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**Hidden Treasures in Ivory Towers: The Potential of University Art Collections in
South Africa, with a Case Study of UCT**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 1 October 2007

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* * *

Abstract

This dissertation takes as its central theme the context of a university as a setting for artworks. While globally many university art collections enjoy prominent status in their communities, and are well endowed and visited, their South African counterparts are sorely underused and valued. Thus, the aim of the study is twofold; in the first instance, an argument is made for the positive and productive role South African university art collections can play within their society – and primary research reveals the rich and varied collections held throughout the country. The second focus is on one particular case study: the University of Cape Town (UCT) art collection, and the acquisition body that oversees it, the Works of Art Committee (WOAC). Through a detailed analysis of this committee's thirty-year archive, and informed by the experience of an extensive internship with the WOAC, the study provides an overview of their operation, assessing their successes and failures. What is revealed is that there are numerous problems inherent within the way in which this committee is run, and the management of the art collection in general. Aside from compositional issues within the committee itself, the fact that there is no educational integration between the collection and the university community, is highly problematic. As such, numerous suggestions are offered, with the hope that the collection can become a more meaningful presence to those on campus, and beyond. For, with a far healthier acquisition budget than the South African National Gallery, and access to a large and diverse audience, it seems as though a highly exciting opportunity is being overlooked.

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Introduction: University Art Collections ***The Global Perspective and the Local Context***

The central theme around which this dissertation revolves is that of the complexities inherent in displaying artworks within a university environment. While much has been written on the emergence of national art galleries and the increasingly popular phenomenon of public art¹, very little has been written on the multifaceted site of a university as a setting for artworks. Stemming from a fascination with the apparent wealth and breadth of art collections held by universities worldwide, and the aforementioned lack of scholarly literature written on the topic, this study is informed by the international context, but is singularly focused on the South African locale. Thus, this introduction will offer a brief overview of the scope of university art collections held globally before turning to the local situation, and the particular case study on which this dissertation focuses – the University of Cape Town art collection.

From a cursory search on the Internet it is clear how vast and rich the range of university art collections is around the world; from the first collection started at Oxford University in 1683 at the Ashmolean Museum, which currently includes departments in antiquities, Western and Eastern art, as well as a formidable coin collection, to more limited collections such as that housed at New Hall in Cambridge, which only purchases works produced by women artists from 1950 onwards. Furthermore, the size of these collections ranges from the overwhelming – Yale University currently houses 185 000 objects – to the modest, with the majority of art collections sitting at around one thousand to two thousand works. The amount of information available on each institution's collection varies; some universities offer merely a brief overview, while others make their acquisition and educational policies accessible, the make-up of their acquisition committees known, and a detailed catalogue of their works available. Generally, the larger and richer the institution, the more detailed their website is – some even offering 'virtual tours' of their collections.

¹ A succinct description of public art will be offered later.

Another notable difference between collections is the spaces in which they are housed: some institutions have grand museums and galleries which take the form of the more traditional spaces in which one usually finds art, while others are forced to spread their art works throughout the campus, housing them in offices, libraries and lecture theatres. Additionally, in the USA, there are increasingly more examples of public art collections being added to university campuses, and these (often sculptural) works are usually situated outdoors or in vast foyer areas. They are typically the result of a 'percent-for-art' policy, which, as the name suggests, means that one percent of the budget for any new building on campus is set aside to commission artworks. While some universities generate their own percent-for-art funds, usually the money is derived from the state in which the university is situated.

Therefore, many (publicly-funded) American universities have numerous public art works, spread out in sculpture gardens or interspersed throughout quads and buildings, in addition to an art collection that is housed in a gallery space. In fact, often the gallery-staff takes responsibility for the public artworks on campus, once they are completed². The types of art commissioned for these more public spaces are often quite different from what is usually found within the more traditional gallery spaces. Large, colourful sculptures are most common, sometimes with an audio or lighting aspect, and usually very robust since the majority are intended to withstand the elements for many years to come. Indeed, many universities worldwide boast public sculpture gardens that can be enjoyed by the inhabitants of their campuses as well as members of the public³.

These sculptures/walkways/monuments therefore become part of the landscape of the university in a way that is more permanent and visible than paintings hung on a gallery wall. With public art works being increasingly erected in a variety of spaces, the subject

² Lawrence Mankin's 2002 survey, "The Administration of Public Art on State University Campuses" in *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, Vol. 32, No. 1, in which the author reviews the public art policies of twenty universities, confirms that in most instances, the public artworks, following installation, become the responsibility of the residential art curator on campus.

³ For some example of these see the Arizona State University public art collection, accessible on: http://herbergercollege.asu.edu/public_art/ ; University of Michigan Outdoor Campus Sculptures, accessible on: <http://www.plantext.bf.umich.edu/planner/sculpture/> ; University of Minnesota Public Art on Campus, accessible on: <http://www.weisman.umn.edu/public/public.html>

of public art in general has been the focus of many books, journals, and other publications, one example of which is *Public Art Review (PAR)*, a journal currently in its eighteenth year of circulation. Revealing a growing interest in the university as context for public art, *PAR*'s Spring/Summer issue of 2006 focused on art on campus - featuring a number of articles by academics, scholars, practitioners and curators working at different universities across America. Furthermore, in September 2006 a conference was held at Colgate University entitled "Public Art on Campus: Issues, Opportunities and Implications"⁴, while in December of the same year, a two-day symposium was held at the Florida International University (FIU) in conjunction with Princeton University, under the heading, "Creator, Collector and Catalyst: The University Art Museum in the 21st Century". The latter symposium brought together a large number of curators, academics, critics and students from across the country who discussed the strategies their own institutions were employing to integrate collections within campuses in a meaningful way.

However, it is important to note that the FIU conference was referring not to public art collections, but to those more traditional art collections housed in galleries or museums on university campuses. There are distinct differences between the two both in terms of funding, public participation, as well as physical characteristics of the works, and the public art example will be fully discussed in Chapter 2. However, since both these kinds of collections are situated in a university environment, they can, and should, equally be integrated within educational programmes. An overarching recommendation of the FIU symposium was that collections should be used not only for Art History or Archaeology students, but should be tools for interdisciplinary studies, and exciting new courses and programmes. Thus, in her welcoming address, Princeton University president Professor Tilghman (2006, accessed online) emphasised that one of the university's goals was to "develop a 'creative campus' in which every student can integrate some aspect of the arts into his or her course of study...because a creative mindset can inform and enrich

⁴ While the organisers of this conference had promised to send a DVD recording of this event to me, it has as yet not arrived, and as such cannot be discussed here.

whatever vocation they pursue". Tilghman later referred to a report on a new arts initiative prepared for their Board of Trustees, from which she cited:

The habits of mind that one acquires through the arts spill over into every other occupation. Just as our distribution requirements reflect the belief that competence in scientific and ethical reasoning should be required of a Princeton graduate, so too exposure to the creative arts prepares students to become more effective citizens and, very importantly for the U.S., future patrons of the arts in their communities.

This last view is especially prevalent in America where most art institutions rely heavily on private funding, and there is a culture of philanthropy that is unmatched anywhere else in the world. However, it seems that worldwide most university art collections have at some point been added to by generous benefactors whether it is through donated funds or actual collections of works, and as will be shown, this extends to a large degree to the South African example as well. While university art collections globally enjoy much attention and interest from their local communities, attract large endowments and undertake many activities which often include more than just the student body (e.g. putting on exhibitions, producing catalogues, and holding conferences, all accessible to the general public), in South Africa they are a sorely underused and undervalued resource. In comparison to other countries in which there are national collectives of university museum directors⁵, there is no such body in South Africa; rather, each university art collection/gallery/museum works in relative isolation with no significant contact between the various curators or directors.

Thus, in striking contrast to countries such as America, the last known public discussion held about South African university art collections was in March 1986, at the University of Pretoria. Organised by the South African Association of Art Historians, this conference brought together curators, academics, museum professionals and art dealers in a discussion about the role and validity of university art collections at that time. In an

⁵ In America there are various University Art Museum committees, in Britain the University Museums UK Group, and in Australia the Council of Australian University Museums and Collections (CAUMAC). There is also an international committee for University Museums And Collections (UMAC), which holds conferences and meetings, and produces publications.

article detailing the conference proceedings, Lucy Alexander (then curator of the UNISA gallery) notes that representatives from ten universities were present, and each spoke about their holdings and the challenges they faced within their institutions, which ranged from a lack of adequate facilities (both exhibition and storage areas), an insufficient amount of trained curatorial staff to manage the collections, poor physical access to the collections, and haphazard cataloguing systems. Nevertheless, Alexander (1986: 35) ends the article quite positively, indicating that this conference could be a catalyst for significant changes in the field:

As a result of the conference... some university representatives will be better equipped with strategies with which to deal with these problems [professional conservation and policy]. Better communication between the museums and universities has also been initiated, and greater co-operation between the institutions is likely to result.

However, she does admit that it is the responsibility of the “individuals in universities where facilities are lacking, to follow the initiatives that have been taken to achieve professional standards” for, “only then can university art collection curators pool their resources and ideas and arrive at an assessment of what their role in art education in this country could become” (ibid). Unfortunately, currently, it seems as if each university has become so insular about their respective problems, or about their own agenda, that “greater co-operation” and any form of collaboration has been virtually nonexistent since then.

Though I have travelled to various universities in South Africa as part of my research, the bulk of this investigation focuses on one university: the University of Cape Town (UCT). This is largely because I am a student at UCT and, until very recently, a full-time staff member at the university’s Centre for African Studies (CAS). Through my employment at CAS, I became aware of the numerous artworks owned by the university; the CAS building housing a significant collection of ‘struggle’ art. Upon enquiring on the origin of the works, I was informed of UCT’s policy whereby one percent of the budget of all new buildings is spent on the acquisition of art works. Echoing the principle adhered to by many American academic institutions (as mentioned above), UCT is the only South African university that follows this guideline. However, as will be shown in

subsequent chapters, there are large differences between the acquisition processes employed by UCT and its American counterparts, as well as the acquisition choices themselves – with the UCT collection largely consisting of two-dimensional artworks, rather than the large-scale sculptures referred to above.

As many have noted, the actual site of artworks often plays a huge role in the way in which the art operates within the space, and influences the way it is received by its particular public. While the inhabitants of, and visitors to, the CAS building often voiced their appreciation of the various works, I became aware of less positive reactions to other works on campus. Through a personal acquaintance, I discovered that some of the staff members and students, in the Department of Chemical Engineering, were very dissatisfied with the choice of art works that had been installed in their new building when it opened in 2004. Thus, my interest in the particular context of a university setting was roused; more so, by the unique collecting practices of UCT, when compared to other universities in South Africa. Through a colleague at CAS, I was brought into contact with the body that oversees the acquisition and display of art works on the UCT campus – the Works of Art Committee (WOAC), and I was able to undertake an internship with them from February 2006 until April 2007.

During this time I observed, and participated in, the committee's activities, attended their quarterly meetings, and received all general email correspondence, as well being involved in a specific building project: the Graca Machel women's residence. In the latter, I worked closely with the members of the sub-committee nominated for this project, as well as with the architects, and appointed creative artists. Here the aim was to integrate art into the architecture, in a manner most similar to those public art projects seen internationally. However, as a later section will detail, many of our goals were not realised i.e. seen to fruition, and indeed the entire process revealed many pitfalls of the committee that will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. Further to the internship, extensive research was undertaken into the history and evolution of the WOAC, through a detailed study of its overwhelmingly dense, thirty-year archive.

As such, this dissertation includes the first ever attempt to fully record the history of the Committee, and it is hoped that through doing this, and identifying its successes and failures, I have begun to carve out a more positive and productive route for the future of this body. In light of the questions and issues raised by the study of the WOAC and the art collection of UCT, it also seemed necessary to explore the other collections held by South African universities. Hence, I visited the University of Stellenbosch (US), the University of the Western Cape (UWC), and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), whilst contact was made via email correspondence or telephone interviews with curators from numerous other universities. Through this exercise, the enormous variety and scope of these collections was revealed, as well as the differing amount of integration between each example and their respective university syllabi. While each collection, and those overseeing them, experience differing levels of successes or failures (in terms of visitor attendance, funding, facilities), there remains a great deal of promise within these cultural resources.

This becomes particularly evident when considering the general lack of governmental support for the arts in South Africa, and the crisis faced by most of the country's cultural institutions. One particular example is the South African National Gallery (SANG), which has had a minuscule budget for many years, as well as extremely poor attendance figures⁶. The reasons for the latter, I believe, stem partly from a negative stigma that the SANG will be hard pressed to shake off – seen as an irrelevant symbol of transplanted Western culture, at odds with the 'new South Africa' it finds itself in. The history of the gallery is embedded in white dominancy, both in the make-up of the staff, and in the collections it houses (the most substantial part of the collection comprises European paintings).

These circumstances have led to a situation in which South African university art collections have a unique potential: to provide an alternative platform for people to appreciate works of art, in an environment that is more open to dialogue and debate than the settings wherein art is usually placed. In the particular case study of the WOAC there

⁶ Currently the annual acquisition budget of the SANG rests at R150 000, while attendance figures for 2004 were stated as 40 000 people.

exists a budget far greater⁷ than that of the SANG, and at UCT a (mostly young, diverse) student body of around twenty thousand. Therefore, it is a strong contention of this thesis that the WOAC cannot view itself in isolation; rather, there is an obligation for this Committee to be a leader in the appreciation of, and support for, visual arts in this country. Similarly, universities throughout South Africa (whilst there are unequal amount of funds available to each institution) need to recognise their importance and potential for empowering future supporters of the arts, and equally, identify the significant contribution they could make if there were greater collaboration and cohesion between these various institutions.

As alluded to above, the role of context is fundamental to the interpretation of an artwork, and as Barker (1995: 8) succinctly states, “museums and galleries are not neutral containers offering a transparent, unmediated experience of art”. This quote can be extended to almost every environment in which art is placed, since inevitably there is a select group of people orchestrating the specific acquisition, placement, and intended meaning of the work, no matter if it be in a national gallery, a public park, or a university quadrangle. This study aims to uncover these often unseen complexities, and discuss one particular case study in light of them.

Chapter 1 introduces the first spaces in which art became accessible to the general public, and considers the various stake-holders involved in this process, finally turning to the local example of the SANG. Chapter 2 considers the more recent phenomenon of public art, and introduces UCT in light of this practice; Chapter 3 outlines the moments leading up to the WOAC and the establishment of the one percent policy; Chapter 4 examines the history of the WOAC following the institution of the one percent policy. Chapter 5 outlines and assesses the internship undertaken with the WOAC, giving some suggestions for the future, while Chapter 6 concludes with a general survey of the wealth of South African university art collections, in an effort to confirm the argument of this thesis: that these academic institutions hold a pivotal role in the art education of this country’s population.

⁷ At the outset of my internship the total amount of funds at the WOAC’s disposal was calculated at around R1.7 million.

Chapter 1: Democratic Aims and Elitist Impulses **Contradictions arising within gallery spaces**

Introduction

Before embarking on a discussion that centres on a university as a space in which to display art, it seems necessary to discuss the more traditional places one has usually found art within. Arguably, the most significant event in the display of art was the opening of the national galleries⁸ from the eighteenth century onwards, and thus some of the literature surrounding this phenomenon will be explored first. In reviewing their evolution globally, one sees the debates which have continued to revolve around their very existence, debates that have probed their stated purpose and function within society. These debates reveal the paradoxical nature of inserting art into a public place, caught somewhere between democratic and elitist aims. While the university has inherited some of the conflicting qualities of national galleries due to the similar architecture and Western heritage, it also has an affinity to the later environments in which art has been placed, and these will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

This chapter takes as its starting point the moments leading up to the initiation of publicly accessible art galleries throughout the world. In doing so, one begins to notice the innate connections art typically has had to those in power, both in a political, social and economic sense. Thus, despite there often being selfless and noble reasons espoused for the display of art, it becomes obvious that there are usually vested interests at stake – whether they are those of nations or specific individuals. The latter point is pursued specifically in a study of those who have typically made up the various acquisition bodies of different art galleries throughout the world. What is revealed is that many of these boards are characterised by those that come from an elite circle (whether through wealth, education or corporate power). As will be illustrated in later chapters, the body

⁸ It is important to note that while the examples of the Louvre and the National Gallery in London will be referred to, in America (as will be explained below) a National Gallery was only opened in 1941, while other art museums were opened as early as 1870. These galleries have been termed ‘public art galleries’ or ‘public art museums’, and thus I will refer to them as such. However, this should not be confused with ‘public art’, which is a particular type of art in itself and will be explained at length in the following chapter.

responsible for the purchases of artworks at UCT, the WOAC, is similarly filled with people from a specific group and the homogeneity within this committee may be one of the reasons for some of the shortcomings in its activities. Furthermore, since this committee lacks an acquisition policy (which usually defines the purpose of an art collection), this chapter aims to discuss some of the possible roles art has been charged with serving, both in a positive and negative sense. Particularly given the South African context with which most of this thesis focuses, it is necessary to evaluate the function of art – since here it is often accused as being a luxury rather than a necessity – a symbol of elitism, rather than one of democracy. The final section of this chapter considers the role that university art collections in South Africa might offer; an opportunity for those who would typically avoid art galleries to become familiar with works of art in a non-threatening and educationally-oriented environment.

Vested Interests: The Rise of National Art Galleries

The emergence of national art galleries throughout European cities at the end of the eighteenth century, which extended to London by 1836, was strongly linked to national pride and notions of democracy. While the Louvre was not the first, it was with the opening of this museum to its new citizens that “public art museums became signs of politically virtuous states” (Duncan, 1995: 21), since it was within these walls that a royal collection was transformed into becoming a collection for the people. Thus, this “palace of the people” (McClellan, 2003: 5) was the space in which the symbolic weight of public art galleries embodying all things democratic was born. Moreover, as many scholars argue⁹, the establishment of these institutions was strongly linked to the emergence of the nation-state, which had overtaken former regimes based on despotic rule, and had replaced them with “principles of law rather than individual might, moral rather than arbitrary rule, rational rather than impulsive power, and principles of ‘justice’ rather than divine right” (Prior, 2002: 39).

⁹ Among these scholars are Carol Duncan, Nicholas Prior, Andrew McClellan, to name a few (who will be referred to here).

Therefore, it has been asserted that the rise of these galleries was intertwined with the changing political and social climates within these states; as Prior argues (2002: 38), “the aggrandisement of European state and national power in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was coterminous with the rise of the modern national art museum”. In turn, the actual display of art was modified for the new viewers that were welcomed into these formerly reserved areas. For, in opposition to the previous method of displaying works from floor-to-ceiling (the ‘gentlemen’s hang’) without labels, works were arranged chronologically and were clearly labelled¹⁰ (the ‘art-historical’ hang). This, Duncan contends, was to fill the spectator with a sense of empowerment, and above all realise the relationship between them and their new benefactor: the state. Furthermore, in the case of the Louvre, in presenting France as the last great national school of art (following Egypt, Greece and Italy), the citizen would realise that he found himself in the “most civilised and advanced nation-state” (Duncan, 1995: 27).

While the British National Gallery opened in 1824, it was only with the pending relocation of its premises to Trafalgar Square¹¹ (opened in 1836) that one began to see similar aims spoken of. Up until this point the art collection had not been hung in the new chronological fashion nor labelled as in the Louvre example, and these were some of the points emphasised by those rallying for the new role a national art collection could play in British society. Duncan (1995: 43) notes that a committee made up of

well-known radicals and reformers, including William Ewart, Thomas Wyse, and John Bowring...were convinced that art galleries, museums, and art schools, if properly organised, could be instruments of social change capable of strengthening the social order... [They held the] unshakeable belief that the very sight of art could improve the morals and deportment of even the lowest social ranks.

Thus, free admission was one of the concerns voiced by these reformist politicians, since it was imperative that the ‘lower’ members of society be allowed in to experience these works first hand. Herein one identifies a nationalistic drive, and as one of these orators argued, “no nation is whole without the arts” (Duncan, 1995: 44). As aforementioned, the

¹⁰ See Duncan, C. 1995, *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, pp.26-27 for a thorough description of this transformation in display.

¹¹ The Gallery was originally opened in the house (at Pall Mall) of the deceased John Julius Angerstein, whose personal collection formed the basis of the National Gallery’s collection.

outdated method of hanging was also a source of contention, as well as the amateurish nature in which the gallery was run in general – seen as “outmoded, inefficient and failing in its claims to be a monument of a rich nation” (Prior, 2002: 85). Flaws within the management of the collection ranged from a loose acquisition policy (“based on the individual tastes of the trustees”), a lack of a historical systemisation of the collection, the unprofessional nature of the trustees themselves (“they lacked the critical acumen and sound art historical knowledge befitting guardians of a national collection”), and the employment of detrimental cleaning strategies (ibid: 85-86). As will be shown in subsequent chapters, these are faults not uncommon to many art committees worldwide.¹²

It is important to note that, prior to the initiation of a national art collection in Britain, art was displayed primarily in the “galleries or reception rooms of town or country houses”, which were available for viewing to only a small portion of society, the “well-born, educated, men of taste, and more marginally (if at all), well-born women” (Duncan, 1995: 36). Thus, the display of artworks to a more general public is only a very recent phenomenon, and in turn, the perception that art is democratic a modern concept. In fact, while the audiences have diversified and grown over the last couple of centuries, what remains is that a very select group of people usually makes up the acquisition bodies that form the collections on display. However, this is not generally made publicly known; in her study, Chin-tao Wu (2002: 84) notes¹³ that “In America, as in Britain, there have been few, if any, published statistical data on trustees of art museums compiled from a sociological perspective”, the absence of which she finds conspicuous.

From what information she could find, Wu’s study on the British example revealed that these groups were often made up of extremely well-educated people, of “good birth and breeding”, who in turn, “share certain common values and beliefs” (2002: 97). Emphasising this last point, Wu (ibid) quotes a former trustee of the Victoria and Albert

¹² These are similar problems within the management of the UCT collection. Obviously the responsibility of UCT is on a *far* smaller scale than the National Gallery of London, but it is interesting to note that no matter how large or small the institution the same sorts of dilemmas are sometimes faced.

¹³ For a riveting study of the ‘insider’ world of art trustees, see Wu’s chapter “Guardians of the Enterprise Culture: Art Trustees” in *Privatising Culture* (2002), pp.83-121. While key points will be extracted here, it is worth reading the full chapter for a greater perspective on this state of affairs.

Museum, who noted that these sorts of establishments operate “through unwritten rules of consensus and personal restraint”.¹⁴ Wu (ibid: 105) uses the Tate Gallery as a case study¹⁵ of the typical characteristics of these boards, and records that in the 1960s and 1970s it was “quintessentially a male club”, while the later addition of female members was often related to their wealth or power.¹⁶ Wu (ibid: 106) further notes that another “distinctive characteristic of the Tate trustees is the overwhelmingly similar educational background they share... [which] is not a surprise, given that historically a whole range of British national life has been, and still is, dominated by men who have been to ‘public schools’ and then to Oxford and Cambridge”.

Thus, Wu (ibid: 97-98) concludes that the boards from both America and the UK are “far from being representative of the population at large, but are dominated by a very small and self-selected segment of society”.¹⁷ Indeed, her investigations into the American example revealed a number of similarities to that of the British. Here, Wu (ibid: 85) acknowledges the homogeneity of the American boards: a 1969 survey revealed 60 percent of board members were at least 60 years old and had graduated from Ivy League or Little Ivy League schools, while a later study showed that 63 percent of art trustees were male, 44 percent of whom were over 50 years of age, with 85 percent being white, and mostly originating from the field of business. She adds that, by tradition, “board membership is not only self-perpetuating, but also based on lineage and wealth, in which money and power are the prerequisites to entry”, while she illustrates this statement through giving examples of numerous art boards across America¹⁸.

¹⁴ I would like to highlight this point in relation to the study of the WOAC (following in Chapters 3-5): a similar feature within this group of people which, according to the archive, seems to have persisted throughout the 30 years of the committee’s existence.

¹⁵ See *Privatising Culture*, pp.100-121.

¹⁶ Wu gives the example of the Countess of Airlie, who “is the granddaughter of the financier and philanthropist Otto Kahn. Married to Lord Ogilvy, she has been Lady of the Queen’s Bedchamber since 1973”; as such, Wu does not deem her to be “a meaningfully representative female figure” (2002: 106).

¹⁷ Once again, I would like to draw attention to this quote since I feel it bears similarities to the composition of the WOAC.

¹⁸ See *Privatising Culture*, pp.85-86 for general examples, and pp.88-96 for a specific case study on the Whitney Museum of American Art board.

A Conflict in Interest: The Paradox of American Art Museums

Certainly, (in contrast to their British and European counterparts) the birth of art museums¹⁹ in America was inextricably linked to an exclusive group of wealthy individuals, a relationship that continues to this day. A major reason for this lies in the lack of financial support offered by their national government; one source notes that while most European and UK museums are well supported by their governments (reportedly 100 percent and 90 percent respectively), in the USA only 15 percent of the funds are provided for (Einreinhofer, 1997: 50). It is telling that the National Gallery in America²⁰ was only opened in 1941, while the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Art opened their doors as far back as 1870. These institutions were inspired by the Louvre, which was “seen as a symbol of the triumph of democracy, equality, and freedom” (ibid: 28). However, despite these museums’ core mission of “fostering pride and prestige in American society, of moral betterment and education for all”, Einreinhofer (ibid: 52) concludes that this was “a pursuit full of contradictions, for although America’s first museums were based on the Louvre, they were founded and administered by private citizens with private dollars”.

She notes that “When J.P. Morgan assumed the presidency of the Metropolitan he began to fill the slots on the board with millionaires and those seats have continued to be filled with wealthy patrons” (ibid: 49). Echoing Wu, Einreinhofer continues, “Wealthy board members generally dominate today in the major American art museums...There are no artists or art historians or professional art scholars on the board of the Metropolitan Museum today”. Thus, American art museum boards have long been characterised by moneyed individuals who inject funds and personal collections into the museums²¹. In this vein, Wu (2002: 87) cites one enlightening quote from Joseph V. Noble, director emeritus of the Museum of New York, which outlines the ‘famous Three Gs’ of

¹⁹ It seems that some American scholars prefer the term ‘art museum’ to ‘art gallery’; while I will interchangeably use either, they both refer to the same type of institution (while particularities of certain sites will be noted).

²⁰ Despite the fact that currently, most of this institution’s funding derives from the government, the initial collection and building was a contribution of a private individual, Andrew W. Mellon.

²¹ My own cursory search into one example – the National Gallery in America – revealed that many of the trustees that sit on this board prove this statement (accessed online: <http://www.nga.gov/xio/trustees.shtm>)

trusteeship: “A trustee is expected to *give* money. A trustee, by using political and social muscle, is expected to *get* money. If a trustee can’t do one or the other, then it’s time to *get off* the board and let someone else sit” (original emphases). Wu goes on to outline the specific case study of the Whitney Museum of American Art board that has evolved over the years, which has incorporated many members from the world of high finance and business (some of whom featured on the *Forbes 400*)²². As Wu (ibid: 91) highlights, the 1980s heralded a new type of trustee – the ‘corporate trustee’ – which she has described as “the kind of businessmen whose trusteeship is unequivocally a *quid pro quo* for their brokerage of a unique deal between the museum and their respective company”. Thus, one saw the chairman of the board of Philip Morris Inc (a leading tobacco company) and the executive vice president of the Equitable Life Assurance Society welcomed to the Whitney board. Not only did these “companies contribute handsomely to the museum, but more specifically, both men were instrumental in establishing a Whitney branch within the headquarters of their respective companies” (ibid).

It is important to note the impact of corporate sponsorship of publicly visited art museums, since it is a further reflection of the fact that these spaces are by no way ‘neutral containers’²³ of artworks. Einreinhofer notes that as a direct result of the corporate sponsorship sweeping (in particular) America, certain exhibitions have been avoided or encouraged, and as such the art museum has become yet another instrument with which these corporations can yield their power. Thus, she argues, “These tax-exempt institutions become lobbying enterprises. The art they show is instrumentalised to push a corporate interest” (ibid: 135). As part of her study, Einreinhofer has discussed the work of artist Hans Haacke who has repeatedly exposed the insidious relationship between the museum and the corporate world within his installations. Based on an interview with the artist, she notes, “Haacke believes the corporate sponsors ‘set the tone’ for exhibitions”, quoting him as saying, “The museum director and the curator can anticipate what would fit into the corporate picture, they know what would attract corporate funding. Accordingly, the show is styled or the topic chosen” (Haacke cited in

²² See *Privatising Culture*, pp.88-96

²³ See the quote by Emma Barker on pg. 8 of this dissertation.

Einreinhofer: 136). This form of covert censorship is symptomatic of one of the ways in which the acquisition and display of artworks can be entwined in activities and motives which could hardly be described as ‘democratic’, while the image fed to viewers is always one of egalitarianism.

One of the major consequences of corporate sponsorship has been the emergence of ‘blockbuster shows’²⁴. Both Einreinhofer and Wu credit Thomas Hoving, former director of the Metropolitan Museum (1966-77), as being the first to initiate these shows²⁵ which relied heavily on corporate sponsors and aimed at bringing the highest amount of visitors to the galleries. Wu (2002: 135) describes Hoving, who came from a “big business background”, as transforming the “traditional operation of the art museum from a warehouse of art artefacts into that of an entrepreneurial undertaking”. His assimilation of the art world to the business world has been emulated by other directors over the years, one being Thomas Krens (director of the Guggenheim, 1988-2005), whose very appointment, “was based on his skills in management and development”, rather than any expertise in art or art history (Einreinhofer, 1997: 145). Shunned by purists, Krens “was viewed by the art and museum communities as a businessman/entrepreneur who talked about art as a commodity and museums as an industry” (ibid: 146). Indicative of this, Krens has been quoted as stating, “In many ways, what I do now is that I manage a brand and that brand is the Guggenheim” (cited in Cuno, 2004:16).

This attitude incensed many directors who saw Krens as going against everything that museums and galleries represent; in a recent publication, entitled *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, James Cuno²⁶ and a host of other leading art museum

²⁴ The ‘blockbuster show’ is the term used to describe the popular large-scale exhibitions held at most national and modern art galleries around the world; they usually focus on one artist (e.g. Van Gogh) or one movement (e.g. Impressionism). Accompanied by a vociferous advertising and publicity campaign, with a host of products that can be bought from the show (from mugs to posters to coasters), these exhibitions are heavily funded by corporate sponsors (who, in turn, have their logo lambasted onto every available product or banner associated with the exhibition) and aim at bringing in the public on a mass-scale.

²⁵ Recognised as the first ‘blockbuster show’, Hoving’s 1976 ‘King Tut’ exhibition at the Metropolitan brought in 8 million people (accessed online:

http://www.gazette.com/entertainment/hoving_25302_article.html/art_museum.html).

²⁶ Cuno is the former director of the Harvard University Art Museum, and the current director of the Courtauld Institute in London.

directors have written essays²⁷ outlining their opinions of the purpose and priorities that should underpin their respective galleries – and they concur that these should have nothing to do with increased ticket sales or providing ‘entertainment’. These men (for they are all men) represent a more traditional approach to the business of art museums, and in their rhetoric one is struck by the primarily aesthetic (as opposed to educational or socially responsive) interests supporting their arguments. Foremost, they see their role as providing access to authoritative (i.e. that which demonstrates the taste and knowledge of those leading the art museum) and original works of art in a setting that serves to enhance these collections through grand and noble architecture that inspires tranquillity and concentration; thus, it is no wonder that these spaces have been called ‘secular cathedrals’²⁸. ‘Contemplation’, ‘awe’, ‘wonder’ and ‘absorption’ are the type of words repeatedly used throughout the book, and as James N. Wood²⁹ (2004: 108) rightly asks: “Have we arrived at an apparent contradiction, that the American art museum was made possible by our democratic political system, but that the public’s trust is based on our ability to preserve *elite* values and *precious* works of art that we make available to all?” (my emphasis). While these works are ‘available to all’, they are not necessarily accessible to all, and it seems that this may be an inherent quality within many works of art (from old masterpieces to contemporary art). Indeed, Einreinhofer (1997: 32) has categorically stated that:

Art, by its nature, is not democratic. The whole of what we call Western art was created by superior craftsmen of high intelligence and astute sensibilities. This art was often created for the wealthy rulers, well-educated leaders, the merchants, industrialists, and bankers of refined taste. To complicate the matter further, modern Western art has been based primarily on the artist’s personal vision and the personal expression of that vision. The modern artist has been highly educated and highly trained, and his intention has largely been to communicate on his level, not necessarily to enlighten the masses.

²⁷ These essays were based on lectures these scholars presented at Harvard University during 2001-2002.

²⁸ See *Whose Muse?* Pgs.104, 120, 140

²⁹ Wood is the current director of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Questions of Accessibility: The Aesthetic vs. Education Debate

A way of overcoming this inaccessibility has been the rigorous educational programmes often attached to art museums³⁰. Detailed labels, catalogues, brochures, as well as tours, lectures, seminars, and many other forms of educational activities have been provided to enhance the viewing experience. Furthermore, there have been attempts to include more exhibitions relating to minority groups and issues (dealing with identity and societal problems) that were formerly excluded from these spaces (although these usually happen at the more 'regional' museums³¹). However, this has been met with opposition by those who are intent on preserving the elitist nature of these venues. In a revealing article, O'Neill notes some of the comments levelled against certain display tactics seen in local exhibitions around Glasgow in the mid 1990s. One 1994 exhibition, which centred on artist Stanley Spencer, situated his works within a context that suggested a shipyard since he had produced the paintings while working in a shipyard during the war years³². As such, there were "real machine and hand tools used by the workers" as well as "comments from shipyard workers on the paintings that were displayed, including points on how Spencer had taken artistic licence with technicalities" set alongside the works themselves (O'Neill, 2002: 29). In response to this exhibition, a writer from the *Glasgow Herald* declared,

[This is] the most unsympathetic presentation of any artist I have ever seen... Spencer is popularised and patronised in the misguided view – I assume – that this will bring the punters in... Must they be spoonfed? Are they unable to take their art neat? (cited in O'Neill: 29)

³⁰ See Einreinhofer, N. 1997. *The American Art Museum: Elitism and Democracy*, pp.102-123. This chapter details the rise of the educational programmes in place at many American art museums.

³¹ While this is not a phenomenon very common to South Africa (although the District Six Museum could be classified as one example), in America and the UK there are many smaller museums and galleries that would cater to a more local audience; these have often been at the centre of calls for being more inclusive and accessible (see Richard Sandell (ed.) 2002. *Museums, Society, Inequality*; Karp, I., Muller Kreamer, C. and Lavine, S.D. (eds.) 1992. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*; Karp, I. and Lavine, S.D. 1991. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*).

³² The Second World War.

Similarly, when the Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art³³ opened in 1996, displaying a varied collection of works that comprised pieces from internationally recognised artists such as Bridget Riley, Niki de Saint Phalle and John Bellany to works by more ‘popular’ artists such as Beryl Cook and Ken Currie, the critics were aghast. O’Neill (ibid: 31) notes *The Guardian*’s response: “A travesty...a mockery, quite the worst arranged collection of dire purchases I have ever seen”, while *The Scotsman*, in response to the overwhelmingly popularity of the gallery (it exceeded its target visitor numbers of 300 000 by 100 percent), reported “The Romans got lots of people into the Coliseum to see the lions munching Christians”. Finally, another exhibition held in 1997 at the McLellan Gallery, entitled *The Birth of Impressionism*, which used educational videos and mannequins dressed in late nineteenth-century costumes to accompany the paintings, along with a reconstruction of the boat in which Monet painted many of his scenes, brought another negative response. O’Neill (ibid: 32) cites *Scotland on Sunday* in which the writer states, “I will be blunt...this is simply the worst exhibition I have ever seen...It is crass, unintelligible and a positive danger to the general public. What we have here is not an art exhibition at all, but a history lesson”.

