

South African Art History: The possibility of decolonising a discourse

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Abstract

In light of recent calls to decolonise curricula at South African universities there has been a renewed interest in what decolonisation might specifically imply for particular academic disciplines. Art history in South Africa has long struggled to move away from its settler colonial origins towards a more Afrocentric focus and its art world has frequently been criticised for being elitist and dominated by white practitioners. To this end, one of the primary questions that this dissertation seeks to answer is to what extent indigenous, African art and African epistemology has been included in South African art history and the institutions that support despite the discourse's traces of colonialism. Through a discussion and analysis of South African art history this dissertation seeks to describe the changes in the discourse since the late twentieth-century in light of the entanglements of the national; the colonial and the decolonial. Such an analysis is provided through a discussion of the biases of art history as a discourse originating in Western Europe; the geographical location of museums and university departments; the character of South African art historical writing; the curatorial strategies used to display African art in South African museums and the specific nature of art history curricula as it is taught at South African universities. The dissertation that follows therefore aims to provide an overarching view of South African art history that takes into account a range of factors impacting its particular framing so that the question of decolonisation can be adequately addressed. The dissertation finds that South African art history has a specific, settler colonial character and that historical African art has been neglected in art historical discourse despite overt attempts to transform the nature of the discipline post-democracy. It is argued that this may be the result of a shift in focus towards contemporary practice in the twenty-first century and away from the historical as a result of a resistance to cultural or racial labels attributed to art due to the legacy of apartheid legislation. As such, I argue that South African art history may find a path towards decolonisation through a renewed focus on historical South African and African art that is perceived on its own terms.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AHWGSA – *Kunhistoriese Werkgemeenskap* (Afrikaans) or the Art Historical Work Group of South Africa

ANC – African National Congress

BSP – Bureau for Scientific Publication

CST – Colonialism of a Special Type

CBD – Central Business District

HBU – Historically Black University (also known as an historically disadvantaged university)

HWU – Historically White University (also known as an historically advantaged university)

PAC – Pan Africanist Congress

RSA – Republic of South Africa

SAAAH – South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians

SACP – South African Communist Party

SAJAAH – South African Journal of Art and Architectural History

SAJAH – South African Journal of Art History

SAJCAH – South African Journal of Cultural and Art History

SARChi – South African Research Chairs Initiative

SAVAH – South African Visual Art Historians

TBVC – Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei

WITS Art Museum – University of the Witwatersrand Art Museum

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Introduction

South African Art History. South African Art Historiography. One imagines these as the potential titles of books explicating the historiography of writing on art within the context of South Africa. Yet, no such title exists to describe the manner in which academics, art historians, art critics and others have and continue to write about South African art, how this discourse is framed within the global discipline, in what ways it is particular to South Africa and in what way it can be said to contribute to an African epistemology. Such an inquiry would be aligned to, and made possible by, the broader discipline of historiography (where historiography is the history of historical writing) that gained momentum as a product of a late twentieth-century ideological shift towards an understanding of the constructed nature of knowledge¹. From a Western² perspective this shift occurred, in what is typically termed the postmodern era, as distrust in the ostensible objectivity in historical writing and a movement away from the belief in history as singular towards history as multiple and contested³. The

¹ For many the term ‘historiography’ simply describes the academic field of history writing conducted by historians who may also be referred to as historiographers. Such a perspective is tied to the development of historiography (as historical writing) in nineteenth century, Western Europe as a professional discipline with a ‘scientific basis’ that developed in tandem with modernization. See: Q. Edward Wang and Georg G. Iggers, *Turning Points in Historiography: A Cross-Cultural Perspective (Volume 1)* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2002).

² ‘Western’ typically refers to the cultural, ideological and geographical spaces of North America and Western Europe that are related through a contemporary manifestation of Western European culture spread through colonialism. As such the term ‘Western’ has both a geographical and a cultural element. The ‘Western world’ can be used to refer to geographical locations in the ‘West’ which began with the ideological split between Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire. Even within the Roman Empire this distinction had a cultural element that has been carried through into the contemporary moment so that one can speak of ‘Western’ contexts as being outside of the geographical space of the West. While many critique the term ‘Western’ because it may be seen as another generalisation as it attempts to combine the heterogeneous spaces and contexts I feel that it is useful to refer to the dominance of a particular cultural perspective whose origins lie in Western Europe. I use it to refer to the spaces of Western Europe and North America as well as particular perspectives originating in Western cultural practices. In this sense there is a lot within South African ideology and discourse that could be described as ‘Western’. The term ‘Eurocentric’ implies a similar cultural and ideological focus on Europe but is linked specifically with the geographical space of Europe. See: Christopher Lloyd GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). See also: ‘The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power’, in *The Formations of Modernity: Understanding Modern Societies, an Introduction*, ed. by Bram Gieben and Stuart Hall (Wiley, 1993), pp. 184–227.

³ Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 4. See also; John Warren, *The Past and Its Presenters: An Introduction to*

turn away from history perceived as an objective science in the Western world was a response, in part, to a crisis in European culture following World War Two, the rise of the rights movements in the nineteen-sixties and, most importantly, to the beginnings of decolonisation and the acknowledgement that the history written by Western historians had fundamentally privileged a particular cultural perspective. As such, historiography allows one to see history not as a recorded truth but as knowledge from a particular perspective: one that requires research that is cognisant of the way in which history has been written, its biases, methodologies and assumptions⁴.

It is from such a perspective that I seek to begin this dissertation: an attempt to understand, historiographically, what might characterise South African art history. To elaborate, this question is one that seeks to understand South African art history as part of a nation building project begun during the apartheid period and moving into the historical moment of democracy. This nation building project is one that seeks to develop the character of a nation imagined in its post-apartheid form and is subject to a number of forces in the contemporary moment. In one vein the effort to imagine a free and democratic nation is subject to both contemporary concerns and changing contexts as well as a particular historical legacy that persistently echoes in the present. In another thread the nation has to attempt to imagine itself both as a particular entity with a recognizable national identity as well as an entity entangled with transnational institutions and norms that impact national identities. Each of my chapters seeks to understand the way in which this discourse contributes to South African cultural life and the problems we face in the present. I shall begin this investigation with a discussion of the particular set of inequalities that have structured South African society as a result of apartheid and colonialism. Once this particular narrative of South African history has been established I aim to trace the link between a perceived lack of access, particularly for those classified as black, coloured or Indian⁵ during apartheid, to institutional structures

Issues in Historiography (Abingdon: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998).

⁴ Here the meaning of the term 'historiography' is taken to imply study of the way in which history is written.

⁵ The Population Registration Act of 1950 required that each person in the territory of South Africa be classified by race. Under this act there were three basic race groups: black, white and coloured (understood to mean of mixed race) while the category of Indian was added later. All people not classified as white were discriminated against during apartheid to varying degrees. Since these categories did not fit as easy descriptions for much of the population complex tests based on characteristics such as hair texture, facial features, home language amongst others were employed in attempts to classify each individual. White people were also referred to as 'European' while black people were also referred to as 'African'. Steve Biko and the black consciousness movement rejected these definitions and defined all those marginalised by apartheid laws as 'black'. While I use racial terms in this dissertation with a distinct acknowledgement of their constructed nature the terms black, coloured, Indian and white will be employed in order to create conceptual links to Apartheid's historical policies. I will use black to refer to all South African not classified as white. See: A. J. Christopher, *The Atlas of Changing South Africa* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 101.

(art museums, the contemporary art market and the academic study of art history) and the discourse of art history. The arguments in Chapter 1, where the historical impact of colonialism and apartheid are discussed, will then expand into: a chapter that discusses the nature of art historical discourse and its impact on the way in which Africa has historically been perceived (Chapter 2); a chapter that analysis South African art historical writing since the late twentieth-century (Chapter 3); a chapter that provides a discussion of university-level curricula in the fields of art history and visual studies (which have related but different frameworks) at various South African universities (Chapter 4); a chapter that discusses the geographical locations of art historical institutions such as museums and university departments (Chapter 5) and a chapter that analyses prominent South African art museums and their relationship to art historical paradigms (Chapter 6). The thread that links these various chapters is an attempt to define the particularities of South African art history in light of fervent calls to *decolonise* the university. The call to decolonise the University space is also a way of pointing out that the project of creating a democratic, post-apartheid state has failed. The perception is that the project of nation building has not in fact created an equal sense of belonging to each of South Africa's cultural groups. These calls perceived South Africa as still in need of decolonisation and its universities as, in many cases, being Western environments. The image of students protesting at Stellenbosch University in Figure 1 illustrates such a perception through the sign that reads, "I feel like I am in Europe" and likens a sense of European culture in public space to the nature of academic discourse. To extend this perception to art and art history means to perceive that Western art and Western culture have historically dominated the cultural life of South Africa. Such a view also creates a complex relationship between the University perceived as a global, transnational space at the forefront of contemporary discourse and the University as an institution at the service of national and regional interests. The call to decolonise necessarily situates academic discourse in a geographical and historical grounded arena while at the same time linking itself to the transnational acknowledgement of the contemporary postcolonial space where essential identities are eroded by complex entanglements. As such the tension between the local and the specific on the one hand and the global and the hybrid on the other is a concern when one attempts to speak about categories such as 'the West' or 'South African art history'. It is my contention, however, that while being aware of these complexities it is still beneficial to attempt an understanding of the named and the specific while acknowledging their link to the global. Perhaps the nature of South African art history requires investigation before its link to the transnational can be explored.



Figure 1: Protest at Stellenbosch University in April 2015 by the group known as Open Stellenbosch. One of the signs reads, “Wim, I feel like I am in Europe”. (Photograph: Danielle Becker).

In light of this I seek to understand the nature of the discipline of art history and its connection to historical, social, political and economic forces in South Africa so as to understand how various aspects of South African art history contribute to the sense that the discourse requires decolonisation. I believe this investigation can lead on to a further discussion of the link between such a nationalised discourse and its transnational entanglements. In essence my question is how do we characterise the contemporary writing of art history, the exhibition of art objects and the study of art history in light of South Africa’s history of colonialism, apartheid and racism? Any attempt to debate such a large question must consider art history as a discipline, its connection to specific periods in South African history and its relevance to contemporary concerns.

My dissertation, therefore, aims to discuss the nature of South African art history from a historiographical and de-colonial perspective. Along with the professionalisation of history as academic discipline came the establishment of art history and in turn art historiography that studied the nature of art historical writing⁶. The changing nature of the discipline of art

⁶ Useful texts on Western art historiography are Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also: Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

history is, like the writing of history, tied to an awareness of art history's potential multiplicity. There has been an acknowledgement, since the late-twentieth century, that art history is formed by its own epistemological bias and as such the application of its disciplinary framework to contexts outside of its point of origin in Western Europe are at best fraught and at worst a continuation of colonial hegemony. Such an acknowledgement, that the global distribution of art history is tied to colonialism, has begun to change the historiographical understanding of the discipline itself and has led to what is now known as the 'global turn'⁷. In James Elkins edited book *Is Art History Global?*, Chika Okeke-Angulu proposes that the globalisation of art history either means the adoption of Western models or the rise of "several, parallel or contradictory, art historical models and methodologies" that allow for a diversity of views rather than different yet subordinate perspectives.⁸ The options that Okeke-Angulu proposes illustrate a tension between epistemological plurality and the acceptance of hegemony. This could also be described as the tension between acknowledging the difference of alternative knowledge systems merely to support the centrality of the Western model (inclusion) or acknowledging diversity in the manner of integration. The narrative is further complicated when one acknowledges the falsity of distinct categories such as 'the Western model' in the contemporary, transnational moment. To include then means to add to a system that is already impure, hybrid and complex yet one is still required to know and name the accumulated parts of the mix. For Homi Bhabha, importance lies in differentiation without dominance so that 'cultural difference' is the "attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation"⁹. This moment of differentiation in turn allows for potential 'assimilation', in the sense described by Michel Foucault, where a differentiated and subordinated epistemology is absorbed within the canon¹⁰. Importantly such an inclusion or appropriation already relies on a particular Western understanding of culture in the first place as a "homogenizing, unifying force" that creates distinctions between dynamic/modern and static/traditional cultures¹¹. Western culture, in other words, has been perceived as culture that does not require naming or identification and as such can shift and change without being accused of being 'inauthentic'. Cultures outside of the West, however, have always been

⁷ See *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn*, ed. by Aruna D'Souza and Jill Casid (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Clark Art Institute, 2014).

⁸ Chika Okeke-Angulu in James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* (New York ;London: Routledge, 2007), 206-207.

⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 51.

¹⁰ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977). Judith Butler also writes about subjection as the process of subordination by power. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

¹¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2012), 54.

named (by Western discourse) to the point that they appear fixed in time and place. This distinction is what allows Western culture to remain all-consuming, invisible and unnamed and other cultures to be described as traditional or in fact 'hybrid'. In following on from these perspectives one of the major tensions in art history's global turn has been between an additive approach that seeks to expand the historical Western system of art history to include examples of art from contexts outside Western Europe and North America and an approach (rarely employed) that acknowledges established alternative systems of art making outside of the Western canon whose ideological frameworks can be differentiated from the Western. The second approach may be termed one of integration (as apposed to inclusion) that resists epistemological assimilation and disciplinary unity to the detriment of distinction. The distinction between 'inclusion' and 'integration' as models for multiplying art history as a discipline will form something of an underlying current in this dissertation as a means to explain the particular nature of the South African context as tied to the global sphere. Again, my contention is that the distinctiveness of the South African context needs to be articulated and discussed in order for the manner in which it is entangled with transnational can be perceived.

Art history in South Africa cannot be extricated from the social, political and economic context of the nation and it seems, therefore, to be pertinent to discuss the way in which national discourse on nationhood structures this context. In her seminal text, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1989) Sue Williamson chronicles the pivotal role that 'art' played in undermining apartheid. In the foreword to the book Archbishop Desmond Tutu, suitably regarded as 'South Africa's moral conscience', writes about the arts as intrinsic to human existence rather than peripheral as many would have it:

“There can be no doubt in my own mind that the arts play a crucial role in the life of a people. Long ago, for instance, the San believed that their cave wall paintings had a mystical influence on their livelihood and helped to ensure their continued survival. Painting was not just something peripheral to their existence, which they could do or not do as the whim took them. No, it was a matter of life and death. It was not entertainment, nor were they being merely creative; they were exercising that dominion over their environment which God wanted us human beings to

have”¹².

In the contemporary post-apartheid era the acknowledgement of cultural and artistic practices as performing a crucial role in the development of a national identity for South Africa may be critiqued for being a superficial political policy akin to the entrenchment of the ‘rainbow nation’ as chief metaphor at the service of nationalism rather than a lived reality. It is a result of this perceived difference between the official national policy of cultural preservation (as implicated in the *rainbow* metaphor) and the neglect or lack of public institutions and organisations allowing for a *real* diversity of cultural and artistic practices that I feel it necessary to trace the perception of ‘art’ that is supported through knowledge production in South Africa.

In order to discuss the vested interests in various forms of cultural production and people’s ability to access the cultural capital necessary to gain entrance into the South African ‘art world’ it is first apposite to understand the formation of nationalism in the post-apartheid state. It seems one must ask what forms of ‘art’ are privileged by the nation’s institutions, galleries, museums, departments and government and to what extent discourse on national culture and national identity reflect the perspectives of the population.

The former director of the South African National Gallery in Cape Town (now under the umbrella of *Iziko*¹³) wrote an article two years after the first democratic elections full of hope and exuberance for the new nation of South Africa¹⁴. Titled, *The Rainbow Nation: Identity and Transformation*, the text provides an example of the perspective of this early period in post-apartheid South Africa that is laden with a desire, following isolation, for South African artists to claim their positions on the international stage. Marilyn Martin’s belief in the metaphor of the rainbow nation as not only attainable but as a description of a lived reality in the not-so-distant future has the tendency to brush over inequality and difference with a demonstrated commitment to the notion that “the concepts of nationhood, of one nation-ness

¹² Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd, 1989).

¹³ The Iziko website gives the following explanation for the isiXhosa word used as the title for the collective museums of South Africa: “ ‘Iziko’ is an isiXhosa word, meaning ‘a hearth’. Since the hearth of a typical African homestead usually occupies the central space, Iziko symbolises both a hub of cultural activity, and a central place for gathering together South Africa’s diverse heritage”. Iziko Museums of South Africa, ‘About Us’ <<http://www.iziko.org.za/static/landing/about-us>> [accessed 2 April 2015].

¹⁴ Marilyn Martin, "The Rainbow Nation: Identity and Transformation", *Oxford Art Journal*, 19.1 (1996), 3–15.

and of a national culture are integral to the new South Africa”¹⁵. This is not to say that Martin was unaware of the difficulties involved in transforming an arts sector based on an established inequality. She cites Rasheed Araeen as warning that “goodwill and benevolence ... alone cannot change the system unless it’s accompanied by a position which questions and confronts all those ideas and ideologies which were formed and remain entrenched today in its institutional structure”¹⁶. It is these fundamental and invisible ideologies on which institutional structures are based that have stubbornly resisted revision despite otherwise positive advances. Here the historically entrenched culture of liberalism amongst white South African academics seems to translate, in the post-apartheid context, to an unconscious maintenance of the status quo rather than a willingness to create real, radical change. A focus on superficial transformation may be philosophically linked to a tendency for inclusion as strategy rather than disruption or integration.

The ideological structure of ‘the rainbow nation’, first articulated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, instructs the nation on how to see the real and historically contentious diversity that exists in South Africa¹⁷. For we know that nations must be “imagined”¹⁸ as those in power wish them to exist rather than rise naturally out of fundamental unity. To create a sense of nationalism and national identity in a country with eleven official languages¹⁹ (and many other forms of identification that describe a geographical space that is heterogeneous in extreme) is challenging at best. In a sense it is this ‘diversity’ and plurality that the metaphor of ‘the rainbow’ attempts to describe yet the creation of national identity in this terrain is perilous since none of the traditional elements of nationalism – shared language, religion or ethnicity – can be said to apply to South Africa²⁰. In describing the phases of nationalism Hobsbawm claims that the initial phase in nineteenth century Europe was “purely cultural, literary and folkloric, and had no particular political or even national implications”; as imagined through cultural production²¹. In contrast South Africa appears to have gained nationalism before it could imagine the nature of its own cultures and folkloric practices or

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷ See: Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003). Sontag speaks about the way in which discourse instructs a particular viewing of a nation.

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹⁹ See Brand South Africa, ‘The Languages of South Africa’, 2015 <<http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/language.htm#U59iCRY6HwI>> [accessed 5 July 2015]. for a description of the languages in South Africa

²⁰ Eric John Ernest Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²¹ Ibid.

was able to use these to both celebrate difference and instil diversity without replicating the separate development policies of apartheid or fetishizing cultural authenticity. In this sense the project of building a nation can be said to have failed if it has not sought to focus of the cultural productions (art) of each of its constituents. Here again we have we have the tension between naming and specifying particular cultural practices and artistic forms while at the same time acknowledging the impossibility of purity or of forms not always already entangled with one another.

If one speaks of nationalism one speaks of a process closely aligned to social modernity in Europe and the creation of group identities based on political and economic needs²². In this sense the very process of becoming a post-apartheid nation is, in the extreme, tied to a received European model that may not be applicable to the South African context but nonetheless impacts its creation. In an analysis of *The Sunday Times Heritage Project* Sabine Marschall notes the pressure for the media to position themselves as serving ‘nation building’ rather than enflaming existing tensions²³. Might the rhetoric of service to nation building so common in government discourse result from a fear of the poorly imagined foundations of national identity that do not mimic the conceptual grounding for nationalism displayed in the European model and even so intrinsically flawed? It is this and other related questions that this dissertation seeks to answer through an analysis of the art historical discourse in the country and the way it is employed in various institutional structures.

The rainbow nation identity assigned to South Africa serves a particular agenda that is in many ways aligned to tourism and economic use rather than ‘heritage’ or arts and culture. Many authors, practitioners, educators and stakeholders bemoan the lack of importance placed on the arts and culture sector in South Africa. The perception of the sector as being a non-vital and at times elitist arena is made all the more apparent by the discourse surrounding the appointment of Nathi Mthethwa as the new head in 2014. His appointment was described by many as a demotion from his former position as Minister of Police and led art critic Sean O’Toole to question his suitability for the position considering what he calls: “the crisis in the department of arts and culture”²⁴. The lack of importance placed on arts and culture is echoed

²² See: Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1992 and John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (London; New York: Continuum, 1991).

²³ Sabine Marschall, ‘The Sunday Times Heritage Project: Heritage, the Media and the Formation of National Consciousness’, *Social Dynamics*, 37.3 (2011), 411.

²⁴ See: Sean O’Toole, ‘Is Nathi Mthethwa the Right Man for the Job?’, *Mail and Guardian Online*

by Thompson who cites municipal conferences as identifying ‘heritage’ as the least important factor in development and as being “an adjunct to tourism and sports/recreation” because it fails to generate profit²⁵. Marschall points out that apart from being perceived as being without economic gain, and so secondary to tourism concerns, arts and cultural production (when at the service of national heritage) is “always invariably tied to dominant sociopolitical discourses, because heritage is about the ‘use value’ of the past, tied to identity construction and value systems in the present”²⁶. This predictably creates a divide between what is termed ‘art’ or ‘fine art’ and the broader ‘creative industries’ and at the same time points to the importance of understanding how dominant cultural discourse has the power to structure national identity.

It is the nature of the ‘value system’ within the framework of arts and culture in South Africa that I am interested in and how that value system relates to conceptions of national identity. This interest in national identity does not, however, aim to discuss some kind of art historical nationalism but rather perceives national identity as connected to forces beyond the contemporary nation in both time and space. Traces of a colonial past connect the contemporary South African nation to its past so that these historical moments echo in the present. Spatially, the national project of democratic South African can also not be extricated from the historical and contemporary links across national borders. As such my use of the term ‘national identity’ comes with an awareness of these complexities.

Such an awareness can be tied to an acknowledgement that when speaking about cultural specificity there is the necessity to perceive the sense in which culture is always, already hybrid rather than pure. However, this acknowledgment need not prevent discussion on concepts such as indigeneity. In his chapter “On National Culture” in *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon emphasises the importance of research into indigenous²⁷ culture and

<<http://mg.co.za/article/2014-06-02-is-nathi-mthethwa-the-right-man-for-the-job>>.

²⁵ Thompson, *Report on the MIDI Summit ‘Heritage as a Focus of Development’* (Pietermaritzburg, 2009), 3. as cited in Marschall, "The Sunday Times Heritage Project: Heritage, the Media and the Formation of National Consciousness".

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 416.

²⁷ For greater discussion on the concept of indigenaeity and the indigenous knowledge systems see the work of Ruth Phillips: Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1998). Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011). *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, ed. by Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (London; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999). *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips (Oxford: Berg, 2006).

creative production so as to create a new consciousness in the post-colonial period²⁸. For Fanon creative and cultural knowledge are placed at the forefront of emancipation for the colonised African nation because it allows the production of new knowledge to counter colonial narratives. The nature of such a new value system will be determined by the perceived 'use value' of art, culture and heritage. This is intertwined, specifically in South Africa, with what Erin Mosely and others refer to as "collective memory"²⁹ or "public memory"³⁰. Here collective memory become the remembrance and recovery of cultural knowledge obscured by a colonial history. Mosely argues that artists and artworks have contributed to the critical examination of collective memory and the process of reconciliation. He attributes many of the institutional shifts to the former Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Ben Ngubane, who created the Arts and Culture Task Group and the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage issued in 1996³¹. The contribution to collective memory and the perception of cultural value has been vital to the establishment of a democratic nation in the South African context yet the extent to which cultural and art historical knowledge has been accessible to the public is debatable.

In an attempt to understand the place of culture in the South African imaginary this dissertation seeks to understand the way in which art history has been used in academic writing, in the display strategies of museums, the construction of university curricula and the structure of the art market. art history is assumed to be universal yet it is also tied to a colonial history to the degree that the dynamic between the local and the global becomes particularly difficult to navigate. The difficulty appears to be one of identifying local specificity without reducing its particular characteristics to fictional, fetishised essences. In this light we may turn to the Malian writer Manthia Diawara who, writing with reference to the Negritude movement speaks of a brand of cultural specificity that seeks universal application: "that Africa and other continents involved in the fight against colonialism and racism are the future of the world"³². What Diawara emphasises is the potential universal

²⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), ed. by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

²⁹ Erin Mosely, "'Visualizing' Apartheid: Contemporary Art and Collective Memory during South Africa's Transition to Democracy', *Antipoda*, 5 (2007), 98–120.

³⁰ AE Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

³¹ Mosely, "'Visualizing' Apartheid: Contemporary Art and Collective Memory during South Africa's Transition to Democracy', 109.

³² Manthia Diawara, *In Search of Africa* (New York: First Harvard University Press, 2000), 5. The Negritude Movement was developed by French-speaking, African intellectuals during the nineteen-thirties in France and encouraged a pan-African identity as an anti-colonial strategy.

application of the local: what the specifics of a particular culture can teach others³³. For Diawara the identification with cultural specificity only becomes racist or exclusionary when its ideological gifts are partial. As he puts it:

“... the universal may take on particularist or racist features whenever people, in order to control it, choose a selective means of dissemination.”³⁴

This is linked later in his text to the individual freedom inherent in the theories of the Enlightenment, which were given only partially to Africans³⁵. Diawara asserts that the attainment of true modernism and enlightenment is necessary for Africans to progress and join the world³⁶. Diawara is careful to distinguish cultural specificity from essentialism and explains his argument through the phenomena of the novel. He notes that the novel as written genre, the field of science or the particular forms of classical music are not assumed to be solely Western forms and disciplines but are rather seen as forms “invented in Europe at a particular moment in history”³⁷. As such the rest of the world is readily allowed to use these forms for their own purposes or to turn them into hybrid cultural manifestations. To follow this argument through would be to say that if one were to deny non-Western people the use of such forms it would be akin to asserting that only African Americans can create jazz. To this end it is the denial of the potentially universal to all in the same way that the term ‘art’ has been fixed to cultural production in Western Europe and Northern America. As Diawara puts it: “Currently, white-male control over the definition of what is universal, beautiful and rational also excludes particularists from discursive spaces”³⁸. In this sense art can be seen as a tool for resistance through the validation of particular cultural practices and the refusal to be absorbed into Western hegemony. If ‘art’ is perceived as only the domain of Western culture then it become a partial gift masquerading as a universal.

The push and pull between the particular and the universal, the local and the global and the appropriation of art and culture for superficial fetishism versus the sustained interest and

³³ Ibid., 8.

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

³⁵ The freedoms of the Enlightenment can be encapsulated in the notions of individuality, truth, progress and intellectual freedom. While the intellectuals who developed these ideas believed they were creating greater equality in reality these ideals were available only to white, European, educated, middle class men. As such African people were not allowed access to these humanist ideals as a result of colonial ideology.

