew would be shocking to the traditional tertiary institution, who were expecting more visual information from the student (Barrett 2004: 2).¹⁵⁹ Turk only alludes to the fact that work was made in this space. In contrast to this, *Open Studio* seeks to provide a great deal of background evidence.

In a more classic example, Gustav Courbet chose to present a symbolic representation of the previous seven years of his career in an oil painting depicting the artist's studio. In *The Painter's*

¹⁵⁹ The work was entitled *Cave*, 1991. Turk failed his degree and was the first ever to do so at that institution. Because of this piece, he achieved fame and notoriety in equal measure and was rapidly taken up by prominent gallerist. Jay Joplin (Barrett 2004: 1).

Studio; A Real Allegory of a seven year phase in my artistic and moral life, 1855, the Realist painter is thought to portray his philosophy concerning the art world through a set of private symbols (Nochlin 1989: 17). My own studio installation is a summary of the two-and-a-half years of this degree. Where Courbet represents his influences, I have endeavoured to do the same. Courbet also refers to members the art world within the painting, including figures he referred to as his 'friends' (Nochlin 1989: 17). So too does *Open Studio*.

The studio is located in 26 Commercial Street, in an old pillow factory in Central Cape Town. This is a communal space in which a number of artists work, including Daniel Halter, Christian Nerf and Ed Young. Part of the studio is also regularly used for a Pro Helvetia residency program whereby visiting Swiss artists utilise the space and interact with South African artists working there.¹⁶⁰

The presence of other artists and an established residency program serves to give a measure of authenticity to the installation. That is, the greater context in which the work exists is a genuine place of production. Thus, *Open Studio* works on the same principle of relying on context that has been prevalent throughout this dissertation. For example, the value of works like *Please don't* as art objects became more apparent once inside the commercial gallery space at João Ferreira Fine Art. This is also true of *A Winner in Hawaii II*, whereby domestic furniture was placed inside a project space and consequently taken seriously as artworks by visitors to the space.

I have mentioned that peer group and collaborative practise have been important in the development of this body of work. *Open*

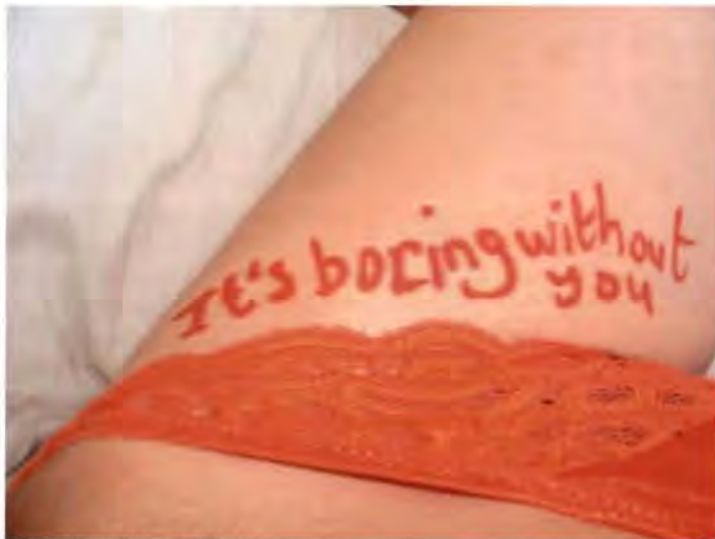
¹⁶⁰ Ironically, Jason Klimatsas has been one of the visiting Swiss artists during the production of *Open Studio*. He is an assistant to Fischli and Weiss and helps to make their polyurethane 'fakes'.

Studio quite literally situates my body of work within the context of that of my peers.



Carol-Anne Gainer, Andrew Lamprecht, Charles Maggs, Sophie Perryer, Doreen Southwood, Mikhael Subotzky, Cameron Platter and Ed Young watching *Don't Panic* from my home | 2005 (Photograph by Ian Smith) Robert Sloon and Dave Skadden at the studio on 26 Commercial Street | 2007

As is evident in the interview supplied in Chapter 8, projects like *Couch Thrown* and *Chanel No.5* all utilise elements from my personal life and apply them to modes of contemporary production. *Open Studio* contains fragments of authentic residue from my personal life. It is here where evidence of the stories behind the scenes comes to the fore in the form of images, collected texts and more private residue. These stories and anecdotes that surround the production and exhibition of work are important to me. They enrich projects and help make the impersonal glare of the white cube dissipate a little. Hence the artist's studio becomes important.