On the basis of these responses, O’Neill concludes that not only are the curators of each exhibition being attacked, but, more specifically, *the viewer* who enjoyed these shows. As he states, “All the critics strongly imply that anyone who enjoyed these exhibitions is somehow not a ‘good enough’ person to be in an art gallery...This kind of exhibition, the critics say, is no longer for us, who belong here, but for *them*, who don’t” (ibid: original emphasis). He continues, “The reviews for these exhibitions reflect more general criticisms made of art galleries and museums that attempt to be socially inclusive. The most common charge is of superficiality, of ‘dumbing down’” (ibid: 33). Expressing this fear, the current director of the Metropolitan Museum has stated of the casual visitor:

As the museum strives to attract him and please him, he will, inevitably, be catered to. That is, to ensure that he is counted at the gate, he will not be challenged. Instead, most likely he will be greeted, through the programs that are offered, at his

³³ On a personal note, I was fortunate enough to visit this gallery (in 2000), and it has stood out in my mind as one of the most enjoyable art gallery experiences of my adult life (both in terms of collection and display).

present level of artistic sophistication. By definition that is not a broadening or enhancing experience of the kind that we are obligated by mission to provide. (de Montebello, 2004: 158)

The educational versus aesthetic debate³⁴ has been ongoing since the very opening of art galleries/museums to a wider public, and it is understandable given that the exposure to art was usually reserved for a very specific, elite audience, prior to this moment. In the American instance, Einreinhofer (1997: 207) proposes that “the duality of the museum’s purpose, educational and aesthetic, may very well be at the heart of the elitist/democratic paradox”, concluding that ultimately “the educational and the aesthetic are at odds: in terms of active/passive, public/private, and verbal/nonverbal”. Thus, she sees the task of museum educators as an ambition full of contradictions.

Additionally, those typically employed as the directors have usually come from a particular background themselves. In his article describing what he calls the ‘Great Museum Conspiracy’, Fleming (2002: 213-14) argues that a significant reason for the exclusivity of museums lies in the directors that oversee them: those “coming from a prosperous, middle-class background”, who are generally “scholarly types”. While these are not ‘criminal offences’ in themselves, they do ensure a particular type of person in charge of these spaces; Fleming (ibid: 214) states, “it is hard for people from a privileged background to understand the pressures, anxieties and aspirations of those less fortunate”, and as such, it is no wonder that “a sector that recruits staff from a particular stratum of society has managed to create a product that appeals most to others from the same stratum”. As for their academic interests, he argues,

scholarly types are often quite introverted, because the pursuit of scholarship is a solitary one. Moreover, as universities have always found, the desire to study often leaves little room or inclination for the dissemination of learning... It is not inevitable that specialists will struggle to communicate with lay audiences, but because they often lack the necessary skills, it has been common. (ibid)

³⁴ For a concise overview of this debate see Andrew McClellan’s ‘A brief history of the art museum public’ in his edited volume, (2003) *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, pp.1-49.

In turn, as O'Neill (2002: 34) argues, often the “underlying assumption amongst many museum and art museum staff, rarely spoken, is that museums are for people who are already educated”, since it is often seen as beyond the scope of their duties to provide such education. He suggests that many directors feel “it is not their job to compensate for the inadequacies of the state education system” or that their role is not to act as “social workers or therapists” (ibid). Certainly, the essays within *Whose Muse?*, prove that many directors feel that the wealth of information currently available³⁵, or calls for the museum to be more inclusive and less separated from life, can detract from the ultimate aesthetic experience that, they believe, lies at the core of the museum’s mission. Indicative of this, the Metropolitan Museum’s director, Philippe de Montebello (2004: 166), has stated:

I know it has become popular to suggest that museums should not be removed from everyday experience, indeed that they should blend in as much as possible... Some have suggested that it is public spirited to advocate that in order to reach the communities we serve, we should seek to demystify the museum-going experience. I must say, I view our role quite differently; in fact, as the opposite.

The Local Perspective: Displaying Art in South Africa

Given the above discussion, one could see how national art institutions in South Africa could be met with suspicion; in a country facing poverty, HIV/AIDS, homelessness and other detrimental societal issues on a grand scale, the elitist and arm’s-length attitude that can (at times) be found within these spaces would be an instant deterrent to those who might visit it³⁶. The South African National Gallery³⁷ (SANG) has a history, like those mentioned above, inextricably linked to a handful of wealthy individuals who made

³⁵ See James Cuno’s, John Walsh’s and James Woods’ comments regarding this information overload, pg.73, pg. 88, and pg. 109 respectively.

³⁶ Furthermore, historically in South Africa those who have been in political power have often felt overlooked within this space, and therefore would not be inclined to support it financially. As outlined in Tietze’s essay in *The Sir Edmund and Lady Davis Presentation: A Gift of British Art to South Africa* (pp. 26-27), the early bequests to the SANG created a very British flavour to the collections, which was at odds with the Afrikaner Nationalist government. In more recent years the lack of African artworks (or a history of collecting African artworks) would deter the current leaders from financially supporting this institution.

³⁷ For a concentrated study on the SANG, see my article “Important or Impotent? The Case of the South African National Gallery” in *postamble* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2006, accessible online: <http://www.africanstudies.uct.ac.za/postamble/vol2-2/gallery.pdf>

significant donations of works³⁸ that subsequently formed the nucleus of the collection. Among them were Thomas Butterworth Bayley, Alfred de Pass³⁹, Lady Michaelis, Sir Edmund and Lady Davis⁴⁰, Sir Abe Bailey⁴¹ and Henry van den Bergh. Most of these benefactors were men with strong ties to Britain who had made their fortunes in South Africa, particularly in mining, and had also entered the political arena in some way. This gesture of donating works of art to a national institution was perhaps a form of legitimating their authority and wealth⁴², as well as securing popularity and respect in a country which was not their native home.

During the time of these bequests the ideological battle between the British and the Afrikaners was unfolding within South Africa, and this, compounded by the later era of apartheid, further exacerbated the fact that there was little room for any African art in a place like the SANG. Thus, it was only in 1990 that an official acquisition policy, outlining the intention to consistently seek out and purchase African art, was finally formulated at the SANG. Therefore, it is not hard to understand the argument of one academic, writing in 1985, who argued that, “for nearly three-quarters of South Africa’s population museums are at best otiose, at worst monuments of privilege, a waste of money, institutionalised proof of white control, ownership, of manipulation of the environment and human culture” (de Villiers cited in Alexander, 1987: 36). The persistent negative stigma of these institutions was further summed up in a statement made by Nelson Mandela, in which he argued that museums such as these have presented “the kind of heritage that glorified mainly white and colonial history” (cited in Witz, 2006: 109).

³⁸ It is important to note that while the Bayley Bequest was given in 1872, with other donations following in subsequent years, the physical building of the SANG was only opened in 1930.

³⁹ See Tietze, A. 1995. *The Alfred de Pass Presentation to the South African National Gallery* for a full description of the donation.

⁴⁰ See Tietze’s essay in *The Sir Edmund and Lady Davis Presentation: A Gift of British Art to South Africa*, pp. 15-29.

⁴¹ See Tietze, A. 2001. *The Sir Abe Bailey Bequest: A Reappraisal* for more information on this donation.

⁴² As seen worldwide by the many benefactors of various art institutions, the gesture of donating art is intimately bound to prestige and respect. Furthermore, simply *possessing* a collection in the first place has significance with regards to the public image or esteem one holds. It seems that one of the earliest examples of this was in 19th century London – where a new wealthy class was emerging: self-made men (merchants, industrialists, etc.). Duncan has described their art collections as symbols serving “as proof” that they were “cultivated and discerning and fit to hold power” (1995: 29)

Thus, it is unsurprising that the SANG has suffered many financial difficulties over the years; its acquisition budget stayed at around R200 000 for many years, finally being cut out altogether in 1997, reviving in 2003 with a mere R150 000 annual allocation (Unsworth, 2005: 8), which has not increased over the years. Admittedly there has been further money provided through the 'Transformation Budget', and more recently, the National Lottery, which SANG has used to repatriate objects from abroad, but the fact remains that the budget for this institution is dismal. While the Department of Arts and Culture has stated explicitly its recognition of the potential reconciliatory role the visual arts can play in South Africa⁴³ and the importance in providing access to art and art education, the figures speak otherwise. Additionally, a recent study revealed that around 85 percent of the viewers visiting the gallery were white, while nearly 60 percent of them were tourists from overseas⁴⁴. These statistics indicate more than merely a financial crisis; the visual arts are seen to be irrelevant to most South Africans. It seems that this has been an ongoing phenomenon. As many as 17 years ago, Arnold (1990: 23) noted that, "At present visual culture has little appeal to South African society in general... Black South Africans, although not apathetic about culture, are either uninformed about art museums or have found Eurocentric visual art to be irrelevant to them".

However, more than irrelevant, these works, and the spaces in which they are housed, can be seen as intimidating. Here, it is worth briefly returning to O'Neill's argument, for within his article is an extremely valid point that is relevant for this discussion. Writing on the experience of first-time art museum visitors for whom none of the works makes sense, O'Neill (2002: 35) notes that there will

inevitably be a sense of having failed some sort of test, a touchstone of sensibility, because the whole message of the building, of facades in the classic manner, the

⁴³ "Arts and culture may play a healing role through promoting reconciliation", taken from the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (4 June 1996), accessed online: http://www.dac.gov.za/legislation_policies/white_papers/white_paper_on_arts_culture_heritage.htm

⁴⁴ These figures are based on research undertaken by Yoshiara Yuuki for her doctoral thesis on the visitor habits of the South African National Gallery (surveys and interviews undertaken from 20 November 2004 until 27 March 2005). Her findings were made available to me through Carol Kaufmann at the SANG in an interview, 12 September 2005.

aura of reverence, or the ritual, clearly says that this is important stuff, this is a high point in human achievement, and it should mean something to you. The message is clear: if you don't know what it's about, if it doesn't reach you, you shouldn't be here, you don't belong... [Therefore] they will have a *negative rather than a neutral experience*. (my emphasis)

A negative experience is not necessarily confined to (national) galleries; as will be shown in subsequent chapters, this is a common complaint laid against much public art. In a succinct statement, Senie (1992: 242) notes that, "If a work of art is not tamed or framed by being placed within a familiar context, a sense of unease persists, sometimes to the point where the work of art itself is perceived as threatening"⁴⁵. She notes that it is vital that artworks be accompanied by an educational component, particularly those works that are situated outside of a gallery context⁴⁶.

Turning to the particular example of university collections (which this dissertation later focuses on), it seems particularly appropriate that educational aids be a prominent component of the display of artworks. Moreover, the university campus would seem to be an arena in which certain perceptions and barriers can be overcome with greater success than elsewhere. In an article dating from 1987, UNISA curator, Lucy Alexander (1987: 35), foresaw the potential inherent in South African universities:

It is becoming apparent that university art galleries and collections *can and should* adopt a different approach to exhibitions to that of the municipal and national art galleries. An educational orientation makes good sense in the university environment and also frees the gallery from the more formalist connoisseur-approach to viewing art, which often results in the isolation of the art object except for minimal information typed on a discreet label card. (my emphasis)

Alexander further relates how, in the face of waning funding during the 1930s, American art museums reinvented themselves to ensure their survival – as primarily educational institutions (despite some challenges by various individuals, as we have seen). In turn, she acknowledges her hope that the future of South African art museums would pursue

⁴⁵ Here, Senie gave the specific example of Richard Serra's public art work, *Tilted Arc*, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

⁴⁶ Senie's research area is specifically public art; as such it is unclear how much information she would expect to be available for artworks *within* a gallery context, since she does not discuss this at all. It seems probable that she would be in support of a fairly concentrated educational program for these spaces.

the same path: “One can hope that out of this period in South Africa, a similar identification of needs will take place, allowing our museums and their collections to become more effectively involved in the educational task ahead” (ibid: 36). While the activities of museums such as the SANG are considerably stifled by financial and perceptual restrictions, it seems that the possibilities that could arise from university art collections and activities are an, as yet, fairly untapped resource. In the spirit of these claims, Alexander (ibid) identified the fact that these venues could bring unique qualities for the display and functions of artworks:

...it could in fact be one of the prime testing-grounds for the presentation of original material in a manner which is accessible to a broader section of society. Such methods should obviously not dilute the content of the exhibitions for the art student, but innovation in this field could be the key to integrating creative activity and thought into the experience of all South Africans. As centres of research, university art galleries could become both adventurous in their programmes and in their presentation. Formalised research could be undertaken, if a research unit were established, through which programmes could be evaluated.

The fact that universities have (in general, but more pointedly in South Africa) frequently been “described as ivory-tower institutions” (Arnold and Basson, 1991: 2), highlights a need to undertake such endeavours – in order to overcome this negative assessment (and reality, if it is so). Additionally, in a country in which “art is regarded as a luxury and elitist pursuit” by many, (ibid) this may be the most apt space in which to begin to consider art as a more necessary and vital part of democratic life. With such a range of works now being produced by a diverse group of contemporary South African artists, dealing with range of issues that engage with the current social and political climate, it seems that the time may now be ripe for this to happen.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to do a number of things in an effort to introduce the issues that arise in the forthcoming chapters. It has outlined the beginnings of publicly accessible art galleries and museums, and the circumstances that led up to this moment, both in the

European and American context. In doing so, it has identified the sometimes conflicting aims and motives behind this seemingly 'democratic' act. While there are untold pleasures and benefits to be had from experiencing works of art (both in terms of the actual appreciation of the objects and the knowledge that can be drawn from them), there are many factors that can influence this experience. Some of these are more overt than others, and the role that certain individuals play can be influential in ways that are unknown to the general public. The purpose for discussing acquisition bodies in such depth here has been twofold; firstly, to make one aware of the power and influence a very select group of people have in this role, and the contradictions between their make-up and the stated aims of art galleries; secondly, to prepare for the pending discussion of the Works of Art Committee at UCT, whose members find themselves in a somewhat similar situation in terms of choosing art works for a large, yet contained, community. This committee, it will be argued, displays some of the (negative) characteristics of these more prominent boards.

The argument over the aesthetic versus the educational role of artworks has similarly been invoked in order to provide the reader with a foundation from which to consider the role art could or should play within a university context. This is particularly in light of the fact that the specific case study of UCT, which forms the majority of the remainder of the thesis, while promising so much potential, at present seems to lack a clear direction. As the final section of this chapter suggested, negative perceptions of art, and art institutions in South Africa, may be overcome through the assertive utilisation of the various university art collections within the country, of which UCT is a prime example. While this chapter has largely discussed the gallery setting, the next chapter will focus on the sites of public art, and will consider the university campus in light of this discussion.

Chapter Two: Issues of Inclusion **The Recent Development of Public Art**

Introduction

Having discussed some of the problems inherent in displaying artworks in a gallery setting, this chapter is to consider the more recent phenomenon of public art. Seen predominantly in countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia, public art has become very popular in recent years; state- or federal-funded buildings, plazas, atriums, sporting grounds and parks often carry a requirement that 0.5 to 2 percent (depending on the country) of the capital for these new structures be spent on commissioning 'site-specific' artworks⁴⁷. This chapter will offer a concise definition of what has become known as public art, and a brief history of its evolution, challenges and successes. Mostly placed outdoors, these works are situated in spaces in which people interact on a frequent basis, and as a result they are normally large-scale and robust. Moreover, the process through which these public art projects are seen to fruition differs considerably from that governing an art gallery; rather than only a curator and an artist being involved, the public art commissioning process usually incorporates members from a public art agency, artists (who work to a specific brief), architects, landscape architects, members of the community, and at times even representatives from the legal profession.

It is my contention that there are numerous elements in common between public art projects (as seen worldwide) and the artworks on the UCT campus. The most significant similarity is the one percent policy at UCT⁴⁸, seemingly drawn from the international principle, as well as the increased visibility of the artworks on the campuses, placed in many communal areas. Indeed, some of the endeavours undertaken by UCT have been

⁴⁷ In his book, *Art, Space and the City*, Malcolm Miles looks in particular at public art in the UK and USA. Here he notes that by 1993 around 40 percent of local authorities in the UK had adopted a public art policy of some sort (1997: 3), while in the USA a public art policy of between 0.5-2 percent was operational in more than 90 cities and states (ibid: 5).

⁴⁸ Chapters 3-5 will detail the evolution of the one percent policy at UCT. To summarise, it is a guideline that was adopted by the University in 1982, whereby one percent of the budget for any building projects on campus was reserved for works of art (commissioned or acquired). It remained as only a guideline (i.e. not compulsory) until 2005, when it was officially adopted by the University Building and Development Committee.

similar to public art projects in terms of the *physical* manifestation of the artwork (large-scale, robust, situated outdoors) with examples like the *Alma Mater* sculpture on Middle Campus or the *Mind Body Maps* project at the Medical School (both of which will be referred to later). Additionally, the lack of an educational programme attached to the UCT art collection⁴⁹, would seem to indicate that the artworks are meant for all the inhabitants of the university, and not just a small cluster of Fine Art or Art History students, and this too is reminiscent of public art works. However, there are also numerous differences that distinguish the UCT art collection to public art collections, a notable one being the process administered by the university's acquisition body, the WOAC, which has not been the same as those seen in public art projects worldwide.

As will be shown, this committee operates in a fashion somewhat reminiscent of the insular and exclusive gallery-boards that have been discussed in the prior chapter, rather than the more transparent, and community-orientated public art committees. Furthermore, the actual purchases of the WOAC are typically dominated by ready-made artworks; paintings, prints and photographs are the most favoured media in the collection. Many of these works are situated *within* buildings, and these range from the more communal areas – foyers, highly-frequented libraries, or lecture theatres – to more intimate spaces such as offices or lesser-used corridors. The differing types and placement of, artworks purchased or commissioned by UCT may, to some extent, be symptomatic of the confusion within the WOAC, a body arguably conflicted over the role it is meant to play and the type of work it should be supporting. Thus, this chapter begins with an overview on public art and the types of challenges and questions these kinds of artworks reflect. In doing so, one begins to realise the complexities that arise within inserting art into communal spaces, with issues of identity, heterogeneity, and accessibility coming to the fore. To further illustrate this, a brief discussion is offered on the Heritage Trail at UCT, a recent intervention which caused heated debate among students, while the final section

⁴⁹ While the lack of an educational programme, on some level, frees the artworks from being used for only a narrow scope of academic disciplines (such as Fine Art or Art History), it is detrimental to the meaning and purpose they could have to many on campus (who are unaccustomed to works of art). This point will be elucidated further in Chapter 5.

succinctly outlines the differences between public art works on American university campuses and those at UCT.

Public Art: Oxymoron or Democracy at its Best?

While the monuments commemorating war-heroes and statues depicting conquerors or city founders, seen worldwide, are all early forms of public art, it is with the later development of a distinct practice of commissioning artworks for government-funded buildings or public structures that this study is concerned. In his brief history of percent-for-art policies in the USA, Wetenhall (1993: 1) notes that as early as 1927, there were numerous circumstances in which those overseeing national building projects set aside anywhere between two and four percent of the budget for the purpose of integrating art within the architecture. These art commissions were often in the form of detailed sculptural reliefs or symbolic statues that rested atop soaring pedestals. However, it was in 1934 that the first percent-for-art public policy was implemented; part of the New Deal and the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, this policy "set aside approximately 1 percent of a federal building's cost for artistic decoration" (ibid).

As Wetenhall (1993: 3) details, this federal policy was later disbanded, while individual states later began to adopt the one percent rule, the first being Philadelphia in 1959, with numerous others following suit in subsequent years. Nevertheless, most scholars assert that 1967 can be recognised as the official year in which major public art began – with the inception of the Art in Public Places Program (APP) at the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) (Miles, 1997: 221). This was soon followed by the General Services Administration's (GSA) Art in Architecture (AiA) Program which began in 1973, with many other countries worldwide adopting similar policies in the ensuing years. As various publications and a host of websites evidence (and as introduced above), public art works are extremely varied but are typically large-scale and meant to last for many years, often out in the open [**Figure 1**]. One public art agency lists the types of art works usually considered public art:

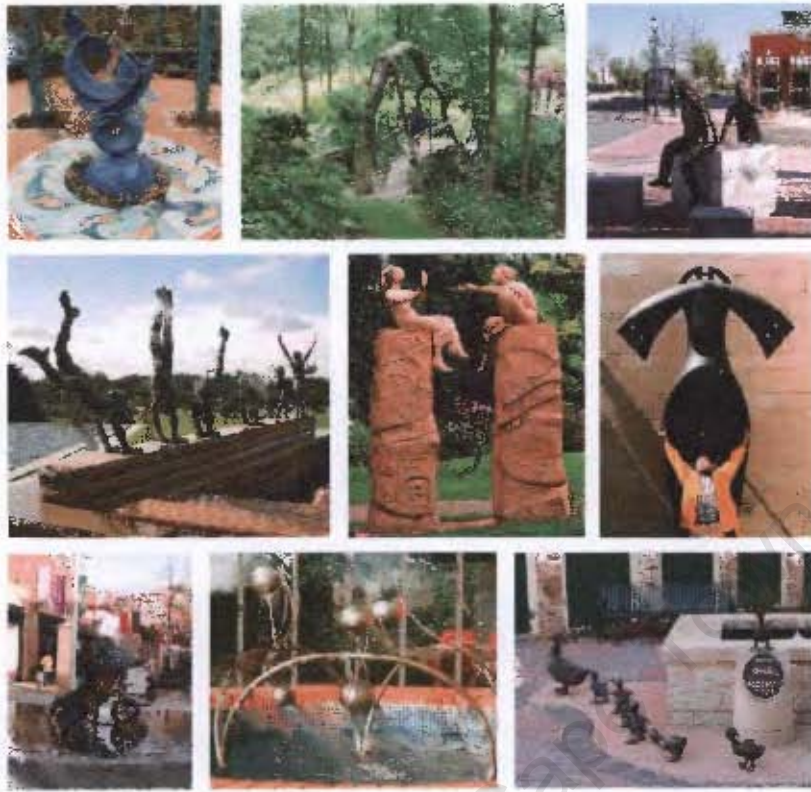


Figure 1. PUBLIC ART

Some examples of public art: (Top) a collage of public art works at Alston Activity Centre, Cary; (Bottom left) the most controversial piece of public art in history, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*; (Bottom right) Robert Indiana's *Love*, Japan.



Sculpture (in the round, bas relief, kinetic works, electronic works, light works; figurative, statuary; formed from any material that provides the type of durability required for the project); mosaics, including engravings, carvings, frescoes; fountains or water elements; fine art crafts (clay, fibre, textiles, wood, metal, plastics, stained glass; mixed media video and computer-generated works, collage, photography; installations; earthworks and environmental artworks; decorative, ornamental, or functional elements (designed by an artist); murals, drawings and paintings; and monuments (Project for Public Spaces, 2006: accessed online).

As Fleming and Goldman (2005: 58) outline, over the years, particular public art programs have been run very differently. In their study comparing the GSA's AiA to the NEA's APP, they note that the former commissioned artists to create works for specific sites, while the latter "offered grants to artists and arts organisations to create works of their own design, without giving any specific guidelines for the art's creation". This, Fleming and Goldman assert, often resulted in works of art that did not relate at all to the site in which they were situated, and either offended or inconvenienced the passing public (due to size, content, or design). Thus, the APP was made defunct in 1995, while the AiA is still in existence. Not without its own problems, the AiA was the commissioning body that funded Richard Serra's infamous sculpture, *Tilted Arc*, arguably the most notorious piece of public art in recent history.

Commissioned by the GSA in 1979, erected in 1981, and torn down eight years later, this work was a long, curving wall made out of Cor-Ten steel, stretching a length of 120 feet and standing 12 feet high. It was removed due to the efforts of employees from the nearby offices who petitioned to tear it down, followed with an overwhelming letter-writing campaign, and finally, a public hearing. Certainly the most referenced piece of public art, opinions and interpretations of the work, and indeed the whole controversy surrounding it, vary. Fleming and Goldman (2005: 66) cite it as "an ugly work right in everyone's way", and that Serra's "intended interpretation was so subtle – or obscure – that few people understood it", criticising the lack of explanatory texts on site. Schapiro (1999: 68) relates how, in "cutting the space in half", the sculpture "functioned metaphorically as a divide", and that its "mean" quality "was its strength".

Levine (2002), however, uses the *Tilted Arc* debate as an instructive insight into the more critical issues that surfaced through this example. She details the intriguing fact that both supporters and detractors of this work *agreed* on the way in which the sculpture interacted with the site and its inhabitants – and outlines that it was in the response to these effects that the differences arose. Here, Levine (2002: 55) notes that:

Serra's detractors presented familiar complaints about the work's defiance of mainstream taste, its elitism and inaccessibility... (One) witness claimed that the tight-knit art world was trying to "intimidate" viewers with "a smoke screen on intellectual mumbo-jumbo about art". Meanwhile, the *Arc*'s defenders consistently praised the work for defying public taste and mass culture... Many who fought to preserve the *Arc* agreed that the object was "confrontational", "bullying", and "aggressive", but they made the case that this was a good thing: it was precisely the work's tense and critical relations to its surroundings that allowed it to function as a meaningful response to a pitiless urban experience.⁵⁰

This impasse revealed a deep, underlying conflict over who should speak for the public. Levine (ibid: 54) asks, "Was it the press, the local government, the artistic community, the courts?", or, "the people who used the space daily ... or was it the whole nation? Was it only the taxpayers who had paid for the work, or did the public include international visitors and future generations?" In turn, this event caused people to question the methods employed by the GSA in their commissioning process. Thus, in 1989 this administrative body underwent a radical reformation in the way in which they operated; rather than projects being overseen by three arts professional panellists as before, there were now five arts professionals and five community representatives in place. This subsequently changed to "one nationally recognised arts professional, one local artist from the project area, a community representative, the project's architect, a representative of the GSA building client, and two GSA associates" (Fleming and Goldman, 2005: 63). As described in the introduction to this chapter, this is the kind of constituency that makes up public art committees worldwide currently, and it stands in striking opposition to the boards that usually decide on works of art placed within a gallery setting.

⁵⁰ Levine's argument here proved very helpful when considering the reactions from the various students and staff to the works in the Chemical Engineering Department (as mentioned in the Introduction, and discussed at length in Chapter 5).

However, this is relatively unsurprising given the differences that numerous scholars have identified between public art and ‘gallery art’, which predominantly (and logically) centres on the different physical contexts of the works. For Fleming and Goldman (2005: 55), the two are poles apart; they state, “Unlike gallery art, public art must not be mindful merely of artistic concerns, but must also be attentive to the contextual aspect of its siting – it is created not to stand on its own, but to augment a larger public space”. Sharp et al. (2005: 1017) note that “while it is possible to walk away from a work in a gallery, once works are incorporated into lived spaces they cannot always be avoided”, while Senie (1992: 240) outlines that, as opposed to a museum or gallery, in which “a select and voluntary audience places the art in a context relating to a known body of work – both the artist’s and a larger art historical oeuvre”, art placed in a public place without any educational accompaniments (as in the case of *Tilted Arc*), produces an end result in which “the public audience is excluded from the art experience ostensibly intended for them and the art remains a foreign object on familiar turf”.⁵¹

Those charged with overseeing the public art process are often held accountable for their methods and decision-making, not least since they are working with the public’s prized tax dollars. Fleming and Goldman (ibid: 56) blatantly state, “All citizens, including artists, have a right to free speech, but nobody deserves a free ride to use taxpayer money with out any discussion”. Thus, transparency and public participation are common requirements of the public art process. From a basic search on the Internet, one can view countless articles relating to public art, and the types of committees that make up the decision-making process⁵², the actual step-by-step conceptual and development processes involved in a public art commission⁵³ and in some cases even the minutes from their

⁵¹ Thus, Senie’s argument, which echoes my own belief in relation to the case study of UCT, is that an important component of public art needs to be (a range of) educational elements that allow the viewer to engage intelligently with any given work.

⁵² For examples of these see the City of Austin Art in Public Places Panel, accessible on <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/aipp/panelists.htm>; the District of Saanich (Canada) Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee, accessible on <http://www.saanich.ca/municipal/clerks/boards/achac.html>; and, the Albuquerque Public Art Program Board Staff, accessible on <http://www.cabq.gov/publicart/cipart3.html>

⁵³ For examples of these see the Project for Public Spaces: Design and Review Criteria for Public Art, accessible on http://www.pps.org/info/pub_art/pubart_design; Queensland Government Public Art Agency Art Built-In Guidelines and Policy 2004, accessible on http://www.arts.qld.gov.au/publicartagency/Downloadable%20Files/artbuiltin_guidelines_&_policy_2004.

meetings are made available⁵⁴. While the exact constitution differs given the example, invariably there is always a range of professionals and a number of community representatives present. As Sharp et al. (2005: 1003) note, this is largely due to “the belief that public art, or the processes through which it is produced, is able to create a sense of inclusion”. In their discussion, Sharp et al. (ibid: 1006) cite Young’s definition of ‘inclusion’ – “a democratic decision (being) normatively legitimate only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making”, and use this as a basis through which to evaluate the processes of various public art projects throughout the UK and the USA.⁵⁵ As their study notes, the tangible outcomes of public art are difficult to gauge⁵⁶ but the process through which these works are commissioned and installed can more accurately be assessed.

Often seen as part of a larger project of ‘urban renewal’ or ‘regeneration’, public art has been met with criticism from many urban studies scholars. Hall (2003: 50) argues that public art has created “the impression of affluence, vibrancy, conviviality, change and regeneration, while at the same time being used to mask the increasingly fractured and polarised social and economic realities that characterise life for the majority of urban dwellers”, while Deutsche (1992: 167) sees the urban gentrification projects, of which public art is usually a component, as ultimately “a process that replaces poor, usually minority, residents of frequently well-established neighbourhoods with middle-class residents”. Thus, as Sharp et al. (2005: 1014) argue, it is imperative that public art projects seek “a more socially inclusive and aesthetically diverse practice”, recognising what another scholar, Amin, has noted: that “difference must be an integral part of the

pdf; and, Albuquerque Public Art Program Public Art Process, accessible on <http://www.cabq.gov/publicart/cipatr5.html>

⁵⁴ For examples of these see the Scottsdale Public Art Board minutes, accessible on http://www.scottsdalepublicart.org/meetings_agendas.php; the District of Saanich Arts, Culture and Heritage Advisory Committee minutes, accessible on <http://www.saanich.ca/municipal/clerks/agendamin.html>; City of Vancouver Public Art Committee minutes, accessible on <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/ctyclerk/civicagencies/publicart/index.htm#minutes>

⁵⁵ See Sharp et al. 2005. “Just art for a Just City: Public Art and Social Inclusion in Urban Regeneration” in *Urban Studies*, Vol. 42, Nos. 5/6 pp. 1007-1019, for the various case studies they detail.

⁵⁶ This is an oft-repeated criticism of public art; leading public art scholar, Harriet Senie, has noted “I know of no mechanism currently in place and certainly no budget for gathering responses to a work of public art” (2003: 186).

process towards inclusiveness” (cited in Sharp et al., 2005: 1011). For, as Amin continues, most communities are “not homogenous or primarily place-based communities... They are simply mixtures of social groups with varying intensities of local affiliation, varying reasons for local attachment, and varying values and cultural practices” (ibid). This statement has great relevance to the particular case study of UCT, and it seems apt here to turn to a brief discussion on this institution, and consider its recently instituted Heritage Trail. Following this, a concise account will be given on the typical public art collections seen in American public university campuses, in order to demonstrate the differences between those and the public art displays of UCT.

UCT's Heritage Trail: A Contested History

The specific example of the Heritage Trail at UCT encompasses many elements seen within public art, both in the physical manifestation and visibility of the objects of which it comprises, as well as in the kind of reactions it elicited (which confirms Amin's statement above). In 2005, at the suggestion of the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Njabulo Ndebele, a Heritage Committee was formed at UCT, with the prime purpose of mapping out a Heritage Trail leading from the Middle Campus (the administrative heart of the University) to the Upper Campus (the most frequented campus on the university, and home to the Jameson Hall in which graduation ceremonies and other official activities take place). The Committee was chaired by Ndebele, and consisted of a range of academics and administrators, as well as members from the university's Planning Unit. Together, they identified 18 pivotal sites which marked out this path, and which narrated the contested history of UCT. This was aided by informative boards which were erected alongside the sites, giving a brief history to the relevant building, sculpture or area. Among these were the Summer House, the War Memorial, the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, the residences of Smuts and Fuller Hall, Jameson Hall, and the Cissy Gool Plaza and Molly Blackburn Hall. The trail was officially launched on 7 September 2005, and a glossy map-brochure published, depicting the route and photographs of each site, along with information taken from the boards.

Furthermore, Professor Howard Philips of the Historical Studies Department offered repeated tours of the Heritage Trail; as a leading authority on the history of UCT, Philips offered additional information to attendees⁵⁷. Finally, there was also a series of Heritage lectures, organised by the Heritage Committee and some post-graduate students, given over a series of weeks, which dealt with the notion of ‘heritage’. In a statement to the student newspaper on campus, *Varsity*, Ndebele noted that, “The purpose [of the heritage celebrations is] to recognise our past, as painful and controversial as it might be, and celebrate our progress” (cited in Reddy, 2005: 1). While I would hesitate to agree that the Heritage Trail celebrates much progress at UCT (most of it is characterised by transplanted Western cultural symbols), the methods employed by the Heritage Committee were far more proactive than the WOAC has ever attempted to be (thus far). Interestingly, a number of the pieces within the Heritage Trail are works of art that the WOAC has commissioned, among them Bruce Arnott’s *The Oracle* (1987) and *Alma Mater* (1996), Andrew Verster’s *Birds in flight* (1987) and Neels Coetzee’s *Skull Series* (1986), though nowhere in the pamphlet or boards has the WOAC been acknowledged. With works such as these as well as statues and memorials, this is in part a kind of public art trail, and it evokes a number of questions surrounding identity and public histories.

Inevitably, some of the choices elicited violent reactions from certain individuals, and soon after the erection of the Heritage Trail, the information board for Jameson Hall was defaced, with the name ‘Leander Starr Jameson’ underlined in red, with an arrow pointing to the words, ‘RACIST MASS MURDERER!’⁵⁸ What this action – and indeed the Heritage Trail itself – reveals is that public art and, moreover, public space, is never neutral. Rendell (2000: 19) notes the common fallacy that “space is inert...a backdrop for human action to occur in, and as homogenous, and undifferentiated.” Echoing Amin, she continues,

But this is not the case. Space is dynamic – it is both producing of and produced by people, people of different kinds, who relate to each other in a myriad of ways.

⁵⁷ I attended one of these tours which took about two hours; throughout, Professor Philips noted the contesting and conflicting history of the institution, and noted the symbolism of each of the 18 sites.

⁵⁸ For an article on this see *Varsity*, Vol. 64 No. 8, 27 September 2005: 1.

Understood as such, as socially produced space, public space can only be considered heterogeneous, patterned with differences of all kinds.