³⁶ Ibid., 64.

³⁷ Ibid., 9.

³⁸ Ibid., 11.

research into particular artistic practice provides a thread for the discussion that follows. My aim is to provide an analysis of the various factors that frame art historical discourse in the South African context so as to create a basis for the production of a decolonised discipline of South African art history.

The aim of the chapter that follows is to discuss the nature of South Africa's history so as to understand the existing social divisions. When writers critique the manner in which South African society is divided by race, and the inequalities that seem to exist in the arts sphere despite attempts to transform the sector, it is often done with the assumption that the reader understands the historical reasons for such inequality. While a cursory understanding of the way in which colonial divisions and apartheid laws impact the contemporary state of affairs is understood by many, there is a need to understand how this specifically impacts the field of tertiary education and what bearing this might have on the specific discipline of art history.

Recent calls to decolonise the university in South Africa have placed importance on the term 'decolonisation' as an overarching philosophy in the struggle to gain equality. While the term 'decolonisation' is used with increasing frequency there seems to be little knowledge in the public sphere of where this term comes from and how it has been used historically with reference to South Africa. Students, such as those in Figure 1 are aware of decolonisation as a means to undermine a pervasiveness of Western or European culture but the precise definition of this term needs greater exploration. As such Chapter 1 will provide an analysis of the term 'decolonisation' and relate it to various periods in South African history so that an understanding of the origins of structural inequality can be understood before investigating how these figure in the 'art world'.

As a discourse and an academic discipline art history attempts to provide a framework for understanding those objects of cultural production that are defined as 'art'. The discipline has undeniable origins within the paradigm of the Enlightenment in Europe and as such has struggled to expand its boundaries to include objects from epistemologies outside of Western cultural production. In the era of the post-colonial many art historians have begun to acknowledge the bias of what is referred to as Western discourses on art and visual culture³⁹ and the existence of a plurality of knowledge systems that pertain to objects. This reflects an

³⁹ A term created with the intention to allow for an expansion of the sphere of objects previously known as 'art'.

understanding that a contemporary discourse on value has structurally privileged an art history originating within the context of Modernity in Europe. What such an acknowledgement allows is the possibility of art historical practices that are local and culturally specific (while always tied to the global) rather than reflections of a Western paradigm.

With that in mind this dissertation will discuss the impetus for and possibility of decolonizing art history as an academic discipline so that it may adequately represent the particular national and cultural context of South Africa. In Chapter 2 I will discuss the various epistemological frameworks that have led to the current state of art history, its impact as a discipline on the way in which African culture and art is seen and the manner in which these frameworks can be said to affect the discipline's adoption in the South African context. In order to understand the possibility of Art history becoming a global discipline with multiple manifestations this second chapter will set up a comparison between a Western and an African system for understanding art and assigning value to objects.

For South Africa, the epistemological frameworks for academic disciplines have historically been modelled (predominantly) on British structures informed in part by Dutch and other European models, as they were perceived to pertain to Afrikaner identity⁴⁰. The colonial and later the apartheid government presided over a settler-colonial ideology that sought to mirror Europe while at the same time claim a geographical and cultural specificity (see Chapter 1). This is made clear in the sphere of art historical discourse and institutional practice in South Africa, which for most of the twentieth century focused almost exclusively on the products of white artists within a Western cultural paradigm (see Chapter 3 and 4). As far as art historical writing is concerned, authors transplanted an ideological framework established by nineteenth century European scholars onto the sphere of South African cultural production. This resulted in the inability of scholars to account for work produced by black South Africans as 'art' and the exaggeration of differences in value, intention and function⁴¹. Such a disciplinary dismissal forced many artists to work within the framework of European modernism in order to be accepted by the establishment rather than to continue and expand

⁴⁰ See: Anitra Nettleton, 'Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi', in *Compression vs. Expression: Containing and Explaining the World's Art* (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006), pp. 39–56. White, Afrikaner identity has been historically perceived as connected to the migration of Dutch and other Western European settlers to South Africa following the arrival of the Dutch in 1652.

⁴¹ Lize van Robbroeck, 'Beyond the Tradition/modernity Dialectic', *Cultural Studies*, 22.2 (2008), 209–33.

on artistic traditions indigenous to South Africa or inherited from other cultures through slavery. When black artists adopted the style and medium of modernism in the twentieth century (as did many white South African artists), white authors acknowledged the work's status as 'art' but their writing was burdened by a need to distinguish difference – to describe the art by black South Africans with terminology that emphasised the work's existence outside of the dominant discourse⁴².

Within such a context there has been very little published art historical research that focuses on the historical and indigenous art of South or southern Africa before the twentieth century, its existence and practice in the twentieth century and its epistemological or methodological influence on the contemporary period of production. This is at odds with the conception of post-apartheid national identity in South Africa, which has explicitly sought to reinstate a sense of cultural belonging to 'Africa' and to reinforce certain indigenous cultural identities. To a large extent, the project of creating a new national identity has failed to place importance on establishing and institutionalising indigenous knowledge systems and this extends to the discipline of art history.

To this end, Chapter 3 will analyse art historical writing and art historical institutions from South Africa in order to establish the ideological framework that has been adopted before moving on to an analysis of the ways in which authors have attempted to account for indigenous artistic practices. The particular case study I will use here is an analysis of the organisation known as SAVAH (South African Visual Art Historians) and the proceedings of its annual conferences. The organisation was formed in 1984 and has had an annual conference since 1985. As such it has been in existence through the apartheid period, into democracy and through to the twenty-first century and the contemporary arena of student protests. SAVAH is the principle professional body of art historians in South Africa and as such the proceedings of its conference provide a useful tool to analyse South African Art historical discourse.

Many attempts to challenge art history have sought to revise existing frameworks so as to include previously excluded artists or practices. Yet, there has been little that has sought to create anew. I ask what it might mean to decolonise an art historical practice in the South

⁴² See the writing of Lize van Robbroeck for detail. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

African context and argue that such a project may entail a focus on knowledge systems and practices for aesthetic appreciation that have historically existed within southern Africa, but have been largely ignored.

The nature of art historical discourse in particular nations is strongly connected to the way in which it is taught in educational institutions. Since formalised art history is most often found at tertiary level the nature of this pedagogical discourse is especially pertinent to understanding the particular character of art history in the South African context. The university as institution is the most prominent target for the calls to decolonise that have occurred in recent times. As such this Chapter 4 analyses the art historical curriculum employed on a tertiary level at prominent South African universities and will compare the changes that have occurred in such curriculums since the advent of official democracy in 1994.

In the post-colonial and post-apartheid period institutions and individuals are attempting to find historical models based on forms of knowledge production that are rooted in Africa (and specifically South Africa). Since such attempts have their greatest impact in the context of education there appears to be a need for a more extensive study of educational models. Recently, there has been an intensification of calls for the decolonisation of universities, which has placed the question of an Afrocentric curriculum at the forefront of discussion. For the discipline of art history and indeed for art history that has become visual studies⁴³, the range of possible material for study is overwhelmingly extensive. This had led to a certain confusion among academics as to how to structure courses that both acknowledge the legacy of art history as a European discipline while at the same time situates their focus in particular geographical and cultural contexts.

Such a difficulty is particularly apparent at South African universities and in art history or visual studies departments. As such Chapter 4 analyses the frameworks that have been employed by South African universities in teaching art history in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the changes that have occurred following attempts (or lack thereof) to include indigenous forms of knowledge production. Using interviews with educators and a

⁴³ Visual Studies seeks to merge art history and cultural studies in order to broaden the range of material for study. Part of the impetus for this was the dismantling of distinctions between high art and popular culture as well as the recognition of the artistic productions from geographic spaces outside of Western Europe and its cultural colonies.

discussion of art historical curricula, I review such changes and assess the failures of various institutions to implement Afrocentric methods.

Considering art history as an ideological apparatus sanctions the understanding that certain physical structures allow for ideology to be employed. In the case of South African art history the primary institutional structures that allow for the particular character of the discourse are art museums and universities. As such my fifth chapter seeks to understand the discursive access to discourse as linked to the physical access and geographical location of museum art collections and university departments that teach art history or visual studies. This is done through the illustrative use of two sets of maps: a map of South Africa created by Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) that shows the various institutions and amenities available within the South African art world in a geographical sense and an interactive map created by Adrian Frith that uses the 2011 census data to plot the South African racial demographics (among other attributes) onto geographical space so that it shows both the location of the various apartheid-designated race groups and the population density.

Museums have, historically, been the physical and visual support of particular epistemologies in Europe and in contexts that have adopted hegemonic, Western culture. For art historical discourse museums provide a visual display of the hierarchies and systems of value that prevail academically. Despite the perceived ‘freedom’ of capitalist markets and the existence of many institutions with loose affiliations to state funding and governance, in the contemporary sphere museums (and indeed by extension, galleries) continue to reflect dominant ideological frameworks. In South Africa, the question becomes to what extent museums (both public and private) reflect a knowledge system that is reflective of a democratic South Africa and one that allows access to a diversity of people.

Chapter 6 therefore discusses the discursive frameworks that govern how art is displayed in prominent South African museums and galleries. The aim is to ascertain the extent to which conventions of display mirror the hierarchies and value systems transplanted by colonisation and to what extent these have been challenged. I will focus on the frameworks used to display ‘historical African art’⁴⁴ as it is such work that appears to have suffered the most neglect and

⁴⁴ While I acknowledge the problematic generalisation here, for my purposes I use ‘historical African art’ as a term that has

whose institutionalization reflects the ideologies of art historical practice.

The collections of and display strategies for historical African art at institutions such as the *Iziko South African National Gallery* in Cape Town, the *Johannesburg Art Gallery*, the *University of the Witwatersrand Art Museum* and *Museum Africa* in Johannesburg and the *Tatham Art Gallery* in Pietermaritzburg will be analysed as a way of understanding the value systems that are reflective of a national and disciplinary ideology. I will attempt to ascertain the nature of these various institutions and their framing of historical African art. In particular, I intend to trace the changes that have occurred in such institutions since the advent of official democracy in 1994 and the ways in which these changes are reflective of a national identity that is post-colonial and post-apartheid.

Each of the six chapters mentioned above seeks to provide a discussion of a different component of South African art history that will aid in understanding the particular character of this national discourse. If art history is understood as part of a nation building project and if the contemporary call is one that asks for its decolonisation then that call is pointing to the failure of South African art history to adequately represent the nation and one needs to investigate the nature of that failure in the contemporary moment. The call to decolonisation specifically points to the dominance of one particular aspect of South African culture life in the creation of art history: Western cultural paradigms. My aim in this dissertation, therefore, is to understand in what way and to what extent this perceived dominance may have occurred, how it frames the discourse of art history and what the implications are of that discourse in its various manifestations: in institutional frameworks (discursive and educational), the structure of space and the display of art in museums.

referred to work resulting from indigenous cultural practice on the continent and that in some sense appears to reflect a pre-colonial epistemology. Museum curators have also used the term 'African art' to distinguish certain parts of their collections from others but this does not allow a distinction between work that is influenced by an indigenous African art system and work influenced primarily by the global, contemporary system that begins with Western, cultural precedents. I also use the term 'historical African art' rather than 'traditional African art' as the word 'traditional' has been linked to objects perceived as artefacts and connected to static cultural practices.

Chapter 1: South Africa: The impact of historical division

The acknowledgement that art history, despite efforts to include, may not be truly global provides one strand in a series of catalysts for this dissertation. Another strand that has provided a catalyst for this investigation is, as mentioned in the introduction, the call to decolonise the university both locally and internationally, particularly in the context of the student protests at South African universities in 2015 and 2016. To begin, in this chapter, I shall discuss the contemporary South African context in which this dissertation is framed, where student protests and calls for academic decolonisation have gained momentum and where there continues to be a call for greater access to art institutions in South Africa. In order to understand the trajectory of this current context I shall also discuss South Africa's history and its movement from a colonial state, through the apartheid period to the contemporary moment with its status as democratic nation. I will attempt to create a narrative of these historical time periods that links socio-political context to the accessibility of institutional structures in the arts sphere, the state of education and particularly the state of arts education.

The continually unfolding events of 2015 seemed to synthesise the simmering dissatisfaction with the slow pace of transformation in South Africa and a growing disbelief in the rhetoric of the rainbow nation⁴⁵. Anger was directed at a number of connected targets and the perception that the nation has failed both politically and culturally became a relevant concern

⁴⁵ The term 'rainbow nation' was used by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe the diversity of post-apartheid South Africa following the first democratic election in 1994. It has come to be associated with a liberal perspective that claims to be colour-blind and favours equality among all race groups. Those critical of the term point to the manner in which it glosses over continuing inequality and racism.

within society and academia and, more specifically, within the field of art history. On December 16th 2015 thousands of people in Cape Town and Johannesburg joined a protest march under the hashtag *Zuma Must Fall* (#zumamustfall)⁴⁶. The march calling for the resignation of the president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, was both the result of a complex series of events in the socio-political life of the country and a direct reference to the student movement known as *Fees Must Fall* (#feesmustfall). As such this occurrence highlights the manner in which political, social and intellectual concerns are explicitly connected to each other and to the broader discussion of post-apartheid and post-colonial nationhood in contemporary South Africa. The protests against student fee increases under the banner of *Fees Must Fall* were in turn catalysed by the decolonisation movement referred to as *Rhodes Must Fall* (#rhodesmustfall), which succeeded in having a statue of British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes removed on April 9th, 2015 from the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Since March 2015 *Rhodes Must Fall* continues to seek racial and ideological transformation at UCT and has spread in various manifestations to almost every other university in South Africa. Following news of a proposed fee increase of 10.5%, at the University of the Witwatersrand in October 2015 students began to protest and forced the university to shut down so as to listen to their demands⁴⁷. Protests quickly spread to other universities throughout the country and movements such as *Rhodes Must Fall* adapted their slogans to *Fees Must Fall* to enable the perception of unified national action. The targets were the decolonisation of the curriculum, the literal increase in fees, the treatment of university staff as well as the perceived lack of access to university education for those beyond the white middle class.

It is the link created between a lack of access based on race and class and the call for decolonisation that becomes relevant for this dissertation. The calls for decolonisation of university curricula fell in line with similar calls throughout the global South that have focused on the hegemonic nature of Western discourse within academia. Internationally, this discursive structure is indelibly linked to the physical dominance of white, male bodies in institutional spaces and as such a call for decolonisation in South Africa may be described as being the result of both global and local forces. In South Africa there has been a sustained

⁴⁶ See: Aislinn Laing, “‘Zuma Must Fall’ Rallies against South African President across the Country’, *The Telegraph*, 2015 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/southafrica/12053485/Zuma-Must-Fall-rallies-against-South-African-president-across-the-country.html>>.

⁴⁷ See: Bongani Nkosi, ‘Student Fee Increases at Wits Have Not Fallen’, *Mail and Guardian Online*, 2015.

attempt to *transform*⁴⁸ university spaces so that they more adequately represent the demographics of the country. The Department of Education's *Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation* (1996), which outlined the strategic plan for transformation, focused on ensuring "equity of access ... irrespective of race" rather than curriculum restructuring⁴⁹. The student movements of 2015, however, shifted the focus from a problem of physical access to an epistemological access: the view that the content of university curricula in South Africa displays a colonial bias and as such creates a sense of dislocation between students, context and content. Importantly this shift was able to link two strands of enduring discontent that otherwise existed in distinct ideological spaces. Under the umbrella of transformation, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and national mandates for diversity⁵⁰ the central aim appeared to be providing physical access to university spaces for black students and staff. The student-led movements that began with *Rhodes Must Fall*, however, connected physical transformation with epistemological decolonisation. In this sense racism and the physical absence of black⁵¹ bodies in academia was ideologically tied to the specific nature of the curriculum. Philosophically, one might perceive this difference between physically including black bodies in university spaces versus reshaping the curriculum as another example of 'inclusion' versus 'integration'. In turn, one might liken physical inclusion to the manner in which art historical examples from previously marginalised contexts are added to texts, curricula and museums.

Decolonisation, as revolutionary epistemic strategy, is then perceived to be an alternative to the strategy of inclusion (whether physical or discursive). As a term decolonisation comes laden with various sets of associations linked to specific moments in history and has been employed to different ends depending on its perceived meaning. In South Africa there has been an increased use of the term 'decolonisation' as a discursive strategy for framing the attempts to transform institutionalised knowledge production and university structures. The use of this term, often perceived in the contemporary sense as an alternative to the term 'post-colonial', may be seen as part of a global awareness of the continuing hegemony of colonial

⁴⁸ In recent times there has been a resistance to the term 'transformation' and its overuse in South African universities. There is a perception that the term has connotations of slow rather than radical change that fails to truly engage with institutionalized racialism and seeks to maintain the status quo.

⁴⁹ Department of Education South Africa, *Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1996).

⁵⁰ Diversity is a term connected to transformation in institutional discourse that many feel is likened to the metaphor of the rainbow nation and as such fails to acknowledge inequality and difference.

⁵¹ Here, and in the dissertation that follows I use 'black' so refer to all those considered non-white during apartheid in South Africa. This follows the ideas of Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness movement. See: Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like: A Selection of His Writings*, ed. by Aelred Stubbs (Oxford: Heinemann, 1987).

culture despite the demise of the official institution of European colonisation⁵². Since the ‘post-colonial’ assumes an era and ideological moment that has moved past and beyond the colonial, the use of the term, ‘decolonial’ (or, at times ‘anti-colonial’) forces an acknowledgment of the continued presence of the colonial in contemporary space. Ostensibly, the verb ‘to decolonise’ is defined only as the withdrawal of a colonial power so that it is left, politically, independent⁵³. For those who call for decolonisation in the South African context such a definition is perceived to be inadequate as it does not account for the on-going economic, cultural, ideological and historical impact of colonisation on contemporary nation states. The insufficiency of terms such as ‘democratic’, ‘independent’ or ‘postcolonial’ in describing the complexity of lived experience in a country like South Africa (which historically has had a relatively large European, settler population) is emphasised in the contemporary use of the term ‘decolonisation’⁵⁴. In his well-known text *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o draws attention to what he calls the “cultural bomb” of imperialism that effects an annihilation of heritage, language and culture to the extent that the colonised person sees their own history as lacking⁵⁵. For wa Thiong’o the effects of the cultural bomb are not lifted with independence, or in the case of South Africa, democracy. The absorption of an imperial ideology that demotes African culture and privileges European culture is maintained despite political independence. It is from this basis that academic disciplines, such as art history, may be perceived to require decolonisation. As such, despite the discourse that frames African states as ‘postcolonial’ in the twenty-first century the employment of the term ‘decolonisation’ can still be said to have both literal and metaphorical weight.

⁵² Ramon Grosfoguel speaks of the “myth of postcolonial world” since power and coloniality are “not reducible to the presence or absence of a colonial administration”. Ramon Grosfoguel, ‘Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality’, *Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1.1 (2011), 13.

⁵³ See: www.oxforddictionaries.com. Dietmar Rothermund points to the German economist, Moritz Julius Bonn as coining the term in 1932 in an article on imperialism for the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*. Bonn also referred to ‘counter-colonialism’ in a book from 1938, which Rothermund points out, gives a greater agency to African people and independence revolutions Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonisation* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 2. See also *Decolonisation: Perspectives from Now and Then*, ed. by Prasenjit Duara (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

⁵⁴ While the description of ‘settler’ is in part misleading considering the many South Africans (particularly Afrikaans speakers) classified as ‘white’ who have a combination of European, African and Asian ancestry and a loss of identification with Europe, it is useful here as a term to describe an historical structure of separation rather than individual’s identities. Achille Mbembe rejects the contemporary use of the term ‘settler’ for white South Africans as it assumes a lack of responsibility for citizens tied to the nation. See Achille Mbembe, ‘Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive’, *Transcript of a Lecture given at the Stellenbosch University*, 2015 <[http://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille Mbembe - Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive.pdf](http://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille_Mbembe_-_Decolonizing_Knowledge_and_the_Question_of_the_Archive.pdf)> [accessed 20 August 2016]. I acknowledge this complexity and seek to use the term ‘settler’ in reference to historical structure and apartheid policy only.

⁵⁵ Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Publishers, 1994), 3.

In the South African context decolonisation takes on a specific and contested meaning, as its history is somewhat distinct from the narrative of pan-African decolonisation in the post-war period that intensified in the nineteen-sixties. The apparently exceptional case of South Africa has meant that it is often left out of discussions of African decolonisation⁵⁶. As Stephen Ellis noted in a lecture on South African decolonisation, the country has long been perceived, from both an national and international perspective, as a special case in relation to colonisation⁵⁷. South Africa legally ceased to be a colony in 1910 when the Union of South Africa was formed and it gained independence from Britain, yet it maintained many of the structures of colonialism as a result, in part, of its dominant settler population and the subsequent instalment of apartheid. This particular situation was described in a document entitled *A Road to South African Freedom: Programme of the South African Communist Party* (SACP) published in 1963 that outlined South Africa's socio-political situation under the description 'Colonialism of a Special Type'⁵⁸. The document details the gradual eradication of rights for South Africans classified as 'non-white' (black, coloured or Indian in apartheid terms) and the privileges afforded those classified as white. In perceiving South Africa during the Union years as a nation whose government enforced a specific brand of colonialism and imperialism the term 'decolonisation' as applying to South Africa in 1910 is not only refuted but also made redundant by the SACP's narrative. From the vantage point of the SACP's publication, in the period between 1910 and 1994 'non-white' South Africa was the colony of 'white' South Africa⁵⁹. In other words, instead of the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 being characterised as the historical point of decolonisation this moment is instead depicted as the transition from external colonialism by Dutch and then British rule to internal colonisation⁶⁰ by a white settler population (or descendants of settlers) whose ties to Europe had been, to varying degrees, severed but who were often still referred to as 'white Europeans' in contrast to 'black Africans'⁶¹.

⁵⁶ In the *Routledge Companion to Decolonisation* South Africa is described as becoming independent before the post-war period and as therefore beyond the scope of the text. Rothermund, 177.

⁵⁷ Stephen Ellis, *South Africa and the Decolonization of the Mind (Talk)* (Amsterdam: Faculty of Social Sciences, Vrije Universiteit, 2009). 8.

⁵⁸ Colonialism of a Special Type came to be known as CST and was endorsed as official policy by the ANC in 1969. There is rather extensive writing on the topic. See Nicholas Visser, 'Postcoloniality of a Special Type: Theory and its Appropriations in South Africa', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 27 (1997), 79–94. Visser discusses CST and is rather critical of its application to the South African context.

⁵⁹ South African Communist Party, 'The Road to South African Freedom: The Programme of the South African Communist Party', *The African Communist*, 2.2 (1963), 24–70.

⁶⁰ See Harold Wolpe, 'The Theory of Internal Colonialism: The South African Case', in *Beyond the Sociology of Development: Economy and Society in Latin America and Africa*, ed. by Ivar. Oxaal, Tony. Barnett, and David Booth (London; New York: Routledge & Paul, 1975), pp. 229–51.

⁶¹ The terms 'white' and settler' describe persons in terms of the dominant social and political narratives of the time which classified South African's by race and also alluded to ancestral origin by referring to white people as European and black

Understanding South African history in the twentieth-century as one of internal colonisation implies that the Union and then the apartheid government operated in a manner analogous to a colonial power. This process has also been referred to as domestic colonialism, settler colonialism and secondary colonialism and in all cases the terms used indicate a transfer of power from the control of a European colonial government into the hands of a white settler community⁶². If we are to characterise this historical move as a move towards secondary colonialism then the ‘settler-run’ government must be defined as a colonial government in a new form. Colonialism defined specifically as settler colonialism has various global precedents including the independence granted to Britain’s North American colonies in 1783 and the gradual independence of the various British dominions: Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa⁶³. The cultural landscape of these settler colonies may be described as different from those colonies controlled remotely by European powers precisely because of the interaction between settlers, indigenous people, migrants, imported workers and slaves brought from other geographies. In contrast to many other African countries colonised by European powers the nations that became the British dominions all had substantial settler populations and the gradual process towards self-governance was granted on the basis of transference of power to the settler community rather than to the nation’s population as a whole. In this light the late-nineteenth and twentieth century history of South Africa is one of a geographical space transitioning from; a colony of separate territories subjected to British imperialism⁶⁴, to British dominion in 1910, to an apartheid state in 1948, to an independent apartheid republic in 1961 and finally to a democratic nation in 1994. The precise way in which decolonisation, both as a term denoting the political separation from a colonial power and as an ideology, has been employed in relation to South Africa is applicable to more than one of these periods.

people as African. Apartheid era signage that segregated public space typically read: ‘Europeans Only/ Slegs Blankes’. Interestingly the English language version of the sign describes by geography (Europe) while the Afrikaans version describes by race (‘blankes’ means whites). Some signs also used the English word ‘whites’.

⁶² Leonard Thompson, ‘The Parting of Ways in South Africa’, in *The Transfer of Power in Africa: Decolonisation, 1940-1960*, ed. by Prosser. Gifford and William Roger Louis (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1982), 419.

⁶³ GE Devenish, ‘Cutting the Apron Strings: The South African Experience of Decolonisation’, *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 9.2 (2013), 310-3113. Canada, Australia and New Zealand all currently retain the British Monarch as their head of state.

⁶⁴ Prior to 1910 the territory of South Africa consisted of the Cape and Natal Colony administered by Britain which were given representative authorities in the eighteenth century. At that time (the mid-nineteenth century) the Boers (white, Afrikaans speaking farmers) had established the independent South African republic (later the Transvaal) north of the Vaal river and the Orange Free State. These Boer republics remained independent until 1902 when the Boers were defeated by the British in the South African War. A number of other lands were declared independent at the time, including Griqualand West and East which were established by ‘coloured’ Afrikaans speaking descendants of Dutch settlers and indigenous Khoikhoi people.

For many commentators the process of turning Britain's former settler colonies into dominions was akin to a process of decolonisation and is still described as such in anthologies⁶⁵. It is from this perspective that South Africa could have been described as becoming 'decolonised' in 1910 when the Union of South Africa was created. The Union government, however, was still subjected to British policy in terms of foreign affairs, legally committed to Britain in the first world war and maintained an allegiance to the British crown⁶⁶. It was only in 1931; following the Statute of Westminster and the subsequent Status of the Union Act in 1934, that South Africa was declared a sovereign, independent state and a commonwealth realm rather than a dominion. The manner in which the Union government operated in the period following dominion status in the early twentieth century corroborates the notion that there was a transition from primary colonialism under Dutch and then British rule to secondary colonialism under white, settler rule⁶⁷. Union South Africa was a dominant power in the southern African region and many other nations (particularly Lesotho, Swaziland, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique) were heavily dependent upon it economically⁶⁸. In the case of what was then South West Africa (now Namibia) South Africa in effect behaved like a colonial power in 1915 when, through military force, it captured the territory from the German Empire. South West Africa (now Namibia) became a satellite province of South Africa and while it was never part of its official territory it can be seen to have been its colony with a shared currency, shared laws and a shared political system implemented by the South African government. Thompson in turn characterises the aforementioned southern African nations mentioned above as virtual satellites of South Africa during the period and in the case of Lesotho and Swaziland, both geographically surrounded by South Africa and heavily dependent on it, the description of internal colonialism becomes a ready attribution⁶⁹.