Open Studio (details) | 2007

- V + J-let → Iziko-PAP, etc
- ~~Discourse = 12~~
- ~~5:00 → 12:35~~
- Ash. - silkscreen? / Cas: new T's
- ~~Stamps: new~~ → invite: bigger.
- (Ed) give new fonts
- Michelle - when pig? → Sarah: final shoot
- Merripack - order boxes → Tom
- Stols: ~~Steve~~ → Andrea Steer - check
- CD's: copy files
- Telkom: more
- Ruth P: guest (CD: Michelle + James)
- Ballies: Chevre + CD (- top) → ~~Michelle~~
- Course outlines + reading lists
- ~~Art SA ad~~
- ~~Cat~~
- Show: Chairs, postcards, Chanel,
- ~~When video vid? → Stues~~
- ~~Books back~~

In a body of work that is tailored according to context, *Open Studio* is a site-specific work that could not exist without its context. Everything from my body of MFA practical work is represented here but altogether forms a single installation. As stated by O'Doherty at the start of this dissertation, the context is as relevant as the artwork itself. (O'Doherty 1999 [1976]: 7)

The greater location of the installation is also appropriate as it is a short walk away from the public *Cissie Gool Memorial*. Should visitors to *Open Studio* choose to follow the maps provided in the studio space and go to the monument, they will be able to experience the greater context of the urban city centre that is referred to throughout this dissertation. Works like *onesizefitsall*, *Terms of Endearment* and *Artificial Moonlight* all intervened in public walkways.

Appropriating Authority:

'In the course of its life a work of art may be exhibited time and again, presented in many different contexts and read and re-read against the shifting political, social and art historical backgrounds in which it finds itself, in which those who view the work find themselves. It is affected by the circumstances around it. The circumstances around it are always changing.'

(Nickas, R. 1990: 7)

As outlined by Nickas above, the reception of an artwork can alter according to change in environment. Throughout this dissertation, I have made reference to the alterations in value that occur when the context of a work changes (for example, *Don't Panic*). Furthermore, I have stressed that the authority of different spaces is not the same. In *Open Studio*, I make reference to the language of institutional arenas.



26 Commercial Street | Cape Town | 2007

The red and green stickers that are used to denote sold and reserved work have been placed on different objects. My

intention is to emphasize the underlying commercial concerns of the majority of exhibitions of contemporary art works. Gallery and museum labels, another form of authority associated with established institutions, are also present. Labels from real shows are included in the installation as a form of proof that these existed. Within the informal studio space, I also provide labels in the form of Post-it notes. While these appear to be notes to myself, reminding me of the work that should take place, they act as guides as to the purpose of each object. As the context of the artist's studio is traditionally one of work in progress, the labelling process in this completed exhibition gives the impression of an ongoing process.



Installation view of *Open Studio* | 2007

I have stressed the fact that organised institutions in the form of museums and collections are not the only source of authority in

the contemporary art world. This also occurs through writing about work. This dissertation acts as a catalogue for *Open Studio*. It qualifies what takes place there and contextualizes the work. Much of the exhibition would be opaque if the information provided in this thesis were not supplied. So too does the exhibition echo elements of this document. Art works by myself and others that have been written about are visible in the studio space. I have also sought to represent the bibliography of this thesis. I create the illusion that all of the books from the bibliography of this dissertation are situated on the studio bookshelf.

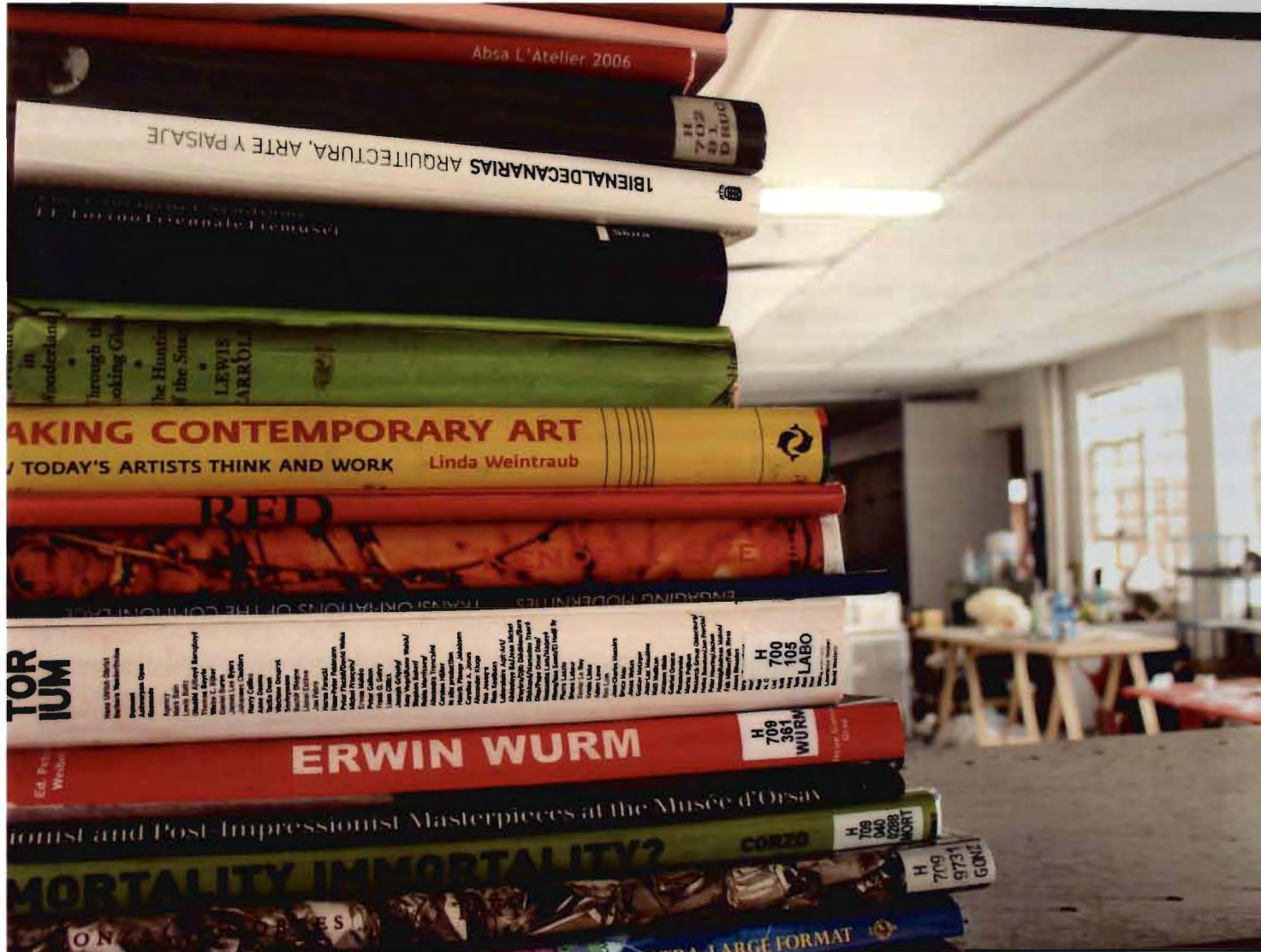
Wrapping up:

Participation in all the forums discussed in this body of research has helped me to both define my practice and establish a system of adapting core concerns to different scenarios. The context of an artwork can provide limits in terms of form, concept, and budget, etc, as well as presuppose who the audience will be. Defining my understanding of the parameters of specific contexts was therefore essential to an explication of my body of work. Siah Armajani explains that:

'Context is a thing like a jar is a thing which gathers and unites. Context is partly always empty and partly to be filled in.'

(Armajani 2001: 2004)

This dissertation seeks to explain the manner in which I have occupied different forums in the contemporary art world. An explication of my work necessitates an explanation of its context. The two are mutually dependent.



Open Studio (detail of fake bookshelf) | Cape Town | 2007

Appendix A:

Proposals for an installation at Los Lavaderos, Tenerife for the *Canaries Biennale*:

1.

I would like to seal off the patio and flood it with water. The level of deepness will depend on the structural limitations of the building. If possible, the water level should go up to just below the lighting system. It is important that the area can still be lit up at night.

The idea is that the courtyard should be separated from its normal function for the duration of the biennial. I am assuming that courtyard is usually utilized for events when they take place in the space. It would be necessary to get an aerial photograph of the piece from above, both at night and in the day. Two large prints of these should be displayed on the walls above the basins inside the interior rooms. We can negotiate what size these should be.

2.

Take samples of water from the Los Lavaderos and have them scientifically analyzed for levels of purity. The different samples should then be taken to different Roman Catholic priests in the area and ask them to make it into holy water. Obviously, the number of samples will depend on the number of priests who are willing to participate. If there are any other religious leaders in the area, they should also be approached to take part. The freshly converted holy water samples should then be taken back to the laboratory for a second analysis. In the exhibition space, the samples would be displayed in small glass vitrines alongside the results of both tests.

3.

Collect the coins that have been thrown into wishing wells and fountains in the area. If any other spaces across the Canary Islands are used as wishing wells and can be accessed, they should also be utilized. The coins could then be displayed, evenly spaced, on a thin white plinth running through the middle of the interior space.

4.

Four powerful, rotating maritime searchlights of the sort used in official navy raids should be installed on the corners of the exterior of the Los Lavaderos building. These should continuously scan the area throughout the night, creating an intrusive visual spectacle.

5.

A diving board and ladder should be erected. These should be positioned as it would be if the patio had been flooded and become a swimming pool. That is, the top of the ladder should reach from the roof to the floor and the ladder should protrude from the roof and be directed over the patio area. The ladder and diving board should be recognizable as those found in domestic and public swimming pools. If this plan is also seen to be harmful to the building, the ladder and diving board could be freestanding. All lights, or any other functioning systems in the building should be turned off for the duration of the intervention.

Appendix B

I Was Born (A Unicorn) The Unicorns

[Diamonds]

I was born a unicorn

I missed the ark but I could've sworn you'd wait for me

[Ginger]

I was born a unicorn

I could of sworn you believed in me.

Then how come all the other Unicorns are dead?

[Diamonds]

Put your crystal's under my pillow

[Ginger]

Send your epistle to my bedfellows

[Diamonds]

If I stop believing in you

[Ginger]

If you stop believing in me

[Diamonds]

If I stop believing in you

[Ginger]

If you stop believing in me

We're the Unicorns,
We're more than horses,
We're the unicorns,
and we're people too!

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