This assessment rings true, particularly in light of South Africa's history; in a country in which space itself was so contested, universities were a fundamental arena in which the inequalities of the nation became apparent, and were heatedly contested. Writing in 1979, the then Chancellor of UCT noted that South Africa was currently "the only sovereign state in the world which officially bars the admission of students to universities on the ground of colour" (van de Sandt Centlivres, 1979: 18). The specific site of UCT is thus an especially interesting example for the placement of public art, because of its own tainted history, and the rapidly changing constitution of the students and staff since the advent of democracy. Symptomatic of the conflicting history of UCT, an article published by the university's newspaper, *Monday Paper*, which ran shortly after the launch of the Heritage Trail, described the intervention as a response to the varied opinions over the university's heritage, in consideration of the national holiday, Heritage Day, on 25 September:

The university's very founders...come with baggage – Cecil John Rhodes, whose gift of land made the erection of UCT on this site possible, is the perfect example of one man's captain of enterprise being another man's imperialist. Depending on who you speak to, he and other historical figures are either heroes or villains, respected, or reviled. Or, for the undecided, both at the same time. So, too, the actions of UCT individuals or the body corporate during South Africa's bedevilled past are either condemned, or showered with praise. It's a heavy burden for any institution to carry into a newfound democracy. But it's one, new building names or not, the university is stuck with. (Morris, 2005: 1)

With its chequered past and diverse current student body, some might see UCT as a prime location in which to install some provocative and dialogic public art works. As Sharp et al. note (2005: 1004), "Hall and Robertson argue that the role of public art should be to encourage the sound of contradictory voices – voices that represent the diversity of people using the space – rather than aspire 'to myths of harmony based around essentialist concepts'". In one of their case studies, Sharp et al. (ibid: 1007) describe a particular project in which formerly marginalised groups installed "memorials or presences in the urban landscape" of those traditionally "forgotten by dominant

histories”, with the example in one instance being, the Black slave and midwife Bidy Mason.

While there are no such sculptures (as yet) on the UCT campus, having recently visited the UWC campus, I would consider the commissioned David Hlongwane sculpture, *Mother and Student*, situated in the central quad in front of the main hall, an example of such an artwork. In honour of the untiring women who clean the university, the sculpture depicts a woman triumphantly raising her son’s arm; he is dressed in an academic gown, she is in a cleaning uniform and holding a broom in her other hand.⁵⁹ However, as will be expanded upon in Chapter 6, most artworks seen at South African universities are reflective of each particular institution and their related history. While UWC was commonly known as the ‘university of the left’ (King et al, 2001: 22), UCT was termed by some as a former “bastion of white privilege” (Whisson, 1979: 15). However, it has been undergoing a concerted process of transformation⁶⁰ in recent years, and while white students formerly made up 95 percent of the university’s population (Harrison, 1979: 171), the intake is now substantially more balanced⁶¹. Indicative of the necessary changes, a 1996 *Cape Argus* article cites the then Premier of Gauteng, Tokyo Sexwale, in a statement aimed at those responsible for academic institutions: “transform or be left behind in history as sorry monuments signifying a failed past” (cited in Malan, 1996: n.p.).

Thus, UCT has instituted various means in order to do just this – changing its mission statement (1996); initiating a Transformation Committee; undertaking an Organisational Climate Survey (2003)⁶², which was aimed at staff members, as well as investigations

⁵⁹ This is in particular reference to the fact that the cleaning staff at UWC are entitled to a tuition fee rebate, which extends to their spouses and children.

⁶⁰ For a detailed overview of the history of transformation at UCT, see Nuttall, J. 2000. *Taking Stock of Transformation at the University of Cape Town, 1996-1999*

⁶¹ In late 2003, the ratio between black and white students was reported in a UCT newspaper as being a “50-50 distribution” (Monday Paper, Vol. 22, No. 33: 1).

⁶² See *Transformation Manager’s Report to the Vice Chancellor: Response of the University Community to the Institutional Climate Survey* (2004), accessible on <http://www.transformation.uct.ac.za/docs/transmanager2004.doc>

into student experiences (2004)⁶³; an active policy of redressing the staff and student demographics on campus; communication from the Vice Chancellor concerning 'Living Transformation' policies (2005); numerous seminars and debates on institutional culture (ongoing since 2005); and so on. However, as Ndebele (2001: 1) himself indicated in correspondence with the *Monday Paper*, the dilemma facing UCT is whether "its inherited institutional culture might enable, or complicate, its ability to chart new intellectual directions".

University Public Art Collections: Differences between American Campuses and UCT

While various works of art on UCT's campus (with some encompassed within the Heritage Trail) are instances of public art, there are numerous differences between them and those, as described in the Introduction of this thesis, commissioned on university campuses in America. In reading the Spring/Summer 2006 issue of *Public Art Review*, I was struck by the copious and varied amount of works installed on state university campuses in America. From large monument-like statues to more playful and colourful sculptural pieces to interactive digital works, the scope is far-reaching. As a result of the pervasiveness of these works, some in-depth publications dedicated to the subject have been brought out in recent times; the Western Washington University, Bellingham campus has devoted an entire volume to their outdoor sculpture collection, entitled *Sculpture in Place: A Campus as Site*. Their extensive outdoor sculpture garden houses works by prominent artists Donald Judd, Richard Serra, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Isamu Naguchi, and many others. Another recent publication, *Sentinel*, focuses on one sculpture of the same name, which was built at the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. Boasted of as the largest sculpture on any American university campus, the book details the design, fabrication and installation of the work. The focus of these books evidences the vast array of sculptural works that are being commissioned by these universities (often in collaboration with the state within which they are situated).

⁶³ See *Same River, Different Boats: Report on 13 Focus Groups With UCT Students, December 2004* (2005) accessible on <http://www.transformation.uct.ac.za/docs/studentclimate.doc>

In response to the increasing popularity of public art works, numerous academic programmes have recently been initiated around the subject, and are being taught both at high school and tertiary level in the USA, as well as various conferences and symposia being organised on the same topic.⁶⁴ Within his survey of 20 American state universities active in percent-for-art programmes, Mankin reveals the differing practices in place at these institutions, and exposes some of the challenges faced in administering public art on campus. Often these have to do with long-term issues – a lack of proper maintenance programmes or of sufficient staff to oversee the works. As one campus representative observed, “Once a piece of public art is installed it basically sits there... No one oversees the collection” (cited in Mankin, 2002: 62). This could be partly due to what Mankin identifies as the universities’ perceived lack of ownership of the artworks, since at some institutions the amount of state representatives sitting on the selection committees outweighs those from the university, and thus there have been “several occasions (where) the public art selected...did not have the support of the university representatives. Thus, universities can have public artworks imposed upon their campuses” (ibid: 59). However, in most instances it seems that the university representatives do have the final say, and Mankin’s study confirms the complex participatory process that these institutions undertake in the commissioning of these works.

Major differences lie between the American examples and UCT. While the funding for the former is typically derived from state percent-for-art policies, and is meant for the installation of large, publicly visible works that will be interacted with by many students on campus, UCT’s art collection is self-funded (i.e. it is a one percent contribution of the university) and not only used for large-scale sculptures. In fact, as aforementioned, most of the works in UCT’s possession are characterised by a more intimate scale, comprising mostly two-dimensional pieces. Furthermore, the majority of the works are placed in offices, lecture theatres, libraries, and other buildings, rather than in outdoor areas. The fact that, over the years, members of the WOAC have repeatedly called for a gallery space further reveals that perhaps the UCT collection’s ‘public’ nature may be by default,

⁶⁴ See the Spring/Summer 2006 issue of *Public Art Review* for examples of these courses, residencies, symposia, etc.

rather than desire. While the current composition of the committee does ensure the representation of a diverse number of academic disciplines, in contrast to many other university public art committees worldwide⁶⁵ there is no student representation, nor any representation by arts professionals from outside the university.

Another discrepancy between UCT and other university art collections – both worldwide and locally – is the lack of integration between the art works and university coursework. It seems somewhat of an irony that the university with the greatest amount of monetary resources and freedom to purchase works of art is virtually the only one in South Africa with no educational programme attached to its art collection. Furthermore, the activities of the WOAC have operated at arm's length to the university community; with no public debates or forums, publications, catalogues, website or public access to meeting minutes, the WOAC is a far cry from the typical examples of public art committees discussed above. Thus, as the following chapters argue, this body will need to undergo some transformations of its own before it can fully realise its positive potential.

Conclusion:

As demonstrated by this, and the prior chapter, the display of artworks is always a complex matter. While the last chapter concerned the finite spaces of a gallery, this chapter considered the more open and accessible spaces in which public art can be found. However, as Rendell has identified, public space is not neutral, and in any location one usually encounters a mix of communities each with conflicting values, morals, histories and cultures. Thus, public art has needed to be mindful of these differences, and historically the processes and ethos underlying the commissioning and installation of these art works has been vastly different from those associated with gallery spaces. In light of the current study of UCT, it seems that while the university employs a one percent policy echoing the principle guiding public art projects overseas, the committee

⁶⁵ For examples of these see the Carnegie Mellon University Public Art Committee, accessible on http://www.cmu.edu/policies/documents/Public%20Art%20Policy_hm; University of Michigan President's Advisory Committee on Public Art, accessible on <http://www.unich.edu/pres/committees/art.html>; and, University of Virginia Office of the Present Committee on Public Art, accessible on <http://www.virginia.edu/uvacommittees/presidentialcommittees/pubArt/membership.html>

overseeing this process, the WOAC, is far less transparent than public art committees. Furthermore, it has been argued that the WOAC generally fails in its duty to supply the kinds of educational aides needed when art is placed in the public sphere.

Both of these flaws seem to result from the conflicting aims and functions of the WOAC itself, caught between various tasks, and never quite positioning itself decisively in relation to them. This lack of a recognised *raison d'être* lies, I would argue, at the crux of the lack of success it has experienced in certain projects, one example of which is the Graca Machel residence, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. The lack of an acquisition policy is, in turn, reflective of the indecisiveness of the committee, and indeed it may be that *due* to the complex and varied nature of the artworks on the university's campuses, a singular acquisition policy would be extremely difficult to draw up. Nevertheless, as has already been indicated, and will be detailed hereafter, there are certain ways in which the WOAC might transform in order to oversee a more constructive and engaging art collection at UCT.

Chapter Three: The beginnings of a collection
The Establishment of the Works of Art Committee at the University of Cape
Town

Introduction

Due to the lengthy and evolutionary nature of the WOAC, the history of this group is divided into two chapters. This first section will begin with a detailed study of the events leading up to the formation of the WOAC, and the early years of this committee. As will be demonstrated, this period was one of consolidation; efforts were made to catalogue the various items, find adequate storage for them, and display them in appropriate areas. The second section (Chapter 4) will begin with the event that dramatically changed the activities and duties of this committee – the institution of the one percent policy.

It seems important to differentiate from the outset the distinction between the Irma Stern Museum (ISM) and the case at hand. While the former is governed by UCT, it is owned by the Trustees of her estate, and has a separate board that meets to discuss matters related to the museum. In contrast to this the university art collection is governed by the Works of Art Committee (WOAC) and the artworks are the property of UCT. The ISM occasionally will exhibit works from the UCT collection, but it is mainly used for the permanent display of Irma Stern's works, as well as temporary contemporary exhibitions, held in the upstairs section. The ISM has an archive and a history that is quite separate from the WOAC, and therefore will not be discussed here in any detail.

Initial Donations and Bequests: The lead-up to the Works of Art Committee⁶⁶

While the WOAC was only initiated in 1977, the first donation to form part of what would become the UCT art collection was a gift from Monsignor Kolbe, in 1925. Kolbe, who was a Reader in the Department of Aesthetics⁶⁷, notes in a letter dated 13 August 1925 his intention to donate his collection of books, illustrations and pictures to the

⁶⁶ All WOAC minutes and agendas, memos etc. referred to in this and the following chapter, unless otherwise stated, can be found in the WOAC archive. This is housed in the Administrative Archive, currently located in the Kramer Building, Middle Campus.

⁶⁷ The establishment of the Readership in Aesthetics was apparently a forerunner for the Michaelis School of Art which opened in 1924 (cited in a presentation given by Christopher Peter, 15 March 1986: audio-cassette tapes accessible from University of Pretoria Archives)

university, on the condition that it be kept together as a whole (Annexure to University Council minutes, 29.9.1925, p.1246). He also offered to act as an honorary curator for the collection, with his duties being the completion of the classification and cataloguing of the works, allocating some components for the purposes of teaching, and showing small groups of students the contents of the collection. The University Council minutes of 29 September 1925 record that "...it was resolved to accept the gift with thanks on the conditions stated, and to appoint the donor honorary curator of the collection" (p.1246), while only in 1938 was it confirmed "that the books in the Kolbe collection should be placed in charge of the Librarian and housed in the subsidiary library in Hiddingh Hall, and the pictures, etc. displayed in two small rooms in the Egyptian building opposite the Hiddingh Hall" (pg. 2289). At this point "the question of the appointment of a custodian of the pictures, etc." was still "under consideration" (ibid). In the intervening years, Kolbe had donated a portrait of himself, painted by Professor Wheatley, which was hung in the Senate Room (University Council minutes, 26.9.1933, p. 1943). According to Christopher Peter, the current Director of the Irma Stern Museum and Secretary of the WOAC, the Kolbe collection amounted to around one thousand pieces (including a large assemblage of books), however over time many of these items were lost.⁶⁸

Another significant donation made to the university originated from Mr. Alfred de Pass, who had already given generously to the South African National Gallery over the period 1926-49. De Pass's donation to UCT in 1950 included art books and magazines, some furniture, various pieces of chinaware and a collection of oil and watercolour paintings. The latter included some work by South African artists (Irma Stern, Ruth Prowse, Terence McCaw, Nerene Desmond, Robert Broadly, and de Pass himself) which was hoped to "form (the) nucleus of a University collection of contemporary South African artists" (unsigned list of de Pass's donation⁶⁹). According to Christopher Peter, other donations in the time leading up to the initiation of the WOAC were the JP Duminy collection, the Jack MacLean Bequest and the Fourcade Bequest (cited in his conference

⁶⁸ According to the WOAC database which is currently being finalised, there are a few remaining works (some photographed); they appear to be mainly landscapes (mostly of the Cape area), a couple of portraits and figure studies (presumably for teaching).

⁶⁹ This can be found in the de Pass file located in the Administrative Archives at UCT.

presentation, 15.3.1986). Among these were a number of antique furniture items which were placed mainly in senior administrator buildings and at Welgelegen (the Public Relations Office). According to the WOAC archive, the committee was called into existence as a response to a potential bequest from a Professor Charles Manning. The University Council minutes of 7 September 1977 record that:

the Principal had been informed by Mr F.C. Robb that solicitors in London were finalising the will of Professor Charles Manning, who was aged 83 and was the possessor of a number of art treasures, including some pictures by South African artists, which were of considerable beauty and value. The solicitors needed to have urgent information as to whether the University intended to display art treasures suitably in the fairly near future and was in a position to look after them. If so, the solicitors could advise Professor Manning to bequeath the treasures to the University. (Extract from Council minutes 7.9.1977⁷⁰)

These ‘treasures’ were in fact a large collection of paintings, sketches, wood blocks and prints by, as well as photographs, documents, and other miscellaneous items relating to, Sir John and Charles Bell⁷¹, both of whom had resided in the Cape from the 1820s onward⁷². Professor Charles Manning was the grandson of Charles Bell, who was the “designer of the Cape Triangular stamp, artist (and) surveyor”, and the man, “after whom the town of Bellville (was) named” (Bradlow, 1981: 16). Sir John Bell, the uncle of Charles Bell, had served in the Peninsular War and became the Colonial Secretary (chief secretary to the Government) in 1826, a position which he held until 1841 (ibid: 23). While the collection is more known for Charles’s work, there are many items in the collection originating from Sir John’s brush and pen; “sharply observed and exquisitely executed impressions of castles in England and Wales” as well as “humorous drawings...made locally by John during his earliest days at the Cape” (letter from Charles Manning, cited in Bradlow, 1981: 18). Charles Bell’s work mainly stemmed from his experiences in the Cape, among them “sketches of Hottentot characters” and

⁷⁰ ‘Extracts from Council minutes’ appear frequently in the WOAC archive; they do not have page numbers since they are merely the relevant sections taken out of the University Council minutes for the purpose of WOAC business.

⁷¹ For a concise account of the contents and history of the Bell Collection, see “The John and Charles Bell Heritage Trust” in *Jagger Journal*, No. 2 (December 1981), pp.16-29. This article, written by Dr. Bradlow, gives an overview of how the works came to be at UCT and the histories of all persons involved.

⁷² Sir John Bell left the Cape in 1841, and presumably returned to Scotland.

drawings relating to the Frontier Wars (Bradlow: 24, 28). However, overall, as Dr. Bradlow notes, a significant part of the collection depicts British country scenes and architectural drawings, rather than South African inspired ones (ibid: 28)⁷³.

The man responsible for the donation of these items, Professor Manning, was Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics from 1930-62, and taught for a time at the School of International Studies in Geneva (ibid: 23). He had inherited his grandfather's collection, and upon considering where to house it, decided that since it was "Cape stuff", he "would like to think of it being kept in the Cape, and on view to the public and available to historians" – as such, UCT was an ideal location (ibid: 22). However, rather than give it to the University as a gift outright, he requested that a board of trustees appointed by him carry out his wishes in terms of restoration, research, publicity, etc. and that when these terms had been carried out, the collection be donated to UCT (ibid: 29). Currently, the collection is still on loan, and housed in UCT's Manuscripts and Archives department. The head archivist has indicated that the donation should occur in the near future and that there have been regular exhibitions of various items within the collection, at numerous locations throughout the country⁷⁴.

The Works of Art Committee: The Early Years

As a result of Professor Manning's imminent bequest, it was resolved at the Council meeting, mentioned above, that the WOAC be formed and the first members were immediately appointed. They were Professor E. Axelson, Dr. F.R. Bradlow, Mr. Justice M.A. Diemont (nominated as Chairman in the first meeting) and Alderman A.H. Honikman. Dr. Bradlow, a long-standing member of the University Council and Chairman of the Irma Stern Committee, was also a member of the trust that administered the preservation and conservation of the Bell Collection. The first official meeting of the

⁷³ It is important to note this when thinking about the kind of collection that UCT was starting to amass; the imagery and history of this body of works.

⁷⁴ Informal interview with Lesley Hart, head of Manuscripts and Archives, 27 July 2007.

WOAC was held on the 18 January 1978, and in addition to the members aforementioned, Mr. L. Read and Mr. B.N. Gaunt were in attendance (Registrar and Deputy Registrar respectively). In the minutes from the meeting, the terms of reference of the committee were noted as the following: “to examine, assess and classify the works of art in Council’s custody and to make recommendations as to their merits and to the manner and place of display” (WOAC minutes, 18.1.1978: 1). Captain George Keast⁷⁵, a long-serving employee of the Jagger Library had compiled a catalogue⁷⁶, which had been circulated prior to the meeting, but it was noted that it was not organised according to different categories (i.e. portraits, oils, sculpture, furniture, etc.), and thus the committee requested that this be done. As will be highlighted below, the question of cataloguing has been an on-going problem for the WOAC/UCT collection, primarily due to the lack of paid staff available for the undertaking of this project. Only in recent years has there been a concentrated effort to complete this laborious task, with the appointment of Mary van Blommestein in 2003, who hopes to finalise this by the end of 2007.

Indeed, in reviewing the minutes from this first meeting, one can see a few areas that remain problematic to this day, one of the primary topics of discussion being the need for a campus gallery. UCT was identified as being one of the few universities in South Africa having no art gallery, and the Chairman decided that this should be pursued (WOAC minutes, 18.1.1978:2). Numerous buildings were suggested as possible venues, namely the Irma Stern Museum, Montebello, Woolsack Residence, Glenara and Hiddingh Hall, of which the committee decided the Woolsack Residence to be the most suitable (ibid:2-3), and that this should be recommended to Council. This suggestion was later rejected by Council, “since the size and scale of the rooms was not conducive to the display nor the serious viewing of works of art” (extract from UPC minutes, 6.11.1978), and subsequent

⁷⁵ Captain Keast (1902-1992) had been on the UCT staff from 1957-1972 as Stack Supervisor at the library, after retiring from the South African Air Force in which he had served for forty years. He and his wife Nora (1909-2000) were actively involved in the work of the WOAC until 1983; they were chiefly responsible for the cataloguing and restoration of the works within the collection, and attended WOAC meetings by invitation (i.e. had no voting rights).

⁷⁶ Christopher Peter noted in his presentation at the 1986 conference on university art collections held at the University of Pretoria, that this was the first attempt to catalogue UCT’s vast and varied collection, and it included items that would not be considered ‘art’ (e.g. reproductions) as such. He also noted that this was something the WOAC were still trying to redress, and update with more recent acquisitions – but, as I will indicate, this has taken over twenty years to see to (near) fruition!

venues also deemed inappropriate (the ISM not being a popular venue with students or staff, and the Hiddingh Hall located too far away from the Upper Campus). Thus, while repeated calls for a gallery space will be recorded in the following sections, it remains the case to this day that UCT does not have a gallery space dedicated to displaying its art collection.

Another resolution made at the first WOAC meeting was that a sub-committee be appointed “to select works of art for display and to make recommendations to the Committee” (WOAC minutes, 18.1.1978:2); the persons nominated were Professors N. Dubow (Head of Fine Art), A.H.R.E. Paap and C. de B. Webb (History Department of UCT, and member of the Archives Committee), while the Keasts were also invited to attend the meetings. It was 9 May 1979 before the second meeting was held, and during this time the sub-committee had been approved by Council, and each member had accepted the offer to serve on the WOAC. In addition, a representative from the University Library had been invited (since most art works were housed in the Library), and as a result, the first woman of the WOAC was appointed in July 1978: Mrs. P. Stevens (extract from Council minutes, 2.8.1978). The last change to the composition of the committee was the appointment Professor C.J. du Ry (Professor of Cultural History of Western Europe) in replacement of Professor Axelson who had retired (extract from Council minutes, 7.3.1979).

While the committee had been dormant for the intervening period of time between the first and second meeting, the Keasts had continued with their work – compiling and submitting ‘reports’ on the university’s artworks. These largely consisted of updates on the restoration of various paintings, the rediscovery of lost works, and the general annotation of items in the collection. As such, in reading them one begins to gain a sense of the contents of the collection – largely portraits of various members affiliated to the university, whether teaching staff, figureheads or donators of art works (e.g. Alfred de Pass, Monsignor Kolbe, Generals Jan Smuts and Louis Botha, and countless professors), as well as other European-slanted genres – flower studies, landscapes, equestrian studies, and so on.

Attached to the agenda for the second WOAC meeting were some letters and reports for review that are worth discussing here. They each relate to the question of a potential gallery, a matter that was discussed at some length in the meeting (and many subsequent meetings, as noted above). Firstly, a letter from the Keasts addressed to Sir Richard Luyt (then Principal of the University), putting forward reasons for the establishment of an art gallery on UCT's campus. In this they state that in their opinion, "art is the expression of culture or civilisation" and that while they "are led to believe that the university is the highest institution of learning and hopefully, exerts the greatest civilising influence on a people"⁷⁷, they had been most disappointed at UCT's lack of commitment to properly house or care for its collection (letter dated 7.12.1978: 1). They outlined that as a result of a lack of a gallery many works had been lost or banished to storage rooms which no-one visited (not even the newly-appointed WOAC members), and therefore:

The University has become the poorer, both literally and figuratively, through not having a properly organised place for the display and safe-keeping of its artistic inheritance... These things are the very fabric of the University's past and a part of our wider heritage. (ibid: 2)

While it is obvious, it needs to be stated that this 'wider heritage' was not that of the country at large – written in the throes of apartheid, this refers to a very select group of people – those who, at the time were allowed to attend UCT: members of the white population. It is interesting to note that at the time this letter was written, white students made up 91 percent of the overall student population at UCT (Humphreys, 1979: 170). In turn, the scope and concerns of the collection belied the specific group (and their related history) to which it catered⁷⁸. It is interesting that simultaneously, collections were growing at many universities across the country that were far more 'African' in their focus⁷⁹, and at Wits African art courses were being taught in the Art History curriculum for the first time⁸⁰. This Eurocentric attitude is one that UCT has been hard-pressed to

⁷⁷ Sounding, once again, very much like the rhetoric of national galleries!

⁷⁸ Equally it is indicative of those choosing the artworks – the committee virtually entirely comprised of white, middle-class, middle-aged (and above) men for the first twenty years of its existence.

⁷⁹ As will be evidenced in Chapter 6.

⁸⁰ As referred to in Alan Crump's presentation at the University of Pretoria conference (15.3.1986); having initiated these courses in 1978, by 1986, it was still the only institution in the country teaching African art courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level to Art History students.

shake off, despite its recent years of concerted ‘transformation’; the current Vice-Chancellor, Professor Ndebele has summarised its inherited institutional culture as having the following characteristics: “whiteness, a Euro-American worldview, maleness, a preponderance of the English language, heterosexuality, and middle-class-ness” (2001: 1). This statement, I feel, has a particular resonance in the history of the WOAC’s members and practices, as will be evidenced in subsequent chapters.

There were two further addendums to the WOAC agenda for the second meeting. The first concerned a recent investigation into the acquisition and display policies of the University of Stellenbosch, which, it was found, was in a similar situation to UCT, having no gallery to display their artworks and therefore also dispersing them throughout their campus. The Head of the Arts Faculty, Professor Scully, was unhappy about the situation and had urged the university to find a suitable location to house the collection as a whole; it appeared that only he and the Rector were in charge of the acquisition of works. The second was a letter from Mrs. Stevens relating her findings from a recent trip to the UK (where she consulted with numerous university librarians and archivists) in which it was made apparent “that if the university doesn’t have a gallery/museum, don’t start one” (letter dated 19.3.1979). She goes on to list various reasons given to her, including the lack of resources, proper storage, staffing and funding necessary for properly caring for a collection, as well as the question of duplication where other museums/galleries exist in the same area; for, she asks, “Will it be visited?” (ibid).

At the second meeting, the committee was informed of the University Planning Unit’s decision that the Woolsack was not a suitable venue for the display of artworks. Following this, it was “debated whether an historical museum (sic), a museum cum art gallery or an art gallery was under discussion, and whether it would be static or whether additions would be made to it.” (WOAC minutes, 9.5.1979: 2). However, it does not seem that a consensus was reached; these issues were merely raised, and not decided upon. What was agreed was that, in the committee’s view, the University Council’s decision to display works of art did not necessarily mean that an art gallery had to be built. As such, it seems that the drive for a gallery was momentarily halted, although it

would revive in future years. Nevertheless, it was thought that some areas needed to be developed for the storage and display of the works in the meanwhile. Therefore the meeting concluded with a number of recommendations for the Planning Unit regarding building extensions to the ISM, increasing archival space for storage, and hanging works in major administrative buildings such as Bremner.

Conclusion:

Thus concludes the first section on the history of the Works of Art Committee, as the intervening years between this meeting and the next pivotal moment in the body's evolution, which the following section describes, were fairly uneventful. The activities of the committee were largely consumed with the organisation of portrait painting, and the general upkeep of the collection (as continuously reported on by the Keasts), with some sporadic minor additions. However, the WOAC was about to embark upon an altering path which would cause their very limited and insular collection to grow and the display of the increased collection to assume more of the characteristics of public art – art commissioned for a particular site, and interacted with on a daily basis. In turn, the challenges that faced the committee took on a more complex nature, particularly in light of the changing public that would soon inhabit the university space.



Figure 2. EARLY WOAC PURCHASES:

(Top) Unknown, *Venetian Scene*, undated; (Bottom left) Phillip Alexander Clancey, *Birds: Kingfishers*, undated; (Bottom right) Robert Bendley, *Hydrangeas in a Vase*, 1947.



Chapter Four: Collection, Representation and Display **The Later Years of the WOAC**

Introduction:

While the previous section focused on the moments leading up to the initiation of the WOAC and the early years of this committee, the current chapter will reveal the later developments within this body. Situated within a rapidly changing political and social climate, UCT has in recent years undergone radical transformations in terms of demographics of both students and staff members. Despite the fact that, as yet, this has not impacted the membership of the WOAC, some curatorial decisions have been influenced by these changes. Most pertinently, the subject matter of works has evolved from the early works of the collection – characterised by portraits, landscapes, floral studies, and other fairly benign images – to works that deal with the current issues facing South African society (HIV/AIDS, poverty, the TRC, etc.). While many of these works have been accepted by the student and staff community, there are some instances in which certain artworks have caused upsets – and numerous pieces on campus have been at the centre of controversy.

These works have largely dealt with issues of sexuality or religious views, and while for the most part the works themselves may not be deemed intentionally controversial, these instances demonstrate the conflicting moral, ethical and aesthetic standards one is bound to encounter when placing works in such a diverse and complex site⁸¹. Some of the more volatile reactions have included vandalism and the (at times, successful) petitioning of artworks to be relocated, while some works are temporarily removed for certain social functions due to the perceived embarrassing nature of what they depict. More than anything else, these instances reveal certain problems the WOAC encounters in their attempts to grapple with the notion of inserting art into a public space.

⁸¹ Here, one recalls the comments made by Amin and Rendell, as quoted in Chapter 2 of this thesis (see pp.33-36).

This specific task was exacerbated by a pivotal change early in the 1980s that powerfully changed the impact and nature of the WOAC's business: the establishment of the one percent policy. A practice unique to UCT (in comparison to other South African universities), it was initially adopted only as a guideline while in recent years it has become official UCT policy. With the influx of funds deriving from the many buildings being erected on campus, the WOAC has been able to embark upon some major projects – with varying degrees of success. While the next chapter will analyse in greater depth the successes and failures of this body, this chapter will give an overview of the events and interventions that have occurred since the institution of the one percent policy. Furthermore, it will consider the changing composition of the WOAC committee itself, the artworks collected, and ventures pursued, including any challenges the WOAC have faced along the way.

A New Development: The One percent Policy

Up until this point in the history of the WOAC, the activities of this body (and affiliated members such as the Keasts) largely concerned matters relating to art works already in the possession of UCT, but with a significant decision made at a University Council meeting on the 2 June 1982, the duties of the committee took an important turn. For, at this meeting, Council approved that (as a guideline only) “one per cent of the capital value of a building or construction be earmarked for works of art” (Extract from Council minutes, 2.6.1982), and as such, UCT entered a new phase in its acquisition of artworks – with an opportunity to commission or purchase substantial works for specific sites. In terms of an acquisition policy, all that was decided was that “the first priority be the purchase of modern Southern African works of art, in no special category in particular” (ibid). Thus, the first major project that the WOAC embarked upon with the newly instituted guideline was the Education building (now the Jules and Wilfred Kramer Law Building), which underwent construction in 1984. With R100 000 allocated, the committee sought the help of artist Andrew Verster, who led the commissioning process.

In a special meeting held on the 2 May 1984 the WOAC members, Mr. Verster, the architects and a representative of the building users came together to discuss proposals for the new building. Here the artist put forward a number of suggestions for the space, including sculptural outdoor features, tapestries (suggesting working with local communities and/or children⁸²) or metal work for the entrances, a major mural for the main entrance, a glass structure for a stairwell (with a light element at night), and artworks purchased from Michaelis for the offices. The committee welcomed Mr. Verster's suggestions, and it was decided that a sculpture competition be held later in the year in order to purchase a major work for the outside area⁸³. According to the WOAC archive, the acquisition process took a number of years, and in minutes from a meeting held on 18th April 1989, the progress is noted in detail. Shangane tapestries were acquired and hung; Professor Kevin Atkinson, who had originally been commissioned to create ceramic murals, instead painted two large paintings (*Abstract Composition No. 1* and *Abstract Composition No. 2*) which were installed in two lecture theatres; a circular garden feature was completed; and various sculptures were installed (WOAC minutes, 18.4.1989: 3-4). It appears that Andrew Verster was commissioned to paint a large mural, entitled *Heads and Animals*, situated on the ground level, as well as an etched glass cube which is positioned outside near the circular garden, entitled *Birds in Flight* [Figure 3].

The minutes of this meeting (18.4.1989) indicate numerous other projects in which the one percent guideline was operative, or would be motivated for in the future⁸⁴ – among them the Zoology building, Chancellor's Walk, the Child Guidance Clinic, and the Centre for African Studies (CAS). While space does not permit a detailed focus on each area, suffice it to say that for each department, over the years, there has been varying enthusiasm and commitment for the purchasing of artworks⁸⁵. In the case of CAS, the

⁸² According to the minutes, Mr Bakker (representative of the building users) "said the building users were eager to have art works which closely involved the local community and were strongly African (but not limited to calabashes and masks)" (2.5.1982: 4)

⁸³ However, the sculpture competition was only initiated some years later, as will be mentioned later.

⁸⁴ Since the one percent policy was only a guideline until 2005 (when it became official policy), departments had to motivate for the funding fairly early on in order to guarantee successfully attaining it.

⁸⁵ The WOAC archive records the successful acquisition and installation of works in the Pearson Botany Building which was under construction in 1993-95 (WOAC minutes 15.3.1993, 31.8.1993; 13.10.1995).



Figure 3. FORMER EDUCATION BUILDING (Currently Jules and Wilfred Kramer Law Building):
(Top left) Andrew Verster, *Birds in Flight*, 1987; (Top right) Bruce Arnott, *Alma Mater*, 1996; (Bottom)
Andrew Verster, *Heads and Animals*, 1987



department initiated their own acquisition committee⁸⁶, made up of various members of the department, as well as representatives of Michaelis, the South African National Gallery, the South African Museum, and the WOAC. Furthermore, they drew up their own acquisition policy⁸⁷, which clearly stated their preference for modern South African art, “primarily but not exclusively by black South Africans, working within a wide spectrum of media and grappling with a hybrid inheritance giving rise to transitional or ‘cross-over’ art forms” (Younge, Report to the Board of African Studies, 9.8.1989).

In March 1988, an intricate wooden sculpture, *The Tree of Life* by Sampson Makwala, and a set of puppets by Alfredo Mkhabela were purchased, while a major sculpture, *Kava va Nga Heti* by Jackson Hlungwani, was commissioned. Almost a year later, the Centre held an art exhibition (the CAS Art Fair) from which fifteen other purchases were made. Remaining funds were spent on commissioning two murals - Stanley Hermans’, *Some day one of you will betray me*, and Thobile Skepe and Thembinkosi Goniwe’s, *Untitled* – while Shelley Sacks’ *The Child is not Dead*, was donated by the Oppenheimer Trust in 1990. The collection houses a group of six linocuts from artists working at Community Art Project (CAP), as well as major works by prolific artists John Muafangejo, Helen Sebidi, Tommy Motswai, and Willie Bester (a later addition, purchased in 1995). Overall, this body of work is the most political in its theme (when compared to most WOAC holdings at the time) most of the works relating to the apartheid years in which they were produced, and virtually all by black (‘township’) artists. Due to the acquisition policy underpinning the purchases, it is also the most coherent collection; ISM Director, Christopher Peter, has described it as a ‘period piece’, describing a particular moment in South Africa’s history and art production [Figures 4 & 5].

⁸⁶ In an unpublished memo, former Director of CAS, Professor Martin Hall conveyed to Andrew Steyn (then Cultural Project Coordinator of CAS) that when the prospect of a CAS collection arose, certain people (outside of CAS) saw it as an opportunity to create an ‘authentic’ African collection. He states that the idea was “that the collection be ‘ethnographic’ – trying to connect with the ‘real’, ‘traditional’ Africa”. It seems that in response to this, the CAS made plans to create its own Artworks Committee, since they were “quite determined to get material which deliberately challenged and disturbed this ethnographic view” (email dated 3.12.1993).

⁸⁷ Although they were at pains to note that this was an acquisition policy for the project at hand, and not a long-term one, since they were not in the business of collecting art (having inadequate storage, funding, etc.).