With Union, South Africa became a self-governing country ruled by its white minority whose National Party (the political party that came into power in 1924 and again in 1948) sought to portray itself as "part of Africa in a geographical sense only ... as a distant outpost of the

⁶⁵ Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonisation*, 2006.

⁶⁶ See Devenish, "Cutting the Apron Strings: The South African Experience of Decolonisation", 311-318.

⁶⁷ Thompson, "The Parting of Ways in South Africa", 419.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁶⁹ Thompson, "The Parting of Ways in South Africa", 421.

North Atlantic world”⁷⁰. Politically, socially, culturally, economically and geographically the successive regimes of colonial rule, Union and then apartheid government sought to gradually displace black, African people and culture and place Western dominance in the void⁷¹. During Union times only white men were eligible to participate in parliament, except in the Cape Province. In the Cape, black voters were disenfranchised in 1936 and coloured voters in 1958 affecting the gradual removal of political participation begun in the nineteenth century⁷². A line of successive laws in the early twentieth century, prior to the institution of official apartheid in 1948, continued this disenfranchisement for all not classified as white. The list of laws that legislated the subjugation of black, coloured and Indian South African’s is lengthy but includes: the Mines and Works Act of 1911 which granted certificates of competency in skilled labour to white and coloured people only; the infamous Land Act of 1913 that prohibited black people from owning property outside designated reserves; the Native Affairs Act of 1920 which forced black people into district councils determined by tribe; the Durban Land Alienation Ordinance of 1922 that prohibited Indian people from owning property in areas designated as white and the Class Area Bill which enforced residential and trading segregation for Indians; the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 which regulated the presence of black Africans in urban areas; the Minimum Wages Act of 1925 which reserved particular trades for white people; the Woman’s Enfranchisement Act of 1930 that gave only white women the right to be elected into parliament; the various Land Acts of 1936 which created more reserves, prohibited black people from owning land and allowed for the removal of black-owned land in rural areas designated as white; the Black (Native) Laws Amendment of 1937, which prevented black people from acquiring land in urban areas; the Pension Laws Amendment of 1940 which set pension pay for black people at less than a third of that paid to white pensioners (this amendment was protested by the National party on the grounds that pensions for black pensioners was not needed)⁷³. These laws can be understood as legalising successive privileges for white South Africans, gradually removing access to

⁷⁰ Ellis, *South Africa and the Decolonisation of the Mind*, 10.

⁷¹ Sium et al characterises settler colonialism as one of displacement and replacement where indigenous knowledges (and people) are cast as primitive and unworthy of study and are physically and epistemologically replaced. Aman Sium, Chandni Desai and Eric Ritskes, ‘Towards the “Tangible Unknown”’: Decolonisation and the Indigenous Future’, *Decolonisation: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1.1 (2012), ii-ix.

⁷² Thompson, "The Parting of Ways in South Africa", 420. Devenish, "Cutting the Apron Strings: The South African Experience of Decolonisation", 314. While the Cape Qualified Franchise was in principle non-racial the increased cost of qualification and the gradual additions to qualification including literacy, the exclusion of tribal form of property ownership as well as the difficulty in accessing voting structures for those in rural areas meant that relatively few black and coloured voters made use of their franchise.

⁷³ For a more complete list see: ‘The History of Separate Development in South Africa’, *South African History Online* <<http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/apartheid-legislation-1850s-1970s>> [accessed 5 August 2017]. See also: Christopher, "The Atlas of Changing South Africa".

economic and social institutions for those classified as non-white and instituting a system where central urban zones classified as white operated in a manner analogous to the colonial metropole.

The term ‘decolonisation’ was again employed during the early period of apartheid following the National Party’s rise to power in 1948. In response to the international move towards independence for previously colonised nations and as an attempt to further entrench racial segregation in South Africa, the ruling party introduced the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951⁷⁴. This act drew on the colonial establishment of reserves for ‘native’ people in the nineteenth century and the Union government’s Land Act of 1913 and pushed more black South African’s into ‘homelands’ away from economic centres. While European colonial powers were granting independence to many African countries from the nineteen fifties onwards and withdrawing from their former territories, the National Party government sought to imitate this process by creating independent ‘homelands’ or ‘Bantustans’ for black South Africans based on perceived ethnic, cultural and language groups⁷⁵. If we understand South Africa’s independence in 1910 as a transfer to internal colonisation then the creation of Bantustans can be perceived as akin to a process of disenfranchisement masquerading as internal decolonisation. In some sense it was the process of decolonisation that was beginning to take hold in other African nations that provided the catalyst for the creation of Bantustans or, as the National Party referred to them: ‘homelands’. As the pressure exerted by African revolutionaries for colonial powers to grant independence increased many colonial governments and external commentators began to speak of decolonisation as an inevitable process. In the nineteen fifties Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana and Guinea all gained independence and the momentum only increased in the nineteen sixties. With South Africa still a dominion and part of the British Commonwealth the growing wave of independence on the African continent created the question of what was to become of the southern African dominion ruled by a settler minority. In South Africa anti-apartheid movements were

⁷⁴ The term ‘Bantu’ is used to refer to hundreds of different ethnic groups on the African continent who speak related languages understood to be part of the Bantu language group. In South Africa the term was initially employed in the early twentieth century in preference to the term ‘Native’ with reference to black people. During the apartheid-era, National Party government adopted the term officially to the extent that it began to be associated with racist policies in opposition to the terms ‘African’ and ‘Black’ as employed by the African National Congress (ANC) and the Black Consciousness Movement led by Steve Biko respectively.

⁷⁵ Devenish, "Cutting the Apron Strings: The South African Experience of Decolonisation", 312-314. Laura Evans notes that the term ‘Bantustan’ (Bantu state) was used by the National Party government initially in relation to the ‘stans’ created in the partition of India in 1947. The term ‘homelands’ was employed to connote the idea that the territories in question were the ethnic, cultural and linguistic homes of black South Africans. As this was at best an artificial division the term Bantustan came to be used pejoratively by scholars and activists. L Evans, ‘South Africa’s Bantustans and the Dynamics of “Decolonisation”’: Reflections on Writing Histories of the Homelands’, *South African Historical Journal*, 64.1 (2012), 117.

intensifying their activities yet the violence of the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the campaign against the imposition of Bantustans and the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) led not towards freedom or democracy but to the creation of the independent Republic of South Africa on the 31st of May 1961. In February 1960 British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made a speech in Cape Town, which came to be known as the ‘winds of change’ speech following a month of visits to British colonies in Africa. In it he acknowledged the inevitability of decolonisation as the demand for self-rule in Africa increased and rather subtly pointed to Britain’s disapproval of apartheid policies⁷⁶. In response the apartheid government (led by Hendrik Verwoerd who became synonymous with policies of separate development) furthered the divorce of the Bantustans from the rest of the now independent South Africa. The goal of becoming a republic had long been a policy of the National Party, as had the complete separation of the races. In an election pamphlet from late 1947 detailing the National Party’s manifesto ahead of the May 1948 election where they were elected into power, they outline their policy for the creation of Bantustans. This policy was to become legislation in 1951 with the Bantu Authorities Act and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959) and to become further enforced through the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970⁷⁷. Sections of the 1947 manifesto read as follows:

“The reserves should be the national home of the Bantu. There their educational institutions should be situated and their social services should be provided instead of the present practice of providing them in urban locations ... The Bantu in the urban areas should be regarded as migratory citizens not entitled to political or social rights equal to those of the Whites ... The Bantu are progressively to assume responsibility for financing and controlling their own education, under white supervision⁷⁸”.

The removal of black (defined as ‘black African’) people from South Africa into the ten Bantustan reserves aligned with ten designated ethnic groups meant shrinking the land for use

⁷⁶ Frank Myers, ‘Harold Macmillan’s “Winds of Change” Speech: A Case Study in the Rhetoric of Policy Change’, *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 3.4 (2000), 555–75.

⁷⁷ ‘The History of Separate Development in South Africa’.

⁷⁸ National Party, ‘National Party’s Race Relations Policy’, *Politics Web*, 1947 <<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/apartheid-the-nps-1947-manifesto>> [accessed 20 August 2016].

by those classified as black to thirteen percent of the national total area of the country⁷⁹. Thompson notes that Verwoerd's apartheid government described their Bantustan policy as 'decolonisation' in their foreign diplomacy and in so doing sought to compare this process to the decolonisation policies of Britain, France and Belgium⁸⁰. In a few respects the creation of Bantustans did, as was the aim of the apartheid government, mimic the policy of world powers with regard to Africa as a whole⁸¹. Colonial powers had established connections between the European metropolises and the African territories as core and peripheral zones respectively. When colonial administration withdrew this often came with the withdrawal of infrastructure, the severing of citizenship ties to the colonial centre and, where possible, the transfer of power into the hands of African rulers sanctioned by Europe. Many colonial powers also sought to retain a relationship of dependency that would be to their own benefit despite independence and Britain's creation of the Commonwealth of Nations (headed by the British monarch) may be seen as an example of this. With the creation of the Bantustans the apartheid government sought to effectively remove black South Africans from the territory of 'white South Africa' and the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 meant that all black people were given additional citizenship status on the basis of a perceived, yet artificial, connection to one of the designated homelands. This 'dual citizenship' meant that when the various homelands/Bantustans became independent black citizens of the respective territories lost both their South African citizenship and nationality in the eyes of the apartheid government⁸². With the forced occupation of rural 'homelands' came the removal of access to economic opportunities and infrastructure and the attempt to control black movement into urban areas. This meant that black South Africans wanting to access work in urban areas either had to fall in line with the enforced system of migratory labour or reside in impoverished townships on the outskirts of urban centres⁸³. In some sense the relationship of the white, urban centre to the black, rural periphery meant the removal of access to the products of modernity, which may be extrapolated from the South African context to the context of decolonisation as a whole. For some commentators the analogy extends to the

⁷⁹ Jaana Puukka and others, *Higher Education in Regional and City Development: The Free State, South Africa* (OECD Publishing, 2012), 44.

⁸⁰ Thompson, "The Parting of Ways in South Africa", 439.

⁸¹ Ellis, "South Africa and the Decolonisation of the Mind", 11.

⁸² Jonathan Klaaren, 'Post-Apartheid Citizenship in South Africa', in *From Migrants to Citizens: Membership in a Changing World*, ed. by Douglas. B Klusmeyer and Thomas. A Aleinikoff (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 224. This was fully in line with the apartheid government's aim. C.P. Mulder, minister of Bantu Administration and Development stated in 1978: "If our policy is taken to its full logical conclusion as far as the black people are concerned, there will be not one black man with South African citizenship ... there will no longer be a moral obligation on this parliament to accommodate these people politically." From "House of Assembly Debates" as quoted in Aleinikoff and Klusmeyer, 225.

⁸³ See: Evans, "South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of 'Decolonisation'", 118. and Thompson, "The Parting of Ways in South Africa", 429.

notion of a commonwealth with the apartheid government's policy of granting independence to each Bantustan being compared to the creation of the British commonwealth: white South Africa at the core and in control of various emerging Bantu states⁸⁴. Four of the ten homelands were granted independence by the South African government but were not recognised internationally. The Bantustans of the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei became nominally independent in 1976, 1977, 1979 and 1981 respectively and came to be known as the TBVC states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei). To further the analogy to international African independence, in South Africa administrative power in the Bantustans was given to 'chiefs' but was effectively controlled by the apartheid government⁸⁵.

The creation of the Republic of South Africa as an independent nation and the subsequent transformation of the existing reserves into artificial 'homelands' or Bantustans was thus a process analogous to international decolonisation but one that instead of conferring freedom and independence onto the black, African population as well as all others defined as 'non-white' subjected them to extreme disenfranchisement and the denial of access to basic human rights. As Suren Pillay noted in a talk at the university of Cape Town in April 2015, the National Party's use of the term decolonisation to describe the removal of people into Bantustans was, then, an attempt "to make [black people] foreigners, while naturalizing the foreigner as the person who has the right to belong", echoing the notion that settler colonialism was a process of displacement and replacement both physically and culturally⁸⁶.

It is the sense of access to rights, access to geographical spaces and access to institutions that is pertinent when considering the contemporary call for decolonisation within the sphere of education. The division of South Africa during apartheid into a 'core' with a series of subordinate, peripheral zones was applicable in an economic, legal and geographic sense but also as far as access to education and institutional structures was concerned. Prime Minister Verwoerd entrenched the 'homeland' system and along with it the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (also called the Black Education Act), which enforced the segregation of educational

⁸⁴ Evans, "South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of 'Decolonisation'", 120. and Devenish, "Cutting the Apron Strings: The South African Experience of Decolonisation", 328.

⁸⁵ Thompson, "The Parting of Ways in South Africa", 440.

⁸⁶ Suren Pillay, 'Decolonizing the University', *Talk given at the University of Cape Town* <<http://africasacountry.com/2015/06/decolonizing-the-university/>> [accessed 20 August 2016]. As quoted earlier, Sium et al characterises settler colonialism as one of displacement and replacement. Sium, Desai and Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknown': Decolonisation and the Indigenous Future", ii-ix.

facilities⁸⁷. In 1959 the framework of separate education for each of the race groups defined by apartheid legislation was extended to universities making it a crime for a person classified as 'non-white' to register at a 'white university' without permission. It was imagined that each 'homeland' would have its own higher education institution (university or technikon⁸⁸) so as to further the goal of complete separation for the TVBC 'homelands' – the Bantustans that became locally independent – and to deny access to South Africa's best universities to black students. By the nineteen eighties the government perceived South Africa to consist of five separate spheres: the Republic of South Africa (RSA) and the four TVBC 'republics'. In detailing the higher education landscape under apartheid Ian Bunting notes that each institution had to be designated for "exclusive use by one of the four race groups: African, coloured, Indian or white"⁸⁹. By 1985 there were 19 higher education institutions for white students, two for coloured students, two for Indian students, six for Africans in the central RSA and seven in the TBVC countries (for a more detailed description see Appendix A)⁹⁰. Statistics show that the policy of segregation was largely successful in dividing students along race lines: in 1989 black Africans made up 98% of the students at universities designated for that race group while 96% of the students at white, Afrikaans-medium universities were white⁹¹. The permit system, which allowed a student to attend a university not in line with their race group was not used extensively and in 1989 only 7% of South Africa's students would have needed a permit despite the system of segregation having ended in 1988⁹². Again, the higher education structure replicated the ideology of centre and periphery or, as Evans puts it more pointedly; a white core and a black periphery, for there were obvious differences in the quality of education offered for the different race groups⁹³.

The manner in which South Africa's history has extended influence into the present this has meant the continuation of a sense of partial access to rights, economic opportunities and high quality education. In the contemporary moment the sense that dissatisfaction with South

⁸⁷ 'The History of Separate Development in South Africa'.

⁸⁸ For a discussion on the distinction between universities and technikons see Ian Bunting, 'The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid', in *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*, ed. by Nico Cloete and others (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 60-63. In short the apartheid government understood universities to be engaged with science and abstract knowledge while the technikons were to be engaged with practical, technical skills.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Jon File, 'Critical Challenges for South African Universities', in *Restructuring South African Tertiary Education: Academic Contributions to the Debate on Rationalisation*, ed. by Nadia Hartman and Ian Scott (Johannesburg: Union of Democratic University Staff Associations, 1990), 8-9.

⁹² Ibid., 8-9.

⁹³ Evans, "South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of 'Decolonisation'", 120.

Africa's democracy is increasing may be seen to come from this perception that despite legal equality all citizens do not have equal access. Ellis describes this as a perception that South African citizenship is not a singular, homogenous status but rather a hierarchy of access to rights that increases as one gets geographically or culturally closer to the "inner core" or perhaps, to whiteness in an ideological sense⁹⁴. If this is true for South Africa, then democracy is still only partial for many citizens and the legacy of apartheid, which treated black South Africans as aliens, continues a pseudo-colonial situation.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the historical division and inequality instituted by the legal, social and ideological system of apartheid. It is necessary to set up this inequality before moving on to other sections of this dissertation so as to extend this argument to its conclusion in relation to higher education and specifically to the nature of art history as an academic discipline. Chapter 4 will, specifically, attempt to untangle the affect of Apartheid's legacy of separation and disenfranchisement on the Art historical curriculum at South African universities. Before we are able to understand the nature of the curriculum, however, I will outline the way in which inequality was instituted in the sphere of tertiary education in South Africa. The context of higher education during apartheid was one of division. As mentioned above, in the territory of South Africa the 'homelands' for each designated black ethnicity were removed from the ideological core of the rest of the country with each given its own institution for higher education. Even within the core of the Republic higher education was further divided by race, language and culture. In referring to the history of higher education and in documents on transformation, universities are often referred to as either 'historically white' (HWU) or 'historically black' (HBU) – terms which come with the added qualifier that historically white universities were distinctly advantaged while historically black universities were disadvantaged (see Appendix A)⁹⁵. Bunting, and others, further divide the historically white group into Afrikaans-medium and English-medium. He indicates that Afrikaans-medium universities gave strong support to the apartheid government, adhered to the policy of segregation (student enrolment for this group was 96% white in 1990), tended to be conservative, authoritarian and hierarchical in nature and did not tolerate student protest⁹⁶. Afrikaans-medium universities, that were isolated from the international academic

⁹⁴ Ellis, *South Africa and the Decolonisation of the Mind*, 4.

⁹⁵ Bunting, "The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid", 65.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 65-69. The Afrikaans-medium universities were: the University of the Orange Free State, Potchefstroom University, the University of Pretoria, the Rand Afrikaans University and the Stellenbosch University. The University of Port Elizabeth was dual-medium but dominated by Afrikaans executives.

community for their support of apartheid, presided over knowledge production that was largely uncritical and focused very little on research. In 1986 the white, English-medium universities produced 59% of the total research output units and were awarded 62% of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) research grants while the white, Afrikaans universities produced 38% of the research outputs and were awarded 38% of the research grants (black universities account for less than 3% of these historical totals)⁹⁷.

In the post-apartheid period many universities were created anew through a national restructuring plan aimed to work against apartheid legacies and this resulted in mergers between historically white and historically black institutions or between universities and technikons (see Appendix A). Within the category of Afrikaans-medium universities the Stellenbosch University remained intact, the University of Pretoria absorbed the now defunct Vista University's Mamelodi campus (an historically black institution) in 2004, the University of the Orange Free State changed its name to the University of the Free State in 2001 and also absorbed the Bloemfontein campus of the former Vista University as well as the QwaQwa campus of the University of the North in 2004 (an historically black University or HBU)⁹⁸. The Rand Afrikaans University merged with the Technikon Witwatersrand and the remaining parts of Vista University (an HBU) to form the University of Johannesburg in 2005 while the highly conservative Afrikaans institution, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, merged with the 'homeland' institution of the University of Bophuthatswana to create North West University⁹⁹. The University of Port Elizabeth (an HWU) merged with the Technikon of Port Elizabeth to create Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University¹⁰⁰.

The historically white, English-medium universities were self-defined as 'liberal', did not perceive themselves as servants of the state, held 'academic freedom' in high esteem, were relatively resistant to the government's ideals of segregation (student enrolment was 72% white in 1990) and perceived themselves to be part of an international academic

⁹⁷ File, "Critical Challenges for South African Universities", 10.

⁹⁸ Martin Hall, Ashley Symes, and Thierry Luescher, *The Governance of Merger in South African Higher Education*, Pretoria: Council on Higher Education (Pretoria: Council on Higher Education, 2004).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

community¹⁰¹. With the restructuring of higher education institutions in 2004 many of the historically white, English-medium institutions remained intact as the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand and Rhodes University¹⁰². This reality may be taken to indicate that they were perceived to be capable of transforming their demographics on their own and also that their high academic standards should remain intact. The former University of Natal (an HWU) merged with the University of Durban Westville (UDW), which was intended to cater exclusively to Indian students, but had in 1989 only two-thirds Indian students and one third black, African students among others¹⁰³.

The historically 'black' (used to mean non-white) universities in the RSA were further divided by race after 1984 so that they included four universities for 'Africans' a university for Indian students (UDW) as well as a university for coloured students (the University of the Western Cape)¹⁰⁴. While initially conservative these institutions became the sites of student protest and anti-apartheid campaigns in the nineteen eighties. Black universities were set up to maintain the segregated status quo and train civil servants while maintaining allegiance to the apartheid system by, until the early nineteen eighties, reserving academic and leadership positions for white academics and offering very few opportunities for research or postgraduate study¹⁰⁵. While the student bodies at historically black universities (both in the RSA and TBVC countries) were almost 100% black during apartheid the permanent academic staff was at least 50% white at all institutions while Vista University had an 82% white staff demographic and Medunsa (Medical University of South Africa) had a staff cohort that was 87% white in 1989¹⁰⁶. The student enrolments in 1989 show that only 5% of South African postgraduate students were black and that only between 1 and 2% of the total research outputs for 1985 were from historically black universities¹⁰⁷. The University of the Western Cape (UWC), reserved for coloured students, and the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), reserved for Indian students, became the sites of early defiance against apartheid education as is evidenced in their student enrolment being 59% Indian for the University of Durban Westville and 68% coloured for the University of the Western Cape in

¹⁰¹ Bunting, "The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid", 70-74. The English-medium universities were: the University of Cape Town, the University of Natal, Rhodes University and the University of the Witwatersrand.

¹⁰² Hall, Symes and Luescher, *The Governance of Merger in South African Higher Education*, Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

¹⁰³ File, "Critical Challenges for South African Universities", 9.

¹⁰⁴ Bunting, "The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid", 74. The universities for black students were Medunsa University, the University of the North, Vista University and the University of Zululand

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 74- 76.

¹⁰⁶ File, "Critical Challenges for South African Universities", 9-10.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

1990¹⁰⁸. Apart from inadequate funding and a lack of access to research and postgraduate study historically black universities were also the recipients of students who had been through a wholly inadequate schooling system with unfavourable teacher-pupil ratios, inadequate facilities and a per capita expenditure six times less than white schools¹⁰⁹. This meant that during apartheid black university students were far less equipped for academic study and that situation has plagued attempts to demographically transform university enrolments ever since as many schools in black areas remain inadequate. The situation of disparity between HWUs and HBUs has continued into the post-apartheid era as historically black institutions have attempted to repair the gap in quality education despite rising student-lecturer ratios and insufficient resources¹¹⁰. With the restructuring that occurred for many universities in 2004 two historically black institutions, the University of the North and Medunsa (Medical University of South Africa) were merged to create the University of Limpopo. Vista University was absorbed into various other institutions while the University of Zululand remained intact¹¹¹.

There were also four universities linked to each of the 'independent' TBVC countries and specifically intended for particular black, African ethnic groups (though many students in fact came from urban areas in the RSA): the University of Transkei, North West University in Bophutatswana, the University of Venda and the University of Fort Hare in the former Ciskei¹¹². The University of Fort Hare had, prior to the University Act, had an illustrious history and maintained very high academic standards. In 1957, upon notice of the intention of the apartheid government to turn Fort Hare into a 'Bantustan university' specifically for use by isiXhosa speakers the then acting principle, Professor Zacharia Keodirelang Matthews wrote a powerful objection to the plans. Among other things he listed the need for greater funding for the university, the fact that it had historically served a great variety of people from southern Africa (rather than one cultural or language group) and that its research and postgraduate programmes needed to be extended rather than curtailed based on demand¹¹³. These objections were not heard and the University of Fort Hare declined as a result. With the advent of democracy and the attempt to transform higher education institutions the

¹⁰⁸ Bunting, "The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid", 75.

¹⁰⁹ File, "Critical Challenges for South African Universities", 8.

¹¹⁰ National Council on Higher Education, *Report: A Framework for Transformation* (Pretoria: Department of Education, 1996), 36-40.

¹¹¹ Hall, Symes and Luescher, *The Governance of Merger in South African Higher Education*.

¹¹² Bunting, "The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid", 76.

¹¹³ Zacharia Keodirelang Matthews, 'The University College of Fort Hare', *South African Outlook, Lovedale Press*, April-May (1957).

University of the Transkei was merged with Border Technikon and Eastern Cape Technikon to form the Walter Sisulu University of Technology and Science while the University of Bophuthatswana became North West University and the University of Venda as well as the University of Fort Hare remained intact in name¹¹⁴.

During the apartheid period South Africa also had seven historically-white technikons, two historically-black technikons in the Republic of South Africa, three historically black technikons in the TBVC countries and two technikons for coloured and Indian students respectively, one distance learning university and one distance-learning technikon¹¹⁵. The University of South Africa (UNISA) was and is the principle distance-learning institution. Despite being legally open to all races during apartheid since there was no physical contact between students, it had a 50% white student enrolment in 1988 – a percentage disproportionate to population numbers¹¹⁶. The technikons were differentiated from the universities in offering practical, vocational training and focusing on undergraduate teaching rather than research or postgraduate study. The *van Wyk de Vries Commission* (1974) and the *Goode Committee* (1978) established the various functions of the universities, technikons and colleges so that the universities' aim was described as intending to “educate students in a range of basic scientific (or scholarly) disciplines with a view to high-level professional training; while that of technikons [was] to train students in the application of knowledge rather than in basic knowledge itself”¹¹⁷. With the merger of various universities in 2004 and 2005 the University of South Africa absorbed Technikon South Africa and the distance learning portion of Vista University while Tshwane University of Technology was created following a merger of Pretoria Technikon, Technikon Northern Gauteng and North-West Technikon¹¹⁸. The former Peninsula Technikon and the Cape Technikon were merged to form the Cape Peninsula University of Technology¹¹⁹.

The institutions of higher education in South Africa were therefore deeply divided by race, culture and language to the extent that each group of institutions could be described as having particular characteristics. When one looks at this landscape and asks what the differences were in curriculum offered by each group a clearer narrative emerges of centre and periphery;

¹¹⁴ Hall, Symes and Luescher, *The Governance of Merger in South African Higher Education*.

¹¹⁵ Bunting, "The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid", 78-80.

¹¹⁶ File, "Critical Challenges for South African Universities", 9.

¹¹⁷ National Council on Higher Education, *Report: A Framework for Transformation*, 30.