Figure 4. CAS ART COLLECTION:
(Top left) Tom Sefako, *Winter in the Squatters* (1988); (Bottom left) Solomon Siko, *Untitled* (1988); (Right) Sampson Makwala, *Tree of Life* (1988)

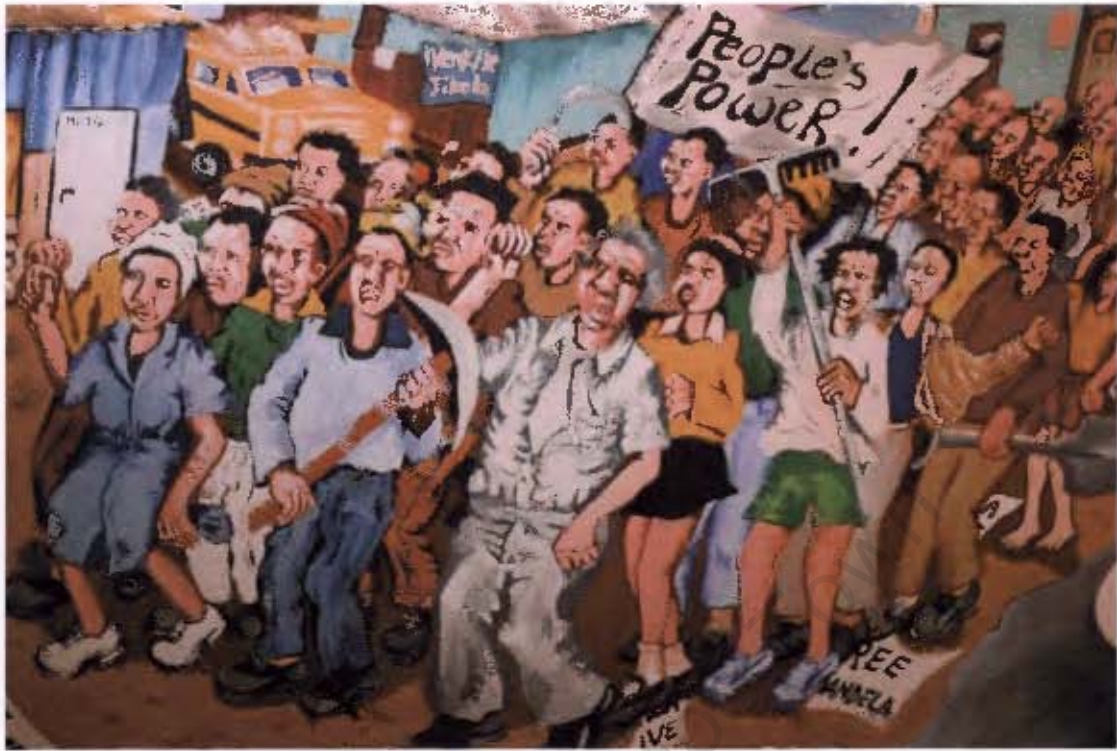


Figure 5. CAS ART COLLECTION:
(Top) Thobile Skepe and Thembinkosi Goniwe, *Untitled* (mural, early 1990s);
(Bottom) Jackson Illungwane, *Kava Va Nga Heti* (1989)



Along with the offices and seminar rooms, the opening of the CAS building initiated a new gallery space which has been used over the years for many exhibitions and seminars (thus providing the WOAC with another exhibition space). At the outset, it was foreseen as a venue which could

provide a forum for talented young artists who found it difficult to exhibit on the gallery circuit (a) because of the expense; (b) because they found the commercial circuit hostile to experimental work and to certain kinds of political art; (c) because they found that their work was removed from the particular community at whom it was directed; (d) because they did not want to exhibit commercially (Memo from Rochelle Kapp to Christopher Peter, 19.7.1990)

Unfortunately the CAS Gallery has been under-utilised over the years due to a lack of a full-time curator, nonrecurring funding, and inadequate storage facilities, but as of 2007 there has been a concerted effort to revitalise the space, with the appointment of three student curators, and a programme of workshops, seminars and exhibitions. However, until very recently⁸⁸ these have all happened independently of the WOAC, and as I will detail in the following chapter it may be an idea for this committee to become more involved with this space.

The Middle Years: Growing Pains...

In reviewing the WOAC archive, it becomes clear that the 1990s witnessed both achievements and shortfalls within the committee, and the growing collection. After the establishment of the one percent policy, the potential impact of the committee's work had grown, and this period can be characterised as one full of 'learning curves' – the WOAC feeling its way (very painstakingly) through various projects. Worth highlighting here are a couple of ventures undertaken during this phase, which each took an extraordinarily long time to come to fruition: the long-awaited sculpture competition for the Education Building (begun in 1992 and the work, *Alma Mater* by Bruce Arnott, only unveiled in

⁸⁸ As Chapter 5 will note, on 19 September 2007 an exhibition was held at the CAS gallery, with the help of the WOAC, based on the university's permanent collection. However, while funded by the WOAC (for a catalogue specifically), this exhibition was curated by two Masters students, who worked fairly independently on this project (there was help gained from Ms. Van Blommestein and Mr. Peter only), organising an accompanying talk to which none of the (voting) WOAC members attended.

1997)⁸⁹, and a commemorative plaques project for various buildings at UCT (a project initiated by J.V.O. Reid in 1987, which is currently still under way⁹⁰). Other business largely related to small donations, questions of storage, and placement of works.

The minutes of this period reflect many changes in the leadership of the committee; Professor J.V.O. Reid who was chairman from 1982 until 1992, was succeeded by Dr. Mamphela Ramphele (first person of colour to sit on the committee) until 1995, after which time Professor Horn was the chair until 1998. The other members of the committee were still predominantly men, with usually only one or two women present out of about eight members. However, interestingly, this period reflects a very good representation of people from Fine Art, Art History and Architecture backgrounds (while this is not the case currently), as well as attendance of a member (or two) from the University Planning Unit, who had been invited by the Committee. The latter practice has fallen away in recent years, and it may be advisable to reinstate it, since in going through the WOAC minutes it seems these individuals played a critical role in the activities of the committee. Besides Dr. Ramphele there were no members of colour elected during this time, and only at the end of 1998 did this issue become highlighted, with the proposal of the election of Mr. Zwelethu Mthethwa (an artist and member of the National Arts Council), which did not eventuate.

In order to reveal some of the recurring problems faced by the WOAC during this period (many continuing to this day), it is worth returning to the meeting held on the 18 April 1989, in which one can see some of these items discussed in detail. Once again, the question of a gallery arose and members felt that this project should be once more pursued. Ten years after the inception of the WOAC, the composition of the committee had changed somewhat; only Mr. Justice Diemont and Mr. Bradlow remained from the initial board, while (as alluded to above) there was a fairly significant representation of

⁸⁹ See WOAC minutes 15.3.93; 31.8.93; 24.3.94; 13.10.1995; 15.5.1996; 20.9.1996; 22.8.1997

⁹⁰ See WOAC minutes 24.3.1994, WOAC agenda 7.9.1994 (annexure 1) , WOAC minutes 13.10.1995, 15.5.1996, 20.9.1996, 3.11.1998, 18.10.2000, 26.4.2001; 16.8.2001, 26.2.2002, 17.10.2002, 24.2.2003, 12.8.2003, 19.2.2004, 13.5.2004, 17.9.2004, 25.11.2004, 20.7.2005, 24.11.2005, 29.3.2006, 22.6.2006, 18.9.2006, 4.12.2006, 22.3.2007.

artistic expertise (with Professors Arnott and Dubow from Fine Art and Professor Godby from Art History). Perhaps due to this new dynamic, the committee “agreed that the existing policy of works of art being scattered over the whole campus, as well as in offices, was unsatisfactory” and that the establishment of an art gallery was imperative (WOAC minutes, 18.4.1989: 5). However, according to the documents in the WOAC archive, nothing concrete emerged from this discussion, and the issue was not substantially addressed again for many years.

Appeals for a gallery space were, among other things, to do with the safety of works. However, since some of the larger, sculptural works – such as Gavin Younge’s *From Hoerikwagga* and Bruce Arnott’s *The Oracle* (commissioned in the late 1980s) – are situated outside and in public view, they have been prone to other problems, namely vandalism and litter. The minutes record this occurrence⁹¹, and the suggestion by then Chairman of the committee, Professor J.V.O. Reid, that “vandalism could be curbed by educating viewers by means of a written statement by the artist as to his intentions, etc.” (WOAC minutes, 18.5.1989: 1). This proposition highlights another continuous weakness within the committee which I have already alluded to – the lack of educational accompaniments to works, whether through labels, information boards, seminars, walkabouts or readily available catalogues (depending on the placement of the work). While there have been many calls to supply at least some of these aids, not much progress has been made to date. At this particular meeting, it was discussed that a ‘Visitor’s Brochure’ be created for the Public Relations office, in addition to a comprehensive catalogue of the artworks including photographic records.

The latter, as Christopher Peter outlined in a memorandum attached to the Agenda for this meeting, would have to be undertaken by a skilled librarian or cataloguer, as he was already overburdened with commitments. This is yet another predicament, which Mr. Peter has reiterated over the years, but which until recently has not been addressed; he

⁹¹ And, it seems these two pieces were plagued with such problems – as further letters of complaint from the artists attest (see WOAC archive, letter dated 2.10.1995 from Bruce Arnott and ‘Report on conservation of sculptures and three-dimensional works of art at University of Cape Town’, dated 15.5.1996, by Gavin Younge).

noted in a memorandum dated 19 July 1991 that “the proper curatorship of two large collections by one person was an unreasonable request”; at a WOAC meeting in March 1993, when asked if he had completed a specific task⁹², that “he was unable to undertake a project of such magnitude due to a full work schedule” (WOAC minutes, 15.3.1993: 2); and, in an annexure entitled ‘Taking Stock and Looking Forward’ in October 2000, stated “The Custodian of UCT artworks is also the Curator of the Irma Stern Museum. The time required for building and curations of the WOAC competes with the multiple responsibilities of the Irma Stern Museum Curator. The WOAC has to recognise this” (WOAC Agenda, 18.10.2000, Annexure 2).

As a result, it seems that there was a concerted effort to enlist the help of a Masters student in Art History (who already possessed a qualification in Library Science) to begin a comprehensive catalogue of the university collection⁹³. However, it appears that this idea never came to fruition, and no further mention is made of it after 1991. What *was* initiated soon after, however, was the first fairly in-depth discussion (recorded) on a purchasing policy. At the meeting held on the 15th March 1993, the members suggested a number of guidelines, which were recorded as thus:

- a sub-committee be formed to identify works suitable for the Committees’ consideration;
- works would be South African;
- works would be UCT-related;
- works of high merit would be purchased from the students of the Michaelis School of Art;
- works should reflect to the public at large that art is a thinking process;
- the collection should not be too parochial – i.e. UCT is a university in Africa but not an African university;
- that the purchases of the WOAC do not clash with the purchases of the Centre for African Studies;
- that due to financial restrictions the work of younger artists would have to be sought and purchased from a studio;

⁹² This was to create a space at Hiddingh Hall for the display of UCT memorabilia, portraits, etc. as well as to exhibit contemporary artworks (WOAC minutes, 15.3.1993: 2).

⁹³ See WOAC archive, memo dated 19.7.1991 from Christopher Peter to Hugh Amoore; memo dated 2.8.1991 from Hugh Amoore to Professor Reid; memo dated 2.8.1991 from Hugh Amoore to Mr. Roach (deputy registrar).

- that in spite of the many financial strictures the pursuit of appropriate art works should continue (WOAC minutes, 15.3.1993: 4)⁹⁴

While these were guidelines, no official acquisition policy has ever been adopted or ratified, though various attempts have been made over the years (the most concerted being a draft composed by Noëleen Murray and Malcolm Payne in 2004⁹⁵). In reviewing the WOAC archive, I came across only a few documents pertaining to the goals or purpose of the UCT art collection. In 1997, at the request of the university's Finance Department for a 'vision statement'⁹⁶, the WOAC drew up a "1998-2001 Strategic Plan", which included three subheadings – 'vision', 'goal' and 'input'. Rather vague in its wording, it states that the WOAC aims to "enhance the status of the University of Cape Town in the sphere of the visual arts" while promoting the awareness and appreciation of the visual arts to the campus as a whole. One line reads (under the heading 'goal'): "To meet the growing needs of the University community for visual material for corporate areas through the acquisition of suitable prints and drawings to improve the working environment" (WOAC Agenda, 22.8.1997, Annexure 2). Somewhat ironically, the activities of the WOAC lapsed from the end of 1998 until the end of 2000, when it was reformed under the new chairmanship of Hugh Amoore.

WOAC in the 21st century: 2000 onwards

With the reconstitution of the WOAC in October 2000 came a few changes; Mr. Hugh Amoore (Registrar of UCT) was appointed by the Vice-Chancellor as the Chairperson, and other new members included Dr. Jocelyn Kane-Berman (Medical School) and Professor Pippa Skotnes (Head of Fine Art). As such, the number of women on the committee was at an all-time high⁹⁷, with the figure to grow in future years. What has also increased in recent years is the number of members who do not have artistic 'expertise', with the later appointments of Professor Horst Klump (Molecular and Cellular Biology), Ms. Lucia Thesen (Centre for Higher Education Development, or

⁹⁴ This is taken verbatim from the minutes of the meeting.

⁹⁵ This document will be referred to at greater length in the following chapter.

⁹⁶ The Agenda for the meeting of 22.8.1997 notes that UCT's Finance Department had requested a vision statement from all departments funded by the university.

⁹⁷ Mrs. Anita Saunders was also serving on the Committee (her appointment was from 1986-2002).

CHED), and Ms. Noëleen Murray (CAS/Architecture). This has been a cause of concern for some of the other committee members, as will be noted below. The first meeting largely addressed the document compiled by Mr. Peter, Professor Skotnes and Mr. Amoores entitled “Taking Stock and Looking Forward”, in which they outlined the need for the WOAC to highlight their specific aims and work in accordance with these (namely a coherent acquisition policy, maintenance of a catalogue, and frameworks around display). It also served to introduce the upcoming project that would be the focus of much of their attention for the immediate future: The Upper Campus Project.

Launched in 1998, this was a heavily funded building project aimed at majorly revamping the resources available to students (including library facilities, computer laboratories, CHED, and a student learning centre, among other things)⁹⁸. In keeping with the one percent guideline R500 000 was made available for artworks in this area. With this fairly significant sum of money, and a very public site with which to engage, the WOAC were aware of the responsibility they held, and the various members of the university that they would need to consider in carrying out this exercise. With the demographic and cultural changes sweeping through the university (and the country at large), new problems arose which might not have necessarily arisen in the past. A good example of this was the opposition to Arthur Hughes’ *Doors of Mercy* [Figure 6] which came from the Director of the Library, Ms. Joan Rapp. The minutes of the next meeting, held on 26 February 2001, record that:

Ms. Rapp considered that the work was thoroughly inappropriate for a multi-cultural library – as a single statement the painting appeared to be prejudicial in relation to other religions, which were not afforded the same visual representation. She considered that the work did not suggest a spirit of enquiry or the pursuit of academic freedom and it therefore clashed with the ideals of the building. (WOAC minutes, 26.2.2001: 3)

In turn, as the minutes record, “[Ms. Rapp’s] response brought to the fore certain key matters relating to the role of the Committee” (ibid), and after much discussion over the work and the nature of their part in the acquisition of works, it was decided that the

⁹⁸ See Nutall, J. 2000. “Taking Stock of Transformation at the University of Cape Town 1996-1999”, pp. 31-33 for a detailed description of the Upper Campus Project.



Figure 6. Arthur Hughes, *Doors of Mercy* (Undated)

WOAC's "role was to build a collection for the University of Cape Town in perpetuity – which task, at times, would involve artworks, which could be controversial" (ibid: 4, original emphasis). While the Hughes work is currently in storage, there are many other works at UCT that have caused controversy in recent years⁹⁹. However, there was one work that sparked controversy *within* the committee, as well as within the broader UCT population. Acquired out of the Upper Campus funds, Willie Bester's metallic assemblage sculpture *Saartjie Baartman*, was at the centre of a heated debate between various members of the university, after its placement in the Science and Engineering Library¹⁰⁰. In one of the rare 'public appearances' of the WOAC¹⁰¹, members of the committee were present at a seminar held at CAS at the end of April 2001. Here, numerous students and staff members made the case against the display of the work, while the minutes of a later meeting notes,

that the debate surrounding the sculpture was positive. Members of the Committee who had attended...were impressed by the interest shown in the work. The role of the Works of Art Committee in choosing and selecting the work appeared to have captured the attention of students and staff. It appeared that the visual arts were becoming the subject of debate and healthy controversy (WOAC minutes 26.4.2001: 2).

However, what is not public knowledge is that prior to the placement of the work, the purchase of the work itself had already caused quite a commotion from within the ranks of the committee. The reason was that one of the committee members¹⁰² felt that they had not been consulted in the acquisition process, and were unaware of the decision made by the rest of the group. In response to this criticism, Mr. Amoore noted that as the committee as a whole (with this member present) had decided in principle to purchase a Bester work, when the opportunity arose (in this person's absence) to acquire the

⁹⁹ The next chapter will detail the heated debate over the works installed in the New and Old Chemical Engineering buildings in 2004 ; in late 2005 works by Gabriel Clarke-Brown on exhibition at the Bremner building were defaced with ballpoint pen; a photographic work by Pieter Hugo was successfully petitioned to be removed from the Kramer building on Middle Campus in early 2007.

¹⁰⁰ For a succinct article on the installation of the work, see "New dispute over Saartjie Baartman: Sculpture placed in UCT science library", *Cape Argus*, 3.5.2001: 7

¹⁰¹ It seems that Hugh Amoore spoke at the occasion, and other members were present for the discussion. This was the first time since the unveiling of the *Alma Mater* sculpture that members of the WOAC had made any sort of public appearance, and certainly the only event in which a discussion or debate on the chosen work was aired.

¹⁰² This person's name remains confidential.

Baartman piece, the rest of the WOAC was in agreement, and he had felt that the member would not object (having already agreed in principle). This incident catapulted the said member to write a formal letter of complaint to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Mr. Wieland Gievers, which highlighted numerous objections to the manner in which the committee was being run.

This letter identifies key issues that, during the course of an internship with the WOAC, I also found to be questionable (as seen in the subsequent chapter), and some of them have been recurring complaints since the inception of the committee. These include the need for a gallery¹⁰³ and the impact the lack of an acquisition policy has on the coherence of the collection, while another suggestion was that due to the nature of the one percent policy, it would be better to be involved from the ‘drawing stage’ of the relevant building – rather than inserting art after the building has been completed. An excerpt from the letter reads, “Had artworks been considered, for example, when the Upper Campus project was designed, or even prior to the placing of furniture within the library buildings there would have been a far more satisfactory integration of art with interior than is currently going to be the case” (dated 1.5.2001). However, as the later chapter will illustrate, this is not necessarily a viable solution (due to other inherent flaws of the committee). The other cause for concern mentioned in the letter was the composition of the committee, noting the predominance of men (although at this stage, as Mr. Amoore responded¹⁰⁴, there was about an even ratio of men to women) and whiteness, as well as a lack of art expertise among the group. This latter issue is problematic and raises many questions about taste, education, and essentially the difference between installing art in a gallery space as opposed to a university¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰³ Under Mr. Amoore’s chairmanship, the discussion of a gallery arose again; in late 2002 he arranged for a meeting with the DVCs to consider establishing one. While this was not successful at the time, the DVCs did think it a worthy project to consider some time in the future.

¹⁰⁴ Mr. Amoore responded to Professor Ndebele on the letter addressed to Professor Gevers (copies sent to all parties).

¹⁰⁵ Mr. Amoore has staunchly supported the presence of ‘laypersons’ on the committee, and it may not be coincidental that since his chairmanship began the committee has been made up of a more varied group of people in terms of academic training.

While these matters will be discussed in more depth later, it is important to return to the subject of the Upper Campus Project, since it was for this project that the WOAC began a very important affiliation with a particular individual: Mr. Johann C. Porer (Hans Porer). A personal acquaintance of Mr. Peter, Mr. Porer is a German businessman who has an extensive collection of contemporary South African art and apparently not enough space to house it. As a result, he has lent a number of works from his collection to the university on a 'permanent loan' basis, beginning with those in the revamped Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, installed in 2001 [Figure 7]. Numbering 54 pieces, the initial set of works comprise paintings and prints produced by a variety of South African artists, including William Kentridge, Mark Hipper, Stanley Pinker, Steven Cohen, and a host of others who have achieved far-reaching recognition. The conditions of the contract entered into with Mr. Porer clearly state: that the works should be on display for most of each year; that they be housed in the Chancellor Oppenheimer Library (or other equally secure areas at the discretion of the WOAC); that if the owner requires a work from UCT, six months written notice must be given; and, that, in the event of his death the works must be returned to the deceased's estate within a three- to six-month period (signed on 27.3.2001). It is important to note that the hanging of the works was done in consultation with members of the library¹⁰⁶, and at a WOAC meeting following their installation, "Ms. Rapp reported [that] the response was overwhelmingly positive and she expressed her own personal enjoyment of these works. She said that even the noise level in the library had dropped. Students felt themselves to be in a special environment and were quieter" (WOAC minutes, 26.2.2002: 2).

With the generous amount of work on offer from Mr. Porer, the WOAC was able to spend a large portion of the Upper Campus Project's R500 000 on artworks for other areas of the university. Among the artworks chosen were works by Guy Tillim, Ezrom Legae, David Kolane and Sam Nhlengethwa, and they indicate the changing acquisition choices of the UCT art collection. The committee selected these works from an illustrated database prepared by Ms. Julia Teale, artist and art historian, who had been contracted to

¹⁰⁶ Furthermore it is important to note that throughout, the WOAC's involvement in the Upper Campus Project was coupled with correspondence with many representatives of the university (including among them, Professors Martin Hall, then of CHED, and Loveness Kaunda, then Dean of Students).



Figure 7.

HANS PORER LOAN, CHANCELLOR OPPENHEIMER LIBRARY:
(Top) Installation view of the works in situ; (Bottom left) Paul Stopforth, *The Aging Gunslinger*, 1987; (Bottom right) Mark Hipper, *School Girls*, 1998.



provide a catalogue for the Porer collection in the library. This was in response to an opinion offered by Professor Skotnes at the meeting dated 16 August 2001; here she stated “that the time required to source appropriate works of art was not available to any WOAC members and that it would be expedient to employ an expert to build up a database of artists and their work which could be used on an ongoing basis to source appropriate works” (WOAC minutes, 16.8.2001: 4). Unfortunately, rather than an ‘ongoing’ practice, this was a one-off occurrence (despite its success and the WOAC’s immense approval of Ms. Teale’s work), and it seems advisable that the WOAC repeat this process in the near future. While there have been discussions over initiating a website for the Porer loan, or even, “a computer dedicated to the collection, with full catalogue details...possibly in the Knowledge Commons (computer centre for students) for the use of students wishing to acquire greater knowledge of Hans Porer’s collection” (WOAC minutes, 17.9.2004), this was eventually abandoned due to the worry that it may encourage thefts (if people knew how valuable the works were)¹⁰⁷. However, the fact that currently *no* website at all on the UCT art collection exists is indicative of the lack of integration between the collection and the research/teaching of the university, a problem to which I will return later.

Following the success of the Upper Campus Project, several subsequent building projects proved to be smooth and positive experiences, one example being the Faculty of Health Sciences Learning Centre (with the commissioned works of Lovell Friedman and Walter Oltman, **Figure 8**) reaching completion in early 2004. However, several other buildings which were under construction from 2002-2004 made evident the fact that some departments were very resistant to the one percent policy, and in the case of donor-funded projects, completely rejected the guideline. Minutes from this period indicate that the old (renamed ‘Hoerikwagga’) and the new Chemical Engineering buildings as well as the Institute for Infectious Diseases and Molecular Medicine (IIDMM) were three instances in which realising the full funds proved an ongoing, and eventually futile, struggle. In the case of the first building, R65 000 instead of R74 000 was made

¹⁰⁷ However, a fully illustrated catalogue (with text by Julia Teale) was produced at the end of 2001; unfortunately it is not widely available or accessible (the author received a personal copy from the Irma Stern Museum due to her research interests).

Figure 8. FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES LEARNING CENTRE:



(Top) Lovell Friedmann, *Healing Hand*, 2005; (Bottom left) Walter Oldmann, *Hand*, 2002;
(Bottom right) Lovell Friedmann, *Growth and Health*, 2005.



available; in the second, only R114 000 instead of R540 000¹⁰⁸; and in the third, only R57 000 instead of the projected R210 000. Once again, Mr. Porer came to the aid of UCT, with a further offer of works for both the old and new Chemical Engineering buildings (also on permanent loan)¹⁰⁹. However, as the later chapter will describe in great detail, some of these works were met with great hostility by the users of the building. Nevertheless as noted at the WOAC meeting of 24 February 2003, the overall funds of the WOAC were far healthier than that of the South African National Gallery, since their budget was cited as being almost R520 000 at the time (WOAC minutes, 24.2.2003: 4).

Funds have been used in recent years to purchase a range of works by emerging and leading artists that touch on important issues facing South Africa, and Africa in general: xenophobia (Mimi Cheron), genocide (Guy Tillim), HIV/AIDS (Lovell Friedman), the TRC (Sue Williamson), child soldiers (Guy Tillim), among others [Figure 9]. However, these are still a minor part of the collection, and as will be shown in Chapter 6, the broad scope of the UCT collection is quite different from the more specialised collections housed at other South African universities. According to the most recent information, of the approximately 950 works (thus catalogued) in the collection there are around 120 portraits and busts of people affiliated to the university; about 50 pieces of commissioned artworks such as murals or mosaics; about 40 floral studies and 15 bird studies, while other animal-related drawings or paintings make up about another ten images; around 50 landscape paintings and drawings, and 40 architectural studies. There are also about 100 student works in the collections, procured from the Michaelis School of Fine Art.

Predominantly two-dimensional, recent additions to the collection by contemporary artists have been largely photographic figurative works, and these make up about another 100 works. Presently, the Porer Loan numbers nearly 200 works, and these are all by contemporary artists, mainly working in photographic, print and paint media. Unlike many other university art collections held in South Africa, sculptures and ceramics are

¹⁰⁸ Here, only R24 000 was available for the WOAC to spend since the Department had already committed R90 000 to a photographic commission; the lack of funds in the first instance was largely due to the reluctance of the donor to spend money on art (when it could be used on equipment, etc.).

¹⁰⁹ Mr. Porer's continuing generosity was rewarded with an honorary Masters in Fine Arts at the graduation ceremony in December 2005.

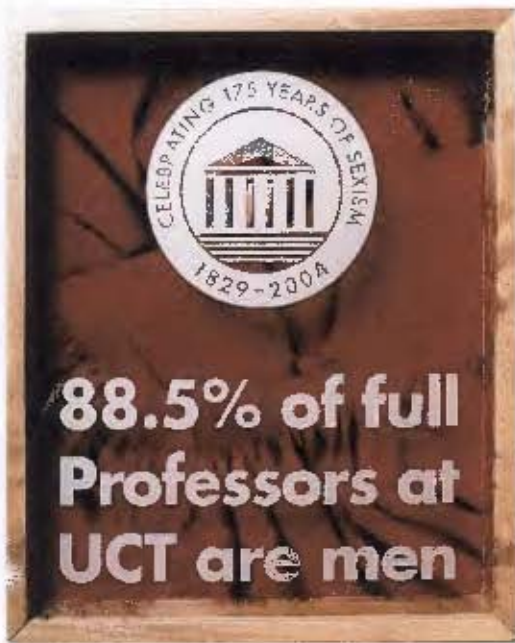


Figure 9. RECENT WOAC PURCHASES:

(Top left) Svea Josephy, *88.5% of full Professors at UCT are men*, 2005; (Top right) Guy Tillim, *Kumajoor, Sierra Leone*, 2001; (Bottom) Sue Williamson, *Nkosimathi Biko – False medical certificate – Dr. Benjamin Tucker (From the Truth Series)*, 1998.



fairly uncommon components of the collection, and together these add up to about 50 works in total.¹¹⁰ Furthermore there are virtually no traditional African art objects in the collection; as opposed to a collection like Wits¹¹¹, there are no examples of beadwork, weaving, tapestries, textiles, carvings or pottery. The aforementioned CAS art collection house the only examples of township or struggle art works at UCT – as will be seen later, these are reminiscent of the works held at institutions like the University of Fort Hare or UWC.¹¹² Nevertheless, while the UCT collection is still largely characterised by portraits, landscapes and flower studies, there is a significant change underway – and a more contemporary, socially responsive body of works produced by engaging artists is being accumulated.

A final project worth mentioning, for which the WOAC provided a majority of the funds, was the *Curiosity*¹¹³ exhibition housed at Hiddingh Hall from November 2004 to April 2005. Curated by Professor Skotnes, and fellow lecturers Gwen van Embden and Fritha Langerman, this project drew on existing objects, documents, collections and general paraphernalia from various departments throughout the university, which were housed in 175 cabinets, symbolising the 175 years of the university's existence¹¹⁴. Additionally, numerous artworks were created for the purpose of the exhibition, mostly from artists teaching at Michaelis. All of these artworks and some of the cabinets (i.e. those that remained intact) became the property of the WOAC and since the dismantling of the exhibition, have been dispersed throughout the campus, while the catalogues that were produced are also in possession of the WOAC.

¹¹⁰ It is important to note, therefore, that while the type of artworks bought or commissioned by the WOAC are not of the typical media of public art works (as seen overseas), the public nature of the works (displayed throughout the campuses) is a significant reason for which I see a similarity between UCT's art collection and public art collections. Additionally, the one percent guideline enhances this similarity.

¹¹¹ The Wits collection will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

¹¹² These collections will also be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

¹¹³ See WOAC minutes 13.5.2004; minutes of an Extraordinary meeting 30.6.2004; 17.9.2004 Annexure 3; minutes 24.11.2005; 20.7.2005.

¹¹⁴ This was to celebrate the 175th anniversary of the university.

While a significant amount of time lapsed between the final meeting of 2004 (25.11.2004), and the first for 2005 (20.7.2005)¹¹⁵, a crucial decision was made during this hiatus that brought much pleasure to those on the WOAC: the formalisation of the one percent policy. The minutes from this meeting record that the University Building and Development Committee had, after 23 years of following it as a guideline, “committed itself to 1% of capital allocations for all future projects” (WOAC minutes 20.7.2005: 2) for works of art. Thus, as chairman Mr. Amoore noted, there would be quite a substantial amount of money available in the near future for two building projects: the renovations of the PD Hahn Building, and the construction of a new women’s residence, the Graca Machel. It is with this latter building that the following chapter begins.

Conclusion

As this and the last chapter have indicated, the WOAC has had an eventful and multifarious history. Beginning as a body chiefly concerned with the conservation of a number of works depicting, or donated from, people affiliated to the university, it has evolved into one that actively commissions a variety of works that respond to the surrounding environment. As evidenced by the above discussion, some of these ventures have been more successful than others, with the former Education building and the Upper Campus Project being among the former. Currently, the composition of the UCT art collection is very broad, and this is a result of the lack of an acquisition policy (and can be seen as positive or negative), particularly when compared to other South African university art collections, which are far more specialised.

While the question over establishing a gallery has arisen at various moments throughout the years, there are certainly positive qualities in the practice of housing art works throughout the various campuses of UCT. The recent affiliation with Mr. Porer has meant that very public spaces such as the Chancellor Oppenheimer Library have become areas in which thousands of students are exposed to works by leading South African artists, and

¹¹⁵ The period of time between meetings has been uneven over the years – some years there have been five meetings, others only two, while there were periods where the committee was completely dormant for a couple of years. It is a problem that I will return to in Chapter 5.

are provided the potential of developing an interest in contemporary art. With the overwhelming societal changes within South Africa over the last twenty years, institutions such as UCT have had to transform, and similarly the bodies that operate within them. While this chapter has shown that the WOAC has responded to this changing landscape in some ways, the next chapter will reveal that there are still many areas that it will need to address in the future.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Five: An Internship with the Works of Art Committee
Assessing the Current Composition and
Management of the WOAC

Introduction

Following the detailed history of the WOAC, this chapter aims to outline and assess an internship that I undertook with this body from February 2006 to April 2007. As aforementioned, during this time, I acted both as an observer of, and a participant in, the committee. While I attended all of their quarterly meetings and received all general email correspondence, I had no voting rights, although I was asked on some occasions for my opinion (particularly in regards to purchasing works). My largest involvement was with the Graca Machel women's residence project, for which I attended all meetings with the architects, subcommittee and various artists, as well as being actively engaged with creating proposals for the project, and all correspondence with the respective parties. Another task which formed part of this internship, but was largely self-directed, was initiating a discussion around art works on campus – in the form of a seminar that I presented to the Department of Chemical Engineering in November 2006. Due to the word constraints of this dissertation, I have attached a detailed account of the internship as an appendix (see **Appendix 1**) which can be referred to for greater specificity on all activities, as well as the seminar paper presented to the Engineers (**Appendix 2**). However, the first section below is an attempt to outline the experience more succinctly, encompassing all the key moments within the fifteen-month process.

Throughout the course of the internship I was struck by the almost contradictory practices of the committee; while its work aimed to benefit students (and staff to a degree) through placing artworks on campus, no further educational aids were in place to enhance the presence of these works. There seemed to be a number of reasons behind this, one of them being the pressurised time constraints of the various members on the committee, each overburdened with their own teaching, research or administrative tasks. However, a more overriding and fundamental reason seemed to be the lack of a clear understanding of what exactly the purpose or role the WOAC (or the artworks for that matter) might

have in the context of UCT. This is evidenced by the lack of an acquisition policy, as well as the poor communication between the WOAC and the rest of the university (whether it be through seminars, tours, catalogues, or more spontaneous communication). While most universities worldwide (and even most of those within South Africa) do have detailed acquisition policies as well as an active educational programme attached to their collections, UCT seems to be floundering in this respect. As I have already surmised, this seems to be partly due to the inherently conflicting nature of the committee's business – caught somewhere between public art and gallery collecting (albeit without a gallery) – and the indecisiveness of the committee.

Furthermore, the make-up of the actual committee is a problem in itself. As illustrated in the previous chapters, the composition of the WOAC has maintained a similar dynamic over the years: white, middle-class, and middle-aged (and over). The only difference of late is the dramatic shift in gender representation (from a wholly male enterprise in the early years, to a majority of females in more recent times). The disparity between the representation of members on the WOAC with the general UCT-going public (whether they be staff or students), and indeed the country at large, is somewhat reminiscent of the (board of trustee) committees discussed in Chapter 1. For, while they do not bring extreme wealth or corporate connections to the committee, certain members do hold 'sway' within the university (among them a Deputy Vice-Chancellor's wife, a University Council member, and the Registrar), and most do come from a fairly privileged background and have university training. Many of them sit on many other committees in the university and are familiar with each other through personal and professional connections. As a result of their similar upbringing, age, social standing, etc. there is an unspoken consensus as to what is deemed tasteful or appropriate for the university, as evidenced by the meetings which I attended (and will be discussed below in more detail). This lack of diversity within the committee can be seen not only to affect the purchases of specific works, but also the ways in which the works could be used throughout the campuses.

The Internship:

(Part 1) The Graca Machel Residence

Running parallel to Woolsack Drive (the road which makes its way from the university's Upper Campus to the Main Road in Rondebosch) sits the latest women's residence to be built by UCT. Evidence of the changing face of UCT, the Graca Machel residence represents a number of transitions and transformations, both physically and symbolically. Not only is it named after the university's first black (and female) Chancellor, but also the architecture of the building itself speaks of a new era [Figures 10 & 11]. A far cry from the more traditional residences such as Smuts or Fuller Hall, or even later additions such as the neighbouring Tugwell Residence, with its 1970s appearance (affectionately referred to as the 'salt and pepper' shakers), the Graca Machel was always envisaged as, and has materialised into¹¹⁶ a highly modernist and minimalist building in comparison. With a stark, neutral palette and strong, geometrical lines, it is an understated yet commanding structure - particularly the entrance, which has a dramatically high ceiling and large paned-glass windows providing a view of the foyer and dining room beyond. Given the one percent principle, the budget for artworks for this building was set at R670 000, the largest amount the WOAC has ever received for a project.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, prior ventures had caused the committee to believe that it might be more beneficial to consult, and even collaborate with the architects at an early stage of the planning process, to try to ensure a more integrated approach to the installation of artworks. A common feature of public art, this approach has been used in many corporate art collections, including the new MTN Innovation Centre in Roodeport¹¹⁷. As such, discussions began between the WOAC and the architects **Krugerroos** late in 2005, and it was decided that the latter would provide a number of available options early in 2006. It was with a meeting held in February 2006 that my

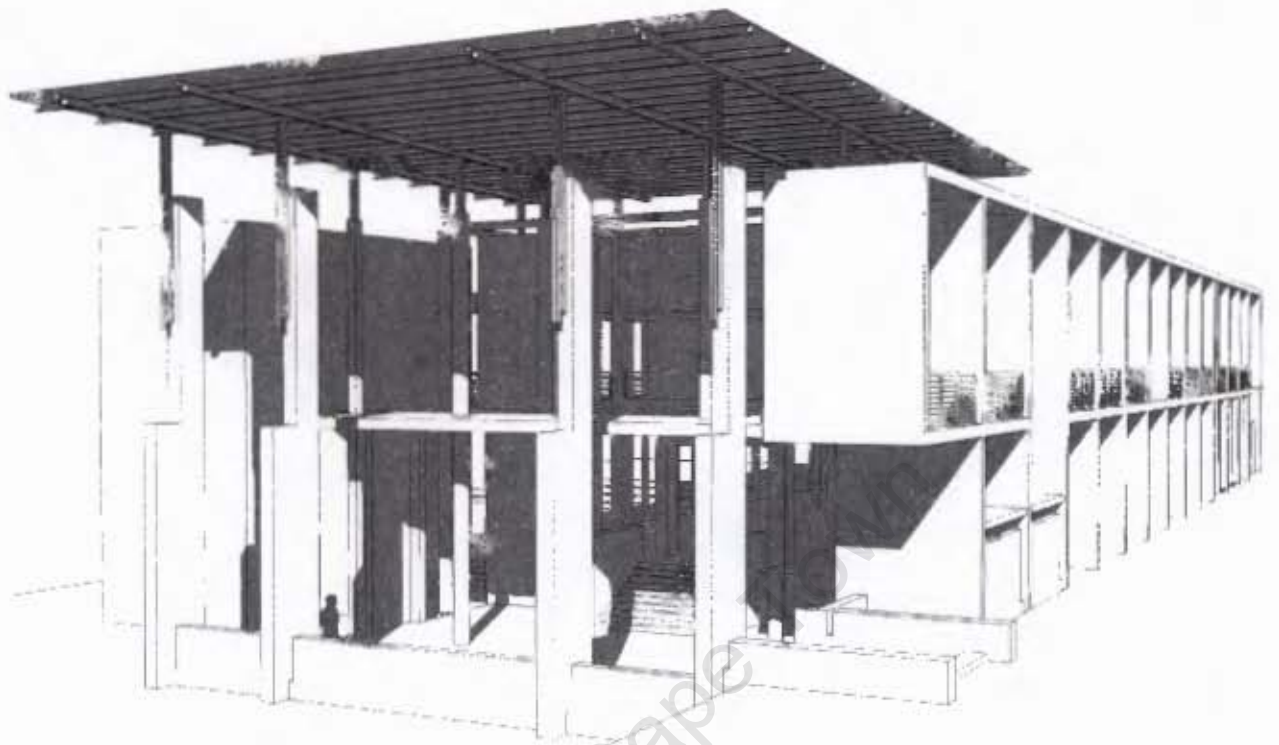
¹¹⁶ The actual construction of the Graca Machel residence began in April 2006, while the official opening (and completion of the building) was held in August 2007.

¹¹⁷ See Ronel Kellner's essay, "Innovative Strategies in Corporate Collecting: The MTN Art Collection" in *Messages and Meaning: The MTN Art Collection*, p.44.



Figure 10. GRACA MACHEL RESIDENCE: Projected images





**Figure 11. (Top) Entrance to Graca Machel Residence;
(Bottom) Site of the proposed 'Poetry Walk'**



internship began; Ms. Noëleen Murray and I met with the architects, Mr. Martin Kruger and Mr. Philippe Fouché, to discuss the proposals they had for the space. It must be acknowledged that their ideas were integral to the final proposal put forward to the WOAC at the next quarterly meeting; they identified the five major areas in which art could be a prominent feature, and they were the first to suggest a ‘poetry walk’, which would later become a major focus of the project. It was thought that this poetry walk would incorporate the façade of the building leading up to the main entrance – three five-metre walls, spaced some metres apart – that ascended up towards the mountain and the university itself. In contrast to the austere palette, the architects suggested that a strong colour such as red be used to transform these walls into a striking feature. Following this discussion, Ms. Murray and I compiled a formal proposal which we submitted for the approval of the WOAC at their first quarterly meeting of the year. It is important to note that we had no guidance in composing this proposal; with no acquisition policy or guidelines from the WOAC, it was rather a daunting prospect to compile a document which would potentially initiate works and spaces that students would interact with for many years to come.

Nevertheless, our proposal was met with approval and the R670 000 was tentatively allocated to the various areas. The poetry walk and dining room doors were considered major features, with between R350 000 to R400 000 set aside for these two projects. Other areas noted were communal common rooms in which paintings, photographs and prints could hang (R70 000); the ‘grand’ courtyard where a sculptural opportunity was identified (R100 000); and niches which would be carved into the dining room wall, in which objects could be housed (R100 000). Suggestions of a sculpture competition were rejected, after certain members informed us what a lengthy and often problematic process this had been in the past¹¹⁸, and a specific request was made that we actively seek out black artists, preferably female. The latter suggestion was a positive indicator of the changing attitude of the WOAC, and while attempts were made to achieve this in projects such as the poetry walk and the dining room doors, they were not realised (see **Appendix**

¹¹⁸ At this point, I had not read the WOAC archive which records such instances, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

1). However, as part of the internship I did submit a database detailing various emerging black female artists (among them Zanele Muholi, Nontsikelelo Veloko, Nandipha Mntambo, and Dineo Bopape), but as yet, no works have been purchased by these artists.

The members of the subcommittee responsible for the Graca Machel project were confirmed as being Ms. Murray, Professors Godby and Ramesar, Christopher Peter, and I. Unfortunately Professor Ramesar was unable to attend any meetings, and had to excuse himself from our activities, while Professor Godby also resigned from the subcommittee during the course of the year. With Mr. Peter's (aforementioned) extremely busy schedule, Ms. Murray and I undertook most of the work ourselves and over the course of the following months visited artists, liaised with the architects, made contact with leaders in the local literary front, arranged an intensive workshop, and maintained good correspondence with the other members of the WOAC to keep them up to date with our activities.

As the full report (**Appendix 1**) illustrates, this project promised huge potential, and many individuals went to great lengths to try to see the numerous art 'interventions' translate from theory into reality. However, these were not realised nearly as successfully as we had hoped. Currently, the Graca Machel has a number of two-dimensional art works (either acquired works, or those on permanent loan from Mr. Hans Porer) – paintings, photographs and prints¹¹⁹ – that have been hung in many communal areas while the dining room houses a monumental painting on permanent loan from Porer (Deborah Poynton's *Forever and Ever*)¹²⁰. The dining room doors, at various times envisioned as housing panels by either Cecil Skotnes or Helen Sebidi, stand with clear glass panes instead¹²¹. The poetry walk which was envisioned to display poetic texts and

¹¹⁹ Upon a recent visit to the Graca Machel (21 September 2007), I was pleased to note that many of these works have had detailed labels affixed to them. While the number and scope of the works was also very positive, they were somewhat hidden, placed in intimate spaces of the building. As such, I would propose regular guided tours, and increased signage to indicate where the works are (i.e. arrows).

¹²⁰ This work measures six metres wide by two metres high; as Appendix 1 relates, a special wall was built to hang this work.

¹²¹ However, the decision to abandon inserting panels or detailing the doors was a conscious one made by the WOAC, following the completion of the dining room (since the transparency of the doors was thought to be a positive feature – letting in light and illuminating the large painting and other works beyond them).

imagery provided by young talented practitioners stands bare of each. However, an internet ‘blog’ project (see Appendix 1) created for students and budding poets has recently started to gain momentum in recent months, and it is hoped that something material will eventuate from this in the near future. While one of the oft-repeated aims of the Graca Machel was to commission and acquire works from black artists, this has not been substantially achieved as yet.

(Part 2) Meetings with the WOAC

Before discussing the proceedings of the meetings in great detail, it seems necessary to outline the specific group that made up the WOAC in 2006, since this was the body to which the sub-committee referred for all matters relating to the Graca Machel residence. The committee continued to be under the chairmanship of Mr. Hugh Amooore (Registrar of the University), while the secretary and ‘Custodian of UCT art collection’ was the long-serving member and Director of the ISM, Mr. Christopher Peter. The Deputy Chair of the Committee was Professor Horst Klump (Molecular and Cellular Biology), and the other members were Dr. Jocelyn Kane-Berman (Medical School, University Council member), Professor Michael Godby (Art History), Professor Pippa Skotnes (Fine Art), Ms. Noëleen Murray, Professor Raj Ramesar¹²² (Human Genetics) and Ms. Lucia Thesen (CHED). All except the last two had been members of the WOAC since 2001. During the course of the year, Mrs. Valerie West (wife of the principal DVC, Professor Martin West) was co-opted to the committee, and at the year’s final meeting Ms. Mary van Blommestein, the assistant curator of the ISM, who had been attending meetings by invitation since 2003, became a full member with voting rights.

While the number of annual WOAC meetings has fluctuated over the years, it appears that under the leadership of Mr. Amooore, it has become practice to hold four meetings a year (approximately one per quarter). However, while this is a great improvement, it seems that this number is still too few for the committee to undertake its responsibilities

¹²² It is important to note that Professor Raj Ramesar is currently the only member of colour on the committee, but due to various commitments was unable to attend any of the WOAC meetings throughout the year.

to the full potential. This is exacerbated by the fact that some meetings were scheduled during the university's vacation period, with staff members away on annual leave or research trips. Thus, as will be referred to later, it was a rare occasion to have all members present during a meeting. Due to the extended intervals between meetings, projects were drawn out far longer than they may have been had the committee met more frequently. As a result, the agendas for the meetings repeatedly listed the same items (and this has been an ongoing occurrence, as the WOAC archive evidenced). With regards to the Graca Machel residence, there were several instances in which Ms. Murray and I were forced to wait for a WOAC meeting in order for an executive decision to be made so that we could progress with our activities.

As illustrated by their various disciplines indicated above, only four of the eleven members were from an art background, and due to various commitments (alluded to above) Professor Godby was only present at the first and last meeting of the year, and Professor Skotnes, the first. Thus, it was often the unnerving case that I was one of the most art-trained persons present. Recalling the homogeneity of most art committees worldwide, despite the various academic backgrounds of the members, it remains that all the members present¹²³ were white, well-educated, middle-class with the median age being over fifty years old. Furthermore, as mentioned above, many of them have strong links to UCT and either occupy positions in other important committees of the university (i.e. Dr. Kane-Berman, Mr. Amoores) or have personal connections to those heavily involved in the running of the university (i.e. Mrs. West). Due to the insular nature of the university the members would have met each other on numerous occasions, and may even know each other socially. This is not a phenomenon peculiar to the particular group that make up the WOAC currently; through a study of the archive, it appears that this has been the case since the inception of the committee – a group with a strong history and attachment to the university, and coming from a similar social background. This impacts the way in which decisions are made within the meetings, and the way in which the committee operates in general. During the meetings held throughout the year, I noted repeatedly that members often concurred on questions of taste and what was deemed

¹²³ I say *present* quite concertedly, since Professor Raj Ramesar was unable to attend any meetings.

suitable, one example including that when reviewing catalogues of works by Nicholas Hlobo and Zanele Muholi¹²⁴ (two young, South African artists, who are fast becoming highly acclaimed) members gasped in distaste, and unanimously agreed that they would be inappropriate for a UCT audience.

A typical meeting would largely concentrate on the current major building project, as well as various smaller projects, while there would always be a moment at which point the committee would transform into a mini ‘auction house’ – viewing and deciding upon the purchases of artworks. It was always intriguing to see the responses different members had to works, and the rationale behind refusing or accepting prices. On these occasions it was interesting to consider whether or not having more art experts on the committee would be beneficial. The works originated from galleries such as the Association for Visual Arts¹²⁵ (which Mr. Peter would source works from) or from exhibitions held at the ISM. Occasionally, artists would drop off works with Mr. Peter for the committee to consider, while there was usually a catalogue or two from current exhibitions on around Cape Town at the time (fairly ‘cutting-edge’ galleries such as the Michael Stevenson gallery, or the João Ferreira gallery). Mr. Porer’s collection, it seems, largely stems from artists represented by Michael Stevenson, and at times his latest gifts were on display. Thus, there were usually quite a range of works to review¹²⁶, and it was always fascinating to see what would be deemed acceptable. Further to purchasing works, the committee would usually discuss where to place the works, mindful of the different tastes of the various departments.

¹²⁴ Nicholas Hlobo is a performance and installation artist; the catalogue was from a recent show at the Michael Stevenson gallery which dealt with issues of sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Zanele Muholi’s medium is photography; the catalogue was also from a show at the Michael Stevenson gallery which displayed works around sexuality and homophobia (particularly violence towards black lesbians in South Africa). While both artists work on confronting issues, many of their works are subtle and aesthetically enchanting.

¹²⁵ The AVA is a gallery which often showcases works by emerging artists – recent graduates of art schools, and those who have not exhibited much. Notably, they have a good representation of works by emerging black artists.

¹²⁶ While there is usually a range of works by various artists (both emerging and established), it must be stated that the actual media in which the artists work is generally the same – photography, painting, printmaking, etc. It is very rare that tapestries, ceramics, beadwork, etc. are actively sought out.

During 2006, the major item on the agenda was the Graca Machel women's residence, but outside of meetings, the main committee did not have much to do with the sub-committee (and, as noted, the numbers of the sub-committee dwindled greatly over the year). Other major activities were the Anzio Road Project which include mosaics coordinated by the artist Lovell Friedman based on the 'Mind Body Maps' workshop¹²⁷, and Brett Murray's playful relief work for the Medical Research Unit [Figure 12]. These were completed relatively easily in contrast to the Graca Machel project – probably due to the less ambitious nature of these smaller sites – and I would assert that these have been among the most successful of the WOAC projects to date. Both Friedman and Murray's creations are reminiscent of the public art works seen in the American universities mentioned in the first chapter. Bold, arresting and exuding colour, each are very striking visual interventions which would attract the attention of any passer-by. While Friedman's mosaics are inspired by three women's experiences of living with HIV/AIDS, Murray's work, entitled *Specimens* is more playful and simple. Importantly, there have been informative texts to supplement these works; Friedman's mosaics are accompanied by a board acknowledging the creators of the Body Maps and detailing their stories, while an attractive A2 illustrated pamphlet has been created on the Murray work (produced by the gallery representing him, the Goodman Gallery).¹²⁸

Throughout the course of the meetings, several issues were repeatedly discussed; among them was the subject of representation – the lack of members of colour within the committee – which, despite repeated discussions and suggestions of people, was never acted upon. Storage was another cause for concern; the ISM and a store room at the top of the African Studies Library ('Camelot') currently house the majority of the works not displayed, and the conditions are far from ideal. In a recent excursion to Camelot, I had a firsthand view of the countless paintings, photographs and prints that were stacked up tightly against each other, in a cramped room which was not suitably climate-controlled.

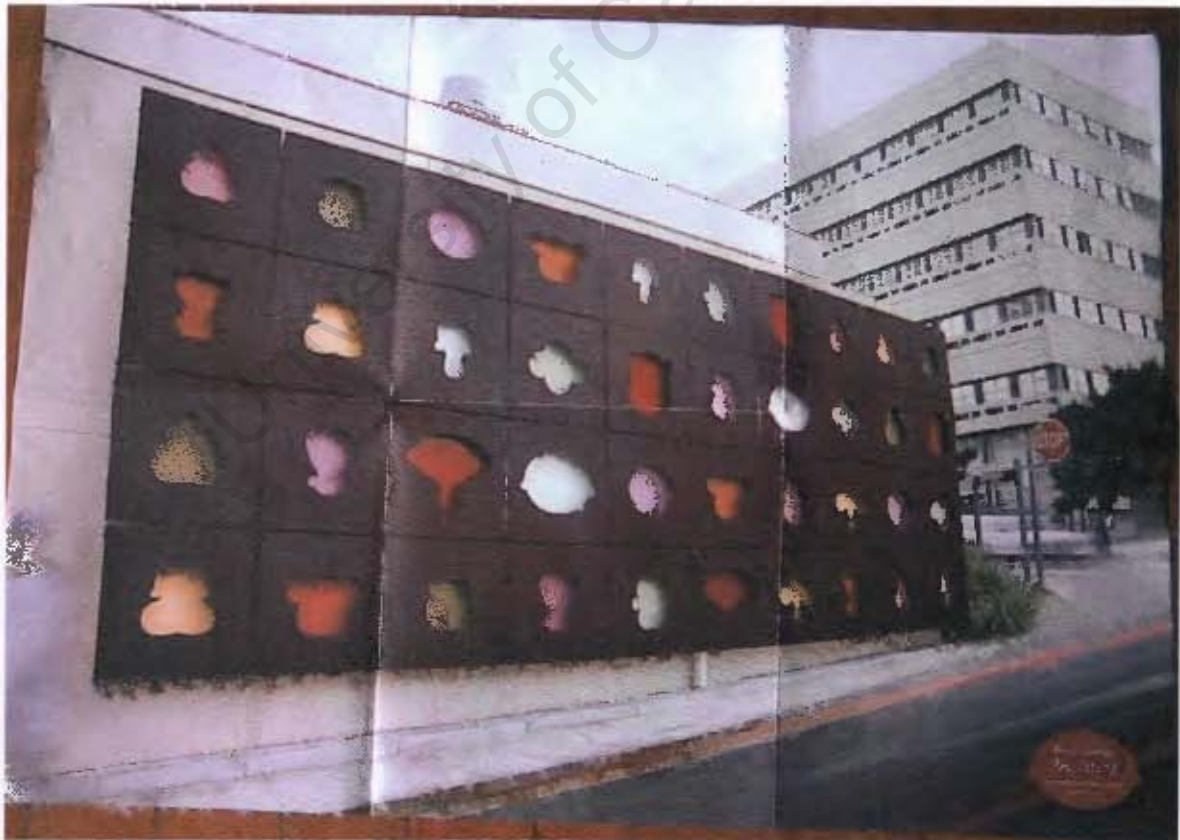
¹²⁷ A Monday Paper article dated 5th March 2007, notes "The artworks, Body Maps, originally done on brown paper, were created by three women in the Bambanani (which means to support each other; to lend hands) HIV/AIDS support group, in a workshop run by Jane Solomon in Khayelitsha in 2002". These were then reconceptualised into mosaics by Friedman, and executed by community artists Xolani Badli, Sibongile Memani, Mbuyiseli Somdaka and Sandi Mdekazi (Vol. 26, No. 2: 1).

¹²⁸ I am unsure how widely these pamphlets will be distributed; Christopher Peter supplied me with a copy, and intimated that they should be fairly widely circulated.



Figure 12. MEDICAL SCHOOL LIBRARY, ANZIO ROAD:

(Top) Lovell Friedmann's *Mind Body Map* mosaic designs being executed by Sandi Mdekazi, Sibongile Memani and Xolani Badli, 2007 (Image taken from *Monday Paper*, Vol. 26, No. 2); (Bottom) Brett Murray, *Specimens*, 2007 (Image taken from brochure, produced by the Goodman Gallery).



Some of the frames were in disrepair and glass broken, while many pieces were so buried by various works that it was impossible to view them. From what was visible, however, it appeared that most of the paintings were portraits of various people linked to the university¹²⁹, as well as a number of large busts (notably Cecil John Rhodes and Jan Smuts). This leads to a related problem that was repeatedly noted in the meetings, that of ‘the white male’ dilemma – what to do with the portraits and busts of these figures? Already noted as a problem as far back as 1993, the WOAC archive records minutes from a meeting held on the 15 March of that year, in which,

the Committee’s attention was drawn to the unresolved problem of attempting to change the image of the Bremner Building by introducing works of art and replacing some of the ‘white males’ who dominate the hanging space. Where these portraits would go if they were to be replaced was an important question. It was suggested that they be hung in libraries. Some members suggested that the history of the university was tied up with ‘white males’ and they consequently had considerable historical importance. (WOAC minutes, 15.3.1993: 2).

In the subsequent years it seems that a number of these works have therefore been placed in storage, while recent discussions revealed that WOAC members are rather offended by this policy, and have reiterated that these ‘white males’ are an integral part of UCT’s history, and should not be hidden from view.¹³⁰

Other concerns included the problems certain departments had with specific works: those by David Brown, a Pieter Hugo photograph in the Kramer building (successfully petitioned to be removed), and the response to the Gabriel Clarke-Brown exhibition in the previous year (in which two works were vandalised). While the committee agreed that there should be more done to increase the information on various works (through detailed labelling, walkabouts, etc.), this too was not addressed in any way. Other matters usually included questions over donations or bequests, which ranged from bronze busts of former Vice-Chancellors to additional works by David Brown from a UCT alumnus currently

¹²⁹ Most works do have printed captions on the back, presumably catalogued by the Keasts.

¹³⁰ At the meeting of 22 March 2007, Mr. Amoore and Mr. Peter noted that it was unfortunate that so many of the works in storage were of white males, since it would be hard to distribute them throughout the campus without causing some furore. This was met with disapproval from some members, particularly Dr. Jocelyn Kane-Berman, who thought it unacceptable that those who were *factually* part of UCT’s history could be discriminated against in this way (personal minutes of the meeting).

living in the UK. It was revealing to note that virtually all decisions were made ad-hoc; there were no guidelines to govern any of the committee's decision-making processes, and as such, the specific influence some members have (due to personality, qualifications, power, outspokenness) became a significant factor in the running of the meetings. Apparently, while Ms. Murray and Professor Malcolm Payne had created a draft acquisition policy some years prior¹³¹, this had been met with conflicting opinions from various committee members, and had never been seen to fruition.

It is especially interesting to note that in spite of the main motivation for the existence of the WOAC¹³² – providing access to artworks for the benefit of the students – there has never been any student representation on the committee. While I would recommend appointing at least one student to the committee, it must be said that I found the proceedings most intimidating: seated around the imposing antique table in the Irma Stern dining room, the committee felt at times a little like an exclusive club in which one is expected to speak only when being spoken to, and agree politely on questions of taste and aesthetics. The homogeneity of the group, as mentioned above, is disconcerting, and students may have difficulty expressing their views particularly if they have any new or radical ideas to offer. This is further exacerbated by the fact that most of the members have been on the committee for a fairly substantial amount of time, and thus have a certain way of running their business.

(Part 3) The Chemical Engineering Seminar

As mentioned above, as part of my involvement with the WOAC and through a personal affiliation, I agreed to present a seminar at the Department of Chemical Engineering relating to the artworks on campus. Entitled “Art in public places: sites of contemplation or contestation?” it was also specifically in response to some of the vehement reactions against the placement of artworks in the new building which opened in 2004. As detailed in the previous chapter, most of the works originated from the collection of Hans Porer

¹³¹ This will be referred to at length later in this chapter.

¹³² This is the view expressed by the chair, Hugh Amoore, and is echoed by most of the current members (personal minutes of the meetings).

and had been placed on permanent loan in the building, following the success of other Porer works situated in the revamped Chancellor Oppenheimer Library. Other pieces of his collection had simultaneously been installed in the ‘old’ Chemical Engineering building (renamed Hoerikwaggo, where CHED is now housed). It seems the two major pieces causing the consternation were both sculptural works by David Brown – an artist who has proven to be quite problematic at UCT in general¹³³. The one situated in the new building has no given title, but is attributed to his *Dog Watch* series (1989), while the other situated in the old building is entitled *One man without his dog* (1982) [Figure 13]. The reason for the antipathy towards these works seems to be their phallic imagery. One of the recently elected WOAC members and a staff member of CHED, Ms. Lucia Thesen, related to me how on numerous occasions the Brown sculpture was ‘wheeled away’¹³⁴ – seen as a source of embarrassment at various important functions held in the building.

Furthermore, examples of some of the comments from various staff and students¹³⁵ of the new Chemical Engineering building were made available to me through copies of a series of heated emails that had circulated from July to August 2004. One person commented that the David Brown work was “completely foul” as well as “inappropriate”. He stated, “I like to have my preconceived ideas about the world challenged, but not in the Chemeng foyer. Rather in an art gallery where I am receptive to that happening.” With regards to a Willie Bester work (entitled *Rollerskater*), which he referred to as “the bizarre, organic/metallic superstructure”, he sarcastically noted, “Wow, that guy is some artist” (email sent 9.6.2004). Writing on the Brown work, one second-year student questioned, “how does it have anything to do with Engineering? It looks really dodgy.” She goes on to state:

I don’t see the point of a rusted piece of metal being placed in the chem eng (sic) building. It is a smart building, one that many of us are proud of and the sculpture really does not suit it, apart from the sculpture needing to be censored. I don’t feel

¹³³ The ‘problem’ of David Brown’s works was brought up repeatedly during the WOAC meetings I attended – in discussing the reactions to works already displayed, as well as the question of where to house future works – particularly in light of a potential donation of twelve large Brown works by a UCT alumnus Charles Diamond.

¹³⁴ The sculpture is movable, being on wheels.

¹³⁵ I have kept the names of these people confidential.



Figure 13. HANS PORER LOAN: CHEMICAL ENGINEERING

(Top) David Brown, From the *Dog Watch Series*, 1989; (Bottom left) Willie Bester, *Rollerskater*, undated; (Bottom right) detail of the (offending) *Dog Watch Series* work.



it is fair to expose students, especially female, to sculptures as dubious as that daily. What about innocent minds? (email sent 2.8.2004)

Later in the email the student asks, “Please cant (sic) there be some rule as to the type of artwork displayed that ALL can enjoy the artwork and not find it offensive”, and concludes asking that the work be removed (ibid). Continuing in this vein, a professor noted:

In my opinion, this sort of work does not qualify as art – rather than inspiring you or challenging you, it just makes you feel tainted. I would also like to ask who is foisting this sort of rubbish off on us – surely we should have some say over what graces our building? I am particularly concerned about the impression which this gives to those entering the building, be they students or visitors. I would strongly suggest that both statues be removed. (email sent 6.8.2004)

This same professor went on to state that after viewing the other David Brown sculpture in the CHED building, he had decided that “this person has a huge hangup about penises” (ibid). What was detrimental to the interpretation of the artworks, inserted into areas inhabited by people who were probably not a ‘gallery-going’ audience, was the lack of labelling or a readily available catalogue. One person noted that the “plethora of ‘untitled’ plaques is a total cop-out” (email sent 16.7.2004), while another suggested that David Brown be contacted for an artist’s statement so that the people in the building may better understand the work (email sent 6.8.2004). Finally, numerous requests were made to Christopher Peter for a seminar to explain the works in the collection. While detailed labels were inserted after some time (authored by Julia Teale), no seminar ever eventuated. As such, my presentation was the first real response to their requests, held some two years later.

In preparing for the presentation, I decided that it would be beneficial to give a brief introduction to the WOAC and more specifically the one percent policy, since it seemed that no-one had heard of neither the committee nor their business. It also seemed appropriate to outline the different spaces I had begun to think about in relation to the university as a site for artworks, and thus I began my talk introducing my thesis topic and the evolution of opening art to the public from national art galleries through to public art. This led to a discussion on the WOAC and the one percent policy, and my observation

that the budget for the latest project, the Graca Machel women's residence, was set at over three times the annual acquisition budget of the SANG (a fact that shocked the audience greatly). The subject then turned to the case at hand – the negative reactions to the David Brown sculptures, and other works in the collection – and I suggested that this may be partly due to the lack of interpretation or engagement offered by the WOAC (in terms of a catalogue, a seminar, walkabout tours, etc.), which in turn could be attributed to the inherent problems of the committee (lacking a full-time curator, exceedingly busy schedules, etc.). Furthermore, it seemed that the nature of the artworks – their size, avant-garde quality, and somewhat confronting imagery – were reminiscent of the (in)famous example of public art (as mentioned in Chapter 2), Richard Serra's *Titled Arc*, and the dilemmas it raised.

Comparing the Serra work to that of the Brown sculptures, I described the various similarities at play; ultimately, each example had been interpreted by an audience as a threatening experience, and these responses revealed a very different relationship to works of art when placed outside of a gallery. It seemed as though there was a shift in the power dynamics – as soon as art was placed in a 'public' environment (rather than a 'private' space such as a gallery), it became an intruder, an unwelcome foreign presence. This, I outlined, may be because art (particularly contemporary art) is bound up in its own foreign referents – it is a language that needs to be learnt; just as the formulas and equations of Chemical Engineering are baffling to the lay person, so too are many contemporary artworks. Thus, I concluded that in order to make the presence of artworks on campus truly meaningful, the WOAC would need to expand their activities/duties. Installing works was merely the first step; this should then be accompanied by educational programmes and other interactive events.

It is important to note the response that I received following the presentation. Considering the audience (a group of Engineering students¹³⁶ and staff members) and, particularly, the circumstances that led to the seminar, I was struck by the lively debate and discussion that ensued. Many members of the audience had thoughtful comments and ideas to

¹³⁶ Despite the heated reactions of most staff members, it was largely students that attended the seminar.

contribute, and it was surprising how positive some of them were about the presence of art on campus. The majority of them seemed very interested in supporting tours and lectures of the artworks on campus, and some made suggestions for different works to be acquired (multimedia, sound installations, etc.). They welcomed my offer of a personal interpretation of the David Brown works, to which they listened with intent. Overall the entire experience, though daunting, was inspiring and invigorating, and in talking to this group of people it really felt as though art could have a far more prominent role on campus. Indeed, it was extremely interesting to hear the varying importance students relegated to the social, political or aesthetic elements of the works

This was further evidenced through examples of short essays produced by first year Humanities students for the course ‘Text in Context’ (SLL1001F/S)¹³⁷ which were made available to me earlier in the year from tutors of this course. These essays, which were analyses of visual texts, could be based on a range of items – advertisements for perfumes, clothing, and other consumable items – or the artworks or monuments on campus. A fairly significant proportion (around 15 percent) of the responses were based on these items or statues, and in reading these reports it became clear the extent of the varied interpretations and impressions made by the students (most of whom were not registered in art history courses). It was particularly revealing to see which were the most popular pieces for discussion, and interestingly the top two were the Sara Baartman sculpture (twelve essays) and the Cecil John Rhodes statue (five essays). These two figures, created many years apart and each situated in prominent areas within the university, have been at the focus of much controversy over the years. The students’ papers reflected many different interpretations on the placement of the works on the campus, some offering positive, and others negative viewpoints. In relation to the Rhodes statue, one student thought that the “statue is ideally placed as it not only tempts controversy among the fresh minds of the university students but also persistently prompts us to remember our history”, while a more critical opinion was offered by another who, “felt it was inappropriate for a statue of a person who is commonly seen as a symbol of colonisation, African dependence on Europe, white power and European

¹³⁷ This course has run for a number of years, but apparently 2006 was the last year in which it was offered.

oppression, to be placed on a pedestal at the forefront of the Jameson Steps which have become the symbol and trademark of Cape Town University (sic)".

The placement of the Baartman sculpture in the Science and Engineering Library was also debated by most students; while some saw it as 'ironic' that the sculpture of a woman who was ridiculed and tortured in the name of science was on permanent display in a scientific library, others thought that it was appropriate due to the physical nature of the work – that the media (recycled scrap metal and other metallic objects) lent itself to the particular setting. The broader perspective of inserting it into a library, and a university library at that, was also discussed, and some interesting comments were made about the nature of students and student life:

A library is a place of learning. Somewhere we both store and access knowledge. The presence of this statue serves to remind us of what has passed and of the errors made by people in the past. A record that cannot be erased or forgotten.

The target audience of this sculpture is significant because students are traditionally seen by society as agents of change, and thus the sculpture of Sara Baartman, through its visual statement, appeals to students to understand history and its injustices, and to play their part in upholding the dignity of all human beings.

The statue being found on the university campus is relevant too. University is where (sic) tomorrows (sic) leaders of the country are made, this statue I believe would help remind these leaders the importance of human rights.

It also seems strange that she was placed in a university where people have the opportunity to learn and the privilege of having a choice as to the direction of their lives. Perhaps the sculpture is placed here to remind us as students what we have to be grateful for.

If this sculpture was in a different context the meaning would change. If it was in a museum it may be appreciated more by people who are there to take the time to analyse and really look at it. In the daily rush of a student's life we might simply dismiss it, though it is right there as you walk up the stairs, it is easy to just walk past.

Other popular works were Ernestine White's *I do not speak Xhosa* (situated on the stairs leading down to the African Studies Library), and Mark Hipper's *School Girls* (near the general circulation desk of the library), while the striking Jameson Hall was also

discussed by various students. The remaining works were diverse, and came from both the Upper and Middle Campuses¹³⁸. Most students referred to political and social messages they thought underpinned the works; many spoke of apartheid and the move to democracy, in particular noting the university's transition accompanying these changes. These essays were a glimpse of the role the art collection could play in students' lives at UCT, and the host of functions and meanings they could have to various members of the university community. This point leads to the next section in which I will suggest some ways to enhance the presence of the artworks on UCT's campus.

A way forward: Suggestions for the WOAC

The lack of an acquisition policy, and other problems faced by the WOAC, I believe, stem largely from the fact that the members are undecided on the purpose of the art works they deal with. Situated on a university campus, it seems that the educational aspect would be the function of this art, but since there are virtually no courses linked to its art collection (as the SLL1001F/S course has recently been cancelled) and no tours, walkabouts, educational pamphlets, etc. it is clear that this option is not being pursued actively. Thus, the art collection lacks real meaning within the university community, and one could begin to understand various departments' queries over the reason for its existence. While it would appear that since there is no gallery at UCT, the art collection would *need* to have a sustained educational programme attached to it in order to have any purpose, the fact that the works are displayed throughout the various campuses could also provide an opportunity to encourage a far more interdisciplinary approach.

Furthermore, as other universities have proven, the induction of a gallery space does not necessarily guarantee more viewers – in fact, the opposite seems to prove true¹³⁹. Having artworks dispersed at various places throughout a university could encourage those who may not enter a gallery space to take notice of art, and could, at best, initiate a new life-

¹³⁸ Among them were works from the CAS collection, some from the Graduate School in Humanities, one from the Kramer building, and a number of others from the Chancellor Oppenheimer Library.

¹³⁹ As will be mentioned in the following chapter, the University of Stellenbosch's gallery is rarely frequented by its student body.

long interest. Certainly, given the rigid disciplinary boundaries between departments at universities, the opportunity to explore an avenue not dictated by course requirements or credit points could be a refreshing and invigorating one. Indeed, in the post-seminar discussion with the Chemical Engineers, one student noted how he enjoyed having a moment with the artworks in the building; an opportunity for a brief respite from the daily lectures and activities, where he could immerse himself in something totally unrelated to his studies. Another stated that he did not attend university only to study Chemical Engineering, but to learn about how to live in society – with lessons on tolerance, and being open to new things – as such, he saw the artworks in the building as contributing to this ‘other’ form of education.

Considering that the main business of the WOAC aims to integrate art with architecture in a fashion most similar to public art, it would be more appropriate for this committee to operate more along the lines of public art processes, as detailed in Chapter 2. This would mean incorporating more public participation into the activities of the committee – both in terms of inviting members of the university (students, administrators, building-users) to meetings, as well as holding debates and forums around the possibilities of certain artistic ventures. There should also be procedure by which suggestions and ideas could be received and debated publicly, so as to ensure greater transparency, which is much-needed. The CAS gallery, mentioned in the previous chapter, could be a venue in which such dialogues could take place, particularly since it is situated within an interdisciplinary department, and is currently run by Masters students.