¹¹⁸ Hall, Symes and Luescher, *The Governance of Merger in South African Higher Education*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

of the inaccessibility of many academic disciplines to those excluded from the historically-white, advantaged institutions. As my question relates specifically to art history let me briefly discuss how the additional layer of access to Arts education at tertiary institutions may be applied to the landscape outlined above.

During the apartheid period, and specifically following the Bantu Education Act, very few schools offered any kind of arts education to black learners and black students were, with a few exceptions, prevented from studying art full-time at a university level¹²⁰. Aspiring black artists were able to study some form of art as part of their teacher training at institutions like the University of Fort Hare or take part in part-time classes at institutions like Chiawelo in Soweto, the Federated Union of Black Arts in Johannesburg, the African Institute of Art at the Funda centre in Soweto, the Johannesburg Art Foundation and the Community Arts Project in Cape Town¹²¹. Polly Street Art centre in Johannesburg offered more formalised classes and Rorkes Drift Art and Craft Centre, begun in 1965, offered a three-year fine art curriculum that produced many renowned artists – specifically printmakers. South Africa’s distance learning institution, the University of South Africa, offered a BA degree in fine art to students of all races. While these opportunities existed for the study of practical fine art there was virtually no course in formalised art history available to black students. The Separate Amenities Act (1953) meant that some art museums and other cultural spaces created for the RSA were also off limits to black South Africans¹²². There was a great demand for arts education from the South African public classified as ‘non-white’. The University of Fort Hare, established in 1916 as a mission college, had gained a sound academic reputation but was desperately lacking in adequate funding. Professor Matthews, then the acting principle, objected to the downgrading of Fort Hare to a Bantustan University and specifically requested funding for the establishment of a Department of Music and Fine Arts. He requested a department that “might develop the study and development of African music and art, fields in which the admitted aptitudes of Africans are not receiving sufficient attention today owing to the lack of the necessary funds”¹²³.

Fine art and art history were historically studied in tandem in South Africa with art history

¹²⁰ John Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 22-24.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

¹²² Peffer quotes David Koloane as saying (in 1995) that there was a lack of role models for black artists: “We were not even allowed into art museums, or theatres, or cinema because of the separate amenities act”. *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²³ Matthews, “The University College of Fort Hare”, 20.

often being perceived as an adjunct to practical subjects. Almost all of the HWUs offered courses in fine art and art history and this has not changed in the post-apartheid period. In the contemporary moment all the HWUs as well as their new manifestations (since the mergers of 2004) offer fine art, art history or visual studies as well as various courses in practical, design-related subjects¹²⁴. The University of the Western Cape, historically designated as a black university for coloured students, does not offer either fine art or art history though it does have a History Department where visual history is dealt with¹²⁵. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, which exists as the merger between both historically black and historically white institutions, offers courses in Theory of Art, Theory of Design and Communication to supplement practical programmes but these cannot be strictly defined as art history¹²⁶. Of the historically black universities the University of Limpopo and the University of Venda (UV) offer no courses in practical art or art history despite UV having its own gallery that acknowledges the art of the local, Venda people¹²⁷. Fort Hare now offers fine art, history of art and philosophy of art¹²⁸ while Walter Sisulu University (formerly the University of the Transkei) offers fine art along with art education and fashion design under the department of Science, Engineering and Technology with limited art history or art theory¹²⁹. The University of Zululand no longer has any Visual Arts courses and has recently begun to offer a Bachelor degree course in drama and performance art¹³⁰. Three of the former Technikons (created through mergers) which have become ‘technical universities’ offering degrees provide courses in both practical art and history of art or art theory: Tshwane University of Technology, Cape Peninsula University of Technology and Durban University of Technology¹³¹. While many universities offer some form of arts education as far as the institutions of South African art history are concerned the HWUs dominate the staffing of galleries, museums and other institutional spaces. It was noted in 2004 by Judy Ramgolam that for the conferences held by the principle Art Historical association, SAVAH (South African Visual Art Historians), technikons (or former technikons) and historically-black/historically-disadvantaged universities have almost never been hosts for the

¹²⁴ A more detailed analysis of curricula at South African universities will follow in Chapter 4.

¹²⁵ See: University of the Western Cape, ‘About The Department of History’ <<https://www.uwc.ac.za/Faculties/ART/History/Pages/About-Us.aspx>> [accessed 2 February 2017].

¹²⁶ Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, *Faculty of Art: Prospectus 2015* (NMMU, 2015).

¹²⁷ Elelwani Ramaite-Mafadza, ‘Email Correspondence (University of Venda)’, *July 2016*, 2016. There are plans to offer courses in art and culture in 2018.

¹²⁸ University of Fort Hare, ‘Department of Fine Arts: Undergraduate’ <<http://www.ufh.ac.za/faculties/social-sciences/departments/fine-arts/undergraduate>> [accessed 16 October 2016].

¹²⁹ Walter Sisulu University, ‘Arts Information Leaflet 2015’ (Department of Science, Engineering and Technology, 2015).

¹³⁰ Mandla Patrick Mlotshwa, ‘Email Correspondence (University of Zululand)’, *July 2016*.

¹³¹ A more detailed analysis of these institution’s curricula will be discussed in Chapter 4.

organisation's conference and the institutions were not represented on the council or editorial committee¹³². This situation has not shifted since 2014 as can be seen in Figure 10 which shows the various institutions that have hosted the conference since 1985¹³³. As such, despite the introduction of many courses in art history at higher education institutions subsequent to democracy those institutions that had established the academic discipline in the union and apartheid years continue to be perceived as custodians of the epistemological core in this area of knowledge production. I shall further discuss the production of South African art historical discourse in Chapter 2 and 3 and the specific curricula offered at various institutions in Chapter 4.

Such a continuing imbalance in the demographics of and access to the visual arts sector in South Africa is so obvious to any who find themselves within it that the observation has started to be devoid of novelty and garners only mild reactions. A study published in 2011 proved with both qualitative and quantitative data what many within the creative sphere already knew to be true. The study was commissioned by the South African Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) in 2008 and was undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). It showed that only 2% of South Africans view art in galleries and museums,¹³⁴ that the majority of artists (58%) come from the minority white population¹³⁵ and that while artists are generally in a socially and economically precarious position, white male artists earn more than double their black, female compatriots¹³⁶. Put succinctly, the report acknowledges that while "black artists play an increasingly prominent role in the contemporary art market, the ownership of mechanisms for distribution and presentation continue to be dominated by white South Africans"¹³⁷. Such mechanisms would include access to high-quality tertiary education, access to the museum and gallery system (the art market) and as an umbrella: access to the art historical discourse that gives an individual knowledge of the global art system and access to its mechanisms.

An acknowledgement that this inequality is by no means a new observation lies in the

¹³² Judy Ramgoolam as referenced in Jillian Carman, 'South Africa: Empowering the Local', in *Global and Local Art Histories*, ed. by Celina Jeffery and Gregory Minissale (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 77-78. There will be a greater analysis of SAVAH and its conferences in Chapter 3.

¹³³ This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

¹³⁴ The Human Sciences Research Council, *An Assessment of the Visual Arts in South Africa: Consultation Draft*, 2010, 10.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³⁷ The Human Sciences Research Council, *An Assessment of the Visual Arts Sector: Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations*, 2010, 26.

frequency with which various practitioners have emphasised it since, and indeed prior to, the first democratic election in 1994. David Koloane, a South African artist and writer, wrote about the inequalities in the artistic sphere in 1998. He noted that “[a]rt discourse is and always has been the prerogative of the privileged white community whose education system has been designed according to Western standards,” going on to note that “[t]he visual arts in the South African context are often perceived as elitist and a specialist undertaking because they are associated with power and affluence”¹³⁸. Here Koloane describes a divided arts education system whose physical division is entrenched by content that he perceives as more adequately serving the needs of a white community tied to European culture. Koloane also emphasises a common accusation that the arts are by nature elitist since they serve those in power. In light of the history of segregation and the limited access to art history or fine art education for black people during apartheid the perception that the dominant ‘system’ of art production in South Africa is aligned to ‘Western standards’ becomes clear. This is not unique to South Africa or for that matter to previously colonised nations but it is the fact that power was engineered to have a white face in South Africa that allows art to be associated, by default, with whiteness or a settler-colonial identity. Fifteen years later (in 2003) Vuyile Voyiya and Julie McGee created the documentary *The Luggage is Still Labeled: Blackness in South African Art* which provided an outline of the inequalities experienced within the creative sphere in South Africa. Commentators spoke about the difficulties they faced as black artists in what they perceived to be a culturally Western arts sphere catering specifically to white practitioners¹³⁹. Those interviewed, in the video, such as Gaby Ngcobo and Lloyd Pollock emphasised the way in which black artists felt forced into a separate, liminal category in South African art historical practice rather than being allowed to exist simply within the dominant domain of contemporary or historical ‘South African Artists’¹⁴⁰. This would corroborate the ideological space of the centre and periphery enforced by apartheid’s geographical and epistemological divisions. Many of those interviewed in the documentary pointed to a lack of access to a particular kind of discourse used within the arts, which was linked to an historical (and present-day) lack of arts education in schools¹⁴¹. If the historically white universities were the only institutions that offered access to the academic discipline of art history (a discipline whose Western character has become globally

¹³⁸ David Koloane, ‘Art Criticism for Whom?’, in *Art Criticism and Africa*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (London: Saffron Books, 1998), 69-70.

¹³⁹ Moshekwa Langa in Vuyile Voyiya and Julie McGee, *The Luggage Is Still Labelled: Blackness in South African Art* (South Africa, 2003).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Gaby Ngcobo and Lloyd Pollock.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Garth Erasmus, Graham Falken and Thembinkosi Goniwe.

dominant) then those institutions became to gatekeepers of the particular kind of discourse needed to access the internally colonised art market.

Despite being 13 years old in 2016 the questions the documentary raises (for, as Mario Pissarra pointed out there were more questions than solutions¹⁴²) appear to maintain relevance in the contemporary South African context. In February 2014 Iziko (the umbrella organisation for the Museums of South Africa)¹⁴³ held a debate titled: *20 years on: Is the luggage still labelled?* as part of a summer school programme which looked at museums in the context of events celebrating 20 years of ‘official’ democracy. Four panellists discussed the relevance of the documentaries’ concerns of continued marginalisation in the present arts sphere and expressed their view of the structural inequalities that continue to exist as well as the various forms of progress that have been made. The first panellist was Vuyile Vuyiya – the co-producer of the film – who began by questioning the use of the term ‘post-apartheid’ as a reflection of a break with a previous era. He urged the audience to understand it rather as the “consequence of a set of knowledge systems that framed the previous era and creates a number of shadows in the present¹⁴⁴”. Here we have, again, the notion that the regimes of the past have left a legacy on the present. This is the same perception that allows for the call to decolonise through perceiving contemporary South Africa as remaining, ideologically, in a colonial and apartheid space.

For Vuyiya the apartheid period was characterised by the exclusion of those classified as black, coloured or Indian from the economic, social, cultural and geographic spaces of citizenship. He noted that such exclusion continues in a structural sense since the advent of official democracy, particularly in the spaces of art and culture (museums, galleries and educational institutions) that become, perforce, political institutions. Vuyiya concluded his statements without answering the question of whether the luggage is still labelled but by providing a critique of the manner in which true transformation takes place in the post-apartheid space. To continue previous arguments, he warned against the insistence on ‘inclusion’ as a practice in which a person is brought in from a marginal space into a sphere that already exists in favour of ‘integration’, which implies the ceremonial welcoming of a

¹⁴² Mario Pissarra, ‘The Luggage Is Still Labelled: But Is It Going to the Right Destination’, *Third Text*, 18.2 (2004), 183.

¹⁴³ The South African National Gallery is situated in central Cape Town and falls under the umbrella of Iziko, Museums of South Africa. ‘Iziko’ means ‘hearth’ in IsiXhosa (a language dominant in the Western and Eastern Cape) and the title seeks to emphasise the central role that such a gathering place plays in Xhosa culture.

¹⁴⁴ Vuyile Vuyiya in Iziko Museums of Cape Town, *Debate: 20 Years on: Is the Luggage Still Labelled?*, 2014.

person on equal terms with others.¹⁴⁵ The subsequent panellists took up the theme of inclusion versus integration with Athi Joja relating it to Slavoj Žižek’s notion of the included as always already excluded – the peripheral subject whose existence outside of the symbolic order is defined by inclusion¹⁴⁶. South Africa is again described as having citizens with layers of access to rights through the spatial metaphor of the centre and the periphery.

As indicated in the introduction, Vuyi’s framing of continued cultural marginalisation as hinging on the difference between inclusion and integration provides a useful lens through which to view South African art historical writing. Such statistics and perceptions depict a visual arts sector that has to a certain extent maintained the “exclusions, marginalisations and hierarchies” entrenched by a colonial and apartheid legacy¹⁴⁷. It also hints at the notion that, despite the ease with which we can declare a non-racist or discriminatory constitution and a commitment to transformation in South Africa, it is in fact historical structures, entrenched discourses, economic systems and market forces that perpetuate imbalances rather than or despite progressive ethical philosophies. For example, the legacy of colonial discourse that perceives African art as unworthy and the global art economy that places greater value on Western art continue to impact the democratic nation of South Africa despite attempts at ‘transformation’. As Athi Mongezeleli Joja points out in a review on *ArtThrob* of Steven Cohen’s controversial *Magog* exhibition in 2012, which he viewed as perpetuating a racial stereotype, “the presiding understanding of the problem still seems to be predicated, almost wholeheartedly, on the understanding of racism as something contingent rather than inherently structural”¹⁴⁸. If we are to understand racism as structural then it is the understanding of South Africa as created through the ideology of centre and periphery that becomes most useful in framing contemporary inequalities.

It is this structural inequality that became the focus of the student-led movements of 2015 and allowed for the shift in focus towards the structure of universities and their production of particular kinds of knowledge. Throughout the protests it became apparent that various South African subjects had different responses to the ideals of the movements. This too became polarised along racial lines with commentators pointing out that the *Fees Must Fall* protests

¹⁴⁵ Vuyile Vuyi in Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), 101.

¹⁴⁷ Jillian Carman, ‘Introduction: Other Ways of Seeing’, in *Visual Century: South African Art in Context* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press ; Oslo : Visual Century Project, 2011), 7.

¹⁴⁸ Athi Mongezeleli Joja, ‘Resubjugating the Black Body: A Review of Steven Cohen’s *Magog*’, *ArtThrob*, 2012, online.

were dominated by black students while the *Zuma Must Fall* protest as it manifested in Cape Town appeared to be a predominantly white, middle class cause¹⁴⁹. Here Peter Hudson's discussion of the manner in which the colonial unconscious manifests in the South African socio-political sphere becomes useful. Hudson describes the South African state as divided between two perspectives: "the South African state as a liberal democratic state" and the South African state as national democratic state¹⁵⁰. These different perspectives of the state are connected, for Hudson, to Frantz Fanon's elucidation of the manner in which the colonial structure implicates the unconscious lives of subjects so that the only possibility for the black subject becomes assimilation or complete emancipation¹⁵¹. From these subject positions we gain divergent perspectives of the nature of the nation and its goals: the liberal democratic nation defined by Enlightenment notions of individuality and free speech and the national democratic state defined by the collective and its attempts to exist in a 'postcolonial' context. Such a division may also be applied to the various institutions for tertiary education and their apartheid legacies. As mentioned, the historically white English-medium universities had a strong liberal institutional culture, which valued free speech and academic freedom. Many of the student protests that begun in 2015, for example, were catalysed by students at these institutions. Despite commentators having spoken of a crisis in university education since the nineteen eighties there were still those academics that found the situation surprising. There is a case to be argued for the notion that while historically white, English medium universities were against the apartheid system that their liberalism prevented the kind of radical change needed to work against it and may in turn be the explanation for the slow pace of transformation since democracy.

The question becomes to what extent these different views of the nation and the view that South Africa's art world has been focused on a form of inclusion have in common with the student-led call for decolonisation. In February of 2016 the student protests at the University of Cape Town, having reignited across the country with the start of the academic year, focused on a student-housing crisis that saw seven hundred beds not being released for use in

¹⁴⁹ See: Wim Pretorius and Thulani Gqirana, "'A White People's Campaign' - Actors at Zuma Must Fall", *News24* <<http://www.news24.com/Video/SouthAfrica/News/watch-zuma-must-fall-a-white-peoples-campaign-20160427>>. See also: Gillian Schutte, 'Whites Marched to Uphold Their Privilege', *Sunday Independent* <<http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/whites-marched-to-uphold-their-privilege-1962232>>.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Hudson, 'The State and the Colonial Unconscious', *Social Dynamics*, 39.2 (2013), 263.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 264-265.

January 2016 and pointed generally to a lack of university accommodation¹⁵². In a poignant move the *Rhodes Must Fall* group built a shack in a prominent position on campus very close to the site of the removed statue of Rhodes. What was referred to as ‘shackville’ sought to highlight the specific housing crisis at the University of Cape Town (UCT) while at the same time drawing attention to the stark inequality that exists between the neo-classical grandeur of the University of Cape Town’s Jameson Hall and the dire poverty of the Cape Flats just a few kilometres away. On the 16th of February 2016 the shack was forcibly removed and the student protestors reacted by burning artwork that they found around the university. Much of the media outrage focused on the burning of the paintings and the sense that this action undermined the student’s cause. The prominent South African magazine *Art Times* published an editorial with an image of Adolf Hitler giving a thumbs-up approval in an attempt to draw an analogy between the burning of books in Nazi Germany and the burning of artwork (see Figure 2). The editorial began with the following:

“In yesterday’s shocking act of daylight barbarism, students burnt priceless and treasured cultural objects donated to and commissioned by UCT ... The fact that very few seemingly-educated students can go into a historic building, indiscriminately remove artworks and burn them will not prevent others going into the National Gallery, other cultural museums or shops, next time, and burning all art – be it made by Black or White. Why stop there? Libraries, houses, and people can also be burnt.”¹⁵³”

This reaction, which labelled the students as “barbaric” and “seemingly-educated” and emphasised the symbolic and monetary importance of the artworks by calling them “priceless and treasured cultural objects”, encapsulated what became a common criticism of *Rhodes Must Fall*’s actions. The *Rhodes Must Fall* movement responded with a statement sent from a ‘hacked’¹⁵⁴ university email account:

¹⁵² University of Cape Town, ‘UCT Protects Rights to Lawful Protests’, *Press Statement 15/02/2016*.

¹⁵³ Gabriel Clark-Brown, ‘Editorial: UCT Should Have Known That, after Books, Art Is the Cheapest Political Fodder to Burn’, *Art Times*.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Hacked’ is here used to refer to gaining unauthorized access to computers and computer networks. The email was sent as if it had come from an official account.

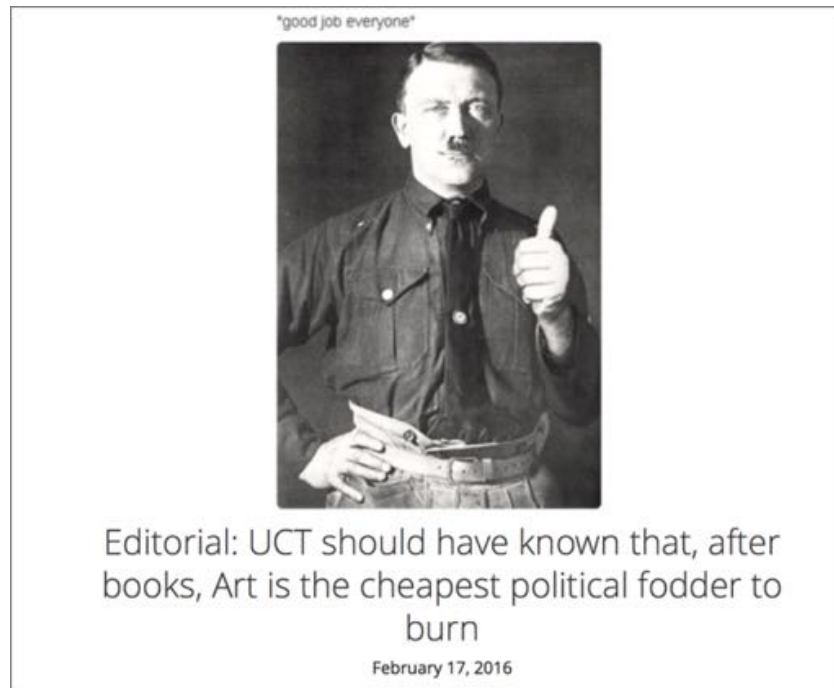


Figure 2: Image used for the online editorial from Art Times, 17th February 2016.

“The public has framed the events of the 16th as violence on the part of students and has centered the destruction of ‘priceless artworks’ and ‘heritage’ in the narrative ... Management has again and again stated publicly that it respects the right to protest except when it results in ‘criminal acts, intimidation and the violation of the rights of others’ The burning of colonial artifacts of white heritage is seen as a violent act, while the psychological violence these inflict on Black bodies at the university is never considered.”¹⁵⁵

The argument that objects and physical property cannot be elevated above human life echoes the accusation that art is by nature elitist. Such a claim has characterised movements both within the art establishment and those without. It is also the perceived elitism of art and the art world that prevents art and culture from being prioritised within the education system in South Africa. In part, the fact that the burnt artworks came in the form of paintings was deemed to be an indicator of the ‘colonial’ quality of the work in question. The term ‘colonial’ appears to be employed here to indicate that something is culturally and

¹⁵⁵Rhodes Must Fall, ‘Email sent to UCT Students and Staff from RMF’, 22/02/2016.



Figure 3: A pile of artwork burnt on the 16th February 2016 at UCT. The painting, *Release Our Leaders* by Keresemose Richard Baholo (1993) can be seen on top of the pile.

ideologically replicating historical or European culture. In the case of the student protest the term used is ‘white heritage’ which further connects race with cultural ancestry. Somewhat problematically the terms white and colonial are all used as virtual synonyms of each other. The *Rhodes Must Fall* movement described the burnt work as, “old house committee group photographs and other images and paintings upholding and glorifying white supremacy and the legacies of colonialism”¹⁵⁶. Art, and specifically portrait painting, as a genre that had historically sought to entrench Enlightenment understandings of subjectivity, becomes here the symbol of colonialism and white supremacy. This in turn can be related to a sense that within the colonial elitism of academia, art and art history are perceived to provide the pinnacle of such elitism. The perception that art is elitist is somewhat understandable in light of the limited access to institutions for art and art history during apartheid. What is missing from this line of reasoning is any acknowledgement that there is or may be an alternative system for art that is not tied to whiteness or colonialism. The African art system, itself centuries old and established, is ignored in favour of a simple reduction of art = whiteness = Europe. To make art only a European invention is in fact to replicate the colonial narrative that African people did not make art but rather ‘primitive craft objects’.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.



Figure 4: Keresemose Richard Baholo. *Extinguished Torch of Academic Freedom*. (1993). Part of a collection of seven works commissioned by the Student Affairs department and presented to the University of Cape Town's Works of Art Committee in 1993. They were on display in the Otto Beit Building and five of the seven were destroyed in the fire on February 16th 2016¹.

After students burnt the paintings it was pointed out that amongst the burnt artworks were five paintings by black South African artist Keresemose Richard Baholo, which were burnt unintentionally. As emphasised in a statement by the then director of the University of Cape Town's Michaelis school of fine art, Fritha Langerman, Baholo was the first black student to receive a Master's degree in fine art at the University of Cape Town (in 1994) and the series of works in question in fact dealt with the theme of academic freedom¹⁵⁷. The painting seen on top of the heap in Figure 3 was entitled *Release Our Leaders* (1993) and, with ironic foreboding, depicts a protesting group around the statue of Cecil John Rhodes that was removed in 2015. This series of Baholo's paintings were commissioned by the Student Affairs department and were presented to the University of Cape Town's Works of Art Committee in 1993 while Baholo was completing his Masters in fine art. They were intended to illustrate the universities recent history of student protests and had the recurring image of

¹⁵⁷ Fritha Langerman, 'On the Destruction of Art and the Loss of Collective Histories', *University of Cape Town: Today's News* <<https://www.uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=9590>> [accessed 3 April 2016].

Jameson Hall, with its neoclassical pillars, as a theme as can be seen in Figure 4¹⁵⁸. At this time the committee had already acquired another work by Baholo in 1991 called *Sixpence* that was intended for the universities' Senate Room but was eventually placed in storage at the Irma Stern Museum due to objections from members of the committee¹⁵⁹. It is relevant to note here that the impetus for the acquisitions of Baholo's work was a commission seeking the 'transformation' of UCT's public image displayed through its artwork¹⁶⁰. Jessica Brown emphasises that the Works of Art Committee sought to achieve this through the, "introduction of contemporary works of art in order to replace the 'homage to white male dominated history', that is, portraits of the university's previous vice-chancellors that were perceived to monopolise the available atmosphere and hanging space"¹⁶¹. The portraits were never removed and their prominence again became the focus of calls for change when the student's burnt them in February 2016. It is worth mentioning, here, that the decision to transform the collection by including more contemporary art is a strategy repeated in South African art historical discourse and in the structure of university curriculums (see Chapter 3 and 4 of this dissertation). Instead of including historical African art or work by modern, black artists the dominant strategy has been to move past the historical to the contemporary where all artists are supposedly operating on an equal stage. Again the strategy may be defined as one of inclusion rather than real change or integration.

I have chosen to focus, here, on the figure of Keresemose Richard Baholo, his work and his unintentional position within the *Rhodes Must Fall* protest because he provides an illustration of the primary issues pertinent to my dissertation. We see, through these events, the perception that 'art' (particularly a certain kind of art) is perceived as a symbol of colonialism and white supremacy. This perception was, in the case of the *Rhodes Must Fall* burning, informed primarily by the medium of painting as an indicator of the work's connection to colonial discourse rather than the identity of the maker (who was in fact black) or the content of the work which was critical of the academic environment. Depictions of masculine whiteness through painting was the symbol intended to be burnt by *Rhodes Must Fall* but it was oil painting as a medium that, through the student's actions, became the true image of 'Euro-centrism'. As a movement *Rhodes Must Fall* has also had a close relationship to

¹⁵⁸ Jessica Natasha Brown, 'Ethics of the Dust: On the Care of a University Art Collection' (University of Cape Town, 2015), 155.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 152 – 156.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 152.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 152-153. University of Cape Town Works of Art Committee Minutes, 23 October 1992.



Figure 5: Keresemose Richard Baholo. *What a Horror!* (1992). Johannesburg Art Gallery (Photograph courtesy of the Johannesburg Art Gallery).

methods commonly used by artists in their protests. In an analysis of the initial ‘poo-throwing protest’ that sparked the removal of the Rhodes statue, Chumani Maxwele described his realisation that if he framed his action as performance art it would both enhance the statement and give it a sense of legality and validity¹⁶². He notes that, having carefully planned his protest to occur in tandem with the opening of the *Infecting the City* performance art project, campus security allowed him to continue because he described his actions as art¹⁶³. *Rhodes Must Fall* has since engaged in other actions described variously as ‘performances’ or ‘artworks’ and held a photographic exhibition entitled *Echoing Voices from Within*¹⁶⁴ which was itself the subject of vandalism and actions described as “protest performance” by members of the University of Cape Town’s Trans Collective¹⁶⁵. Art, then, is perceived by the protesters to be both the height of academic elitism and white supremacy as well as a central means through which to engage in the process of decolonisation. It appears that the medium, method and content of the art in question is vital in determining its position. This may be

¹⁶² Chumani Maxwele, ‘Black Pain Led Me to Throw Rhodes Poo’, *Business Day Live* <<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/2016-03-16-black-pain-led-me-to-throw-rhodes-poo/>> [accessed 20 August 2016].

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ This exhibition opened on the 9th of March 2016 at the Centre for African studies Gallery at UCT.

¹⁶⁵ The Trans Collective describes themselves as follows on their Facebook page: “#TheTransCollective UCT is a collective of transgender, gender non- conforming and intersex students and their allies at the University of Cape Town”. The collective are themselves part of RMF (and continue to support it) but chose to vandalise the exhibition because they felt there needed to be a greater sense of intersectionality when fighting oppression. For more see: ‘Transfeminist Collective Facebook Page’ <<https://www.facebook.com/transfeministcollective/posts/1132209633512418>> [accessed 20 August 2016].

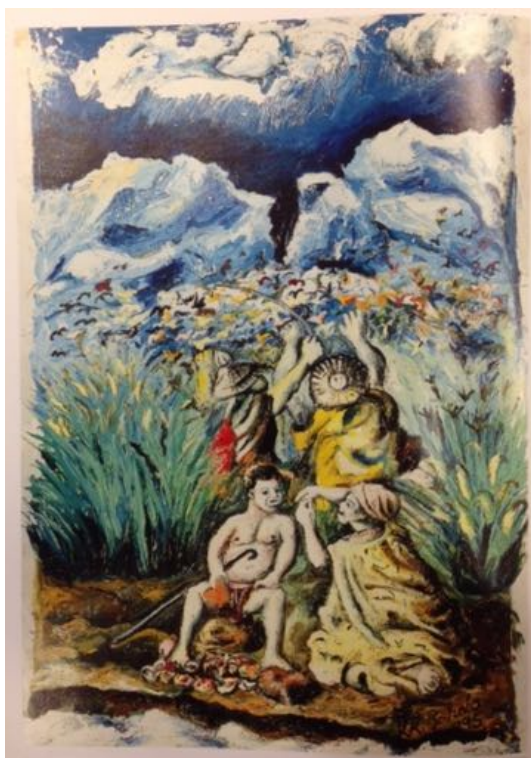


Figure 6: Keresemose Richard Baholo. Illustration for the text “Birds of Clay: A Sotho Legend” in *The Quivering Spear and other South African Legends and Fables* (Thomas A. Nevin, 1996) page 62.

linked to the very poignant manner in which art is connected to cultural capital in South Africa and the continual proclamations by the, predominantly white, middle class that the realm of culture constitutes an exceptional and vulnerable space in need of protection through freedom of speech. The sentiments put forward by the *Art Times* editor that the burning constituted a “shocking act of daylight barbarism” were echoed by many on social media platforms and more official media outlets.

The case of Baholo’s burnt paintings provides an illustration of the many prevalent issues in South African art discourse. The uncanny resemblance of Baholo’s subject matter that was intended to represent student protest in the nineteen eighties to the student protests in 2015 and 2016 highlight both the continuity of past concerns in the present and the very real lack of change (see Figure 4). The portraits of white vice-chancellors whose display was debated in the early nineteen nineties remained on the walls and the protests continued. As an artist Baholo also provides a key to understanding the manner in which South African artists are written into and out of official art history. There is very little information available on Baholo

and his work outside of his own Master's thesis, yet his name has risen to prominence amidst the outcry of 'destroyed artistic culture' that somehow symbolises shared cultural capital. The Johannesburg Art Gallery is one of the few institutions to have collected his work (see Figure 5). The lack of information about Baholo's work extends to the RMF students who proved they knew nothing of him as an artist. Anecdotally this provides us with a situation that is analogous to the larger arts education system and the structure of curriculums, which lack teaching on black South African artists and indigenous, historical art practice in particular. Much of the work Baholo created during his time at UCT's Michaelis school of Fine Art dealt in fact with what he calls 'witchcraft' and folklore.

In Figure 6 we see a painting that Baholo created for a collection of South African legends and fables. Baholo's painting for this collection illustrates a Sotho legend and echoes a clear interest in oral tradition and historical Sotho culture found in his dissertation, *A pictorial response to certain witchcraft beliefs within Northern Sotho communities*¹⁶⁶. As I will explicate in the following chapters (particularly Chapter 4) historical African art and art connected to historical South African culture has been the primary casualty of a higher education system plagued by settler colonialism and apartheid. Even in the case of Baholo, his interest in Sotho culture as content for his artwork is overlooked. In part this may be a result of the dominance of the Western system of art history, which has filtered into other geographical contexts around the globe without acknowledging existing knowledge systems. Baholo's own view of how decolonisation must take place is evident in a conference paper he presented in 2006 in which he argued for the transformation of the curriculum through a focus on what he calls African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS)¹⁶⁷. In South Africa, a country plagued by its history as a settler colony, the imposition of European cultural practices through colonialism and the subsequent disenfranchisement and spatial division instituted through apartheid have meant that Western art historical discourse has elided indigenous discourse.

¹⁶⁶ Keresemose Richard Baholo, 'A Pictorial Response to Certain Witchcraft Beliefs within Northern Sotho Communities' (University of Cape Town, 1994).

¹⁶⁷ Keresemose Richard Baholo, 'Creating Space for African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in the Visual Arts: A Transformatory Tool in the South African Higher Education System', in *Transformation/s in Visual Culture: Proceedings of the 22d Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*, 2006.

Chapter 2: Art History as Ideological Apparatus

“I don't need to remind you that the problem of liberation is also one of culture. In the beginning its culture and in the end its also culture. The colonialists have a habit of telling us that when they arrived in Africa they put us in history. You are well aware that it's the contrary, when they arrived they took us out of our own history. Liberation for us is to take back our destiny, our history” (Amilcar Cabral)¹⁶⁸.

In understanding the precise manner in which European philosophical frameworks dominate both global art historical discourse and its local South African manifestation, Louis Althusser's distinction between repressive and ideological state apparatuses becomes useful. Althusser defines ideological state apparatuses as those that function primarily through the ideology of the ruling class while repressive state apparatuses function primarily by violence and repression¹⁶⁹. These ideological state apparatuses have, for Althusser, a material existence and are executed through repeated practices that interpellate individuals as subjects¹⁷⁰. These apparatuses, while not necessarily employing physical methods, act as mechanisms that assist in controlling the state's population and maintaining an ideological status quo. Althusser gives education and culture as examples of ideological state apparatuses, which may provide a useful way to understand the South African art world. For the purposes of this dissertation I would like to define four ideological state apparatuses that I perceive to operate within the South African art world to inscribe the rituals of a particular

¹⁶⁸ Irving Leonard Markovitz, *Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Politics of Negritude* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

¹⁶⁹ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards and Investigation)', in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. by Meenakshi Gigi. Durham and Douglas Kellner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 79-86. Althusser's writing owes much to Marxist theory and philosophical positions that define the ideological structure of society and its material conditions.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

ideology and as such to interpellate certain subjectivities¹⁷¹. These apparatuses also correspond to the larger framework of my dissertation but they will be stated here so as to begin the discussion on art historical discourse through this particular lens in the chapter that follows.

Firstly, the discursive ideological apparatus operates in the sphere of art history (or visual studies) to define the products of human creativity in particular ways and as such structures the manner in which creative objects are defined: their perceived social, cultural and monetary value. The second apparatus that may help in understanding the discipline of art history in South Africa is the apparatus of object display. Here the key point of discussion is the manner in which artworks are shown to the public and how that feeds a particular discourse about their value and their place in the cultural life of the nation. A more specific analysis of this apparatus will follow in Chapter 6. The third ideological state apparatus may be seen to connect quite closely to that of discourse but is manifest in the particular area of education and the application of discourse to the structure of curricula, which will be discussed in Chapter 4. Lastly we have what may be termed the apparatus of the market where discourse and the manner in which art objects are displayed feeds into the system of a global, capitalist economy. Each of these apparatuses function as a part of the nation's cultural realm and operate within institutional frameworks that contribute to a particular ideological framework. As such, they have the subtle (most often unnoticed) power to construct how art is defined, how it is valued (culturally and monetarily) as well as how the subjects who make art are interpellated. In explaining how ideological state apparatuses operate at the site of class struggle Althusser explains that the unseen nature of ideology and the difficulty in dismantling the former ruling class's hold on its discursive power makes it a fraught territory¹⁷². In the South African context where centuries of colonial and then apartheid rule have created a hierarchical structure of privilege that continues to cause an overlap of race and class (see Chapter 1), it is the historical ideological state apparatuses of the (white) ruling class that continues to impact the discourse of art history in this context. In continuing to draw from Althusser's descriptions it is useful to emphasise here that ideology is not simply abstract thought but discourse connected to action and ritual practice¹⁷³. For example, a discourse that describes objects created within a particular cultural system as

¹⁷¹ Althusser defines interpellation philosophically as the manner in which the subject's individual identities are conditioned by ideology.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 83.

valuable and others as not manifests in specific, repeated practices such as written texts, conference presentations, museum displays and auction sales. These actions become inserted into practices in an obvious way but are also part of the larger ideological structure that interpellates subjects. In the chapter that follows I hope to show how the very particular discursive practices of art history manifests in Western and African systems so that we can further understand how they might impact a nation historically governed by specific ideological state apparatuses.

In the previous chapter I outlined the legal, economic and cultural division of South Africa into core geographical spaces with access to amenities and education on the one hand and peripheral zones violently disenfranchised by successive apartheid laws on the other. Such a description of historical inequality aims to show that the basis for racism and unequal distribution of power can be perceived as structural. Since ideological apparatuses operate predominantly through discourse it is apposite to understand power relations in this sphere. Writing that describes the power dynamics between Western powers and their former colonies, often referred to as postcolonial theory, tends to use Michael Foucault's descriptions of the relationship between discourse, power and knowledge to describe how former colonialising nations continue to extend their economic, political and cultural power in their former colonies¹⁷⁴. In a sense this relationship becomes abstractly spatial as it defines an ideological centre of power that exercises control over a periphery. In a nod to Althusser's already discussed notion of ideological state apparatuses Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri speak of the notion of 'Empire' as more than the geographical and military control of land but also an ideological control; "a mode of cooperation between former colonial powers [that] works on the basis of cultural and economic hegemony..." and so is "decentred and de-territorializing"¹⁷⁵. For Adam Haupt this manifests in the cultural sense in what we innocuously refer to as globalisation, which is in fact an ideological system that has the power to define the lives of subjects¹⁷⁶. The impact on subjects, within a South African context, of such cultural dominance is a marginalisation exercised both from within national boundaries as a legacy of apartheid and from without in the guise of globalisation. The

¹⁷⁴ Foucault famously implores us to "admit that power produce[s] knowledge... [t]hat power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute.... [p]ower relations". Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 27.

¹⁷⁵ M Hardt and A Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), xii.

¹⁷⁶ A Haupt, *Stealing Empire: P2P, Intellectual Property and Hip-Hop Subversion* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008), 5. See also: M Parenti, *Against Empire* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1995).

dominance of a Western view of what can be constituted as ‘art’ and what form this ‘art’ must take in order to be considered valuable no longer needs to be geographically centered in Europe as this knowledge system has expanded with globalisation. In a continuation of the discussion on decolonisation put forward in Chapter 1, if we consider the narrative of South Africa’s historical context as one of internal colonialism exercised through the creation of city centres as the equivalent of the colonial metropole then one must ask to what extent the ideological state apparatuses of that system are still in place in a democratic society¹⁷⁷.

Let me begin, then, with an analysis of the discursive ideological state apparatus as it pertains to the discipline of art history. The following chapter will analyse the nature of the discipline and outline its European and African systems so as to more readily understand the impact this discourse, which I have also been referring to as an apparatus, has in the South African context. Before we can arrive at art history as ideology, however, let me discuss the importance of understanding discourse as a powerful system of thought that allows subjects and objects to be perceived in particular ways.

If ideology can be understood as a particular system of thought it is necessary to understand academic disciplines as systems of thought belonging to a community of people. According to the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben “we are always already many” for in language and communication “there cannot then be one and only one being who speaks it”¹⁷⁸. In his writing Agamben wants us to acknowledge both the collective nature of existence and the requirement of acknowledgement by others for existence. Through becoming a human being with the rights of a citizen and, as Agamben puts it, ‘clothed’ in the repetition of thought a subject can enter a life, an existence governed by discursive acts¹⁷⁹. It is discourse, then, that interpellates subjects and clothes them in perceived value. As such, a discourse on art history has the power to interpellate subjects and to create perceived value not only for objects but for people.

¹⁷⁷ It is also pertinent to add mention here of the notion of the West as concept and of the ideology of Western superiority that dominates the perception of art. The ‘West’ is “as much an idea as a fact of geography” [S Hall, ‘The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power’, in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, ed. by T.D Gupta (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2007), 186.] As an idea it is itself contingent on ideology and on the specific ideological assumption of Western superiority. For further discussion on how this notion specifically impacts African universities and contemporary political change see the work of Silvia Federici: *A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African Universities*, ed. by Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, and Ousseina Alidou (Asmara: African World Press, 2000). ‘African Visions: Literary Images, Political Change and Social Struggle in Contemporary Africa’, ed. by Cheryl B. Mwarira, Silvia Federici, and Joseph McLaren (London: Hofstra University, 2000).

¹⁷⁸ Giorgio Agamben, ‘Means without End: Notes on Politics’, in *Theory out of Bounds Volume 20*, ed. by Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt, and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 10.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

For the discipline of art history such tensions between plurality and hegemony as well as the pervasiveness of a Western understanding of culture, exists within an intellectual framework whose structure is very difficult to alter. The question becomes to what extent truly alternative art historical models are able to maintain their particularity in a context that seeks to ‘include’ rather than ‘integrate’. Here it seems pertinent to draw on the idea of epistemic violence used by Foucault to describe the manner in which dominant discourse can erase others¹⁸⁰. In this sense violence can be enacted upon epistemologies in a mode that disallows diversity and seeks to erase alternative epistemic systems. Following on from Foucault the writing of Ramón Grosfoguel, an author invested in understanding what he called the ‘Eurocentric’ nature of the world-system, becomes particularly useful here. Grosfoguel seeks to develop the work of Enrique Dussel in understanding the need for a decolonisation of knowledge, particularly in the context of the university beholden to Western standards (an institution that he argues exists globally rather than only in the geographical space of Western Europe and North America)¹⁸¹. By tracing the rise of Enlightenment thinking or what is also known as the Modern World-System, the European World-Economy or the Capitalist World-Economy¹⁸² in the period between 1450 and 1650, Grosfoguel attempts to understand the enduring canon of thought in the Westernised university. Grosfoguel poses his question as follows:

“How is it possible that the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the Westernized University (Grosfoguel 2012) is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA)? How is it possible that men from these five countries achieved such an epistemic privilege to the point that their knowledge today is considered superior over the knowledge of the rest of the world?”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ In writing about the redefinition of madness Foucault categorises epistemic violence as a destruction of knowledge outside of institutionally sanctioned power. M Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Pantheon, 1965), 251, 262, 269.

¹⁸¹ Ramon Grosfoguel, ‘The Dilemmas of Ethnic Studies in the United States: Between Liberal Multiculturalism, Identity Politics, Disciplinary Colonization, and Decolonial Epistemologies’, *Human Architecture*, 10 (2012).

¹⁸² Wallenstein, 1974 in Ramon Grosfoguel, ‘Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality’, *Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1.1 (2011), 74.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

For Grosfoguel the hegemonic nature of patriarchal, ‘Eurocentric’ thought is a result of a series of interlinked epistemicides¹⁸⁴ that occurred in tandem with the rise of Enlightenment thinking in Europe¹⁸⁵. These epistemicides are linked to Cartesian philosophy and the secularisation of knowledge production that characterises white male thought as universal rather than conditioned by particular bodily experiences in particular contexts¹⁸⁶. The “epistemic racism/sexism” that arises from the perceived superiority of an unsituated¹⁸⁷ Western epistemology functions from the imperial assumption that non-European people and women (the majority of the world) were inferior beings who produced inferior knowledge¹⁸⁸. For the discipline of art history this implies that the creative products of the non-Western world were perceived both as not worthy of the status of art (a term loaded with perceived value which I will elaborate on later) and allegedly as being part of alternative epistemological systems deserving of active erasure or deliberate disavowal.

Art history, in its European or Westernised form, is such a pervasive discourse that it has been adopted by countries around the globe despite their own traditions for the understanding of objects. This means that art history has had a tendency to assume its universality without acknowledging that its primary case studies are undeniably parochial and provincial¹⁸⁹. Such an acknowledgement leads to the question of what ‘epistemic diversity’ might actually mean in the context of art history or what exactly the project of decolonisation may entail for this particular discipline. While art history might be a discourse analogous to a master’s tool¹⁹⁰ it belongs to a family of epistemologies that seek to describe the objects we now call art. The challenge, it seems, is to gain acknowledgement for the potential plurality of the system rather than furthering the ideology of one branch: Western art history¹⁹¹.

¹⁸⁴ Grosfoguel cites Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010) as using this term

¹⁸⁵ Ramon Grosfoguel, ‘The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century’, *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 11.1 (2013), 74. These epistemicides are described as: “the conquest of Al-Andalus, the enslavement of Africans in the Americas and the killing of millions of women burned alive in Europe accused of being witches in relation to knowledge structures”.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. Cartesian refers to the philosophy of Rene Descartes who was a French philosopher, mathematician and scientist during the early seventeenth century. In mathematics Descartes is known for Cartesian coordinate system while in philosophy he is known for his emphasis on the use of reason and the pre-eminence of empirical thought. His focus on the mind implied a perspective that the mind was separate from the body.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Unsituated’ is used here to mean not coming from a particular, embodied point of view – without position. Grosfoguel points to the Cartesian ‘I think therefore I am’ as encapsulating the notion that intellectual knowledge can be universal and removed from the context of the body and as such is ‘unsituated’.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 75.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹⁰ Audrey Lorde famously declared in a talk related to patriarchy that The Master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. Audrey Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007).

¹⁹¹ I shall delve later into the assumption embedded in the use of particular terminology to describe what I have been calling ‘creative products’, ‘art’, ‘cultural products’ or ‘objects’ in an attempt to remain neutral until my argument is fully developed. Suffice it to say, at this point, that these designations carry the weight of underlying assumptions of the discipline

This system of thought has indeed the potential to create not only perceived value for art objects but also for the subjects who create them. As a result of ‘art’ being tied, within a Western ideological perspective, to the perceived humanity of its maker art history has been connected to the notion of civilisation. The perception of civilisation as the entry criteria into the Western system of cultural value has undeniable connections to the discipline of art history. Within the systematised framework of the new (in the nineteenth century) discipline of anthropology the study of civilisations was defined by the study of objects. The objects were seen as the remaining evidence of past peoples and as a tangible measure of progress from primitivism to civilisation¹⁹². Through the lens of anthropology one could create a hierarchy of the world’s people based on a hierarchy of objects. Crucially, these objects established their place on the hierarchy based on their relative, perceived distance from the haloed category called ‘art’.

One of the primary ways in which civilisations were distinguished, in Western thought, from cultural groups supposedly lacking civilisation was in the perceived lack of objects that could fit within the definition of ‘art’. Objects that were not ‘art’ were defined as ‘craft’ or ‘artefact’ and were expected to occupy different spaces. This distinction had a particular relevance in the South African context where, during apartheid, the centre of art historical discourse was constructed as synonymous with urban whiteness. As Nessa Liebhammer notes “[f]or much of the twentieth century in South Africa, examples of Western fine art and culture, traditionally considered to be fundamental markers of civilisation, were housed in art museums (or galleries), while objects of African origin were relegated to the realm of nature, ethnography or craft”¹⁹³. In other words, museums in the Western world and in South Africa’s apartheid core (attempting to model itself on Europe) defined objects as art, ethnography or craft and their designation directly impacted their relative perceived value. The museum, as a primary institution displaying art history’s discursive frameworks, is pertinent for the South African context because of the manner in which it has historically been tied to university departments and was off-limits to black South Africans during

as a whole.

¹⁹² George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (Ontario: The Free Press, 1991), 185.

¹⁹³ Nessa Liebhammer, ‘Dominant and Contrasting Patterns: The Representation of Black South Africans by White South Africans’, in *Visual Century: South African Art in Context*, ed. by J Carman and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press ; Oslo : Visual Century Project, 2011), 51.

apartheid¹⁹⁴.

The notion of what constitutes civilisation has been used as a marker for cultural and artistic value. Samuel Huntington describes the movement away from eighteenth-century notions of the civilized (singular) as the positive antithesis of the ‘barbaric’ towards an understanding of civilisations (plural) as large cultural entities with their own understandings of what it meant to be civilised¹⁹⁵. For many German writers there remained a distinction between culture as ethical and artistic and civilisation as material while for other’s, including Huntington, the two are intertwined as the long-lived, yet dynamic, “overall way of life of a people” who share “blood, language, religion”¹⁹⁶. For Western ideology, to have civilisation has historically been linked to being fully human: the “cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species”¹⁹⁷. As such it was the assertion that a group of people lacked a cohesive civilisation that gave them the label of ‘primitive’ within a Western, nineteenth century discourse on race. For Norbert Elias civilisation can be seen as a process of structural changes in Western society that have impacted the creation of the ideal, Western subject who is restrained and controlled whereas those outside of this structure were perceived as barbaric¹⁹⁸. The discourse of cultural inferiority, as one strand of the colonial complex, was applied to all colonised spaces and most systematically to the African continent in relation to African art, religion and culture. As such, what can be defined as cultural racism is precisely what Huntington and others assert: that one cannot categorically recognise a distinct civilisation in Africa that does not belong to another entity such as Islamic civilisation¹⁹⁹. Such an assertion, though erroneous, continues to plague perceptions of Africa both from within its borders and from without. An understanding of civilisation has been integral in the construction of the academic discipline of anthropology, which was itself constructed under the auspices of Enlightenment grand-narratives such as reason, truth and progress. As George Stocking shows the rise of anthropological discourse reached its height, unsurprisingly, in tandem with the rise of colonialism and pseudo-scientific racism in the

¹⁹⁴ In Chapter 6 I will discuss the place of museums in the South African context and the way in which they support particular understandings of art history.

¹⁹⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 40-41.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁹⁸ Norbert Elias, ‘The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations’ (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47. Islamic civilisation was historically (from the perspective of the West) assumed to be responsible for all the cities and artefacts that can be found along the east African coast. See: Randall L. Pouwels, ‘The Medieval Foundations of East African Islam’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 11.2 (1978).

nineteenth century²⁰⁰. Enlightenment understandings of progress meant that civilisation came to be used as the “generic term for both the overall process of human progress and its cumulative achievement in every area of human activity”²⁰¹.

Within Enlightenment thought, to be deemed to be without civilisation, as Africa was perceived to be, was to be excluded from history and we may say ‘art history’. The nineteenth-century German philosopher Georg Hegel, whose canonical writings are still influential in contemporary academia, gave a series of lectures between 1822 and 1830 in Berlin in which he outlines his philosophy of history. Hegel was heavily influenced by Enlightenment scholars and wrote about history as the progressive pursuit of freedom and reason. From his perspective Europe was the end point of history: the example of historical achievement to which other civilisations should look. As Europe’s ideological counterpoint he sees Africa as having no history at all:

“At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it – that is in its northern part – belong to the Asiatic or European World. Egypt ... does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World’s History”²⁰².

Here we have an extreme illustration of the way in which Africa was perceived within an influential branch of nineteenth century European discourse. Hegel’s conviction that Africa has no civilisation to speak of leads him to claim that Egypt must be perceived as belonging culturally to Europe. This perception has had a lasting and meaningful effects on the writing of art history as ancient Egypt and Greece are appropriated as origins for European artistic traditions. Hegelian philosophy points towards the notion of human history as a linear progression of barbarism towards refinement and such a conception required examples in

²⁰⁰ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 10-11. Stocking traces the understanding of ‘civilisation’ within European ideology from a seventeenth century battle to assert the superiority of certain cultural groups over others (savages versus barbarians or ancients versus moderns) to an eighteenth century understanding of ‘Europe’ as an entity philosophically distinct from ‘Christendom’ and therefore defined by a more general understanding of groups connected by culture rather than only religion.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, ‘The Philosophy of History’, ed. by John Sibree (trans.) (Mineola; New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 91-99.

order to provide evidence of an historical model that was contrasted with understandings of history as cyclical²⁰³. Within this framework, African people provided the physical illustration of Europe's origins to scholars involved in the construction of racial hierarchies. As such the consequence of a perspective of history as teleological was the characterisation of African people as incapable of attaining 'civilisation' (in the sense of cultural refinement) due to a perceived lack of historical documentation that would prove their own progress rather than degeneration. Writing about a Western perception of 'Africa' Achille Mbembe confirms that, "Africa as an idea, a concept, has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world"²⁰⁴. 'Africa', and by extension 'African art' has provided a site of opposition for all that is valued in Western art history and philosophy – it provides its discursive opposite. As we see in the discussion of Huntington and other's writings, the question of whether or not a group of people has reached the category of 'civilisation' has been the dominant means to determine cultural worth in European philosophy. It is on this point that the fields of anthropology and art history converge as history relies on existing categorisations of cultures before being capable of studying their products as 'art' as it is art that become the most highly valued cultural product. The advent of colonialism has also been problematically related to the meeting of civilisations and the dominance of the most 'civilised' thus providing justification for the violent process²⁰⁵.

Historically, both exhibitions and written texts about the art of 'Africa' in Europe and America before the latter part of the twentieth century follow an anthropological model, one defined by a view of Africa as a continent without a credible history, as being primitive, undeveloped and therefore static (having always been the same) and one whose people made objects that were of cultural interest but could not be considered worthy of the term 'art'. The period of colonisation enabled a form of cultural colonisation where sculptures from the African continent were violently pillaged (as is the case with the Benin empire in 1897) and brought to Europe as objects of anthropological interest used in exhibitions as all-encompassing emblems of an entire continent. The placement of objects from the African

²⁰³ Ibid., 16. The idea that prior to the dominance of the Roman empire Proto-Indo-European, pagan peoples functioned in societies that worshipped goddesses, centred around the sacred feminine and perceived development as cyclical was espoused by Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas in her work *Bronze Age Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe* (1965). A perception of time as cyclical can also be seen in many African religions as well as in Hinduism.