In fact, the first exhibition of a selection of the UCT permanent collection is currently on display in the CAS gallery.¹⁴⁰ For the exhibition, entitled *Finding UCT: Narratives, New and Old, in the UCT Permanent Collection*, the two CAS student curators worked closely with Mr. Peter and Ms. van Blommestein, and chose a selection of works which aimed to show the changing nature of UCT’s acquisitions over the years. While the WOAC provided generous financial support (granting funding for a catalogue, and contributing

¹⁴⁰ This section of the paper actually had to be slightly modified – in an earlier version I had posed the suggestion of holding such an exhibition, and then found out about one taking place (it is being run from 19 September until 10 October 2007).

towards hanging costs), there was very little real interaction between this body and the curators, or the public that visited the exhibition. Of the voting WOAC members, only three were present at the exhibition opening, and none were present at the seminar held on 21 September 2007, in which various aspects of the collection were discussed.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, none of the committee members were willing to contribute an essay or comment for the catalogue.¹⁴² While the exhibition is certainly a positive step in terms of the permanent collection gaining more of a presence on campus (and there is a strong possibility of holding similar exhibitions in the future), it would be far better if the WOAC were more actively involved in the process – in co-ordinating a seminar, offering comments on their selection processes, or publishing an essay; ultimately, there needs to be more of a dialogue between this body and the rest of the university.

Due to the varied undertakings of the committee itself, it is difficult to make suggestions in terms of an acquisition policy, since the public art ventures and the paintings and prints hung throughout the university, are very different and would each require a different acquisition process. However, help should be sought by a number of arts professionals in constructing a policy (or policies). While these guidelines should offer direction, and map out a kind of mission behind the works of art (since the lack of this is felt), they should not be so prescriptive as to prevent any form of innovation. The draft collection policy composed by Ms. Murray and Professor Payne (as referred to earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter 4) offers a number of valid points that could be considered when finalising such a policy; they list proposed criteria for evaluating potential works of art (including artistic merit, teaching/research merit, contribution the artist would make to the collection, etc.) and criteria for rejections too (including technical problems, content too localised, legal obstacles, conditions of artist/benefactor too stringent). Having attended the WOAC meetings, this is a significant issue that needs to be addressed since too often

¹⁴¹ Here, the curators and I provided an overview of the collection and the exhibition itself, followed by an open discussion with the audience.

¹⁴² The catalogue is still being finalised, and while there is a possibility of Pippa Skotnes' opening address being included, no other comments or essays have been offered by the WOAC.

personal opinions and taste influence decisions, and as a result the collection begins to look disjointed¹⁴³.

Furthermore, this draft policy also notes that the methods of acquiring works needs to be more varied, as well as that the university needs to undertake a more vociferous awareness-raising campaign, including educative elements such as guided tours of the collection. These are both critically important points, but not expanded upon at enough length in this document; no suggestion is made of the WOAC venturing out to find artists working in more remote areas, or methods in which to seek out emerging artists. To return to the MTN Collection once again, it is interesting to note that the curators embarked on field trips to search for artworks, “travelling to far-flung regions of South Africa to purchase works directly from artists” (Kellner, 2006: 37). However, as has been noted, the time constraints on the WOAC members prohibits this kind of activity, and thus points to another vital suggestion: that the WOAC appoint a full-time curator. This person could work collaboratively with departments in order to construct educational courses around the artworks; organise adequate labelling, cataloguing and guided tours of the works; liaise with fellow curators (such as the CAS curators, and, importantly, those from other universities) in order to arrange interactive seminars and exhibitions; develop a user-friendly website that students and the public could use, and offer their opinions; use inventive methods in which to acquire works of art; and oversee the various public art projects the WOAC embark upon, ensuring that the composition of the committees changes regularly in order to have a fair representation. This person would be the public interface with the rest of the community (UCT and otherwise) – a person solely employed to initiate the kind of dialogue and respond to the needs of the university, in a way that the WOAC has, thus far, been unable to do. They could be assisted by student interns, who could perhaps gain credit towards their degrees through a semester internship (thus becoming part of the syllabi as well).

¹⁴³ A case in point is the purchase of an Eris Silke painting for R50 000; while this is a large amount of money that the WOAC would hesitate to usually spend, because a couple of key persons within the Committee liked the work, it was bought.

Publications should also be more consistently pursued, and made accessible and available to any interested students or staff members; since UCT has an evolving and diverse collection that is meant for the enjoyment of its inhabitants, there should be more efforts made to assist this in all ways possible. These suggestions which could be considered in enhancing the operations of the WOAC and the role of the artworks on campus, are based on my own experiences and judgements, and certainly there could be a vast range of further ideas and proposals should a comprehensive study or survey be undertaken by the university (and herein lies another suggestion). A final suggestion relates to the oft-mentioned committee composition; while there may need to be a complete reinvention of this committee altogether (i.e. perhaps one committee that meets to discuss artworks to be placed within buildings, and a different committee for the artworks commissioned for outside areas, which would be a different grouping of people for each project, including architects, landscape architects, etc.), it is imperative that there is student representation, and at least one arts professional member unrelated to UCT. It may be advisable to also consult certain specialists in the field of museum and heritage studies, particularly if a gallery space should eventuate in the future.

Conclusion:

This study of the UCT art collection and its organising body, the WOAC, has revealed similarities and contrasts between this case study and the overseas examples discussed in the initial chapters of this dissertation. A major difference is that the former (national and modern art galleries and public art works) have a stated purpose that underlies their activities, usually bound by acquisition policies and an educational programme attached to the works displayed, while UCT has none of these components. In order for the full potential of this collection to be realised, there need to be some drastic changes within the committee, and the way in which they operate.

While some attempts have been made towards an acquisition policy in the past, this should be pursued as a matter of urgency, and finalised with the advice of art

professionals, and students. Greater student participation in general is advised, with more courses and interactive forums attached to the study and discussion of the artworks. More connections should be sought with other universities, particularly since (as my travels revealed) each institution has its own unique and valuable collection that could be the basis of interesting and enriching collaborations and exchanges. It is hoped that by discussing the successes and failures of the WOAC, one can begin to recognise the numerous opportunities the one percent policy and the site of UCT promises, and start to carve out a more positive route forward for this overseeing body.

University of Cape Town



**Figure 14. CONTROVERSIAL
WORKS ON UCT CAMPUS:**

(Top left) Willie Bester, *Sara Baartman*,
2001;

(Top right) Pieter Hugo, *Self Portrait*,
2004;

(Bottom left) David Brown, *One man
without his dog*, 1982 .

Chapter 6: The Bigger Picture

An Overview of University Art Collections in South Africa

Introduction

Having discussed the UCT art collection, and the acquisition committee that oversees it, at length in the prior chapters, this final chapter serves to give a brief survey of other university art collections in South Africa at present. This is largely to gain perspective of the variety and scope of the numerous collections, which in turn, supports the argument of this thesis – of the great potential of these spaces. In investigating the various universities, it became apparent that the WOAC is an anomaly; most art collections are administered by a select number of curators, often on a full-time basis. This disparity is most likely due to the one percent policy at UCT, and the lack of a gallery space; both inconsistent with the general conditions of other South African universities. The last public discussion held on South African university art collections was in March 1986¹⁴⁴, and reference will be made to certain presentations given at the event, but most information is gained from primary research: interviews and email correspondence with the respective curators from each of the universities discussed.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I travelled to the two other major universities in the Western Cape – the University of Stellenbosch (US) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) – as well as the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg. Each with vastly differing collections that reflect the geographical, social and political history of the various institutions, the experience was most enlightening. Additionally, I was able to contact the curators from the University of South Africa (UNISA), University of the Free State (UFS) the University of Pretoria (UP), and the University of Fort Hare (UFH) and thus these university collections will be discussed too. It seems that despite the inconsistent levels of funding, publicity, staffing, space and storage facilities, each collection is used in some way by students on campus, albeit to varying degrees. Thus, it is argued that UCT (and in turn, the WOAC) should follow the example of their academic

¹⁴⁴ As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, and mentioned in Chapter 3 (when referring to Christopher Peter's presentation at this conference).

peers, and instigate an educational programme to coincide with their artworks. Moreover, there should be an initiative countrywide to publicise and make the collections more accessible through technological tools such as the internet and rigorous outreach programmes to schools and disadvantaged communities.

Different Strokes: The Variety of University Art Collections in South Africa

In their publication, *Art Routes: A Guide to South African Art Collections* (2000), Rayda Becker and Rochelle Keene provide brief descriptions of the numerous university art collections held in South Africa. Only seven years old, this book is already beginning to lose its accuracy, as various academic institutions in South Africa are becoming amalgamated and collections merged (e.g. Rand Afrikaans University, Technikon Witwatersrand, and two Vista university campuses are now the University of Johannesburg, while the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville have formed the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the UCT's entry only pertains to the Irma Stern Collection – no mention is made of the WOAC or the UCT collection that is dispersed throughout the campuses. However, this text does give a good general overview of the assortment of collections held at universities throughout the country, and details the various 'facilities' offered at each of them. It appears that the latter differs somewhat from one university to another: the UFH provides guided tours of the collections, workshops and seminars, public lectures, and film shows; UFS co-ordinates workshops and guided tours; UP offers guided tours and lectures; UNISA arranges guided tours, group visits, and information on the artworks by prior arrangement; Wits and the University of Natal (now part of UKZN) offer tours on request; the US museum give walkabouts and lectures; UCT's Irma Stern Museum offer tours and lectures; and UWC lists only their available publications under 'facilities'. From this guide and supplementary information (mainly gained through university websites or catalogues, or featured articles in journals and magazines), in addition to my primary research, it became apparent how vast the range of art collections is within South African universities.

From their findings, Becker and Keene (2000: 7) assert that:

All the university museums see their purpose as integral to the educational functions of the parent institution. The artworks are considered to be essential for the education of potential artists, and give all students, not only students of art, an opportunity to examine the 'real thing'. The collections are used for research purposes and they offer an academic engagement of a different kind from that in the public collections.

Given this statement, it appears that UCT is (once again) anomalous in its lack of an educational program attached to its collection, and it seems a worthwhile task for the people that oversee the art collection (the WOAC) to consider the initiatives undertaken at their fellow academic institutions.

The University of Stellenbosch

Originating in 1919, the US has the oldest collection, and is largely the result of an ongoing number of bequests from various individuals, most of whom were connected to the university in some way. Among these are the Hugh Solomon Collection (120 works by artists such as Thomas Baines, Charles Bell, and Thomas Bowler), the Solomon Caesar Malan Collection (168 aquarelle, ink and pencil drawings by this artist), the Maggie Laubser Bequest (154 oil paintings by this artist), and the H.B. Thom Collection (75 works by artists such as J.H. Pierneef, J. Volschenk, and Gregoire Boonzaier). Another significant example is the Professor J. du P. Scholtz Bequest, which was given over a 64-year period (1921-85), and consisting of 310 works, around half of which are by South African artists, the rest European and 'exotic pieces' (de Waal, 2005: 63). According to the current curator, Mr. Ulrich Wolff, a pre-requisite of the bequest is that part of this collection must always be hung in the entrance of the museum, which can produce the negative effect of leading viewers to believe that the collection is static¹⁴⁵ (interview, 22.5.2007)¹⁴⁶. Since 1996, Dr. Peter and Catherine Freund have continued to donate various lithographs and etchings to the university, often by European artists. Mr. Wolff intimated that this has proved rather problematic over the years, in that the

¹⁴⁵ Particularly if they have a cursory glance as they walk in, and leave before viewing the rest of the collection, which may change regularly.

¹⁴⁶ Please note that any reference made to Mr. Wolff's comments in the following section is taken from this interview.

donators are very specific as to where and how their works are housed, and considering the works are so different to the rest of the collection, it may be more trouble than they are worth.

With the overwhelming part of the university's collection originating from private collectors, the current director Dr. Lydia de Waal has asserted that there is no University of Stellenbosch identity being forged here (interview, 22.5.2007)¹⁴⁷. However, given the relationship certain individuals had to the university (lecturers, alumni, etc.) as well as the fact that the university certainly would not accept works if they were deemed inappropriate, this statement may not be completely accurate. While the collection "focuses on South African art and on international graphics", de Waal (2005: 65) admits that in the future the collection "will have to address a more representative scope". The US is in a seemingly fortunate situation in that they have two gallery spaces situated some streets apart. The University of Stellenbosch Art Gallery is located in a former Evangelical Lutheran Church on the corner of Bird and Dorp streets, in which temporary exhibitions and student shows are held (it was also home to the Maggie Laubser collection until it moved to the new gallery). According to Dr. de Waal, this gallery is fairly popular with students and the public alike, enhanced by its central location, near the main street of the town. The Sasol Art Museum, housed in the former Bloemhof School for Girls (opened in 1907), was opened in 1991 after restorations were completed aided by a generous financial grant from Sasol (Becker and Keene, 2000: 236). The museum, "a double-storey, late Victorian building" (de Waal, 2005: 60), is situated in Ryneveld Street which is one of the major roads running through the sprawled ('Central') campus of the university. However, despite the 16 – 18 000 students in the immediate area, de Waal noted that the museum is rarely visited by students (besides those who use it for their coursework), and acknowledged that the museum needs to market itself better.

Walking through the museum, I noted the fairly disjointed nature of the collection, exacerbated by the numerous and multifarious works on display (each linked to the

¹⁴⁷ Please note that any reference made to Dr. de Waal's comments in the following section is taken from this interview, unless otherwise indicated.

individual donator/collector), as well as the lack of extensive labelling, wall texts, catalogues, or many other educational aides¹⁴⁸. In the last room on the upper level, I noted some unusually contemporary works (when compared to the rest of the collection) on display, by artists such as Paul Stopforth, Norman Catherine and David Brown. These, I was later told, were chosen by Art History students currently working on curating an exhibition in this space. Co-ordinated by lecturer Katherine Bull, this is entitled the 'Keystone Project' which has been run over the last few years, and offers students an opportunity to practice their curatorial skills. I noted with amusement the choice of artworks (particularly the David Brown, given the infamy of his works on the UCT campus), since they were so different to most of the works in the US collection. Indeed, this collection is far more 'historical' in nature, given the manner in which most of the works are acquired. However, it should be noted that there is a small budget with which to acquire works of art, and in recent years works by Stanley Pinker, Michael Petit, Andrew Verster, Willie Bester, Sandra Kriel, Zwelethu Mthethwa and Allina Ndebele have been purchased (de Waal: 63). Despite these, the majority of the collection is deeply embedded within the long history of the university, and can be seen to be linked to the Afrikaner heritage of Stellenbosch [Figure 15].

The University of Fort Hare (Alice)

In striking comparison then, is the UFH collection, which was initiated in 1964, in reaction to the specific social and political conditions of apartheid. Led by Professor E.J. de Jager (an anthropologist) of the African Studies Department, with the assistance of Professor Vincent Gitywa of the F.S. Malan Ethnological Museum, the collection was a concerted effort to document the new form of art being produced by black South Africans, which they viewed as a direct result of the particularities of apartheid. In the extensive catalogue that accompanies the collection, de Jager (1992: i) notes the significant changes to black culture that arose from the interaction with the "politically dominant European culture":

¹⁴⁸ I came across a very basic pamphlet on Maggie Laubser, while there was a fairly detailed one on the Solomon Caesar Malan Collection.

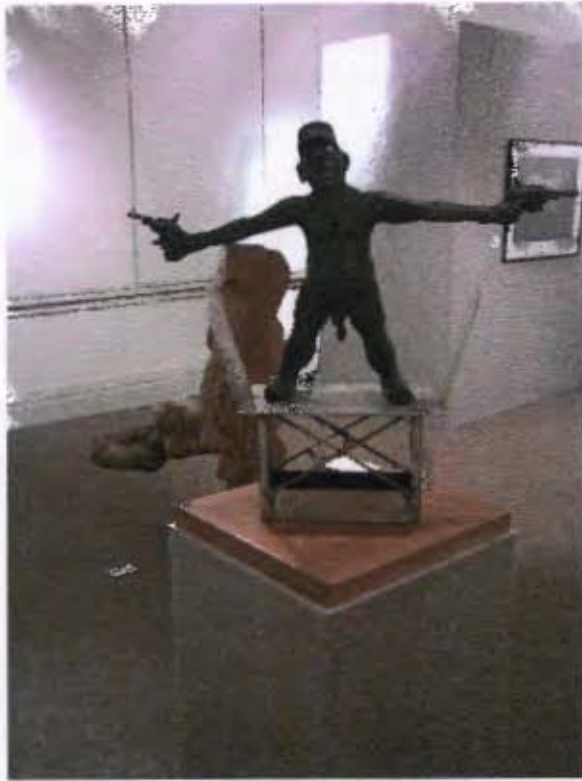


Figure 15. STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY:

(Top left) An interior view of the Sasol Art Museum showing contemporary works by David Brown and Jackson Hlungwane

(Middle right) One of only three paintings hung in the actual buildings on campus. They are all by former Professor of Fine Art, Larry Scully.



(Bottom left) A work by Professor Scully hung in the Sasol Art Museum. It is based on District Six, and is one of the more contemporary works of the collection.



from oral tradition to the written word, from traditional praise songs to some of the most poignant and significant English poetry produced in South Africa...[Extending to new forms of] unique and significant Black music, dancing and theatre, often forming a spontaneous synthesis between the new and the old.

This change, he argued, was also prevalent in the visual arts – due to the “particular social, economic and political circumstances that prevailed in South Africa, namely in the *system of apartheid* [which] often forced Black society and culture to display characteristics peculiar to itself” (ibid: original emphasis). Through responding to their inhumane social conditions, de Jager asserted, black artists were producing works that reflected their specific experience. Thus he felt, particularly after the establishment of a Fine Art Department in the university in 1971, a responsibility for the university to record the achievements of black artists (ibid)¹⁴⁹. As the catalogue confirms, the collection comprises works of 170 artists which include ‘Pioneer Painters’ George Pemba, Gerard Bhengu, Gerard Sekoto, and John Mohl; works by artists from the Polly Street Art Centre and the Jubilee Art Centre such as Durant Sihlali, Sydney Kumalo, Ezrom Legae, Godfrey Ndaba and Patrick Mautloa; prints, pottery, textiles, and weaving by artists at the Rorke’s Drift Art and Craft Centre in Natal, examples of which are John Muafangejo and Charles Nkosi; a vast selection of works from the ‘township art’ movement, including artists such as Dumile Feni-Mhlaba, Julian Motau and Andrew Motjoadi; and, a major component comprising of art hailed from the Ndoleni Art Teachers Training exhibitions.

The UFH collection has been housed in the De Beers Centenary Art Gallery since 1989, after a generous donation by this mining giant. It is somewhat ironic that this corporate body would sponsor the building of a gallery to house works by black artists that deal with apartheid and the alienation of the black people of South Africa – since the mining industry played a significant role within that history. Perhaps it was a purposefully symbolic gesture on the part of De Beers to indicate a sign of change and transformation within the company, and within the country as a whole (on the verge of a collapsing apartheid regime)? Nevertheless, there are two other collections in the jurisdiction of the gallery: the Estelle Hamilton-Welsh Collection which “consists of indigenous artefacts

¹⁴⁹ It is important to note that the UFH was a historically black institution.

created and used by the Xhosa, Mfengu, Thembu, Mpondo, Zulu and Ndebele people”, including “traditional fabric and animal skin costumes, bags, natural and glass beads, carved pipes and sticks, weapons, leatherwork and diviner’s paraphernalia” (Becker and Keene: 22); and the F.S. Malan Collection which “reflects a wide diversity of cultures from the whole of southern Africa”, and includes “traditional household equipment such as stools, mats, clay pots, musical instruments, metalwork and leatherwork” (ibid).

In recent years, the gallery has become part of the new National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre on the UFH campus. Under the current directorship of Dr. C. Thomas, there are a number of staff members who are employed to oversee the university’s archives (including the Piper Collection: historical photographs of the Transkei), with one curator working full-time at the Gallery. The current curator is Mr. Vuyani Booi, who, in conjunction with the Director, sporadically adds works to the collection; however he has confirmed that this does not occur often. In our correspondence, Mr. Booi assured me that students, particularly from the Fine Art Department, use the collection for research purposes, and that there “the university has a strong link with the gallery collection” (email dated 29.8.2007). With such a specialised collection of artworks, focusing on a particular period in time, and capturing the intense emotions expressed by a group of South African artists at a moment in which no one else was listening, the UFH has a strong, cohesive collection. While they do offer a ‘virtual tour’ of their collection on their (cryptically accessible) website¹⁵⁰, this is very basic, and should be updated in order for others to enjoy the cultural treasure this university houses.

The University of South Africa (Pretoria)

Begun at almost the same time as the UFH collection, the UNISA art collection was initiated in the early 1960s. While most documents attribute the beginning of this collection with Dr. Karin Skawran of the Department of History of Art and Fine Art, Becker and Keene (2000: 109) claim that Professor J.L. Steyn, head of the Department of Afrikaans-Nederlands was in fact the person that instigated the formation of this

¹⁵⁰ I will refer to the dire state of South African university art gallery/collection websites below.

collection, purchasing works to “decorate the walls of the Senate Hall at the old Unisa Campus in Skinner Street, Pretoria”. However, they do note that with Dr. Skawran’s appointment in 1961, she and Professor Steyn continued extending the collection together, while in later years she took sole responsibility. Despite the fact that an acquisition policy was only formally composed many years later, Skawran (1997: 3, accessed online) notes that from its inception, the collection was focused on “South African art, from the earliest times to today”, and that it also comprised works from Namibia and Zimbabwe, as well as a small amount of international graphics. The first gallery opened in August 1985 in the Theo van Wijk Building, which was later moved in 1989 to a much larger space within the same building. The first full-time curator, Lucy Alexander¹⁵¹, was appointed in 1985, and thus presented a paper at the (aforementioned) South African Association of Art Historians Conference held on the 15th March 1986¹⁵². Here, she gave a history of the beginnings of the collection, outlining that “teaching value, be it of concept or technique, coupled with aesthetic excellence has been the guiding principle for selections”, and went on to note some of the works within the collection, which at that point held about 600 pieces (among them 140 works by Alexis Preller, and 22 by Walter Battiss, with only about 50 from black artists).

While, in her presentation, Alexander lamented the insufficient exhibition space and inadequate storage facilities, it becomes apparent from the supplementary inventory (of all the universities present) prepared for this conference¹⁵³ (outlining the various details of each collection, such as funding, staffing, attendance, etc.) that UNISA was in a fairly fortunate position in comparison to the rest of the country. Rhodes University’s (RU) acquisition budget was a mere R600 per year, the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) R1000 per year, RAU R4000 per year, and many had not guaranteed funding at all (University of Zululand, University of Natal-Pietermaritzburg, University of Pretoria)¹⁵⁴. In striking contrast, UNISA enjoyed R20 000 per year for funding, and a gallery space,

¹⁵¹ See the Introduction and Chapter 1 of this dissertation for some of Alexander’s opinions (which I have quoted fairly extensively) of the role of university art collections in South Africa.

¹⁵² The papers from this conference were unfortunately lost; I was able to listen to the recording of the proceedings and make my own annotations (audio-cassette from the University of Pretoria Archive).

¹⁵³ A copy of this document was made available to me through the University of Pretoria Archive.

¹⁵⁴ It is noted in this document that UFH and Wits were unable to disclose their acquisition budgets.

which also was not always available at other institutions (among them RU, RAU, UD-W, and UCT). Due to the distance-learning education nature of UNISA, it has always been a fundamental element of the collection that it be integrated with course content and used as stimulus material. Thus, in a subsequent publication, Alexander (1987:35) noted that the “exhibitions are documented and slides or videos may be borrowed from the Art Gallery. Slides of works in the permanent collection can be requested and appointments made to see works in the store at any time. Assignments in History of Art often require direct study of works in the UNISA Art Collection”. With the technological advancements of recent years, the entire collection has been digitally photographed and can be viewed from the university’s website¹⁵⁵.

The current curator, Meredith Randall, has confirmed that the collection continues to be used by a variety of people on campus, stating, “We primarily work with the visual art and art history department, but we do have interactions with many, from psych to communications” (email correspondence dated 20.7.2007). Presently housing around 1200 pieces, most of the UNISA gallery’s artworks are in storage, since of the five exhibitions held per year, only one is based on the permanent collection. Two of the remaining shows are based on student works, and with the exception of these, walkabouts are offered for all exhibitions, as well as information on the permanent collection. Randall is one of three people who work on a full-time basis at the gallery (she is joined by an assistant curator and administrative assistant) as well as two students who work part-time. According to the gallery’s website, a major focus of their activities is community outreach, with disadvantaged and emerging artists invited to all functions, lectures, workshops and exhibitions, and disadvantaged schools in the area are informed of, and (when funds are available) transported to, the exhibitions.

¹⁵⁵ However, the current curator, Ms. Randall, noted via email correspondence that there has been no formal catalogue produced on the collection since about 1980 (email dated 20.7.2007).

The University of Pretoria

Also situated in the area of Pretoria, the UP is home to four museums despite the actual university art collection being spread throughout the offices and buildings of the university (Becker and Keene, 2000: 102). According to Becker and Keene (ibid) the collection comprises of works by Bettie Cilliers-Barnard, Christo Coetzee, Erich Mayer and J.H. Pierneef, while more recent acquisitions include those by Tommy Motswai, Henriette Ngako and Lucky Sibiya. While the current curator of the Edoardo Villa Museum, Mr. Gerard de Kamper, has lamented the lack of a significant acquisition budget (around R20 – 30 000 per year at present), and the fact that the collection does not have proper housing, there are certainly a vast amount of objects for study at this university (interview, 20.7.2007). Each with their own curator, three of the four museums are located on the UP campus – both the JA van Tilburg Museum and the Mapungubwe Museum¹⁵⁶ are situated in the Old Arts Building, while the Edoardo Villa Museum is in the Old Merensky Library building – and the van Wouw Museum is nearby, on the corner of Clark and Rupert Streets, in the former house of the sculptor Anton van Wouw.

These collections are immensely different and span from contemporary sculptures to antique ceramics, archaeological treasures to quintessential Afrikaner sculptures. The Edoardo Villa Museum is unusual in that the artist is still living, and is continually adding to this collection of his sculptures and drawings. These pieces span from steel artworks (which are placed around the actual campuses of the UP), bronzes, charcoal drawings, and plaster of Paris maquettes (de Kamper, 2007: 9). The artist, Italian-born, and resident of Pretoria since the 1940s, is 92 years of age, and is planning an exhibition in 2008 at the Museum to coincide with the university's centenary celebrations (ibid). According to de Kamper, students do make good use of this space, and the contents of the collection are incorporated into History of Art and Fine Art coursework (interview, 20.7.2007). He also indicated that the UP has an immense collection of archival documents relating to South

¹⁵⁶ This is an archaeological museum, and due to word restrictions, will not be discussed here. However, it is worth noting that the collection housed within the museum is an extremely valuable and important resource for South Africa. The precious metal objects, tools, ivory, beads, figurines, ceramics and more that make up the collection date from around ACE 1000-1300, and 174 items have been declared heritage objects. For more information see *The South African Art Times* (July 2007), p. 9.

African artists. A project begun many years ago, it has in recent times been disbanded, and the enormous amount of papers lie unsorted in a store room¹⁵⁷, a project that could be potentially very interesting for student interns.

Comprising of 93 pieces of antique furniture, 4018 paintings, drawings and etchings and 1699 pieces of Oriental ceramics, the van Tilburg collection was donated in its entirety in 1980 upon the benefactor's death (Duffey, 2007: 8)¹⁵⁸. Among the paintings are many water-colours and oil-paintings by Dutch Impressionists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and reflect the tastes of the Dutch collector, Mr van Tilburg, who immigrated to South Africa in 1951. Considered the largest collection of Oriental ceramics in the southern hemisphere, some of the pieces date back as far as 221 BCE, while the most recent are from the early twentieth century. With such a vast amount of works, the curator of the collection confirms that the museum "has been integrated into the academic programmes of many of the teaching departments, thereby giving added value to many courses at the University".

Similarly, the van Wouw Museum has been described by the curator, Mrs. Joey Ernst (2007: 8)¹⁵⁹, as a valuable

teaching tool for students, especially those studying sculpture and History of Art...the large collection of his work at the University of Pretoria enables the interested student to study all aspects of traditional sculpture such as formal sculptural structure, modelling techniques, casting techniques, finishing of surfaces, patination, and much more.

Van Wouw (1862-1945), considered one of the pioneers of South African sculptors, is well-known for his large-scale sculptures such as the Kruger Monument in Pretoria and the Women's Memorial in Bloemfontein. However, as Ernst asserts, it is "his smaller works that more clearly reflect his skill as a portrayer of the human figure", and museum's holdings are representative of these smaller, figurative works. The largest van Wouw collection in the world, the museum contains 172 sculptures in plaster, bronze,

¹⁵⁷ In which, de Kamper miraculously found the audio-cassette tapes of the art conference held in 1986 – however, the transcripts from the proceedings, are lost.

¹⁵⁸ All references made to the van Tilburg collection are taken from this article.

¹⁵⁹ All references made to the van Wouw Museum are taken from this article.

marble and wood, which are divided into three categories: Boer studies, African studies, and Mining statuettes. The museum, which is the last residence of the artist, was handed over to the university in 1974, following a sizable donation by Dr. Anton Rupert, and opened shortly after. With busts of figures such as Piet Retief and studies of voortrekkers, the collection is imbued with an Afrikaner heritage, which in turn is linked to the location and history of the university itself.

The University of the Western Cape (Bellville)

As with most collections discussed here, the UWC art collection is similarly embedded within the ethos and history of the academic institution itself. Described as “the university of the left” during the 1980s, UWC “played a prominent part in the anti-apartheid struggles of that decade” (King et al, 2001: 22). Thus, in 1987, then Rector of the university, Professor Jakes Gerwel, “set up a committee to investigate the idea of a kind of ‘holocaust museum’ for apartheid” (ibid); the end result was the Mayibuye Centre which was formally opened in 1992. The Centre which set about collecting multi-media material on apartheid and the struggle, as well as initiating conferences and exhibitions on the same topic, was incorporated with the Robben Island Museum (RIM) in 2000. As a result, the name of the Mayibuye Centre was changed to the ‘UWC, Robben Island Museum, Mayibuye Archives’. As the detailed catalogue accompanying the Archives notes, its contents

are vast, comprising more than 100 000 photographs, 10 000 film and video recordings, 5 000 artefacts from the Island and elsewhere, 2 000 oral history tapes, 2 000 posters from the struggle, more than 300 collections of historical documents and an extensive art collection. (ibid: 4)

It is with the latter that this section concerns, and they are in keeping with the spirit of the rest of the Mayibuye Archive. Most of the acquired works were bought between 1992 and 2000, and the Annual Reports of the Mayibuye Centre outline the commissions, acquisitions and donations accumulated during this time. 1992 saw the first acquisitions which included Albie Sachs’ Mozambican art collection (around 95 works), five works

by Sandra Kriel, and a twelve-piece exhibition by the community based Visual Arts Group, while Cecil Skotnes donated a few works (First Annual Report, 1992: 12). During 1994, prolific artist Bill Davis donated over 200 of his works to the Centre, and they purchased fourteen works by Tyrone Appollis, as well as works by Dumeli Feni, Breyton Breytenbach and Settlers Chabalala (Third Annual Report, 1994: 11). Additionally three murals were commissioned around the campus, and three workshops organised for art educators, school pupils and local sculptors.

In 1995, the Centre acquired the Abe Berry Collection, consisting of 10 000 original cartoons and around 100 paintings produced by this political cartoonist; the acquisition was made possible by a generous donation from the Rowland and Leta Hill Trust, since the annual acquisition budget was only R25 000 (Fourth Annual Report, 1995: 12). This year also saw the 'UWC Art Trail' launched on campus – taking in twelve venues, the trail included five murals commissioned by the Centre, Sachs' collection, and a sculpture by David Hlongwane. On a personal visit to UWC (19.7.2007), I encountered all of these artworks, but besides the plaque next to the Hlongwane sculpture, and brief labels accompanying some of the Sachs' paintings, there was no information on the works supplied, nor any reference to an 'art trail' as such (although I am told there was a brochure published for the launch of the trail) [Figure 16].

During 1995, the Centre was also involved with numerous touring exhibitions, which were seen by hundreds of thousands of people (ibid: 13). In 1998, the Centre received a significant collection of works by US artist, Selma Waldman, as well as a collection of drawings and watercolours by Hilda Bernstein, each relating to the struggle for liberation during the apartheid era (Seventh Annual Report, 1998: no pg. no). The 1999 Annual Report records that "a new storage area for art works on the university campus, was allocated to the Mayibuye Centre" (Eighth Annual report, 1999: 14) and, in a second excursion to UWC, I managed to view this storage area. During my visit I spoke with David Hlongwane and Hamilton Budaza, each practicing artists, who have been charged with the task of documenting and sorting the copious amount of artworks in UWC's possession. While Budaza is employed on a full-time basis, Hlongwane only works part-



Figure 16. UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE:

(Top left) A student looks at some of the artworks from the Albie Sachs collection hanging alongside the offices near the library; (Top right) Detail of a mural by Senegalese artist, Malangatana Ngwenya; (Bottom left) A large work by Cecil Skotnes which hangs in the cafeteria; (Bottom right) Detail from a mural by Tyrone Appollis.



time. Housed in a former library (quite isolated from the main section of the campus; I had to drive a fair way to reach this building) which has been converted into a vast storeroom, the artworks were packed into numerous drawers and shelves. Among them were the Bill Davis Collection, numerous linoprints by the CAP artists¹⁶⁰, the Abe Berry Collection, Sandra Kriel, and Hilda Bernstein's work. There were also innumerable posters and banners created during the days of apartheid (both from overseas and South Africa).

One of the very prestigious collections of works stored here is the 'Art Against Apartheid' collection, which was first displayed in Paris in November 1983, and relocated to the Mayibuye Centre in 1994, following the advent of democracy in South Africa. The exhibition, which was initiated by French artist Ernest Pignon-Ernest and Spanish artist Antonio Saura, was a response to the horrors of apartheid, drawing on the creative talent of an impressive list of international artists. A set of eighty original artworks (prints and paintings) by artists such as Christian Boltanski, Sol Le Witt, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, and Richard Hamilton were exhibited, with the promise of giving them "to the people of South Africa" once apartheid had ceased (King et al: 17). While Hlongwane and Budaza revealed that the RIM has recently submitted a proposal for a new building to be erected on UWC's campus which would include an art gallery, until such time, it is likely that most of the works in the UWC collection will remain in storage. Given the wealth and variety of the collection, this is surely lamentable. While the Mayibuye Archive (centrally located) is used by many students, the remote location of the storeroom, and unsuitable conditions of the building itself, means that no students visit this area at all.

The University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg)

With a host of publications and numerous exhibitions based on the permanent collection of Wits (exhibited both at the university and in other locations), this academic institution

¹⁶⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 3/4, the Centre for African Studies at UCT also has a collection of works from CAP (Community Arts Project), which was an art-making centre opened during the apartheid years, and offering printmaking courses to black artists.

has always been a dominant member of the university art world. Thus, even as far back as 1986, Professor Alan Crump's presentation at the aforementioned conference indicated the healthy conditions of the university art galleries and collections; three galleries all air-conditioned and humidified to the appropriate levels, high visitor attendance (both of students and the general public), adequate staffing (four staff members with ten additional student assistants), and varied collections. He concluded his presentation stating, "I believe we have probably one of the finest contemporary South African collections, and I'm talking about it in the context of the major museums, as well, in the country" (15.3.1986).