²⁰⁴ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 2.

²⁰⁵ See: Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations* (New York: Penguin, 1995). Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Vol. I: The Structure of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

continent in museums rather than galleries invented 'Africa' as a timeless, homogenous and primitive space while simultaneously devaluing the objects for a European audience. This devaluing took the form of a hierarchy of objects with a greater or lesser, perceived cultural and monetary value.

As far as European attempts to categorise the world's cultures are concerned the historical appellation of the term 'art' for the objects of certain cultures and not of others is authenticated by the discourse of art history. Art historical surveys (though the very nature of the general survey as teleological is increasingly criticised) that originated in Western Europe typically create a narrative that sees art as a product of great civilisations. Horst Waldemar Janson's highly influential text, *History of Art*, is one such survey of art history that has contributed to the creation of a particular canon and a particular view of art, culture and civilisation²⁰⁶. It was first published in 1962 and continues to be reinvented in new, updated editions. Janson's *History of Art* served as a popular textbook for courses in art history around the world, including South Africa, and as such has been instrumental in establishing a particularly dominant art historical discourse. The 1965 edition of the book is based on a structure that is synonymous with an art history of the Western world unaware of its bias and not yet privy to the implications of universality that unqualified history implies. Janson's early editions of the *History of Art* reflect a Hegelian understanding of mankind's universal progression through time on a journey of spiritual refinement²⁰⁷. This version of the art historical narrative moves from the Ancient World with a focus on Greek and Roman civilisation and the influence of Egypt through to the religious art in Europe during the Middle Ages (with some discussion on Islamic art) before discussing the flourishing of naturalism during the Renaissance and finally the formal experimentation of Modernity and Modernism. Despite the manner in which this conventional narrative of art history moves geographically from Egypt and Greece in the ancient world to North Western Europe in the medieval period and then back to the Mediterranean during the Renaissance, such a history was used, uncritically, to describe European art in general as opposed to the art of particular Western European or North African groups. British scholars saw no problem in declaring the origins of 'their' art to have begun in Greece or in appropriating Egyptian history for Europe. Janson's textbook mirrored the art history that had developed with the founding of the

²⁰⁶ Horst Waldemar Janson, *History of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1962).

²⁰⁷ Shelly Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 51.

discipline by German scholars in the mid-nineteenth century (in a time contemporaneous with the writing of Hegel) and had very little space for creative traditions from outside of Western culture. It was Helen Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* that first attempted to include non-Western art as a contribution to the universal canon by adding a section on non-European art traditions²⁰⁸.

Austrian art historian Ernst Gombrich's version of the Western art historical narrative is titled *The Story of Art* and begins with a chapter called 'Strange beginnings: Prehistoric and primitive peoples; Ancient America' (1972 edition) that grapples with the category of 'art' and its application to objects²⁰⁹. Gombrich asserts a difference between the wide range of activities that perform particular functions (weaving, architecture, etc.) and those items that provide "some kind of beautiful luxury, something to enjoy in museums and exhibitions"²¹⁰. This provides an example of the understanding that the primary difference between art objects and others lies at the point of relative utility. Gombrich uses this notion to assert that not all people can be said to create art, for even when they create their creativity is undermined by the need for practical utility. His description, for its explicit prejudice, is worth quoting at length since it reinforces the Western philosophical connection between art and civilisation:

*"...if we leave our civilized countries and travel to the peoples whose ways of life still resemble the conditions in which our remote ancestors lived. We call these people 'primitives' not because they are simpler than we are – their processes of thought are often more complicated than ours – but because they are closer to the state from which all mankind once emerged. Among these primitives, there is no difference between building and image-making as far as usefulness is concerned."*²¹¹

Since, for historians like Gombrich, the category of 'art' is defined by a perceived lack of 'function' and its exhibition of civilisation, rather than its existence in a particular time period, various objects and phenomena could be included within a chapter on art's

²⁰⁸ Ibid. This book was first published in 1962 and has had many editions since including those under the title of *Art through the Ages: A Global History* and *Art through the Ages: Non-Western Perspectives*.

²⁰⁹ Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1972).

²¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹¹ Ibid., 20.

precursors. This art historical trajectory was also assumed to provide the central focus of a universal progression that certain (particularly sub-Saharan African) cultures had simply not had adequate means to contribute to. In the latter half of the twentieth century, when art from the African continent south of Egypt was included in the West's grand art historical narratives it was with a denial of chronology. The understanding of 'primitive' as a description of relative civilisation rather than a time period made it possible for the Lascaux cave painting's from ca.15 000 BCE and the Venus of Willendorf to coexist with nineteenth century African sculptures such as the Bakota guardian figure²¹² in Janson's chapter titled "Magic and Ritual: The Art of Prehistoric Man"²¹³. The same is true of Gombrich's chapter on "Strange beginnings" where he describes a carved Maori lintel, a depiction of Oro, God of War from Tahiti and a bronze head from Benin as belonging to the same category of 'primitive art' as the 17 000 year old cave paintings from Lascaux cave in Spain²¹⁴. The Benin head is not captioned as such but is rather described as the "bronze head of a Negro. Excavated in Nigeria, probably some 4000 years old"²¹⁵. It stands, therefore, not as the example of a civilisation (Benin) but as a general depiction of an enormous group of people defined as 'negroes' whose sculptures happened to be found in present-day Nigeria but are seen as emblematic of African culture in a very general sense.

Art, then, from the perspective of Western academia has been defined as the product of flourishing civilisations and the indication of humanities' relative ability to create meaning. For Hegel art is the ability to make manifest 'the Idea' or to render intelligible the human spirit: "[t]he universal need for art, that is to say, is man's rational need to lift the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object in which he recognises again his own self"²¹⁶. For Hegel and other historians such as Timothy Clark art has a universal sensibility and is aspired to by all of mankind with relative 'success'. For many writers who work within the field of art historiography it is Hegel's philosophy on art as developmental that birthed art history as an academic discipline into being²¹⁷. Considering Hegel's views on Africa as being without history or civilisation, a view which he supports with a great deal of false

²¹² Janson, *History of Art*, 26.

²¹³ Errington, *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and Other Tales of Progress*, 52.

²¹⁴ Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 20-25.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and T.M Knox, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 31.

²¹⁷ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 22. Hatt and Klonk's text discusses the methods of art history and begins with a chapter titled: *Hegel and the birth of art history*.

geographical information, and the manner in which his philosophy has informed the discipline of art history, it can be of little surprise that art history has been slow to consider African art.

The assumption of art's universal applicability has led to a situation in which objects and practices from non-Western cultures have increasingly been 'included' as additions to the canon. Janson's more recent editions of the *History of Art*, for example, have attempted to dedicate an increasingly larger number of pages to art from other parts of the world and has attempted to acknowledge the Western nature of his previous narratives through the qualification of the title as the *History of Art: The Western Tradition* (from the 2003 edition onwards). Western art history or art history that draws on historical European art is, in other words, a pervasive epistemology that has, through centuries of colonisation and globalisation, become discursively dominant. As an ideological apparatus it has permeated a global perception of human creativity. If art history can be seen to be a system of knowledge production then one needs to understand the values that system endorses and the ideological grounding for its structures. That is what I shall attempt to do in the section that follows before moving on to a discussion of the African art system for understanding objects so that a comparison can be made. The comparison of a Western and African art system that follows must be understood with the caveat that such a comparison is flawed since neither 'the West' nor 'Africa' can be said to be homogenous cultural spaces. I feel, however, that this comparison is useful in outlining the very idea of multiple systems for understanding art, whereas it is far more typical to assume that there is only one system and that all alternative forms simply have to be included. It is hoped that future research will be able to make discursive comparisons on a more specific level with case studies such as the isiXhosa art system in different time periods. It must also be said that the values I list do not apply absolutely to all contexts and at all periods in history. Rather, they are what I (and others) perceive to be the overarching characteristics of each system that deserve mention as a means to try and understand the ideological apparatus of art history.

In the rather new discipline of art historiography writers tend to focus on the methods employed by various Western art historians. Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk, for example, outline their introductory text by looking at art historian's shifts in focus between formalism, iconography, social context or critical theory as underlining methodologies. In contrast I would like to focus here on the values that Western art historians have prioritised: its

perception that art has universal values, its non-functionality, its apparent cultural value outside of a system for monetary exchange, its creation by individual authors, its separation from everyday popular culture, its subsequent placement in the gallery or museum and its adherence to the dominant style of the time (for much of Western art history this has been naturalism).

Let us begin with a look at the notion that art, from a Western perspective, has some kind of universal applicability. Western art historical discourse has oscillated between, or held unknowingly in contradiction, two distinct notions of how art is connected to context. Firstly, an understanding of art as the specific creation of work by individuals from particular time periods and cultural contexts and secondly, the understanding that art is universal expression which adheres to timeless aesthetic norms. Prior to the development of a modern understanding of art the perception was that art was governed by a set of universal norms. French art critics (for the art historian did not exist in the contemporary sense) André Félibien (1619 - 1695) and Roger de Piles (1635 -1709) who wrote in the Renaissance period elaborated on the existing set of norms and judged the degree to which they were felt to have been mastered in a practical sense. It was Félibien who ranked the existing genres within Western painting in a hierarchy by placing the depiction of history painting and religious scenes at the apex and still life painting at the base²¹⁸. In his writing from 1708 translated as *The Principles of Painting* de Piles creates a list of the most renowned painters and gives them each points in the categories of composition, drawing and colour expression so as to rank their work according to its ‘degree of perfection’²¹⁹. Here the predominant ideology is that it is possible to categorise such a thing as ‘good painting’ and as such the perspective is one of a universal and timeless goal for human creativity. Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768) on the other hand, writing over a century later, perceived art to be the product of particular societies and civilisations. While he agreed with the idea that certain art forms represented greater aesthetic achievements than others (“good taste ... had its beginning under a Greek sky”) he attributed the Ancient Greek artistic achievements to be a product of a

²¹⁸ Félibien states in his *Conférence de l’Académie Royale de Peinture de Sculpture* (1669) that “the artist who does perfect landscapes is superior to another who paints only fruit, flowers or shells. The artist who paints living animals deserves more respect than those who represent only still lifeless objects. And as the human figure is God’s most perfect work on earth, it is certainly the case that the artist who imitates God by painting human figures is more outstanding by far than all others”. As quoted in: Penny Huntsman, *Thinking About Art: A Thematic Guide to Art History* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 24.

²¹⁹ Roger de Piles, ‘The Principles of Painting (1708)’, in *A Documentary History of Art Volume II*, ed. by Elizabeth G. Holt (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958).

particular context blessed with a mild climate and “the freedom of their customs”²²⁰. In Winckelmann’s writing, as Hatt and Klonk note, a contradiction arises between the view that ‘good art’ and ‘good taste’ could be determined and the idea that each culture produced art specific to its context²²¹. As the notion of art in Europe changed through the centuries the assumption of ‘art’ as having universal characteristics endured to varying degrees. In the late nineteenth century the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl (1858-1905) developed his concept of *kunstwollen* or the ‘will to form’ which he defined as a catalysing particular artists within certain time periods to create art according to a set of universal laws²²². Here again the view is that while context allows for difference, an underlying set of universal principles is said to provide a foundation for all art. Even in the twentieth century many of the avant-garde movements that created Modernism had at their ideological base the notion that their principles could apply universally to other contexts. In the contemporary sphere the manner in which Western art historical discourse, the art gallery system and the current notion of what constitutes good ‘contemporary art’ have been adopted in so many corners of the globe is further evidence that the underlying assumption within the apparatus of Western art history is that its principles are and should be universally applicable.

The second value that I would like to highlight in the Western Art system is the privileging of objects believed to have no utilitarian function over those that are seen to be (for this perception is often false) purely functional. While Western art, since at least the late Renaissance, may have been defined as that which distinguishes itself from ‘craft’ by being more than a functional object, many authors note that this has not always been the case within European discourse. In his lauded text *The Invention of Art* Larry Shiner traces the evolution of the term ‘art’ and describes the social and economic circumstances which led to its current meaning. Shiner reminds the reader that there was a time in European history when ‘art’ was a term used to denote any kind of human skill and that it was during the eighteenth century that a kind of splitting occurred resulting in the term ‘fine art’ on the one side armed with its associations of genius and ‘popular art’ or ‘craft’ on the other with the devalued characteristic of skill²²³. The term ‘art’ was elevated almost to the point of spiritual worship while ‘craft’ or ‘popular art’ was increasingly relegated to the inconsequential. The distinction between ‘art’

²²⁰ Johan J. Winckelmann, ‘Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Art in Painting and Sculpture (1755)’, in *A Documentary History of Art Volume II*, ed. by Elizabeth Holt (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958).

²²¹ Hatt and Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods*, 22.

²²² *Ibid.*, 80-81.

²²³ Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 5.

and ‘craft’ came into existence as a polarity between objects that carried meaning and objects that were created for utility²²⁴. As we go further back into European history we see that the modern distinction between functional and non-functional objects was not in place. The tenth century Greek writer on art, Theophilus, wrote *An Essay upon Various Arts* which takes the form of a handbook describing the methods for creating various ecclesiastical arts of the time including working with gold leaf and composing windows²²⁵. He uses the plural form ‘arts’ in keeping with an understanding that human creativity manifests in various art forms where relative levels of functionality do not play a role in determining value. Authors who wrote about art in the European medieval period were chiefly concerned with the function of art in a religious and spiritual sense. In his work *Rationale of the Divine Offices* (ca. 1286) William Durand is concerned with the degree to which Christian imagery amounts to an excessive and perhaps idolatrous use of images²²⁶. In this sense Durand and other medieval writers see art as being chiefly functional in a spiritual sense and as intrinsically part of religious life. In the modern period many Western artists attempted to challenge the notion that art had to be divorced from function in order to be functional as in evident in the category of ready-mades famously catalysed by Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917). Despite the evolution within the Western art system towards a distinction between art as aesthetics or meaningful creation and craft as functional and its supposed rejection by modern and contemporary artists, the current market for art still relies rather heavily on this divide.

Following on from the division between function and ‘higher order’ meaning is the belief that art should in some way be separated from other areas of social life, the third value I want to stress. The distinction of ‘contemporary art’ as the category of objects and practices with the highest value in visual culture relies on Western notions of ‘high art’ as being distinct from commercial ‘popular culture’ and ‘craft’. This distinction has its roots in the nineteenth century German origins of art history as a formalised academic discipline. In speaking of his conception of style, which was to have an indelible impact on the understandings of art in Europe, Heinrich Wölfflin, writes that “[t]o explain a style can mean nothing other than to place it in its general historical context and to verify that it speaks in harmony with the other

²²⁴ Ibid., 16.

²²⁵ Theophilus, ‘An Essay upon Various Arts (Mid. 10th Century)’, in *A Documentary History of Art Volume I*, ed. by Elizabeth Holt (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958).

²²⁶ William Durand, ‘Rationale of the Divine Offices (Ca. 1286)’, in *A Documentary History of Art Volume I*, ed. by Elizabeth G. Holt (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958).

organs of its age”²²⁷. In an analysis of Wölfflin, Frederic Schwartz notes that “Wölfflin sought to isolate form in order to establish the discipline of art history as scientific and autonomous”²²⁸. He goes on to argue that this need to transform art history into a pseudo-science came largely as a reaction to the beginnings of capitalist mass culture and that “style was understood quite explicitly as the nature of visual form under pre-capitalist conditions of culture” so that ‘high art’ and ‘style’ could be seen as the opposition to ‘popular culture’ and ‘fashion’²²⁹. It is this separation of ‘high art’ from the categories of craft and popular culture that became entrenched by the time that the academic discipline of art history came into being. Shiner stresses the institutional structures which cemented the division between ‘art’ and ‘craft’ and describes them in terms of separation and exclusion from other social functions: the museums and concert halls he says “embodied the new opposition between fine art and craft by providing places where poetry, painting or instrumental music could be experienced and discussed apart from their traditional social functions”²³⁰. The new realm of art quickly became associated with an upper class elite with entrance fees in the early exhibitions of the seventeenth century ensuring that “livery servants, foot-soldiers, porters, women and children, etc” were excluded²³¹. It is this separation that has allowed art to continue to be perceived as elitist in many parts of the world, including South Africa, and is the particular value of the Western art system that many contemporary artists reject. As art became divorced from everyday society in Europe it required special places to house its products and so the gallery and museum space function as distinctive institutions that sanction this division²³².

The fourth value that is privileged within the Western art system is the denial of the commodity status of the art object. Again, this has not always been the case as Renaissance artists produced paintings for patrons to order in a system where the production of art was what art historian Michael Baxandall called, “the deposit of a social relationship” which can be defined as primarily commercial even when it pertained to religious altar-pieces²³³. By the

²²⁷ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque (1888): Translated by Kathrin Simon with an Introduction by Peter Murray* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), 74.

²²⁸ FJ Schwartz, ‘Cathedrals and Shoes: Concepts of Style in Wölfflin and Adorno’, *New German Critique*, 76. Winter (1999), 3–48, 9.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³⁰ Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*, 88.

²³¹ Ian Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680-1768* (New Haven; London: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 1988), 127.

²³² In Chapter 6 I will look at the way in which this manifests in the South African context.

²³³ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

eighteenth century, however, a shift had occurred. According to Gotthold Lessing (1729 – 1781) ‘art’ was said to be that created for some kind of internal aesthetic content (beauty made for itself) while craft was that created with an external purpose²³⁴. Artisans were seen to be those who engaged in trade while artists were characterised by genius and a desire to create that went beyond trade in commodities despite the fact that artist’s works were also for sale. Shiner describes this as a shift from ‘concrete labour’ to ‘abstract labour’ where “the work of fine art is literally ‘priceless,’ its actual price set by the artist’s reputation and the buyer’s desire and willingness to pay”²³⁵. The irony of this state of affairs lies in the art object’s explicit denial of commodity status yet its existence in a realm of objects more purely commodified than the supposedly functional craft object. It is no coincidence that the movement towards abstract labour and indeed the very creation of ‘art’ coincides with the rise of capitalism in the West and the commodification of culture. What emerged in the Western art system from the late eighteenth century onwards was a market system based on commodities and emerging capitalism. Although art exists within the market economy and can have a very high monetary value its perceived value relies on the notion that it is *not* created for sale and as such exists in a separate, haloed realm.

The fifth and final value within the Western art system that I want to highlight is the focus on individual authorship. A Western conception of ‘artworks’ as necessarily being associated with individual creators, as opposed to a collective (which often defines both popular culture, design and craft) has its roots in the Renaissance period in Europe and more specifically in writing such as Giorgio Vasari’s (1511 - 1574) *Lives of the most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* in which he details the individual achievements of artists like Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo as most successfully approximating a ‘*universal*’ aesthetic ideal of naturalism²³⁶. Vasari’s writings also place the source of meaning in the lives of the artists in question and in so doing creates a philosophical connection between ‘artist’ and ‘work’. While artist collectives functioning in an apprenticeship style system continued throughout Europe, and define the workings of many artists within the Western canon, it was the individual name of the artist that began to determine value. The European understanding of individual authorship and originality culminated in Enlightenment understandings of the

²³⁴ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ‘Lacoön (1766)’, in *A Documentary History of Art Volume II*, ed. by Elizabeth Holt (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958).

²³⁵ Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 127.

²³⁶ Giorgio Vasari, ‘Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects (1550)’, in *A Documentary History of Art Volume I*, ed. by Elizabeth Holt (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958).

world as governed by individual, autonomous producers who produced cultural products through divine inspiration mirroring God's act of creation. This grand narrative of individuality and originality in authorship led, structurally, to the establishment of copyright laws in Europe. Martha Woodmansee investigates the effect of this understanding of authorship and Western notions of intellectual property on law and literature in *'The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature'* (1994)²³⁷. In the sense of copyright a 'Western' understanding of authorship as a singular relationship "...in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it," means that creations by singular authors are privileged and structurally entrenched by powerful sanctioning bodies²³⁸. Foucault points to the problematic nature of a 'work' produced by an author and the assumption of unity in the creation that allows us to see an attribution of authorship as both designation that points to a creator and description that tells us about the nature of the work²³⁹. As description the attribution of authorship assumes consistency in all works by an individual author and allows us to see the work as essentially valuable in a way that a collaborative act cannot be.

The section above highlights the perception of value within Western art that continues to have a powerful bearing on the way art is perceived in the contemporary sphere. Western art is perceived to be valuable if it adheres to particular universal tenants but at the same time gives its viewer insight into the culture or civilisation that created it; it is valuable if it is perceived to have some distance from functionality and utility; it is perceived to be valuable if it functions in a sphere distinct from everyday life and as such can be found in the gallery or museum; it is valuable if it appears to exist outside of the capitalist market system as a work of original genius and is therefore created by an individual author whose singular style creates the possibility of celebrity status.

If we turn now to the broadly defined African art system, which can be understood as the historical foundation for the art of the continent's creative production, we will notice a distinct difference in the method for assigning value. The devaluation of African art in the global art market can in part be accounted for by the globalisation of a Western system for understanding objects despite the distinct differences within each system. Attempting to

²³⁷ Martha Woodmansee and others, *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

²³⁸ Foucault in Preziosi, *The Art of Art History*, 322.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 325.

define an historical African art system with a particular set of values and philosophical frameworks may seem to create another generalisation of a continent whose diverse cultures are often reduced conceptually to that of a country. Western art is, however, a category that is readily understood to have a conceptual framework that structures its value system in a particular way despite internal diversity, changes in time periods and vast geography. In light of the wealth of scholarly devotion to understanding the Western art system (even when it is not named as such but is implicit in the assumed universal of ‘art’) it would seem only a matter of equality to attempt to define the African art value system. In order to understand the African art value system in contrast to the Western I will use the examples of South African fertility figures (see the Ndebele example in Figure 7) and the *mpungu* created by the Bakongo people to describe the common epistemological basis for these works (see Figure 7 and Figure 8)²⁴⁰. This analysis will provide one case study, rather than an overarching view, of two examples of African art and this will be used as an example of what we might refer to as an African art system.

The historical African art system can broadly be defined as valuing art that is intimately and symbolically connected to other currents within society; art that is part of a complex system of metaphorical thought that connects the material realm to the spiritual; art whose material or aesthetic form does not exist simply for its own right but is linked to a particular physical or philosophical function; art that while not necessarily being made by a collective is seen to mean beyond the individual and art whose ‘function’ is able to transform and adapt beyond a singular purpose.

²⁴⁰ Southern African fertility figures are variously referred to as *Nwana* (in Tsonga), *Umdwana* (in Ndebele), *Nguana Modula* (in South Sotho), *Ban aba Pelego* (in North Sotho), *Udoli* (in Zulu) or *Popenyane* (in the Ntwane area).



Figure 7: [Figure in foreground] *Umndwana* (fertility figure), Ndebele People, South Africa. Mid-20th century. Medium: glass beads and plant fibre. This image is from a display at the National Museum of African Art in Washington showing a group of figures. The display label describes the figure as a “doll”. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, February 2016).

Art that functions as part of a system of metaphorical thought exists within a complex of cosmological meanings. The conceptual model for fertility or initiation figures is similar for South African cultures yet there are obviously many nuances particular to specific groups. Many of the figures serve, in a spiritual sense, as mediums for accessing the ancestors and their power through ritual use²⁴¹. They represent mature women rather than babies but, as noted by Gwintsa, the name of ‘child’ (such as the Ndebele word *umndwana*) is used to refer to the figure as a sign of the amount of value placed on it rather than as a literal description likening it to ‘doll’²⁴². In southern Africa fertility figures tend to have a simplified, anthropomorphic, often cylindrical²⁴³ form that is adorned with symbolic material. The Ndebele figures (Figure 7), for example, mimic female dress codes while the Sotho people’s figures translate the culturally significant wearing of blankets into the form of the figures. These become metaphors for a masculine, phallic core covered in a feminine skin of beads

²⁴¹ Elizabeth Dell, ‘Introduction’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 11.

²⁴² Veliswa Gwintsa, ‘Double Talk: Problems of Translation, Interviewing and Secrecy’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 31.

²⁴³ Karel Nel and Nessa Leibhammer, ‘Evocations of the Child’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 219.

with each element in the object having a particular meaning and function²⁴⁴. The second art form that exists within a system of metaphorical thought, is the *nkisi* (an older description meaning ‘object that embodies a spirit) or *mpungu* (the contemporary term meaning ‘to stick together’ or ‘the almighty’) made by the Bakongo people of northern Angola and the southern Congo (see the example in Figure 8)²⁴⁵. The *mpungu* can be seen as a material object that functions as a container for Kongo aesthetic and philosophical principles with each *mpungu* performing a specific function²⁴⁶. Like the fertility figures the *mpungu* has a number of material elements that relate symbolically to particular meanings. The use of seeds, for example, refers to protective qualities whereas feathers denote a spiritual connection through the visual metaphor of messages travelling through the air²⁴⁷. Here we see an example of art is perceived to function as part of a system of metaphorical thought rather than as an image for its own sake.

African art is work that connects material existence to the spiritual realm. The *mpungu* object forms part of a religious practice that allows for communication between the Supreme Being (*Mzambi*), the ancestors (*bakula*) and ordinary people residing on earth (*ba nisi*) in a clan (the *kanda*)²⁴⁸. Communication is facilitated through the *mpungu*, which is a container for spiritual power activated by *simbi* (source of spiritual potency) and facilitated by *bilongo* (medicines). As Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz puts it: “The Mpungu accumulates charges of the natural forces manifest through the world as elements, physical powers and natural phenomenon and combines these with the active social and productive legacy of the deceased ancestor²⁴⁹”.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 223.

²⁴⁵ Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz, ‘Ma Kisi Nsi: L’art de Habitants de Region de Mbanza Kongo’, in *Angola Figures de Pouvoir* (Paris: Dapper Museum Press, 2010), 26.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

²⁴⁸ Joseph van Wing, ‘Bakongo Magic’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 71 (1941), 85–97.

²⁴⁹ Martinez-Ruiz, Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz, ‘Ma Kisi Nsi: L’art de Habitants de Region de Mbanza Kongo’, 28.