Like most university art collections, the Wits collections have been shaped and influenced by numerous individuals as well as significantly by one particular corporate entity, the Standard Bank. At the time of the conference there were three collections; as the accompanying inventory noted, these were, "the University Art Galleries South African and African Art Collections (including a number of major works – mostly from Central Africa – on permanent loan from the Ethnological Museum); the Schlesinger South African Art Collection and the Standard Bank Foundation Collection of African Art" (1986: 5). The first "grew out of the small departmental teaching collection initiated in the early 1950s by Professors Heather Martienssen and John Fassler with a small grant from the University Council" (Rankin-Smith and Charlton, 2006: 5), while the Schlesinger collection was donated to the University in 1979. While the former was largely begun as a collection of contemporary South African art, the latter comprised of historical South African works by artists such as Irma Stern and Alexis Preller. However, it was with the relationship, initiated in 1978, with the Standard Bank that the university was able to become the "first gallery in South Africa to collect African art objects, not merely for their ethnographic interest but more importantly for their aesthetic value" (ibid: 11).

This agreement was made after members from the Standard Bank expressed their wish to begin a collection of African art that would be housed at Wits, and jointly owned by the Bank and the University. As Crump (1992: 2) recorded in a later document, the initial

collecting policy was aimed at purchasing works from Central, Western and southern Africa, but after 1985 the focus was more firmly placed on South and southern African art; reasons for this were financial as well as in recognition of “the fact that so much material had been leaving this country and we perceived this as a serious depletion of our national heritage”. A long-serving staff member of Wits, Professor Anitra Nettleton (1992: 4) further noted that:

The Standard Bank Collection was initiated at a time when the History of Art Department of the University of the Witwatersrand was broadening its syllabus to include African art as a major component. From 1978 onwards the African art collection at Wits was used as a major teaching resource for both under-graduate and post-graduate teaching.

Indeed, as aforementioned, Wits was the first South African academic institution to incorporate the study of African art at an undergraduate and postgraduate level, and Crump, in his 1986 presentation noted that (at that point) it remained the only one. As highlighted above there were three gallery spaces at that time, in which students and staff members (and, as confirmed in the inventory, the general public)¹⁶¹ could view and study the artworks: the Gertrude Posel and the Studio Galleries (East Campus), in which the permanent collections and temporary exhibitions were shown, and the Wits Rembrandt Art Centre (West Campus), which was used only for temporary exhibitions. The Gertrude Posel was established in 1972 with funds from its namesake¹⁶², and was originally housed in the basement of the Wartenweiler Library, but relocated to the ground floor of Senate House five years later, “at which stage a generous gift by Norman Herber of funds for the acquisition of artworks enabled the historical and contemporary SA art collections to grow substantially” (Rankin-Smith and Charlton, 2006: 5). In a revealing quote, Crump detailed at the conference that the expansion of the gallery space also was strongly linked to the support of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Tober: “it really does help if someone up in the lofty areas of power decides that the visual arts is important to the university”.

¹⁶¹ Detailed under the “Audience and Visitorship” heading, the document notes that “The University population of some 16 000 students and 4681 staff members are all potential visitors; and schools and other educational institutions use the Galleries regularly. Members of the general public, including tourists, are frequent visitors although exact figures are not available. Important temporary exhibitions have attracted as many as 5000 visitors and normal attendance at exhibition openings is between 150 and 400” (1986: 8).

¹⁶² As a matter of interest, Gertrude Posel was the sister of Helen Suzman.

The remaining galleries, the Rembrandt Art Centre and the Studio Gallery, were opened in 1980 and 1981 respectively. As detailed in the inventory provided for the conference, each of the galleries was “air-conditioned and humidified, and strong emphasis placed on conservation measures including strict control of ultra-violet and light” (1986: 8), which as the conference itself exposed, was in striking opposition to the conditions of most of the other university art collections at that time – with most not even housed in galleries at all. The Studio Gallery was converted into workshop space soon after its initiation, and the remaining spaces became known as the Wits Art Galleries. In recent years, the art collection, with the financial aid of the Standard Bank, has grown to over 7000 objects (Rankin-Smith and Charlton, 2006: 5). Indeed, the current curators, Fiona Rankin-Smith and Julia Charlton (ibid: 12), have revealed that funding from the university has been suspended since 1992, and since then the growth of the collections have relied on donations of which the Std. Bank is the predominant source. At the time of my visit to the university (31.5.2007), former lecturer and renowned artist, Robert Hodgins had just donated one print out of each of his editions, for which he was to receive an honorary doctorate.

Since the construction of a new ‘Welcome Centre’ in the Senate House in late 2002, the collections have been relegated largely to storage, and only a select number of works are on display in glass cabinets in the basement level of the building. This area is still climate-controlled and appropriate lighting is in place. In viewing these works, I was overwhelmed at the vastly different selection to that of UCT; with beadwork, textiles, traditional dresses and adornments, tools, masks, staffs, drums, stools and carvings, the collection is notably selective in its acquisition choices. This is largely dictated by the Standard Bank itself; the contract agreement¹⁶³ clearly stipulates that only five percent of the funds derived from the Bank are to be used to purchase ‘non-traditional works’. The constitution of the acquisition committee includes staff members from Art History, Fine Art, Anthropology and a few other departments, in addition to the Gallery curators, and

¹⁶³ Ms. Charlton made a copy of the most updated version of this agreement available to me; it is dated 26 February 2004.

representatives of the Bank, and they meet monthly. While my visit coincided with the scheduled meeting for May, I was unfortunately not permitted to attend; undoubtedly it would have been a very interesting opportunity to compare the proceedings to those held by the WOAC. However, I was able to see some of the acquisitions from the meeting, as well as some pieces that were rejected (based on authenticity, relevance to the collections, etc.).

Despite the curtailment of display space for the collection, the curators (who work in this space) assured me that the educational element is not affected in any way, and Fine Art and Art History, as well as Anthropology, staff and students study and use the objects on a continual basis. In a recent document they confirm, the artworks

in the collections are constantly used for teaching in the Wits School of Art art history, fine arts and visual literacy programmes, particularly in the areas of African and South African art historical studies; contemporary art and visual theory; interdisciplinary landscape studies; colonial and post-colonial studies; the study of portraiture; the study of gender and representation; theory of public art, craft and heritage... Practical fields of training include museum practices and procedures, such as preservation and conservation techniques, appropriate storage methods, documentation and database processes and classification systems. (Rankin-Smith and Charlton, 2006: 19)

Furthermore, it must be understood that the current situation is temporary; the Wits Art Galleries are currently seeking funding for a new gallery complex that will be situated “on the corner of Jan Smuts Avenue and Jorissen Street at the Braamfontein boundary between the campus and the city” (ibid: 24). This building will house four gallery spaces as well as extensive teaching facilities and rooms in which to hold workshops and special functions. With an envisioned budget of R50 million, this will definitely be the tour de force of South African university art galleries, reminiscent of those seen overseas (particularly in America, a country seemingly bursting with philanthropists). In the interim, there are ongoing exhibitions based on the permanent collection, housed at other venues. This has been ongoing since 1990; as an old catalogue confirms, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the Standard Bank Gallery (in the centre of Johannesburg), and touring exhibitions such as the Std. Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown

have long been regular places of display (Crump, 1992: 2). As such, objects from the Wits art collection have formed the basis for a extensive score of exhibitions over the years¹⁶⁴ which have usually been accompanied by lavishly illustrated and insightfully written catalogues (no doubt aided by the relationship with Standard Bank)¹⁶⁵. It seems that with a tightly integrated educational component, a rigorous exhibitions programme, numerous publications and a specialist collection, barring the current lack of an actual physical space of a gallery, Wits is a model to be admired.

The University of the Free State (Bloemfontein)

The Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery at the UFS is unusual in that it is one of the few places in which to view contemporary art in Bloemfontein. As such, the current curator, Mr. Arie Kuijers, has described the gallery as being “part of the social fabric of Bloemfontein”, and asserts that many members of the public do visit this gallery space (telephone interview¹⁶⁶, 24.8.2007). Indeed, prior to the establishment of the Oliewenhuis Art Museum in 1989, the principal art collection open to the public aside from the Stegmann was the small municipal collection housed in the A.C. White gallery in town. While the university art collection was initiated the 1930s, it was only in the 1970s that this was properly pursued, particularly due to the advent of courses in fine art and art history around this time. The first gallery, which opened in 1983 was situated in the C.R. Swart Building (Law Faculty) and here works from the permanent collection were exhibited. However, with the relocation of the gallery to the UFS-Sasol Library building in 1987, it was transformed into a space which held temporary exhibitions based on student works and touring shows (among them the Std. Bank Young Artists’ Award show, and the ABSA L’ATELIER regional exhibition). This new gallery was named after the Managing Director of Sasol, and then Chancellor of the university, Dr. Johannes Stegmann (Becker and Keene: 42). It was only in 2004, with the construction of a ‘Centenary Complex’ that a new gallery space was built to house works from the

¹⁶⁴ See Rankin-Smith, F. 1992. *The Standard Bank Collection of African Art on Permanent Display – University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries (Opening October 1992)* pp.15-20, and Rankin-Smith, F. and Charlton, J. 2006. *Wits Art Galleries*, pp.15-16 for an extensive listing of exhibitions.

¹⁶⁵ And it must be noted that the curators did indicate that the Bank would, in all likelihood, fund any shortfall they may have in their fundraising drive.

¹⁶⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all information in this section on UFS is drawn from this telephone interview.

permanent collection, which currently comprises of 800 works. Thus, as Mr. Kuijers related, he is currently visiting departments throughout the university, in order to retrieve many art works that were placed in people's offices during the interim period.

The permanent collection is somewhat similar to that of the Stellenbosch university, in its focus on old South African masters such as Anton van Wouw, J.H. Pierneef, Maggie Laubser, Gregoire Boonzaier, Walter Battiss, and the like. Apparently there is around R30 – 40 000 each year to spend on artworks (which Kuijers does in consultation with the university's 'Aesthetics Committee'), and a recent feature article (written by Kuijers) in the *South African Art Times*, notes that recent acquisitions include works by Richard Smith, Pauline Gutter, Markus Steinmann, Clare Menck, Diane Victor and Jaco Spies (Kuijers, 2007: 8). Included in the feature was a selection of images displaying the Stegmann Gallery and the new Centenary Complex space, as well as numerous murals and sculptures that have been commissioned throughout the campus. Among the latter are a very colourful circular painting, *Quest* by Judith Mason, a shimmering mosaic mural by Eben van der Merwe, and an abstract steel sculpture by Edoardo Villa. These images offer an insight into the varied and vivid works dotted throughout the campus, as well as the sophisticated and white-cube like space of the new art gallery. Furthermore, they are the *only* available pictures related to the collection that I was able to locate – since there is no website dedicated to the galleries or the UFS collection.

However, this lack of a technological profile is not unusual; while some university art collections have no website at all (e.g. UCT, UFS), others are so extremely outdated that they are virtually irrelevant (e.g. Wits, US), and others so cryptically hidden among the university's general web-pages they are almost impossible to find (e.g. UFH, UP). Admittedly, some do offer photographic images of works in the collection (e.g. UFH, UNISA, US), but overall the situation fairly dismal. Thus, it is recommended that this be attended to in the near future, a step which could potentially have far-reaching benefits. As well as offering online learning opportunities for the public at large, these websites could form the basis of interuniversity learning and courses. Students unable to travel could be exposed to other university's collections, which vary so much depending on the

institution. Furthermore, since these collections often strongly reflect the particular history of the universities, there would be an opportunity to extend the focus to a more social and historical study, and thus could be of interest to those not only registered in Art History or Fine Art. Indeed, there are countless possibilities offered, just by upgrading (or establishing, depending on the institution) the websites of these collections.

Additionally, with such vast and varied collections, and a focus on education, it should be a priority of universities to concentrate on outreach programmes – bringing works of the collections out to disadvantaged communities and schools, or as in UNISA’s case – transporting them to the exhibitions themselves. One excellent example from which ideas could be drawn is the MTN Art Collection. Here, this corporate sponsor of the arts decided that it should be “a key player in the art world rather than simply a donor” (Kellner, 2006: 43), and thus formed the MTN Art Institute in January 1999¹⁶⁷. This Institute offered a wide range of educational opportunities: from taking works from the Collection out on a weekly basis in the ‘ArtBus’, into classrooms, accompanied by educators and artists, who gave practical workshops and led discussions relevant to the works to publishing art-teaching resources for school teachers and students. Workshops and training for educators were offered, as well as annual school art awards, artist-in-residence opportunities, and a Young Curators Programme aimed at senior secondary school youth (ibid). The MTN Collection is similar to art placed in universities in that the works are housed in a specific environment in which a select group of people view it on a daily basis. However, those overseeing the MTN Collection realised that it would be even more beneficial if other members of society were brought into contact with these works, and that a far-reaching educational programme attached to the collection be an integral feature of the collection itself.

¹⁶⁷ According to Kellner, the Art Institute was absorbed into the newly launched MTN Foundation in 2002, which consolidated all of MTN’s social responsibility projects under one banner.

Conclusion

As this final chapter has demonstrated, the university art collections held throughout South Africa are vastly varied and rich. Each is reflective of the particular location in which they are found, and the social history of the academic institution to which they are attached. While a collection such as that owned by the UFH represents a select theme – that of the effects of, and response to, apartheid – another, such as the US has a more varied selection of subject matter and styles, given the different manner in which the works were acquired. As seen in all examples, the role of certain individuals can dictate the path a university art collection can travel – particularly when there is a lack of university funding. Recent years have seen some collections being significantly sponsored by corporations, usually in terms of the buildings created to house the works (e.g. UFH, US, UFS) and, sometimes even the contents itself (e.g. Wits). Like so many art institutions, university art museums or galleries are not unsusceptible to the pressures of financial restraints, and it seems that in contrast to institutions like the SANG, South African universities may in fact be more attractive to potential donors for the reasons of the audience that they hold within their grasp.

However, as I have argued, more should be done to extend the learning possibilities of these collections – particularly in light of the financial restrictions placed on the SANG. Universities in South African have found themselves in a unique position in which to empower and educate those who may not otherwise have access to artworks, and this should be actively pursued. It seems that university art galleries and museums in general have suffered quite a negative reputation in terms of social responsibility; as David Fleming (2002: 221) states “The university museum sector has not been noted for its commitment to broadening access”, while Nancy Einreinhofer (1997: 112) asserts, they usually only “exist for the cultural enrichment for their students and as a teaching resource for the faculty...They provide a place for scholarship but have little need to appeal to a broad population.” While UCT has not even begun to concertedly integrate their collection within the educational programme of the university, they and their peers need to also consider the constructive role they may play in the rest of the country.

Conclusion:

Reflections on the Study

This dissertation has aimed to do a number of things. The first two chapters discussed the different environments in which art is usually placed: national or other art galleries, and more public sites such as parks, sporting grounds, and thoroughfares, in which people encounter state- or federal-commissioned public art. With regards to these various sites, it was argued that, always, context is paramount to the interpretation and relationship between viewer and artwork. While the former spaces have often been charged with elitism or inaccessibility, the recent development of public art can be seen as a concerted attempt to democratise the display of art – bringing it out of the austere gallery space or modernist white cube, and thereby breaking down the barrier long upheld between ‘art’ and ‘life’. A pivotal component of this democratisation has been the process through which public art projects have typically been administered. Rather than the enclosed circle of privileged individuals (whether through wealth, education, or corporate power) usually responsible for the acquisition and display of artworks, the groups typically involved in overseeing public art projects are composed of a more diverse mix of professionals and community representatives of the space in which the art work will be placed.

Furthermore, there is greater transparency within the operation of these latter groups – with public debates and forums (offering members of the community to voice their opinions)¹⁶⁸, websites devoted to the specific projects (some with meeting minutes available), and complete disclosure of all elements involved in these ventures – from the make-up of committees to the costing of items. As evidenced by Wu’s study (Chapter 1), this is not usually the manner in which many art galleries operate, with a far more covert approach to acquisition or exhibition decisions, and gallery-board members generally

¹⁶⁸ See “On Again, Off Again: Campus-Community Relations” in *Public Art Review* Issue 34, pp.20-22. This article describes the interaction between members of the University of Massachusetts (Boston Campus) and the neighbouring community (with debates, written communication, etc.). This is just one example; a basic search on the internet reveals the very public and communicative nature of the public art processes globally.

recruited for their corporate connections or philanthropic leanings. My focus on these two examples served to highlight a number of issues in preparation for the subsequent discussion on the case study of UCT: the various ways in which the acquisition of artworks are undertaken, and the role of education in the display of the works. These are two fundamental concerns when considering the placement of art in a university setting. As a (semi)public space in which a large group of diverse people interact on a daily basis, with their primary interest being the pursuit of knowledge, one would assume that art situated within a university would fulfil an educational role, and that public participation and interaction would be high on the agenda. Indeed, through a cursory survey on the Internet of university art collections worldwide, and through my own investigations into various South African universities, it would appear that this is largely the case. However, my study of the UCT art collection and the committee that oversees it, the WOAC, revealed that this university did not always fulfil its potential in these areas.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the beginnings of the UCT art collection lay in several donations made by certain individuals whose taste and background reflected the Eurocentric nature of South African society at the time. Until the 1950s most of the UCT staff members themselves were recruited from overseas (predominantly from the UK), a practice echoed at most English-medium universities in South Africa (Welsh, 1979: 26). In turn, the student population was made up from a very select group of society; in 1974 only 16.7 percent of the country's population was white, but they made up 85.5 percent of the university enrolments in South Africa (Whisson, 1979: 16). In 1978, the year in which the WOAC held its first meeting, the white students of UCT made up 91 percent of the student population (Harrison, 1979: 170). Similarly, the WOAC members reflected the demographic make-up of the university, and it continued to be dominated by a white male constituency until the early twenty-first century, when the number of white female members surpassed their male colleagues. As this study has revealed, this is just one of the ways in which the committee has remained fairly stagnant over the years; in comparison to the rapidly transforming university (and country) in which it is situated, the WOAC has been generally characterised by a distinct lack of change and initiative.

While the earlier operation of the committee largely entailed the cataloguing (aided by the Keasts) and consolidation of the collection, the latter years saw the initiation of the one percent policy. Unique to a South African university, but reminiscent of public art policies worldwide, this enabled UCT to become potentially a very significant supporter of the arts, both in terms of acquisitions and education. As has been continually noted, this is particularly noteworthy in light of the dire financial situation faced by institutions such as the SANG, with the budget for UCT's Graca Machel project alone over three times the amount of the annual acquisition budget of this national body. Furthermore, given the more representative UCT student constituency in current years, the healthy funding for its art collection means that potentially this space could be used as one in which those that typically do not visit art galleries¹⁶⁹ could be offered an opportunity to encounter and enjoy works of art. However, as discussed in the latter part of the dissertation, there has never been an educational programme or even an adequate policy of labelling for the artworks at UCT. As evidenced by Chapter 6, this is rather anomalous in relation to most other South African university art collections, which typically have an integrated educational component to their displays.

As argued throughout this thesis, the lack of an educational aspect to the collection seems to be indicative of the general problems inherent within the operation of the WOAC. While the one percent policy and public display of many of the artworks throughout the UCT campus reveals a distinct connection to the principles governing many public art projects, the processes by which works of art are acquired and displayed are dissimilar to those of public art projects worldwide. Through the investigation of the recent years of the WOAC's endeavours (Chapters 4 and 5), many of these faults were revealed. The case study of the Graca Machel residence (Chapter 5 and Appendix 1) exposed a prime example of the malfunctioning of this committee, a result of numerous factors. Among these factors were the lack of an acquisition policy, or any guidelines for such a project (which was detrimental for both the people charged with overseeing the project, and the artists who were sought out – unpractised in the process of public art); a lack of a full-time curator to properly oversee this process (in conjunction with a committee made up

¹⁶⁹ As evidenced by Yuuki's statistics in Chapter 1 (see pg. 23 of this dissertation).

of architects, students, and other university representatives); and, virtually no interaction with the larger university community in terms of public forums or debates as to what should be installed into the site. While the seminar given to the Chemical Engineers (Chapter 5 and Appendix 2) indicated the potential interest and meaning students could find within UCT's art collection, this potential has so far not been realised, given the lack of interaction and information accompanying the artworks. Thus, within Chapter 5 numerous suggestions were given for the future running of this collection.

Ultimately, while the wealth and access to a diverse audience available to UCT stand the university in very good stead, a main argument of this thesis has been that the WOAC will have to transform itself, and the purpose of its art collection, in order to realise fully the potential of this resource. Moreover, it is an overarching recommendation of this study that there be more integration between the art collections of the various universities, as well as between these collections and the world outside the campuses. As my own research revealed, the array and wealth of these collections is overwhelming, and as yet, an undervalued or utilised resource. While each university experiences their own successes and failures with regards to their own art collections, certainly the benefits of engaging with academic peers at other universities could be far-reaching and immensely instructive. Thus, despite the lack of support offered from governmental sources, or an entrenched philanthropic culture, as seen in their European or American counterparts, South African university art collections, with their diverse contents and access to a more representative audience, could be significant contributors to the appreciation of, and education in, the visual arts within this country.

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APPENDIX 1

University of Cape Town

A detailed account of the internship with the WOAC¹

The following is an account of a fifteen-month long internship I have undertaken with the Works of Art Committee (WOAC) at the University of Cape Town. This body oversees the acquisition and installation of artworks throughout the campus and derives most of its income from a policy which states that all new buildings at UCT must allocate one percent of its budget for works of art. Whilst observing the general activities of this committee, I was actively involved with the project of the Graca Machel residence, assisting the subcommittee with numerous tasks throughout the process.

Graca Machel Women's Residence

My internship started in early February 2006 with a meeting with Noëleen Murray, a long-serving member of the WOAC, who briefed me on the upcoming project of the Graca Machel women's residence. Evidently, discussions had taken place in late 2005 between the architects, **KrugerRoos**, and the WOAC in which the architects had stated that they would welcome integrating art with the architecture of the building. With her background as an architect, Noëleen was always thought to play a pivotal role in the collaborative process between **KrugerRoos** and the WOAC, and therefore was nominated as 'project leader'. Others within the sub-committee working on this project included Michael Godby (Art History), Christopher Peter (curator), Raj Ramesar (Human Genetics) and my newly initiated self. It is worth noting, however, that Prof. Ramesar was unable to meet at any time during this process, and barring some initial correspondence with Noëleen, was absent for the entire duration of this project. Prof. Godby resigned from the sub-committee mid-year, and from the WOAC altogether in early 2007.

Accommodating four hundred female students, this residence has been named after the iconic figure, and Vice Chancellor of the University, Graca Machel. From the outset, the

¹ Please note, this essay formed part of a larger piece of assessment already submitted to the Centre for African Studies (CAS4011F: Public Culture Internship). It was the 'journal' element of the assessment, and as such is fairly conversational. It is meant to be referred to in order to gain further clarification and detail of the internship I undertook during February 2006-April 2007.

architects were very influential in the ideas that were formed around creating art interventions within the spaces. In fact, during a meeting held on 28th February with key architects Martin and Phillipe, Noëleen and I were presented with numerous ideas which have more or less been retained throughout the whole process. The architects presented the plans for the building, with different areas demarcated where they thought art could play a significant role, and where it could be literally embedded within the structure of the building itself. As such, they were the first to suggest the idea of a ‘poetry walk’ which would incorporate the façade of the building leading up to the main entrance – three five metre walls, spaced some metres apart, that ascended up towards the mountain and the University itself. They also suggested utilising the main courtyard for a striking work – a large sculpture, or fountain, or possibly even inscribing into the cement paving itself. Other areas which could be thought around were the dining room doors, niches within the dining room itself, and the student common rooms.

Following this meeting, Noëleen and I had numerous discussions regarding these suggestions, and after a meeting with Michael Godby during mid-March in which we talked about the possibilities of specific artists becoming involved, we drew up a formal proposal to present at the upcoming WOAC meeting. This was both a thrilling and daunting opportunity, particularly since there were no guidelines on how to write up such a document. Considering the magnitude of the project – with regards to budget and the thousands of future inhabitants of the building – it was an intimidating responsibility; to be in the position of composing something that would hope to be lasting and relevant in the years to come.

WOAC meeting no. 1: 29th March 2006

The meeting, held on the 29th March, was my first introduction to the formal committee itself, and it was to be quite an experience. Atypically, most of the members were present; Hans Porer arrived somewhat unexpectedly; there was a ‘fresh batch’ of his latest acquisitions/donations (this is somewhat complicated – since the works he gives to the university are on ‘permanent loan’) on display in the dining room; there were a

number of works for consideration (i.e. for sale – which meant transforming the nature of the meeting into an auction-house atmosphere); and the first serious discussion of the Graca Machel was held. As my minutes confirm, with the one percent guideline in place, the amount of R670 000 had been allocated for this project – which is more than triple the annual acquisition budget at the South African National Gallery!

The committee accepted our proposal, and allocated tentative budgets for each area. They strongly urged us to seek out emerging black artists for commissioned works, particularly the dining room doors and the poetry walk. Thus, our list of suggested artists would need to be revised, and we would need to actively seek out such practitioners. Not long after this, at Michael Godby's suggestion, we visited the artist Willie Bester at his home in Kuilsriver. We were going with the aim of viewing works by Theodore Combrink, an artist who had collaborated with Bester in the past, and who had recently done some glass work in Bester's own house. Our thought was to potentially commission him (and possibly Bester) to do glass work in the dining room doors.

Meetings with artists: Willie Bester and Cecil Skotnes:



The trip to Bester's home was unforgettable; the artist has turned his own house into a living work of art. Set in a dull, suburban area his house is an explosion of colour and vibrancy that immediately catches one's eye, and inspires imagination. As with most of his artworks, Bester has used old material – scrap metal, found objects, and paraphernalia – and transformed them into visually exciting, functional creations. As such, his sliding gate for the driveway was made out of objects

including an old bicycle, garden tools, and cooking utensils, each spray-painted into an arresting electric blue. A tall windmill twirled in the breeze; made of glass and recycled soft-drink cans, it shimmered brightly, reflecting the afternoon sun. Once inside, the house revealed even more visual delights – too many to describe, but each bursting with colour, originality and startling ingenuity. Every surface was



used to the fullest, either incorporating built or found objects – a painted car even hung from the ceiling, filled with individually made characters, while a sun room glinted with coke bottles and various objects built into the glass itself. The latter was Combrink's handiwork – he had taken the idea of stained glass windows to a remarkable extreme, using found objects and bright colours to create a vibrant and unusual visual effect. This is particularly due to the fact that Combrink incorporates three-dimensional objects into the glass, which provides a most inviting texture and life into an art-form that it usually seen as being staid and solemn. After talking with Willie, we were excited about the possibility of commissioning Combrink and Bester to create some beautiful doors leading into the student's dining room.



However, a number of weeks later, after some more consideration and correspondence with other committee members (who revealed that Combrink had proved to be a fairly difficult artist to work with and elusive on previous projects, as well as the thought that the WOAC has already supported Bester enough with works such as Sara Baartman), it was decided to pursue Cecil Skotnes for the project of the doors. As such, Noëleen and I had the pleasure of having tea with Cecil and Thelma Skotnes in their airy house in Gardens one afternoon in late April. Once again, this was an exhilarating moment; sitting and sipping tea with one of South Africa's most revered artists, discussing the possibility of him working on the project that we were co-ordinating. Skotnes seemed very enthused about the project, and was most honoured to be involved. However, with an upcoming retrospective show scheduled for June in Johannesburg, he would only be able to work on a proposal in a few months time. Thus, we left Skotnes the architectural plans and images of models of the building, and expected a proposal to be submitted in early July.

In early June Noëleen, Christopher, and I met with Phillippe to discuss the latest progress of the project. We informed Phillippe that Skotnes had agreed to submit a proposal for the doors, and we requested that **KrugerRoos** meet with the artist and the subcommittee once this had come in to ensure the logistics of the work could be carried out. Christopher also noted that a work by Deborah Poynton had been generously offered by Hans Porer for the building, and it was decided that the dining room might be an exciting site in which to place it. At six metres wide and two metres high, it would need a great deal of



Forever and Ever Deborah Poynton

space and we discussed building a wall in front of the kitchen on which to hang the work. The image, *Forever and Ever* is typical of Poynton's style: large scale, executed hyper-realistically in vivid colours, depicting innumerable bodies writhing and dancing in a somewhat otherworldly scene. Reminiscent of a nightclub or rave party, it seemed appropriate to place the work in a popular student venue. However, I did wonder how this work would interact with a Skotnes door; the subject matter, style and media of these artists are very different, and there was a distinct possibility that the two might clash. However, the other members of the subcommittee felt that both artists were very important in their own right, and neither opportunity should be missed.

Shortly after this, Noëleen and I met with Dr. Sam Raditlhalo, a senior lecturer in the English department at UCT, whom we thought could head up the poetry walk project. He was very interested in working on the project, and agreed to draw up a proposal by the end of July; he had a couple of poets in mind, one of whom was Lebogang Mashile, a 'spoken word' poet who has recently been thrust into the public realm with her television show *L'attitude* and her popularly received book of poetry, *The Rhythm of Ribbon* (2005). Due to her style of poetry, Sam, Noëleen and I thought that there could be a possibility of incorporating a graffiti element into the artwork which could have a certain resonance due to the placement of the work in a student residence. Another poet he thought might be appropriate was Marcia Tladi, and upcoming young poet and novelist, who had worked with Lebo in the past. Thus, when the next scheduled WOAC meeting for the year took place, there was a lot to report back on; since Noëleen was unable to attend, I had the intimidating responsibility of doing this.

WOAC meeting no. 2: 22nd June 2006

There were noticeably less people in attendance on this occasion, particularly those with any formal art background. Nevertheless, those who were present expressed great enthusiasm at the prospect of Skotnes contributing to the building; they looked forward to Dr. Raditlhalo's proposal for the poetry walk, particularly since it offered the opportunity to commission young black poets and artists; and they asked that I start collating a

database on emerging black visual art practitioners. Christopher reported that the architects had agreed to create a cabinet to house a number of artworks the WOAC had bought at the Michaelis Graduate Exhibition the year before, as well as erecting a wall in the dining room for the purpose of hanging the Poynton work. The general consensus of the WOAC was that of relief when it was confirmed that *Forever and Ever* had been offered by Mr. Porer, as opposed to the work (originally thought to be offered), *Safety and Security* which they felt was too sombre and fell into the sexist trap of objectifying women which I thought was an questionable interpretation, but at the same time wasn't convinced that it would work in such a space. I did agree that the chosen work would probably be better suited. Christopher also noted that Mr. Porer had a number of other works on offer, and some could well be placed in the Graca Machel building. He promised to provide a list of what was available. Those for the residence would largely be placed in the communal areas of the students ('clusters') of which we had identified nine spaces (later we realised this was actually 27). The committee was also mindful of the



Deborah Poynton *Safety and Security*

other spaces we had suggested for artworks/interventions (the courtyard and the niches in the dining room), but was happy on our progress for the building at this point.

Problems... and the poetry walk

As the university semester had come to an end, there was a predictable lull in the planning and activities of the sub-committee for the next couple of months. Given the pace of term time, student vacations are a welcome respite for overworked staff members

(both academics and administrators). As such, it was early August before Noëleen and I reconvened on the Graca Machel project. The first item on the agenda was to contact Cecil Skotnes to enquire about the pending proposal. Unfortunately, this request was met with some bad news; due to fairly bad health (and at the age of 80), Skotnes was sadly withdrawing from the project, although he was willing to collaborate on a smaller scale for another part of the building, should the opportunity arise. We decided to bring this information to the next WOAC meeting, and be guided by their comments (while we did email Hugh to let him know), and turned our focus now more intently on the Poetry Walk.

We met with Sam, and conceptualised the project further; gender (being a women's residence), notions of identity and empowerment were felt to be strong issues that should come through in the poetry and artwork. The figure of Graca Machel could also be a strong consideration in the creative process. Sam reported that he had approached Lebo and Marcia, both of whom were extremely excited about the opportunity to work on such a venture. They had suggested Gabi Ngcobo, a prolific artist and curator based in Cape Town, with which to collaborate. Through a series of emails, and phone calls, it became obvious that a face-to-face meeting or series of meetings with the subcommittee (as well as a site visit) would be necessary in order for this project to move forward. However, before this could happen, the WOAC would have to formally accept our proposed practitioners; this was our most pressing item on the agenda going into the meeting in mid September.

A couple of weeks prior to this, Sam, Noëleen, Christopher and I met with the architects to discuss the logistics of the Poetry Walk; what would be possible, in terms of lighting, materials, time frame, etc. The architects seemed quite flexible, willing to help, and excited about the choice of poets. They did suggest that the committee may want to think about playing with language (that the poems might be translated into some, or all, of the eleven official languages of South Africa) and advised us that colour might too be an element to think about, since the building would be employing a very neutral pallet, and the walls could become a very striking visual feature. They are also the most 'public'

areas of the building – seen from the outside by students who are not residents, and other members of the public who may be walking by (there are to be a series of shops and ATMs opposite), and thus verging onto a very distinct category of art that has been rising over the last few decades – public art.

During a subsequent meeting, in realising the number of collaborators in this project and its scope, the subcommittee began to question the amount of money this specific site was allocated (R150 000 was the figure proposed in the March meeting). It seemed more suitable now, to assign the larger figure (R250 000) to this project, rather than the dining room doors, as originally thought. Thus, we thought to raise this at the next WOAC meeting.

WOAC meeting no. 3: 18th September 2006

This meeting served to formally introduce the committee to Dr. Raditlhalo, as well as the Poetry Walk project itself. Noëleen and Sam reported on the past months' activities; meeting with the architects, corresponding with the poets, brainstorming amongst ourselves. Sam outlined the work of the nominated poets, giving examples of their prose for committee members to peruse, in addition to brief biographies. He indicated that should the WOAC choose to accept the proposed practitioners, an intensive workshop would need to be arranged soon, so that they could meet with the architects and the subcommittee, as well as to view the site in person. After some discussion, the WOAC chose to accept the subcommittee's suggestions, and agreed to accommodate the costs for a two-day workshop to be held later in the year. We also reported on Skotnes' withdrawal from the dining room doors commission, and the WOAC discussed other artists who might be approached; Helen Sebidi was one artist in particular that the committee was very enthused about. A grand female figure in the history of South African art, it would be a great achievement to include her in this prestigious project that will hopefully relate to issues on being a woman in South Africa (a recurring theme in her oeuvre). Therefore, they requested that the subcommittee pursue the possibility of commissioning her to create a design for the doors, or even a work for the courtyard area (whether it be a free-

standing sculpture or a mosaic that gets worked into the floor surface). The niches within the dining room were also discussed, and it was decided that there should be three glass cases installed here where permanent or temporary works be housed. One work that was suggested was an Eris Silke painting, which had been purchased at a prior meeting (for R50 000).