Figure 8: *Nkisi*, Songye Artist, Democratic Republic of the Congo, late 19th to early 20th century. Medium: wood, brass, iron, horn, cowrie shell, gourd, leopard's teeth, glass beads, reptile skin, plant fibre. This image is from a display at the National Museum of African Art in Washington. The display label reads: "Male figure (nkishi)... Its abdominal cavity once contained empowering medicines (bisimba), which a ritual specialist had added to activate the figure and ensure the well-being of a community or individual... Because the power of an nkishi could be dangerous, specialists manoeuvred them with sticks attached to their upper arms". (Photograph: Danielle Becker, February 2016).

The *mpungu*, as a container for a life force, therefore has value beyond its representation or narrative; its power is intangible but felt and is used to provide solutions to physical and social problems²⁵⁰. In this sense it is indeed an art form that draws from both the physical and spiritual realm: *kanga mambu* – the art of tying up problems²⁵¹. The South African fertility figures are, in a similar manner, vessels symbolizing a conduit for ancestral access and as such their external form has been modified over time for it is their ability to garner power that remains paramount rather than specific aesthetic concerns for their own sake²⁵². The figures are most often connected to belief systems that hinge on their use as a powerful device initiated by a traditional diviner or *sangoma*²⁵³. As such these art forms provide a vehicle

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 29.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

²⁵² Nettleton and others note the following: "In South Africa women from many different language groups used to produce child figures consisting of a clay core covered with grass, beads of natural materials and metal. These were modified in colonial times with the introduction of woven cloth and glass beads, and women began to construct their figures over a core of an empty tin can or bottle. This process meant that the basic shape of the figures, either conical or cylindrical and without a defined head or limbs, remained the same. From the nineteen fifties, however, women began to give their child figures defined heads, limbs, and facial features which made them more recognisable as human. The final step in this process of transformation appears to be the use of discarded, store-bought, mass produced plastic Barbie and baby dolls". Anitra Nettleton, Julia Charlton and Fiona Rankin-Smith, *Engaging Modernities: Transformations of the Commonplace* (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand Art Galleries, 2003), 72.

²⁵³ Gwintsa, 'Double Talk: Problems of Translation, Interviewing and Secrecy', 31.

through which the physical and spiritual realm can be connected and are valued for their ability to do so.

In connecting multiple realms this kind of African art also has a particular purpose or function. Within Bakongo epistemology this is known as *kanga mambu* or ‘the art of tying up problems’. This is expressed through the Kinsala term of *vanda* meaning ‘to do’ which as a verb refers to artisanship²⁵⁴. Kongo art is seen as complex and one that “embodies religious, social and environmental perspectives”²⁵⁵ and is both a visual/material and textual language. The notion that art has a particular purpose or rather is the *art of doing* can be likened to the philosophy underlying the creation of fertility figures. Gwintsa emphasises that the figure’s function extends into a sacred realm beyond the apparent physical form as they are quite literally used to aid physical problems (in some cases infertility), rather like medicines²⁵⁶.

Within this framework art objects are not simply *either* material or symbolic. They do not function in the binary of form versus function/content since their material properties are linked intrinsically to their function and in fact embody their function. *Mpungu* or fertility figures, rather than being representations of something external, are an embodiment of the thing itself – a container that allows for both visual and textual meaning at once and that has real power. For Wyatt MacGaffey this can be described as the relationship between word and image: “the relation between word and image is intrinsic, thus much more intimate than that between picture and label a nkisi is like a text rather than like a painting...”²⁵⁷. The form of the fertility figure as having an inner core covered by additive decorations is symbolically significant to the ontology of many southern African people. The figures have complex symbolic structures that often signify sexuality and procreation. For Venda people, for example, the use of tassels signifies semen while the colour red is associated with female menses²⁵⁸. The theme of procreation extends beyond being a metaphor for a literal sexual act as it has connections to a central myth of origins. Nel and Leibhammer cite various authors who show that among the Tsonga, Shangaan, Zulu and Swazi people of southern Africa reeds

²⁵⁴ Martinez-Ruiz, ‘Ma Kisi Nsi: L’art de Habitants de Region de Mbanza Kongo’, 1 & 6.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁵⁶ Gwintsa, ‘Double Talk: Problems of Translation, Interviewing and Secrecy’, 31.

²⁵⁷ Wyatt MacGaffey, ‘Magic, or as We Usually Say “Art”: A Framework for Comparing African and European Art’, in *The Scramble for Art in Central Africa*, ed. by Enid Schildkrout and Curtis Keim (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press), 231.

²⁵⁸ Dell, ‘Introduction’, in *Evocations of the Child*, 17.

are likened to a water-carrying vessel that penetrates the earth, catalysing birth²⁵⁹. The fertility figure thus reflects this religious myth by functioning as a womb-like vessel able to channel ancestral spirits. The analogous relationship between the empty core of the figure and a womb is clearly evident in the x-ray images used by Nel and Leibhammer, which show the figure as a hollow container potentially for medicinal substances²⁶⁰. The core of the figure represents the masculine ‘reed’ while the outer covering represents the feminine ‘earth’ that allows for the creation of progeny. This religious symbolism is emphasised by Von Sigrud in 1970 who describes the figures as having “magic power, partly as a well-prepared vessel for a child’s (or ancestor’s) soul to enter both doll and its owner’s womb”²⁶¹. Following conversations with urban *sangomas*²⁶² in the late nineteen nineties Gwintsa also describes the appellation of ‘child’ as a term used to denote the identity of the object as a surrogate “which, it is believed, the ancestors in question will recognise as their own”²⁶³. This belief: that the fertility figure or ‘child’ is to be treated with care so that ancestral spirits may recognise the figure as their own and potentially inhabit its ‘womb’ (and by extension the womb of the women who carries it), is corroborated by other authors. Casalis, writes in 1861 that Basotho women “to whom maternal joys have been denied, form rude effigies of clay, and give them the name of some tutelary deity. They treat these dolls as if they were real children, and entreat the divinity, to whom they have consecrated them, to give them the power of conception”²⁶⁴. The figure known as a ‘fertility doll’ can be seen as “a prefiguration of the child to come” and is therefore used in various contexts by women of different social standing²⁶⁵. While it appears that in some cases it is used by childless women, in other cases it is used by young girls and yet in others by Ntwane pre-initiate girls who pretend the figures are their children²⁶⁶. For Northern Sotho women the container is worn around a bride’s neck and only removed after the birth of the first child²⁶⁷. As such the use of the English term ‘doll’ to describe these figures is somewhat misleading as it is not simply a child’s toy. The particular Ndebele *Umndwana* that forms part of the collection of the *National Museum of African Art* in Washington (figure 1) is referred to as a ‘doll’. This is problematic as English

²⁵⁹ Nel and Leibhammer, ‘Evoations of the Child’, 221.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Von Sigrud 1970, 6 cited in Nel and Leibhammer ‘Evoations of the Child’, 219.

²⁶² A *sangoma* is understood as an expert in traditional medicine in southern Africa or what might be referred to as a diviner.

²⁶³ Gwintsa, ‘Double Talk: Problems of Translation, Interviewing and Secrecy’, 31.

²⁶⁴ Cited in Nel and Leibhammer, ‘Evoations of the Child’.

²⁶⁵ Jacqueline Roumequere-Eberhardt and Pierre Roumequere, ‘Poupées de Fertilité et Figurines D’argile: Leurs Lois Initiatives’, *Journal de La Societe Des Africanistes*, 30.2 (1960), 205–23.

²⁶⁶ Hazel Friedman, ‘Ntwane Gimwane: Ntwane Grass Figures’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 131.

²⁶⁷ Nel and Leibhammer, ‘Evoations of the Child’, 225.

speaking visitors or visitors from Western cultural contexts are likely to assume that this figure is the equivalent of a Western toy, which negates its far more complex purpose. Within a western philosophical system ‘dolls’ are not perceived as objects equivalent to ‘art’ and neither do these figures do not function as ‘dolls’ within an African philosophical system.

Art in this sense is intimately linked to religious ontology, life cycles and social codes and can therefore not be understood without an understanding of the larger context. As containers that prefigure the creation of new life the fertility figures have sometimes been found (in the case of Tsonga figures) to contain various powders and symbolic objects (such as seeds), which further empower the object in a manner analogous to the Kongo *mpungu*²⁶⁸. The use of medicinal substances within the artwork is a characteristic found in many other African art forms including the Kongo *mpungu*. As a container for a life force the *mpungu* can therefore be likened to the southern African fertility figure that provides a surrogate vessel for the life of the ancestor to enter so that the woman who cares for it may have a child. As such beings are seen to move from the ancestral realm into the earthly realm that in Kongo religion is compared to the movements of the sun. The Kongo *dikenga* sign or cosmogram symbolizes such a life cycle and may provide a greater understanding of the fertility figure and its title of ‘child’ in the sense that the figure relates to the human life cycle. Friedman looks at the *gimwane* of the Ntwane people and discusses the use of a symbol known as *sehlora* which, she says, “appears to be of great significance to the Ntwane because it recurs on most of their traditional regalia”²⁶⁹. The circular form of the *sehlora* most likely serves a similar, symbolic function to the *dikenga* in Kongo religion as being indicative of the life cycle. In both these instances the layer of physical material on objects is both an aesthetic and a spiritual action where materiality is an embodied process of making that wields power. For the Kongo people material accumulation allows for an accumulation of power so that the layering of materials in *mpungu* figures creates spiritual power through each layer’s particular significance²⁷⁰. It is this materiality that is therefore empowered to solve individual problems and may be likened to the use of child figures among various South African peoples.

As objects layered with symbolic material the fertility figures of South Africa wield a spiritual power through their materiality and in so doing are able to *create* fertility for the

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Friedman, ‘Ntwane Gimwane: Ntwane Grass Figures’, 135.

²⁷⁰ Martinez-Ruiz, ‘Ma Kisi Nsi: L’art de Habitants de Region de Mbanza Kongo’, 28.

women who care for them as children and that likens them to the Kongo *mpungu*. The above analysis seeks to demonstrate that African art forms have their own art historical framework for understanding objects that is, while not homogenous, distinct from the Western. As Martinez-Ruiz argues; “the Bakongo have their own criteria for assigning meaning and understanding visual material beyond what has been understood as art (in contemporary museum practices) or as artifact (in anthropological and archaeological discourse)”²⁷¹. Academically, positioning the objects most commonly known under the banner of ‘traditional African art’ (which I refer to as historical African art) within a new category beyond the Western dichotomy of art and anthropology means allowing the objects to have value within their own, African, ontological system. Understanding the complex religious and social system in which the fertility figure functions means that one cannot condone the display of such an object as simply an emblem of a lost cultural practice or as an aesthetic object in the Western sense. In the sense that a Western crucifix is believed to have a ‘life force’ (a value specific to the object) and that a contemporary work is believed to embody the genius of its maker, South African and African art, that is inextricably tied to cultural practices, are seen to be embodied and spiritually significant. It would, therefore, seem appropriate to treat such objects in a way that does justice to their original value and this would need to be within a value system distinct from the Western frameworks of anthropology or art history. As far as Western discourse on African art is concerned many of the older sources (such as the 1861 work by Casalis) focus on the details of cultural practice and religious beliefs while more contemporary works tend to focus more on the visual aspects of objects without allowing for the complex narratives that underpin them.

From a Western perspective, objects like the Kongo *mpungu* have been the subject of fear, derision, veneration and, in academic circles, fierce and on-going debates about which category they belong to and which category most appropriately honours the object’s original intention and use. The debate on terminology tends to oscillate between two sides of a perceived binary: the object as aesthetic artwork or the object as ‘power figure’ most relevant to anthropology. Yet, as Martinez-Ruiz points out, both these categories are problematic and tend to oversimplify an ancient and complex system that is at once artistic, philosophical, social, economic and political²⁷².

²⁷¹ Ibid., 5.
²⁷² Ibid., 18.

The Western ‘anthropological perspective’, which has historically described *mpungu* (or *nkisi*) as fetishes or power figures, tends to assume that the practice of using *mpungu* is emblematic of a past tradition and as such information about the cultural significance of such objects has not been informed by current practitioners²⁷³. Apart from the assumption that *mpungu* or *umndwana* relate only to a ‘traditional’ past and must therefore be opposed to terms such as ‘contemporary’ or ‘modern’ the Western study and display of such objects within the realm of anthropology has forced them to signify African culture in a very general sense, rather than allowing the object to have meaning intrinsic to itself and *in relation to culture*²⁷⁴. This reaffirms a perceived separation between the social aspects of culture and those activities that are referred to as ‘art’. This perceived separation (from a Western perspective) is emphasised by the interdisciplinary nature of ‘African studies’ that readily allows for a combination of the previously separate fields of anthropology and art while scholars who study historical and contemporary European objects tend to ignore the anthropological in favour of the purely art historical²⁷⁵.

The primary reason for this disciplinary and philosophical difference is that ‘art’ is seen as a term and category with a specifically European history and so cannot, the argument goes, be applied to cultural production from societies who did not use the term in the past. The anthropological approach used by Western scholars has therefore sought to ignore the artness of African objects and instead to focus on their cultural aspects²⁷⁶. Writing in 1941, Joseph van Wing, for example, argues: “[a] really accurate and objective study ... [of Bakongo culture] ... must discard European terminology and concepts”²⁷⁷. Here he asserts, as many do, that the cultural differences between the Bakongo understanding of *mpungu* and the Western understanding of *art* must be emphasised and remain culturally specific rather than allowing for the projection of historically European concepts onto material culture from other contexts. The problem with this approach is twofold: on the one hand it potentially devalues the *mpungu* and other hand if it defines them within the category of ‘artefact’ (because they remain subject to a hierarchy perceived from a Western perspective) and it also fails to see that the anthropological perspective too has its roots in European, Enlightenment thinking in much the same way that art historical discourse does.

²⁷³ Ibid., 19.

²⁷⁴ MacGaffey, ‘Magic, or as We Usually Say “Art”’, 224.

²⁷⁵ See: V.Y Mudimbe, ‘African Art as a Question Mark’, *African Studies Review*, 29.1 (1986), 3–4.

²⁷⁶ Martinez-Ruiz, ‘Ma Kisi Nsi: L’art de Habitants de Region de Mbanza Kongo’, 21.

²⁷⁷ van Wing, ‘Bakongo Magic’, 85.

The requirement for cultural specificity undoes both the discourse of difference that sees African objects as outside of the category of 'art' and therefore, by global standards, less valuable as well as the discourse that sees 'African art' specialists seeking to redefine such objects as 'art' and literally move them from the ethnographic museum to the Western gallery space. MacGaffey cites Freedberg as suggesting that art theory is a "'native notion,' a feature of the ideology of one particular society during a certain period of its history"²⁷⁸. If so, then the challenge is not to apply exactly the same criteria from either anthropology or art history to objects such as *mpungu* but rather to allow the label 'art' (as this conveys adequate perceived value in our globalised world) while at the same time working towards a different art historical discourse that accounts for the specific ontological understanding of the African art system.

This chapter has sought to provide a discussion of the origins of art history as a discipline and the way in which art, perceived as the greatest cultural product of civilisations, has been used, historically, to determine the relative value of a people. It is this discipline of Western art history, tied to understandings of civilisation, that has spread globally. As such, to deny the term 'art' to a particular culture is in effect to remove the association with civilisation and in turn with human subjectivity. It is an acknowledgement of the value embedded in the term 'art' that has, therefore, allowed for the application of a Western philosophical system for understanding art to African art in an attempt to universalize art history and include previously neglected cultures. What I have attempted to show, however, is that African art has its own historical, philosophical system for understanding the objects we now call art and as such these systems need to exist within a heterogeneous rather than homogenous discourse.

²⁷⁸ MacGaffey, 'Magic, or as We Usually Say "Art"', 220. .

Chapter 3: South African Art History: The character of a discourse

For the purposes of this chapter, I seek to discuss access to art history in order to understand the nature of that knowledge, its particular character and its means for dissemination in the South African context. In order to understand the precise manner in which the discipline of art history is framed in South Africa this chapter will analyse the writing and discourse of South African art historians in an attempt to describe the particular discursive frameworks that are employed. As a specific case study we will turn to a study of the association of South African Visual Art Historians (SAVAH) that seeks to understand the position of the organisation within the larger ideological apparatus of South African art history and its role in the production of art historical discourse. As discussed in Chapter 2, art history has (despite the contemporary diversity within the field) most frequently been used to denote a discipline of European origin. This perceived bias has meant that ‘specialist knowledge’ in the field of art has been assumed to mean knowledge of European (and therefore *Western*) art history despite the existence of African (and other) epistemological frameworks that fit within what is globally understood to be ‘art’.

Within the framework of both physical (as will be outlined in Chapter 5) and epistemological access to discourse (that I discussed in Chapter 2), I seek to understand the particular character of art historical discourse, as it exists in South Africa. A survey of the practice of art history in South Africa provides a narrative of a relatively small and fledgling discipline but one that has been in existence for a number of decades and is more established than others in its geographical region. South Africa offers art history (or visual studies) courses at a number of universities and is the only southern African country to offer art history up to

doctoral level; it has a number of academic journals that publish material within either art history or visual studies and two associations for the professional development of academic art history²⁷⁹. As outlined in Chapter 2, the academic discipline of art history as a formalised area of study only came into being in the mid nineteenth century in Europe, in Western Europe specifically, but it is one whose ideological framework remains heavily embedded in global discourse on art²⁸⁰. In the South African context the formalisation of fine art associations and institutions modelled on a Western understanding of art (for African art in South Africa had existed long before) began around a similar time with the formation of the South African Fine Arts Society in 1850, the establishment of a National Gallery in 1895 (though without official premises until the official opening in 1930), the opening of the first art school in Johannesburg in 1912 and the endowment of the first chair of fine art at the University of Cape Town in 1920²⁸¹. These early organisations, schools and galleries were heavily modelled on Western European prototypes. The first exhibition of the South Africa Fine Arts Society in Cape Town in 1851 included almost entirely European art with a few works by white South Africans²⁸². Following on from the formation of Westernised institutions for fine art the establishment of art history as a discipline in South Africa happened some decades subsequent to the formation of institutions for fine art or practical art tuition. At universities art history was initially only a support subject to fine art and while the first university fine art departments were established in the nineteen twenties and thirties the first official departmental chairs for art history occurred only in the nineteen seventies²⁸³. Art history as a formalised discipline is therefore a fairly recent occurrence in South Africa.

Within the framework of a survey of South African art history, I have chosen to focus my discussion on the organisation known previously as the South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians (SAAAH) and since 2005 as SAVAH so as to gain an understanding of the way in which art historical discourse functions in an institutionalised sense in South Africa. Having been formed in 1984 prior to the first democratic elections, what was then

²⁷⁹ Deirdre Pretorius, 'Does South African Design History Exist?', in *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalization*, ed. by Kjeti Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016), pp. 42–59. This chapter offers a survey of design history as an academic discipline in South Africa and some of the analysis is relevant to art history as well.

²⁸⁰ Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

²⁸¹ Esme Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa: An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary and Historical Survey of Painters and Graphic Artists Since 1875* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1970), xi–vii.

²⁸² Esme Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa: An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary and Historical Survey of Painters, Sculptors and Graphic Artists Since 1875 (Revised Edition)* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1983), 1.

²⁸³ Anitra Nettleton, 'Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi', in *Compression vs. Expression: Containing and Explaining the World's Art* (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006), 54–55.

SAAAH is arguably the most prominent art historical organisation in South Africa whose principle means for the production and dissemination of knowledge is their annual conference and their affiliated journal *De Arte*. They have also been the organisation at the forefront of controversy around racial transformation in the field of art history and visual studies and as such provide a necessary case study. What follows is an analysis of SAAAH/SAVAH as an organisation with a specific focus on the proceedings of their annual conferences and the nature of the papers presented at them (see Appendix C). This will be discussed in the context of other major texts and writings by South African art historians and the broader context of art history in South Africa. My aim with this analysis is to create an image of South African art historical discourse and the manner in which it has changed over a 33 year period since 1984 when the organisation began and in the 23 years since the advent of South African democracy with the first democratic elections in 1994. An analysis of this narrative will, it is hoped, assist in understanding the dominant discourse that manifests in the South African context so that one can map the reflection of this ideological apparatus in museum collections, university curricula and gain an image of what South African art history might be. I have chosen to focus specifically on the proceeding's of SAAAH/SAVAH's annual conferences as these papers, in being informally published as proceedings and as being delivered to a relatively small group, offer a potentially greater litmus test of the discourse of the time than officially published material might.

In 1984, six years before Nelson Mandela was released from prison and at the height of protest against the apartheid regime academics from various economically advantaged, HWUs in South Africa sought to create a professional art historical body that would facilitate the development of art history in South Africa. At this time white South African artists and academics, who constituted the rather small South African art world (formal interaction with black artists and academics was marginal and often illegal) were becoming increasingly aware of the injustices of a racist political ideology. A conference held at the Michaelis School of Fine Art (University of Cape Town) in 1979 titled *The State of Art in South Africa* engendered the decision on the part of white South African artists not to exhibit in state-sponsored exhibitions until national art institutions were open to people of all race groups. Three years later the *Culture and Resistance* symposium and festival of the arts, organised in exile by the Medu Art Ensemble, was held in Gaborone, Botswana under the title: *Art*

*Towards Social Development and Change in South Africa*²⁸⁴. This ground-breaking, racially-inclusive conference, attended by many participants who were living in exile, described artists as ‘cultural workers’ with the capacity to use culture as resistance against apartheid²⁸⁵. In 1984, as a result of the efforts of Omar Badsha, who headed the photography unit for the Second Carnegie Commission on Poverty and Development, an exhibition showing the reality of apartheid through the work of twenty South African documentary photographers was shown at various venues the United States²⁸⁶. Called *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* it was one of a series of anti-apartheid initiatives that occurred outside of the country and used art to highlight on-going injustices. Like many such initiatives, the exhibition and book were banned in South Africa, and Badsha, who was denied a passport, never saw the exhibition on display²⁸⁷.

As such, the context in which SAAAH was formed was one of political unrest and racial segregation, one in which a segment of the art world was actively using art to highlight social injustice in the country (though such art was censored), while others were continuing to work within the existing system. As is evidenced by the very different nature of the conferences mentioned above, the formal art world was nonetheless predominantly white as the ideological apparatus of apartheid governed the institutions of art history: universities, galleries, museums and the market. In the midst of on-going violence, censorship and socio-political upheaval a group of art historians from advantaged, HWUs across South Africa met in 1984 to discuss the creation of a professional association for art historians and an accredited journal.

The attempt to create an art historical association in the form of those found in the West was welcomed by academics from HWUs but resulted in a division chiefly between academics from English universities and those from Afrikaans institutions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, HWUs were divided by having either English or Afrikaans as the primary language of

²⁸⁴ *Thami Mnyele and Medu Art Ensemble Retrospective*, ed. by Clive Kellner and Sergio-Albio González (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2009). See also: South African History Archive. Posterbook Collective, *Images of Defiance: South African Resistance Posters of the 1980s* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991).

²⁸⁵ Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd, 1989), 8-9. Williamson’s seminal work provides details of both black and white artists whose work was specifically critical of apartheid. In this introduction she explains the growing political awareness amongst the art community following the shocking events of the Soweto uprising in 1976 when a peaceful protest ended in the deaths of hundreds of students.

²⁸⁶ A book of the same title was published alongside the exhibition text from a conference held in 1984 on the topic. *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart*, ed. by Omar Badsha (Cape Town; Johannesburg: The Gallery Press, 1986).

²⁸⁷ South African History Online, ‘Omar Badsha’ <<http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/omar-badsha>> [accessed 15 March 2017].

instruction and were known to have different institutional cultures. Afrikaans-medium universities were perceived as conservative, isolated from academic communities to a greater extent and in support of apartheid policy while English-medium institutions were perceived to be more liberal²⁸⁸. In a competitive sense historically white, English universities produced a greater percentage of the total research outputs (56% in 1986) and received a majority of the research grants (62% in 1986) in the time period that SAAAH was formed²⁸⁹. This context of division became apparent in the formation of an art historical association in 1984 as the initiative came from Afrikaans-speaking art historians who were specifically interested in the creation of an accredited journal in which they could publish and by so doing increase their research outputs and grants²⁹⁰. English-speaking art historians joined a meeting created by those chiefly from Afrikaans institutions to establish an association and journal and became the dominant group on the steering committee²⁹¹. As a result of what must have been perceived as unfair dominance, the 'Afrikaans group' reconvened separately to consolidate their own association, AHWGSA (the *Kunshistoriese Werkgemeenskap* or the Art Historical Work Group of South Africa) and in so doing rejected the establishment of SAAAH and established a separate journal²⁹². The AHWGSA had members predominantly from the Rand Afrikaans University which was created in 1967 and had close ties to the ruling National Party and funds from the infamous Broederbond (Afrikaner Brotherhood)²⁹³. SAAAH's members, on the other hand, were predominantly from English-medium universities such as the University of the Witwatersrand (which gained university status in 1922). The creation of

²⁸⁸ Ian Bunting, 'The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid', in *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*, ed. by Nico Cloete and others (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 65 - 69.

²⁸⁹ File, "Critical Challenges for South African Universities".

²⁹⁰ Elizabeth Rankin, "Home Thoughts from Abroad: Looking Back at Art History and the South African Association of Art Historians 1984-1998," 90 - 91. It must be emphasised here, as Rankin does, that the impetus to gain a platform for publication had a greater relevance for academics who wrote in Afrikaans as none of the international journals would publish in Afrikaans. While the international boycott created barriers for all South African academics, those who wrote in English had a greater chance for publication.

²⁹¹ Anitra Nettleton notes that English-language art historians regarded their replication of European art history (predominantly British art history) as superior to that produced at the Afrikaans universities. Anitra Nettleton, 'Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi', in *Compression vs. Expression: Containing and Explaining the World's Art* (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006), pp. 39-56, 40.

²⁹² Elizabeth Rankin, "Home Thoughts from Abroad: Looking Back at Art History and the South African Association of Art Historians 1984-1998," 91. It must be noted that while these two groups were predominantly made up of academics from either English or Afrikaans institutions and that its members spoke either of the two languages there were many exceptions. As such, the label of 'Afrikaans group' is used as a reference point rather than an indication of a homogenous group of individuals.

²⁹³ Jillian Carman, 'Email Correspondence', *January 2017*. The *Broederbond* was an exclusive Afrikaner organisation intent on the advancement of Afrikaner interests at the expense of others and an essential organisation to the creation of apartheid and its ideologies. All apartheid-era Prime Ministers of South Africa were members of the *Broederbond*. See: Charles Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa 1918-1948*, ed. by Saul Dubow (London: MacMillan Press, 1990). In 2004 RAU was merged with Technikon Witwatersrand and parts of Vista University to form the University of Johannesburg (see Appendix A).

two art historical associations with separate journals rather than one was therefore based predominantly (but far from absolutely) on the institutional affiliations of its members, a divide between (white) English and (white) Afrikaans speakers and the political leanings of its members (predominantly liberal English speakers or more conservative Afrikaans supporters of government policy)²⁹⁴.