With the consent of the WOAC, the subcommittee began to plan for the upcoming workshop. Due to the busy schedules of all the participants (between work commitments, university deadlines, and Lebo's hectic shooting schedule) the dates that were eventually set were the 17th-19th November. In my capacity as an intern I found myself responsible for all the administrative

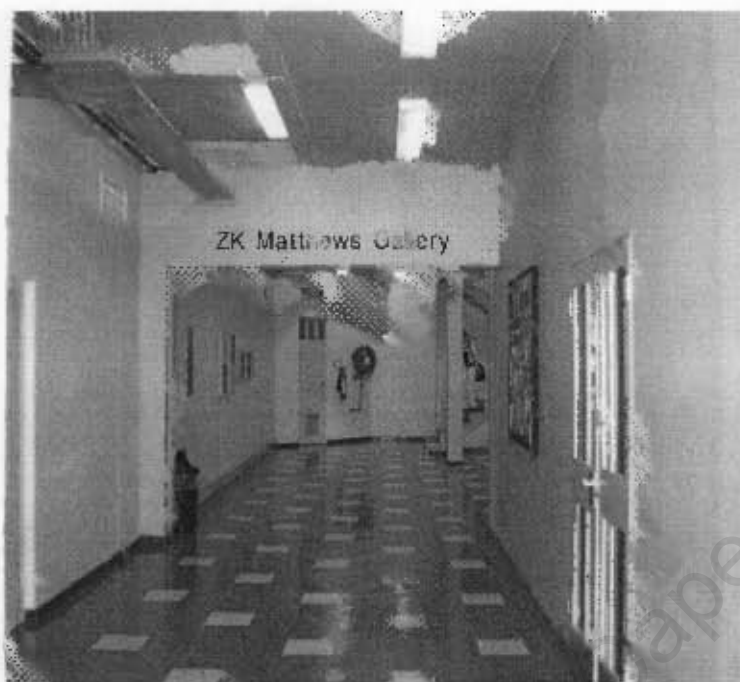


In the end women handle it Helen Sebidi

logistics of arranging their flights, accommodation, etc. which, due to my experience being an administrator at UCT, was a relatively smooth process. Noëleen and I also worked on co-ordinating the actual program of the workshop, which included a presentation on the project itself, meeting the architects, going on a site visit, conceptualising the project in detail through brainstorming, etc. Largely, it was an opportunity for the poets to view the site, and to ask any questions they may have, whether they were material or conceptual. It was around this time that Noëleen and I had our first visit to the building site of Graca Machel – which was still at a fairly rudimentary stage, but where we could begin to see the various spaces being carved out.

Seminar for Chemical Engineers

Concurrently, I was preparing myself for the seminar I was about to present at the Chemical Engineering Department, which took place on the 3rd November 2006. In the lead-up to the seminar, I visited the two Chemical Engineering buildings and viewed the



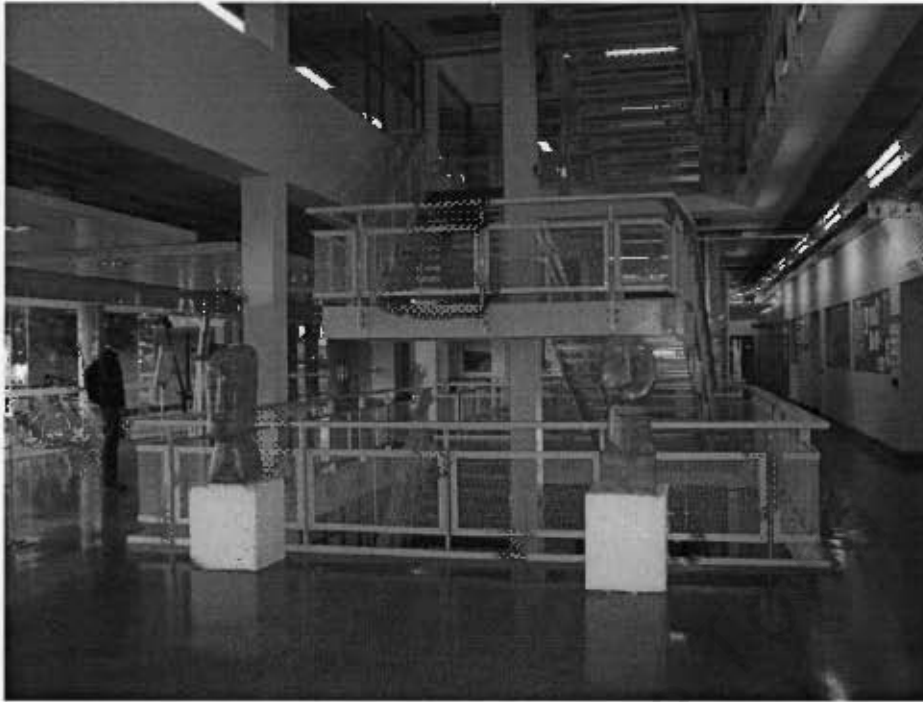
Old Chemical Engineering Building

artworks within each. Between the two buildings there are about thirty works from Mr. Porer's collection on display, largely paintings and sculptures, all by contemporary South African artists. Boasting big names such as Willie Bester, Helen Sebidi, Stephen Cohen and David Brown, as well as emerging artists such as Bongzi Bengu, Jeanette Unite, and Christopher Slack, it is a substantial collection of work that indicates an eclectic eye (and a healthy budget). The setting of each of these bodies of works is reminiscent of modern art galleries, particularly the old Chemical Engineering building, which is a stark, sparse building, with a large, open foyer and good lighting. The artworks are spaced apart in such a way that one can contemplate each work on its own, accompanied by an explanatory text often with biographical notes on the artist. The new building is a highly modernist building, characterised by glass and steel, vast open spaces and shiny foyers, where works are afforded ample space in which to be observed, as well as explanatory labels, and good lighting. Both buildings have an element of space and openness uncommon to UCT – with high ceilings and good lighting, they are a far cry from the low-ceilinged, 70s-style laminated floor, dark-corridorred structures that are characteristic of this institution. As I meandered through the different spaces, I began to think about how the

WOAC actually operates on campus, and with what successes and failures. While the students of UCT are undoubtedly privileged to have access to such an impressive collection of contemporary art (not equalled in any other public collection in the Western Cape at least), it feels as if they are invisible to most people that come into contact with them. During numerous visits to the Chancellor Oppenheimer Library (where more Porer works are placed) as well as to the old Chemical Engineering building, I noted that barely anyone seemed to acknowledge the works at all. However, the new Chemical Engineering building revealed a worse state of affairs.

It seemed, through email correspondence, and informal chats to various staff members within this department, numerous people seemed let down by the practices of the WOAC, or oblivious to its existence at all. They seem bewildered as to why art was in the space of the university at all, particularly in a department devoted to science. My conclusion was that the lack of follow-through of the WOAC (no seminars, tours, catalogues, information on the artists until at least a year later through the insertion of detailed labels, etc.) was the most significant reason for the puzzlement felt by these people, a feeling which had for many, subsequently progressed to resentment. On a deeper level, it seemed that the notion that art should be/is separate to life is prevalent here, and this is a view that has long been debated within art history circles.

New Chemical Engineering Building



The workshop

The workshop brought together poets Lebo Mashile and Marcia Tladi, as well as visual artist Gabi Ngcobo, who over the course of two days met with the architects, Sam, Noëleen, and I. Due to work commitments I was unable to attend the first day, which included a site visit, a meeting with the architects, and a presentation by Noëleen. Gabi was also not present for the day's activities; however she attended a dinner that evening with the poets, Noëleen, Sam and academic Assoc. Prof. Harry Garuba (a well respected Nigerian poet himself). The following morning the three practitioners, Sam, Noëleen, Mary van Blommestein (assistant curator at the Irma Stern Museum), and I met at the Irma Stern Museum to further discuss ideas and talk concretely about the project. The three also visited the site again (this was the first time Gabi had seen the building). In her capacity as an architect, Noëleen was able to advise the group on materials that could be used, and suggested numerous media including metal, paint, mosaic, glass, and Perspex, as well as inventive methods they could employ including inscribing words into plaster,

utilising lighting and sound (which could have a sensor element) and possibly incorporating these into the floor as well as the wall surfaces.

Following on from this, the group brainstormed some creative ideas regarding the display of the poetry. Letters could be carved into the walls, or cut out from metal and attached to the wall (thus more three-dimensional); the physical text could be playful – letters falling off the wall, the font getting bigger and smaller, inviting people to come closer; alternatively, the text could be symbolic of more sombre issues – jarring, disfigured letters, some backwards and illegible (indicating learning problems and feeling lost in such a large, and at times, daunting institution); the actual language of the text could be varied – incorporating those of the African continent such as French or Portuguese, or just of those from South Africa, with its eleven national languages. An idea the poets had was rather than translating texts into different languages (i.e. repeating the same words into a different language), the text could just flow from one language into another. We also spoke about the opportunity that the project offered in terms of student participation. One option was a blog whereby students and the poets could correspond about ideas for text, as well as the possibility of students actually writing poetry themselves, which could go up – either on the outside walls, or within some other space of the residence (one of the dining room niches was a possibility suggested). Another option was utilising the space as a permanent site for performance, for which students could submit ideas and proposals; furthermore these opportunities (and more) could find a way to become integrated within student curriculum (i.e. assessment and teaching related to the artworks at UCT, of which Graca Machel is a large project).

Ultimately, as our discussions proved, there were numerous possibilities available; the only prerequisite being that the work must be robust and durable (considering weather and security), and should aim for not requiring too much maintenance in the long-term (a problem faced by the WOAC). Noëleen did however emphasise the tight budget (up to R200 000 which would include artists' fees, labour and materials for the walls) and an even tighter time frame within which the artists would have to work. The three indicated that they had already discussed holding a meeting in late December in Johannesburg to

workshop ideas and come up with a firm proposal for the WOAC. We welcomed this information, and they confirmed that they would submit a proposal in early January for the WOAC to decide on, since the building is due to open in February.

WOAC meeting no. 4: 4th December 2006

This meeting largely centred on the Graca Machel building, and as such, it began at the site of the building itself. The members of the WOAC, donning hard hats and practical shoes, were led by Noëleen and Phillippe around the site. Since my last visit, a great deal of progress had been made, and one could begin to really see this building transform into the images that had been projected by the architects months before. We were shown the ‘clusters’, the living quarters of the students, the beginnings of the poetry walk, as well as the site of the great court and the dining room. With about two months left before the residents would start arriving, there was still a great deal left to build (particularly given the Christmas holidays were approaching). Nevertheless, it was interesting to see how the developments were going, and exciting to consider how the following months would evolve.

Returning to the Irma Stern Museum, Noëleen presented an in-depth report of the sub-committee’s progress on the Graca Machel. Tony Carr, a staff member from the Centre for Higher Educational Technology (CET) who had been invited to the site visit and to the WOAC meeting, then addressed the committee. In the months prior, he had been working with Sam on creating a blog for the poetry walk project, and spoke about the many possibilities this project could offer. He spoke enthusiastically about the way in which such a venture could bring about a real engagement between students and the poets, and emphasised that process was almost then more important than product. He suggested that there could even be a space in the building itself for students’ poetry, and that perhaps this could change, in response to postings on the blog. He also thought that integrating this project within coursework at UCT would be highly beneficial (and thought of English and Art History here in particular – although others could be appropriate too); by exploring some of the concepts here within a structured curriculum,

students would have a real incentive to become involved in a collaborative process with these emerging poets, as well as with the more general project of integrating art within the UCT campus. These suggestions were similar to the ideas I had already expressed in my seminar to the Engineers, and it truly seems that in order for the WOAC and the role it hopes to play on campus to become a reality, these are the sort of steps that need to be taken.

The remainder of the meeting was spent discussing a range of items, from proposed new works to acquire, to donations that have been offered, as well as the report which was to be submitted to the URC. The question of representation of artists, as well of members of the committee itself was brought up again, and this seems to be a recurring problem. Looking back over the year, it seemed that in general, this committee has grand hopes (in terms of art interventions) as well as valuable ideals (in terms of representation), however due to time and commitment constraints, not enough of these goals had been fulfilled. While Noëleen and I had had an exciting year, meeting with architects, artists, poets, and various other people, we still had only a promise of a project, with not many tangible achievements. In turn, the WOAC's demographics remained the same, as did the majority of the art bought (however, this is changing far more quickly than the body of the committee). Nonetheless, we remained optimistic, and anticipated the poetry project proposal eagerly.

The proposal:

Following the WOAC meeting, Noëleen spoke to Helen Sebidi regarding the dining room doors, which the artist expressed interest in. However, she did indicate that she would work at her own pace, and that they would not be ready in time for the opening of the building. After speaking to the architects it was decided that plain doors would go up in the interim, with Sebidi's panels inserted once completed. Hugh's suggestion of text on Graca and Samora Machel on the back of the doors was welcomed, and Noëleen undertook to contact historian, Christopher Saunders to recommend an author for the text.

Once again, the summer vacation brought with it another lull in the WOAC's activities, which was unfortunate since this was the period during which a great deal of the building process was being undertaken. However, we were expecting the poet's proposal on the 8th January, and anticipated meeting to discuss this as soon as it was submitted, in order to go ahead immediately thereafter. When the proposal was not submitted on the due date, we began to worry, particularly since we had not had any contact with the artists or poets since late November. Noëleen contacted Marcia (who was in Cape Town at the time) to discuss the proposal. Marcia indicated that the group had decided that they were unhappy with the lack of a formal contract with UCT, and with the amount set aside for the project. She stated that the group had met in December and had created a proposal, but they would not submit it until these issues were resolved. As such, Gabi was going to submit a letter outlining these complaints. Soon after this Nandipha Mntambo resigned from the poetry team. On 9th January 2007 Gabi sent an email outlining the particular grievances the creative team had with the project, to which Noëleen responded some days later, after meeting with Hugh and Christopher.

Thereafter, a proposal was submitted which outlined the envisioned artwork/poetry, and a very preliminary 'mock-up' prepared by the architects, based on the proposal. Following this, an impromptu meeting was held with Hugh, the architects, Tony Carr, and the rest of the subcommittee. Generally the consensus was that the proposal was quite thin in terms of substance – foremost, there was hardly any poetry at all, and the visuals seemed a little disjointed and 'busy'. However, the concepts were quite good, and it was thought that there could be potential for an engaging project, but which would depend strongly on the success of the blog, and student participation. Noëleen highlighted that the group still had not specified nor priced exact materials for the project, but she thought that it was too late for certain installations, such as lighting. The group thought that at this late stage it would be best to simplify matters by using a flat surface – using a signwriter for example – rather than playing around with surface and textures, etc. It was suggested that in order to proceed any further, the poets and artist should meet with **KrugerRoos** to discuss the way forward in terms of executing the work. In the meantime, Noëleen was to contact the poets regarding their proposal, stating some requirements including the advancement of

the blog; the need for pricing of materials, maintenance, etc.; more poems to be produced; and trying to keep to some sort of deadline.

WOAC meeting no. 5: 22nd March 2007 (no. 1 for 2007)

However, in the time that passed between the meeting of 23rd January 2007 and this, the first WOAC meeting of 2007, not a great deal of progress was made on the poetry wall project, nor any of the other areas in the Graca Machel residence. Feeling somewhat nervous about presenting this to the committee, I worked hard to create a 'working' database of emerging, black female artists for the WOAC. However, I found this quite challenging – it seems that there are only a handful of such people (although this is maybe only a reflection on the publicity these artists receive), and as such included white female artists within my listing as well. Additionally, I thought it would be helpful to list the different galleries in Cape Town, indicating what type of art(ist) they represent. While there are a few members within the committee who are very involved in, or at least aware of these different spaces, and whom they represent, numerous members do not know much about contemporary art in South Africa at all, nor the galleries.

Despite the lack of progress on the various areas for the Graca Machel, the meeting went well, and a number of decisions were made; significantly, it was felt that the poetry walls should emerge from a substantial writing project which should operate through the blog. This seems a little grey to me, in terms of what the poet's role is at this point – and more pointedly, the artist – particularly since no-one has been paid yet, and the letter mentioned above concerned finances in particular. I fear that this will be a problem in the future. With regards to the other spaces, it seemed that there were a number of paintings and photographs to be hung in the communal areas, while the dining room doors and the courtyard still need to be worked on substantially. Ultimately, it seems that the purchasing of art for built spaces is still the easiest at UCT, rather than the hoped vision of integrating art within the architecture, in a smooth and engaging process. I would surmise that this situation has resulted from the lack of an informed approach to this process – a process which falls into the category of public art – and which has been

written upon extensively. If the WOAC would like to proceed along the vein of public art, they will need to seriously engage with the theory and practices of public art – which will impact the way in which they carry out such projects. Fundamentally, they need to evaluate their role on campus, bearing in mind the complexities of operating within a university in the ‘new South Africa’, one with a specific history – and from there have serious discussions on issues such as membership, acquisition policy, implementation of public programmes, etc.

University of Cape Town

APPENDIX 2

University of Cape Town

Art in public places: sites of contemplation or contestation?¹

As a way of introduction, it seems appropriate to explain the circumstances leading up to this seminar. Quite some time ago, I was approached by a certain member of the Chemical Engineering Department to give a talk to explain the different works of art in the building, especially since there was no catalogue or text to accompany them. These artworks were installed shortly after the new building was completed in 2004, and they originated from the collection of Mr. Hans Porer, who has generously presented UCT with numerous artworks on a permanent loan basis. The bulk of these can be seen in the Chancellor Oppenheimer Library as well as the old and new Chemical Engineering buildings, while more are being distributed throughout the university's campuses on a regular basis.

In the time that has passed since this staff member approached me, texts *have* been added to the various works. These were written by Ms. Julia Teale, an artist and art historian, who was commissioned by the Works of Art Committee (WOAC) and Mr. Porer to do so. As such, I feel it is unnecessary to spend the entire seminar discussing the specific works themselves, since I feel that Ms. Teale has done a very good job of this herself. While the texts arrived somewhat belatedly, they *are* now in place and should be read and contemplated by the residents of the building at their own leisure.

What I will do in the following seminar, however, is give a background to how and why these works are displayed in a university setting, and look at some of the issues that arise when one installs works of art into a site that is not a gallery. I should preface this discussion by stating that I am currently enrolled in a Coursework Masters degree in Art History at UCT, and my dissertation focuses on university art collections. My chosen topic stems from an interest in the way that art has been used and received over the years, through the many different spaces in which it has been displayed. These spaces have evolved from the royal collections of centuries gone by, leading to the national art

¹ Please note this was a seminar presented to the Department of Chemical Engineering in November 2006. Thus, it is fairly conversational in tone and not meant to be 'authoritative' – merely a step towards engagement between the university and the artworks on campus.

galleries which were opened to the public in the late eighteenth century, followed much later by the modernist art gallery – the ‘white cube’ – and finally then into more familiar environments such as the workplace, as seen in massive corporate art collections throughout the world, and the rising phenomena of ‘public art’ – art in the street so to speak.

Each of these spaces, with their specific dynamics have been written about at length, and I’m interested in *situating* university art collections within this field of inquiry, as I see them as a hybrid of many of these sites. Furthermore, I am intrigued that this is an area that has, until very recently, not been written upon at all. Often with outstanding collections, which are being added to continuously, universities seem to be a very important new site in which to evaluate the display of art. This is not only due to their rich collections, but more importantly to the intricate mix of students and staff that populate these institutions, and the interesting hybridity of these spaces – as both a public and a private site – which seems to lend itself quite appropriately to the displaying of art (which I feel is, too, an amalgamation of public and private aims/interests).

Furthermore, it is important to note that my case study of UCT – and more specifically, the administrative body that oversees the placement of art in this institution, the WOAC – finds itself in a better financial situation within which to purchase art, than the South African National Gallery (SANG) itself (and the plight of the SANG’s financial status has been written upon at length in a variety of sources). The WOAC’s funds arise through the many building projects that are continuously in operation at UCT, since for many years the university has upheld a policy whereby one percent of all new buildings’ budgets must be reserved for works of art that are to be installed within them. This is very similar to the Public Art policies and practices in many countries worldwide, which enforce anywhere between 0.5 and 2 percent of budgets for any national/state/federal building towards public art. As such, with its relatively healthy budget, it seems that UCT almost has an obligation towards commissioning and acquiring important works of art that will enrich and enliven the walls in which so many individuals find themselves on a daily basis. Here, it is worth noting that the amount of people who visited the SANG for

the entire year of 2004 numbered about forty thousand– most of which were tourists, which indicates that UCT, with its student body sitting at around twenty thousand, is a vital space in which to display art.

In turn, it seems necessary to interrogate the aims and practices of the WOAC and I have been actively engaged with this body – undergoing an internship with them this year. This has largely involved working on the Graca Machel women’s residence which is currently being built on Woolsack Drive, and has meant liaising with architects, artists, curators and the WOAC itself (through various committee meetings, etc.). This project aims to integrate art with the new building, and as such members of the sub-committee are working on architectural features such as poetry walls, and courtyards in which art will be literally inscribed into the landscape. This has proven to be a scintillating project, and will form the basis of part of my thesis. I must state that I am still in the early stages of the dissertation: I still have many questions that are unanswered, and issues that have not been explored in any great depth, as yet. Thus, I hope that this seminar will be a reciprocal experience – in that both you and I will learn something from it.

As many scholars writing about public art note, there is an overwhelming lack of evaluation when it comes to art situated in spaces which the public inhabit in day-to-day life – while there are often grand aims for an artworks’ role in its immediate community, there are usually no steps in place to evaluate this in reality. Thus, I feel that for my study, it would be very helpful to have direct input from students and staff members – those who are the ‘audience’ of these art works – in order to examine how they feel about these pieces, and how they interact with the spaces in which they are placed. As such, I have drawn up a number of surveys – one aimed at students, one at staff members, and one for WOAC members specifically. However, with such a huge base of people to survey, this is quite a daunting task to implement – (and I can email this/hand it out in hardcopy).

This leads me to note another reason why I was approached to talk about the art works in this building: the negativity surrounding certain pieces, in particular works by David

Brown, which can be found in the foyers of both the Old and the New Chemical Engineering Buildings. The former is entitled 'One man without his dog' while the latter is merely labelled as being part of the 'Dog watch series'. I have been forwarded some of the 'great art debate' emails that circulated in late 2004 surrounding these and other works, and I'll quote a couple of comments here (no names mentioned) to give some sort of idea about the responses that came out:

- One person commented that the Brown sculpture (in the new building) was "completely foul" as well as "inappropriate"; he stated, "I like to have my preconceived ideas about the world challenged, but not in the Chemeng foyer. Rather in an art gallery where I am receptive to that happening." And with regards to the Willie Bester work, "Rollerskater", he states sarcastically, "Wow, that guy is some artist."
- Also writing on the Brown work in new building, one student questioned, "how does it have anything to do with Engineering? It looks really dodgy." She goes on to state, "I don't see the point of a rusted piece of metal being placed in the chem eng building. It is a smart building, one that many of us are proud of and the sculpture really does not suit it, apart from the sculpture needing to be censored. I don't feel it is fair to expose students, especially female, to sculptures as dubious as that daily. What about innocent minds?" Later, she asks, "Please can't there be some rule as to the type of artwork displayed (so) that ALL can enjoy the artwork and not find it offensive", and ends asking that the work be removed.
- One professor stated, "In my opinion, this sort of work does not qualify as art – rather than inspiring you or challenging you, it just makes you feel tainted. I would also like to ask who is foisting this sort of rubbish off on us – surely we should have some say over what graces our building? I am particularly concerned about the impression which this gives to those entering the building, be they students or visitors. I would strongly suggest that both statues be removed."

These comments draw out a number of interesting points – that of the subject matter of the works (interpreted as being unsavoury), their physical placement – within the teaching environment of the university (viewed as inappropriate), and the selection

process itself – questioning who is administering this, and why members of the building were not consulted. These are highly important and valid factors that I aim to interrogate within my dissertation, and will spend most of the rest of this seminar addressing them.

Personally, I would question why art should be deemed inappropriate within this setting – from a purely aesthetic point of view, the building almost *lends* itself to displaying works of art – when I was here the other night to photograph the collection, I noted the stark, austere – almost grand nature of the building – which seemed very reminiscent of a modern art gallery. In fact, in comparison to any other space in which art is exhibited on campus, this space seems the most successfully realised and executed. The works can be observed and contemplated within an uncluttered and well lit space, and they seemed very at home here (despite some people’s opinions). I have noted a similar quality in the Old Chemical Engineering building – with its very sparse and exposed layout – very conducive to displaying works of art. More importantly, as a space in which young, open-minded people flock to learn, be challenged and inspired – surely art could play an interesting role here? Furthermore, are the alternatives of a) conservative, traditional, ‘safe’ artworks or b) no art at all, really more desirable? In my readings on corporate art collections, authors noted that many companies preferred to stay away from challenging work.

One scholar, Chin-tau Wu (2002: 260), noted that “any works that may be politically, socially, and in America racially and religiously controversial are considered inappropriate for display”, in addition to images portraying nudity. Wu cites some American respondents in her interviews and surveys as saying that “paintings by artists with a ‘cause’”, or “anything that might offend customers” are to be avoided, and as such, “decorative works are preferred”. Another scholar’s interviews revealed similar opinions – some quotes from American companies include “We can’t have any depressive or angry art”, and, “We can’t get too abstract or crazy” (Martorella, 1990: 75). As such, one arts administrator disclosed, “In our branch offices, we couldn’t put in abstract pieces. You know, they’re primarily simple farm folk, cabbage patch and the like. They like pictures of flowers in vases. So we buy prints for those branches, and keep the more

modern art in our headquarters” (ibid: 74). In reading these quotes, one gets a sense that the art within these spaces deny any real engagement with the audience that it encounters – and in this, the most powerful potential of art is lost. I would hope that people within a university setting, would be more open-minded, more willing to be challenged and stimulated – and not resign themselves to only looking at work that could be characterised as ‘pleasant’ or ‘pretty’ decorations on a wall.

The vehement reactions towards some of the artworks in the building seem to be indicative of two interlinked problems – one which relates specifically to this example, one to a more general (world-wide) audience. I will discuss the immediate audience first, and address the second one later in this talk. With regards to the Chemical Engineering pieces, rather than a pure dislike for the art or art in general, I believe it is the lack of contextualisation that is the cause of much of the consternation. The queries as to why the work should be in the building at all points to this, as does the last comment concerning why they were installed without any consultation with the inhabitants. Firstly, from interviewing various people involved, it seems that staff from Chemical Engineering were reluctant to adhere to the one percent policy, as they recognised that since they had raised the money for the building themselves they should not have to comply with this rule, and rather than spending their hard-earned money on art – the funds could be better utilised on building more laboratories or purchasing more equipment (and I can partially sympathise with this view). However, as one WOAC member has accurately noted, the money was being raised for a UCT department, and thereby should follow UCT policy – not least of all because this department is situated within a greater institution, which upholds certain values and a distinct ethos – not merely a department operating in isolation.

In any event, a number of options arose as to how to spend these funds – one was to spend the entire amount on a work by the leading South African artist, William Kentridge, whilst finally the money was spent largely on commissioning and framing the photographs by Graeme Williams that can be seen on the third, fourth and fifth floors. These works are of miners and people related to the mining industry, photographed often on

their own, in a sort of portrait fashion. Each of these people stares disarmingly into the camera's gaze. During a visit the other day, one staff member noted that these photographs are 'very rare' – as not many people go down to the places in which the photographs were taken. With such a vast space, the generous presentation by Mr. Porer of a number of works from his collection, supplemented these works – and I would see his collection as equally rare, since they display a number of leading talents within South Africa. The selection process was done in collaboration with the trained eye of an art curator, and the two considered the space in which the works were to be displayed and chose the artworks accordingly. These decisions were then ratified by the WOAC – who, it is necessary to note, are made up not purely of arts professionals – indeed, only three of the ten members are trained in art or art history.

However, the further lack of contextualisation can be seen in the belated insertion of the labels, as well as a seminar such as this – happening two years after the works have been in place (and by a masters student!). I strongly believe this lack of follow-through has strongly contributed to the feelings shared by some of those who inhabit this space. In many companies worldwide, corporate art collections have been in place for decades (and not only characterised by the more conservative works as mentioned above), often with a positive impact upon the employees that work within these spaces. This is because the artworks have been accompanied by

- Explanatory texts or catalogues
- Artist talks
- Tours of the collection
- Excursions to other art galleries
- Usually, a curator is employed solely to provide the proper management and educational facilities that accompany these collections.

As such, there is an integrated art program in place, rather than merely installing what some have called 'plop' art – which many come to resent, as they see the works as money badly spent, and irrelevant to their lives. I feel here it is also necessary to address the final comment made by the professor that was quoted above – who deemed the works as being

'rubbish'. Contrarily, these works, and others lent by Mr. Porer are by leading, award-winning, contemporary South African artists, who are being sought out by national and international galleries alike, and whose paintings and sculptures cost vast amounts of money. Certainly, this is a collection that the SANG would be envious of, and UCT is in a very fortunate position in receiving them. While it is not unproblematic that pieces from one individual's collection currently makes up about 15 percent of the university's holdings, they are nonetheless works that must be appreciated for their local and avant-garde nature – with pieces by William Kentridge, Berni Searle, Bongi Bengu, Willie Bester, Tracey Rose, Guy Tillim and more – the university certainly could not afford to buy these works at the rate Mr. Porer is presenting them. However, it is *precisely* their avant-garde and contemporary flavour that in all likelihood accounts for the controversy and provocation surrounding them.

This relates to the second problem to which I was referring, and this has been more widely experienced throughout the world in relation to the reception of such art works – particularly in public spaces. Avant-garde by definition refers to 'pioneers' and 'innovators', and thus means that which is 'ahead of its time' and we all know the story of how Van Gogh only sold one painting during his lifetime, while his artworks now sell for millions of dollars/pounds around the world's auction-houses. It is often those that dare to break the mould and confound us with new forms and objects that later receive much recognition and acclaim. However, in public spaces it seems that such art is continuously met with disapproval and objection. As a result, much public art has been described as some scholars as being "bland, engaging everyone but offending no-one" (Phillips cited in Sharp et al., 2005: 1004). Furthermore, famous Pop artist Claes Oldenburg has warned that in the "effort to ...please all pressure groups" art will inevitably display "mediocrity and decoration instead of integrity" (cited in Levine, 2002: 55). In order to counter this, some academics, practitioners and writers call for public art that encourages rather "the sound of contradictory voices – voices that represent the diversity of people using the space – rather than aspire 'to myths of harmony based around essentialist constructs'" (ibid). At the core of this argument lies the reality that there is no one public – rather many individuals who share different beliefs, values and

desires – and ultimately spaces. It is within these spaces that such interesting interactions and engagements may take place.

The sculpture of Sara Baartman situated in the Science and Engineering Library is an excellent example of an object that has been purposely placed within a space in order to spark a discussion – encouraging debate through its physical placement, and the media used in the work (another one of Willie Bester’s mixed media creations). This installation creates an awareness of an important part of South Africa’s history, which is enhanced through situating it within a controversial location. The placement of this sculpture was met with mixed reception, and as a result a seminar was held in the Centre for African Studies, in order to hear some of these reactions. Whilst a number of people have and continue to focus on the negative aspects in placing such a work within an area dedicated to Science, positive results of the contentious placement of the work are evidenced in a number of first year Humanities students’ essays that I was privy to reading. “Text in context” (SLL1001F/S) is a compulsory course these students have to take, and for their first assignment, they are asked to analyse a chosen visual text – which may be a work of art on campus. While most students chose advertisements from magazines, a significant proportion wrote about the art works. It was interesting to note which works were the frequently chosen – that being the Sara Baartman sculpture, followed by the statue of Rhodes on Jameson Steps, the Mark Hipper drawing ‘Good girl’ placed in the library, and ‘I do not speak Xhosa’ by Ernestine White, situated along the stairs descending to the African Studies Library. Many of these students examined the placement of the works within the university setting, and were very conscious of what this might mean – given the history of UCT in particular, and the symbolism of a university in general. All noted the social and political issues to which these works refer, and thought that this was appropriate given the setting.

I would like to conclude with the example of a famous public art work which I feel has strong links to the discussion today. Often cited by public art scholars, Richard Serra’s *Tilted Arc* was installed in New York in 1981. Placed outside of a federal office block, this 120 foot long, and 12 foot high wall of Cor-ten steel was removed after four years of

petitioning, letter-campaigning, and finally a public hearing – from the people who worked in the nearby offices. Viewed by some as a powerful metaphor for the divides that make up our lives, others merely saw it as an ugly hunk of metal that inconvenienced their daily pathway. In reading some of the quotes surrounding this debate, there seems to be a sense of familiarity in the opinions raised: some termed this “rusted steel barrier” (Re cited in Levine, 2002: 52) as “an ugly work right in everyone’s way” and criticised that its “intended interpretation was so subtle – or obscure – that few people understood it” (Fleming and Goldman, 2005: 66). Others criticised its “defiance of mainstream taste, its elitism and inaccessibility” (Levine: 55), one worker stating that it was an example of “an arrogant-nose-thumbing gesture at the government and those who serve the government”, while another claimed that the work was trying to “‘intimidate’ viewers with a ‘smoke screen of intellectual mumbo-jumbo about art’” (ibid). As with the Chemical Engineering buildings’ works, the *Tilted Arc* raised the tricky question of who represents the public, especially when there are majorly conflicting views; whose opinion matters more? In the case of *Tilted Arc*, Levine asks (ibid: 54) “was it the press, the local government, the artistic community” or “the people who used the space daily - ... or was it the whole nation? Was it only the taxpayers who had paid for the work, or did the public include international visitors and future generations?”. In the Chemical Engineering building, similar questions arise – is the opinion of the people who actually use the space more important than others who frequent the university (staff and student alike)? Do the artworks need to reflect this specific department’s outlook or the university at large?

What I think is particularly interesting, as scholar Caroline Levine (ibid) elucidates in her article on the Serra debacle, is that the supporters and detractors in this instance *agreed* on how the work operated in the space – she details that “many who fought to preserve the *Arc* agreed that the object was ‘confrontational’, ‘bullying’, and ‘aggressive’, but they made the case that this was a good thing; it was precisely the work’s tense and critical relations to its surroundings that allowed it to function as a meaningful response to a pitiless urban experience”. Whilst I would not call the Chemical Engineering building, nor the university a ‘pitiless urban experience’, I do see many parallels running through

the example of Serra's work, and that of UCT. Ultimately, each involve artworks that are placed within a functional space in order to transform it in some way – to initiate an engagement with the people that interact within it – thus starting a dialogue that can potentially overcome the staidness of everyday life, and inject it with a touch of the extraordinary and the unusual. Furthermore, by evoking questioning and debate, these works can stimulate a discussion that might not otherwise happen. Sometimes this involves pushing people beyond their comfort zone – and this is often the case with contemporary art.

A great misconception about art is that everyone should be able to understand it – or everyone should be able to get something out of it immediately. As such, people often voice their (uninformed) opinions with a great sense of self-righteousness and presumed authority – one arts professional present at the Serra debate noted that, “If I was a nuclear physicist giving a lecture, people who did not know anything about nuclear physics would not stand up and contradict me” (cited in Levine, 2002: 58). This would be true for many other professions as well, but interestingly, when it comes to art, it seems everyone is entitled to their opinion. Ironically, the truth is that contemporary art is not easy. I have spent the last five years studying the language of art, learning the tools with which to unpack an artwork and draw meaning from the complex layers one usually encounters with any good work. This is a very rewarding, but often difficult field to work in. With artists pushing the boundaries in increasingly new directions – as more areas become possible to speak about (such as sexuality, race, gender and political issues) one is constantly being pushed with them – exploring aspects of one's own subjectivity in relation to these works. Just as the language of Chemical Engineering is absolutely bewildering to the uninitiated, so too can the language of art prove to be; the difference between the two is that the latter is more visible – seen here within *your* territory. As such, I feel that it is a lack of understanding that drives much of the negativity behind most of the comments cited earlier. As we all know, one is often humiliated when caught out not understanding something, and true to human nature one tends to cover it up by stating that it was pointless knowing it in the first place.

However, it is not difficult to introduce some entry into this ‘foreign’ world – as seen by the immense popularity of national and modern art galleries world wide. Often this is largely due to the interactive, educational programmes in place – from in-depth catalogues to guided lectures of collections, whilst many focus on activities that involve the youth of the respective societies as well. With such a rich collection at its disposal, I feel that the University of Cape Town and the Works of Art Committee need to start taking similar actions in order to get the most out of this body of work. This will only be successful if staff and students are willing to be challenged, to experience something outside of their own interests, and therefore open to an area which might be difficult to understand at first, but which will not only teach them something of the world of art, but ultimately of themselves.

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