There were a number of catalysts for the decision to create an art historical association the most obvious of which was to create a network of professionals who could engage in relevant, academic exchange and remain aware of notable events and advances in the discipline. The impetus to create academic associations is far from unusual and as Judy Ramgolam notes in her study of SAAAH (2004), art historical associations exist in most countries where art history forms a notable discipline within academia²⁹⁵. Apart from creating a network, the other primary catalyst for the creation of AHWGSA and SAAAH was the need to facilitate opportunities for academic conference participation and journal publication amid the international cultural boycott of South Africa²⁹⁶. A founding member of SAAAH, Elizabeth Rankin, discussed the effect that international isolation had on South African art historians in her paper presented at the SAAAH conference in 1995²⁹⁷. Rankin describes the high rates of (often unexplained) rejection from international journals during the cultural boycott as providing an incentive to focus on the local manifestation of the discipline and to create a local journal²⁹⁸. As such the establishment of a professional body was, as Federico Freschi puts it, perceived to be “a matter of survival for South African art historians” who were increasingly isolated from the international sphere²⁹⁹. An acknowledgement of South African art historian’s enforced separation from international associations can be seen in a SAAAH newsletter from 1989 where a copy of a letter published by the British Association

²⁹⁴ This is not intended to suggest that all members of either group had the same political views or that all members of the AHWGSA were in support of apartheid but rather what that the perception of each association was and what it was that kept them separate.

²⁹⁵ Judy Ramgolam, ‘The Transforming Context of the South African Association of Art Historians (SAAAH)’ (University of the Witwatersrand, 2004), 11. In Western countries art historical associations are large and well-funded bodies. The most notable being the College Art Association (CAA) in the United States and the Comité International d’Histoire de l’Art (CIHA) which was founded in 1930 at the Brussels Congress and held its 34th World Congress of Art History in Beijing in 2016.

²⁹⁶ The need for an academic and cultural boycott of South Africa to put pressure on the apartheid government was first declared by the African National Congress in Exile (ANC) at a conference in Ghana in 1958. This declaration spurred successive boycotts by various international bodies. In 1965, for example, there was a declaration by British academics to boycott South Africa. For a timeline of the boycott see: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/south-africas-academic-and-cultural-boycott-timeline>

²⁹⁷ Elizabeth Rankin, ‘Home Thoughts from Abroad: Looking Back at Art History and the South African Association of Art Historians 1984-1998’, in *Negotiating Identities: Proceedings of the 14th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians* (UNISA Press, 1998), pp. 90–96, 95.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁹⁹ Federico Freschi, ‘Other Views: Art History in (South) Africa and the Global South’, *Diogenes*, 58.3 (2012), 93–101.

of Art Historians was printed. The letter informs its members that they should “follow the lead set by most other cultural institutions and organisations and refuse any professional invitations to visit South Africa or to establish links and exchanges”³⁰⁰. The members of SAAAH felt international isolation to be particularly restraining in their efforts to establish art history as a profession in South Africa, particularly since articles that were declined were at times specifically critical of apartheid. When democracy lifted the cultural boycott members eagerly presented papers at international conferences so as to reconnect art historical discourse in South Africa to its institutionalised centres in North America and Europe³⁰¹.

The AHWGSA had their journal, the *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Kunsgeskiedenis/ South African Journal of Art History* (SAJAH) accredited in 1984 and published their first volume in 1985³⁰². SAJAH received various sources of sponsorship in its early years of publication including various Afrikaans-language universities such as the University of the Orange Free State (for issues 1 and 2 of the 1987 volume and the 1989, 1991 and 1993 volumes, for example), The Rand Afrikaans University (for issues 1 and 2 of the 1987 volume and the 1992 volume, for example) and the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (for issues 3 and 4 of the 1987 volume, for example). Companies such as *Volkskas* and *Sasol* also provided sponsorship in 1987 and 1993, for example³⁰³. It is unsurprising that various universities were willing to sponsor the publication of an accredited journal, as subsidies would then have been made available through publication. Since many of the articles that appeared in the early existence of SAJAH, prior to 1994, were published in Afrikaans (for example, all seven of the articles published in issue three and four of 1987 were in Afrikaans) this journal would have been one of the only avenues for publication³⁰⁴. By 1996 very few of the articles in SAJAH were in Afrikaans and this continues into the present with only one or two articles appearing every few years³⁰⁵.

³⁰⁰ South African Association of Art Historians, ‘SAAAH Newsletter 14’, 25/11 (1989), 4.

³⁰¹ Elizabeth Rankin, "Home Thoughts from Abroad: Looking Back at Art History and the South African Association of Art Historians 1984-1998," 95. Rankin lists a number of international conferences that were attended by SAAAH members and the feeling of recognition and acceptance that came with the lifting of the boycott.

³⁰² Estelle Alma Mare, ‘Email Correspondence’, *February 2017*.

³⁰³ This information comes from the volumes of SAJAH that were available. After 1996 the journal simply states that it was published by the Art Historical Work Group of South Africa.

³⁰⁴ The SAJAH and later SAJAAH as well as De Arte provided for publication in Afrikaans but did not explicitly encourage it.

³⁰⁵ In 1996 none of the articles were in Afrikaans while in 1999, 2002, 2006, 2008 there was one article per year in Afrikaans and in 2014 there were two.

SAAAH's proposal for a journal took some time for accreditation and was eventually granted as a joint publication by the Bureau for Scientific Publication (BSP) to the disciplines of art history and cultural history in 1987³⁰⁶. The SAAAH journal was published from 1987 as the *South African Journal of Cultural and Art History* (SAJCAH) and had the two disciplines in different sections of the publication. As such SAAAH had its art historical journal reluctantly yoked to the discipline of cultural history, which had, during apartheid, an association with the ideologies of cultural separation and classification and was thus not welcomed by the association³⁰⁷. In 1990 SAAAH asked the BSP for its own journal and this was granted in the same year under the title of the *South African Journal of Art and Architectural History* (SAJAAH) which then very closely and confusingly resembled the name chosen by the AHWGSA of SAJAH³⁰⁸. The success of SAJAAH was however short lived as the BSP rescinded their funding in 1991 (after the publication of the volumes from 1991) and between 1991 and 1996 the journal's publication was funded internally by SAAAH and produced by the University of South Africa (UNISA); a situation which eventually led to the journals suspension in 1996³⁰⁹. At this time, a third journal in the field of art history called *De Arte* had already been in existence since 1965³¹⁰. In light of the suspension of their journal SAAAH negotiated with the University of South Africa, who published *De Arte*, to have that journal sent to its members and this created the unofficial affiliation, which still exists today. SAVAH members are encouraged to submit papers for publication to *De Arte* and there has been considerable overlap between the council members of SAVAH and the editorial board of *De Arte* over the years. Currently (2016-2017), five of the eight members of *De Arte*'s editorial board are also on the SAVAH council, which has a total of ten members. Despite the existence of *De Arte* when SAAAH and the AHWGSA were created the journal seems not to have been perceived, in 1984, as sufficient in providing an academic, art historical journal that could provide accredited publications. This may have been because *De Arte* belonged to an existing institution, the University of South Africa, and was subject to its views and possible censorship in a manner that SAJCAH was not³¹¹. Overlooking the established

³⁰⁶ Ramgolam, "The Transforming Context of the South African Association of Art Historians (SAAAH)", 32.

³⁰⁷ Elizabeth Rankin, "Home Thoughts from Abroad: Looking Back at Art History and the South African Association of Art Historians 1984-1998", 91.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 92. See also Ramgolam "The Transforming Context of the South African Association of Art Historians (SAAAH)", 35. The use of a Latin title enforces the established stature of Latin as an academic, European language once used at many institutions.

³¹⁰ Since 2016 *De Arte* has been co-published by UNISA Press and Routledge. A database of older journals is available on Taylor and Francis online. Here the oldest publication is Volume 1, Issue 1 from 1965.

³¹¹ Rankin discusses the censorship of an article by Brenda Schmahmann on Tom Wesselman because of the depiction of a penis in one of his artworks. *De Arte* refused to publish the article but it was published in Issue 3 of the 1989 publication of

existence of *De Arte* as a journal may also have been linked to the intended aims of both SAAAH and the AHWGSA. The principal aim in the creation of SAAAH was specifically to allow for discussion amongst members through conferences and seminars while the impetus for what became the AHWGSA was specifically to facilitate the creation of a journal³¹². This differentiated emphasis has continued in the lifespan of both SAVAH and the AHWGSA as SAVAH's primary focus over its years of existence has been its annual conference despite the loss of its journal and the AHWGSA has focused on the continued publication of their journal, SAJAH.

Another aspect of the separation between what became SAVAH and the AHWGSA was the particular kind of art history that each group supported. South African art historian Anitra Nettleton mentions that, particularly prior to 1994 but continuing into democracy, English-speaking universities concentrated on an imitation of British art history and particularly the "formalist traditions" established by institutions such as the Courtauld Institute of Art in London with a historical account of European art from the Renaissance to Surrealism³¹³. According to Nettleton, Afrikaans institutions were informed by the more philosophical German *Kunsthistorisches* model and established their art history curricula so that it included art by white South African artists in line with the creation of a national Afrikaner culture³¹⁴. While the focuses of these art historical models differ both have at their core an attempt to replicate an existing European discipline in the South African context. The history of SAVAH and its relationship to the AHWGSA highlights a number of points pertinent to this discussion: that the establishment of SAAAH occurred both as a result of the cultural boycott and the context of political unrest while also being established to create a network of professionals despite such socio-political turmoil; that the principal obstacle in the creation of an art historical association was the division between white Afrikaans and white English speakers and their different political ideologies; that both art historical associations can be said to have modelled themselves on European forms and as such were vehicles for the creation a particular kind of settler-colonial discourse, discussed in Chapter 1.

SAJCAH. See: Elizabeth Rankin, "Home Thoughts from Abroad: Looking Back at Art History and the South African Association of Art Historians 1984-1998", 91.

³¹² Mare, 'Email Correspondence', *February 2017*.

³¹³ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 40. The curricula of South African art history departments will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. See also: Freschi, 'Other Views: Art History in (South) Africa and the Global South'.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

During the apartheid period art historical practice in South Africa could be termed ‘settler-colonial’ as a result of the forced exclusion of art historians beyond the white population and the scant focus on art by black South Africans (historical or contemporary). Many South African authors have noted the manner in which apartheid-era South African art and art history transplanted a Western European practice and discourse into a South African context. As Mario Pissarra notes, early twentieth century white artists were typically trained in Western Europe and, “there was little apart from the subject matter to distinguish their works from their European counterparts”³¹⁵. Within the context of art history Nettleton notes that a number of the older members of art history departments in South Africa (such as Heather Martienssen who received a PhD in art history from the Courtauld in 1947 and subsequently became the first professor of fine arts at the University of the Witwatersrand) studied in Europe and therefore brought their training with them into the university curricula and their research³¹⁶. As such, to a large degree and in mimicry of the manner in which art history has spread globally, the methodologies and ideologies employed by European institutions came via white South African academics into university frameworks and professional discourse.

Prior to 1984, when SAAAH and the AHWGSA were formed, the rather scant writing on South African art occurred exclusively by white writers and when it did occur the art of black South Africans was often excluded, scarce or labelled as ‘other’. Lize van Robbroeck has written extensively on the art historical writing of white South Africans between 1967 and 1992 and the anxious attempts to locate the appropriate methodology and terminology to describe art by black South Africans. As van Robbroeck puts it, this writing stemmed from a fear of the ‘other’, which “led to the development of discursive strategies and the invention of numerous taxonomies to deny proximity and coevalness”³¹⁷.

Without rehearsing van Robbroeck’s analysis of (white) art historical writing from this period a few of the early writings on South African art are worth mentioning because of the manner in which it illustrates exclusion. In the nineteen fifties and sixties the writing on South African art that did appear was primarily in Afrikaans and was written in such a way that it

³¹⁵ Mario Pissarra, ‘Cast in Colour? Towards an Inclusive South African Art’, in *Revisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2006), 49.

³¹⁶ Nettleton, Nettleton, “Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi”, 39 and 49. Nettleton provides the example of Heather Martienssen (note, page 49). A further elaboration on the matter notes that art history departments were very small during the apartheid period and that while postgraduate degrees in art history were most likely to be obtained in Europe staff members with such qualifications were scarce (page 41).

³¹⁷ Lize van Robbroeck, ‘Writing White on Black: Identity and Difference in South African Art Writing of the Twentieth Century’, *Third Text*, 17.2 (2003), 171–82, 171.

emphasised the nationalist notion of South Africa as the land of the Afrikaner with an absolute ignorance of black South African people or culture and little recognition of white, English-speaking artists³¹⁸. As van Robbroeck notes, these publications included: *Kuns in Suid-Afrika* (1935) and *Skone Kunste in Suid-Afrika* (1951) which included no black artists; *Anton Anreith, Africa's First Sculptor* (1953) which laughably ignored all historical African sculpture; *Ons Kuns/Our Art* (1959 and 1961) which included the modern black artists Gerard Sekoto and later Sydney Kumalo; *Art in South Africa Since 1900* (1962) which included brief mention of African art traditions that influenced white artists and *Kunswaardering* (1964) which was routinely prescribed as a textbook at schools and structures the narrative with a history of Western art followed by a single chapter on South African art without any art by black South Africans³¹⁹. One of the first attempts at writing a broader survey of South African art prior to the formation of SAVAH or the AHWGSA came from the three texts by an historian at times referred to as the “doyenne of South African art history”, Esme Berman: *Art and Artists of South Africa: An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary and Historical Survey of Painters and Graphic Artists Since 1875* (1970); *The Story of South African Painting* (1975) and a revised edition of *Art and Artists of South Africa* (1983) that expanded the narrative to include more black artists³²⁰. Berman’s surveys of South African art were lauded and incredibly popular: the fourth impression of the 1970 edition was out of print by 1978³²¹. In the case of Berman we can again see how the settler-colonial perspective was perpetuated through generations of scholars with waning connections to the colonial metropole: Berman studied at the University of the Witwatersrand under Heather Martienssen who had in turn studied at the Courtauld in London. Berman’s history of South African art was the first to include some work by black South Africans, and some brief mention of historical South African art not made within the Western tradition, but on the whole the history is focused on the art of white South Africans that adheres to a European understanding of art making. In her introduction to *Art and Artists of South Africa* Berman mentions that the history of South Africa prior to European colonisation in 1652 still needs to be investigated but that “the story of that heritage falls beyond the compass of this

³¹⁸ Lize Van Robbroeck, ‘Unsettling the Canon Some Thoughts on the Design of Visual Century: South African Art in Context’, 3.1 (2013), 27–37, 28.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

³²⁰ Jillian Carman, ‘South Africa: Empowering the Local’. It must be noted that historical African art had been studied and written about prior to this but most often not as ‘art’ but as ‘artefact’ in the field of anthropology rather than art history. This means that histories of South African art in this period determined their field of study not only by time period but also by category.

³²¹ Esme Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa: An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary and Historical Survey of Painters, Sculptors and Graphic Artists Since 1875 (Revised Edition)* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1983), ix.

book”³²². While the early seventeenth century was explicitly outside the scope of Berman’s art history the perception that the artistic heritage of black South Africans lies outside of the discipline of art history is further emphasised by the erroneous claim, in speaking about the emergence of urban black artists such as Gerard Sekoto and Louis Maqhubela, that “Bantu culture had never manifested a tradition of pictorial or sculptural expression”³²³. In keeping with the definition entrenched in the nineteenth century of non-European material culture as artefact or craft the initial assumption, illustrated by Berman, was that southern African peoples had no ‘art’ to speak of. Following on from this framework modern, black artists are then perceived to be working within an adopted Western tradition of art making rather than as working with any connection to indigenous South African art practice. Rock art is mentioned as a particular artistic heritage as is the more contemporary manifestation of Ndebele painting, yet Berman explicitly notes that Ndebele painting “is not an independent artform but a class of decoration associated with the traditional domestic architecture” despite referring to it as “their art”³²⁴. Here we see the notion that southern African people have no tradition of art making as such and the idea that their production should be defined as decorative craft rather than art continues into the nineteen eighties in South Africa.

Another aspect that is noticeable in Berman’s art history is that black artists are perceived as part of a separate category that makes ‘white art’ (though it is not named as such) appear to be the normative standard for art. In *The Story of South African Painting* (1975) Berman devotes nine of the ten chapters to the study of white South African art as perceived through the framework of Western art history (subheadings include: “A link with our Dutch founders”, “Impressionism” and “Fantasy and the Mystique of Africa”) and leaves the final chapter to the discussion of what she refers to as “township art”, the adoption of African forms by white South African artists in the manner of Picasso and an analysis of one individual black artist: Louis Maqhubela³²⁵. Another history of South African art was published in 1982 under the title, *Three Centuries of South African Art, Fine Art, Architecture, Applied Arts* by Hans Fransen who was then a lecturer in the history of art at the University of Natal and wrote the text for use by students. Fransen’s history is divided into a Dutch period (1652 – 1820), an English period (1795 – 1895) and a South African

³²² Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa: An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary and Historical Survey of Painters and Graphic Artists Since 1875*, 1.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 17. See extensive writing by Anitra Nettleton on this notion that no art existed in southern Africa.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

³²⁵ Esme Berman, *The Story of South African Painting* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1975).

period (1885 – present day) and he separates the work by black artists into sections on “non-Western art of South Africa” and a chapter titled “A South African Art?” but does not include black artists in the South African period³²⁶. As noted by Julie McGee, Fransen repeats the notion that “unlike those of central Africa (Ife, Benin)” indigenous South Africans do “not have a local tradition that has been handed down through the centuries” and as such sees any modern art by black South Africans as simply a mimicry of European traditions and therefore not ‘authentically African’³²⁷. Berman and Fransen’s writing can thus be described as *settler colonial art history* in their use of Western models and frameworks as well as their outright exclusion of work by black South Africans or their writing about it in such a way that emphasises both difference and perceived inadequacy. The use of terminology to create distance is used by many writers of South African art history under different guises with terms such as ‘traditional art’, with its shadow of primitivism, making way for ‘township art’ and then ‘black art’. These taxonomies disseminate the understanding of whiteness as normative and unnamed, for as van Robbroeck observes, “no books have ever been published in South Africa with titles such as ‘White Art of South Africa’”³²⁸.

Though historical South African art, made within an African rather than Western tradition, and the modern and contemporary art by black South Africans was largely left out of narrative writing on South African art during the apartheid period this material was studied in the field of anthropology and, for its own separatist ends, by the government department of ‘Native Affairs’ and the cultural anthropology known as *Volkekunde* that was taught at Afrikaans-medium universities³²⁹. E.J de Jager was such an anthropologist who published the books *Contemporary African Art in South Africa* (1973) and *Images of Man* (1992) and while they are instrumental in adding knowledge in this area of art they can be critiqued, as they are by van Robbroeck, for subscribing to the notion of cultural essences³³⁰. These writings are, however, valuable as they were some of the few that engaged with historical and contemporary African art on its own terms prior to democracy. De Jager’s text *Images of Man* discussed the collection that he had established in the oldest historically black university

³²⁶ Hans Fransen, ‘Three Centuries of South African Art: Fine Art, Architecture, Applied Arts’ (Johannesburg: Donker, 1982).

³²⁷ Julie McGee, ‘Canons Apart and Apartheid Canons: Interpellations beyond the Colonial in South Africa’, in *Partisan Canons*, ed. by Anna Brzyski (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007).

³²⁸ Lize van Robbroeck, “Writing White on Black: Identity and Difference in South African Art Writing of the Twentieth Century”, 180.

³²⁹ Van Robbroeck, “Unsettling the Canon Some Thought on the Design of Visual Century”.

³³⁰ E.J De Jager, *Contemporary African Art in South Africa* (Cape Town: Struik, 1973). See: Lize Van Robbroeck, “Unsettling the Canon Some Thoughts on the Design of Visual Century: South African Art in Context”, 30.

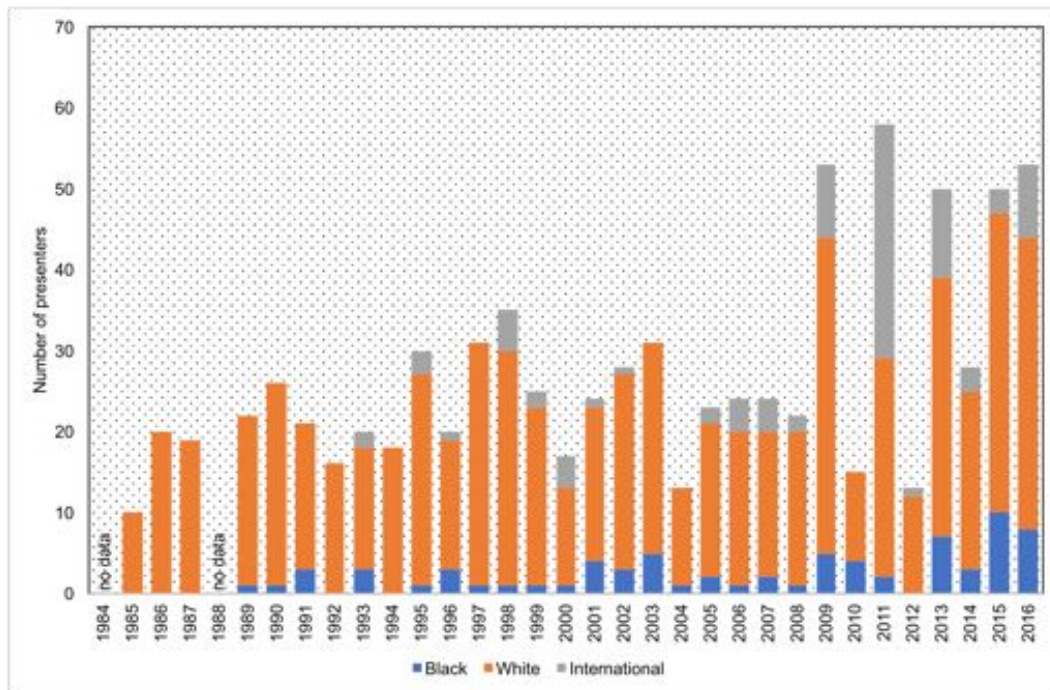


Figure 9: The estimated racial demographics of the SAAAH and SAVAH conferences 1985 – 2016. Sourced from conference proceedings. (Presenters whose papers were not included in the proceedings or records of attendance are not included).

in the Eastern Cape, the University of Fort Hare where he was a lecturer. Another anthropologist, David Hammond-Tooke, who lectured at the University of the Witwatersrand, published general texts on the culture of black South Africans such as *The Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa* (1980) and joined the art historian Anitra Nettleton to publish *African art in southern Africa: From tradition to township* in 1989 which explicitly questioned the exclusion of historical southern African art from the canon of South African art history³³¹. Nettleton had herself published work that critiqued the use of the term ‘primitive’ for African art in 1976 and later published an article titled *The Arts of Southern Africa* with Catherine Vogel in 1985³³². Also in 1985 the archaeologist James David Lewis-Williams published a book on *The San Artistic Achievement* which began his publication of texts on San rock painting but was framed in the manner of an ethnographic study³³³.

1985 was the year that the first SAAAH conference was held at the University of Natal in

³³¹ David Hammond-Tooke, *The Bantu-Speaking Peoples of Southern Africa* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1980). Anitra Nettleton and David Hammond-Tooke, *African Art in Southern Africa: From Tradition to Township* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1989).

³³² Catherine M. Vogel and Anitra C. E. Nettleton, ‘The Arts of Southern Africa’, *African Arts*, 18.3 (1985), 52.

³³³ James David Lewis-Williams, ‘The San Artistic Achievement’, *African Arts*, 18.3 (1985), 54–59 + 100.

Pietermaritzburg where Hans Fransen was a lecturer (see a full list of conferences in Appendix C). The conference proceedings record that ten papers were presented, seven of which were from the English-medium University of the Witwatersrand, two were from the distance learning institution the University of South Africa and one was from the English-medium institution of the University of Natal. The conference shows a dominance of English-medium institutions (which were all HWU) and as may be expected in the context all the presenters were white. Figure 9 shows the estimated racial demographic of SAAAH / SAVAH conferences using the definition of ‘black’ as all those not classified as ‘white’ under apartheid legislation. Here we can see that there were only white presenters at the SAAAH conferences until 1989 when one black speaker participated. Of the ten papers, seven discussed Western art such as Greek Doric Temples; Ancient Synagogue Mosaic Floors; Baroque, Rococo and Neoclassicism at the Cape (by Hans Fransen); Images of Queen Victoria; Hogarth's Harlot Progress and Duchamp's coding system³³⁴. One of the papers was presented in Afrikaans and discussed the philosophical perspective of imagination (emphasising a tendency to focus on philosophy by the Afrikaans-speakers mentioned above) while three discussed historical or contemporary South African art. Anitra Nettleton presented a paper titled *The Visual Significance of Southern San Painting*, her colleague from the University of the Witwatersrand Catherine Vogel presented on *Pedi Mural Art* and Leora Farber on *Popular Art* which included a case study of mass-produced paintings. The nature of this first SAAAH conference illustrates the focus on Western art history that existed in apartheid South Africa as well as the attempts by particular individuals and institutions (the University of the Witwatersrand in particular) to introduce an African focus. Fransen, who had published his history of South African art three years earlier presented a discussion of the European origins of Cape Architecture and declared that “the Cape had no existing architectural or decorative traditions to interact with” while further denying the possibility that various decorative elements in the architecture were of Malay origin³³⁵. The vastly disparate views of South African art history are emphasised in the following paper, by Vogel, which dealt specifically with Pedi art and architecture and which she referred to as such³³⁶. Nettleton’s paper specifically critiqued the methodology used by archaeologists, such as

³³⁴ SAAAH, ‘Proceedings of the 1st Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians’, 1985.

³³⁵ Hans Fransen, ‘The Application of Art-Historical Stylistic Concepts to Local Architecture and Design: Baroque, Rococo and Neoclassicism at the Cape’, in *Proceedings of the 1st Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians* (SAAAH, 1985), 34.

³³⁶ Catherine A.M Vogel, ‘Pedi Mural Art: An Interpretation’, in *Proceedings of the 1st Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians*, 1985.

Lewis-Williams, to discuss San painting as she viewed this approach as focusing too heavily on the socio-religious context of making, while amateurs tend only to focus on the aesthetic³³⁷. Here Nettleton draws attention to the way in which historical African art has been studied within the framework of Western art history: either as artifact and therefore studied for its social aspects, or as ‘art’ in the Western sense and therefore studied for its formal qualities. The discussion on which of these methods is most appropriate to the study of historical African art has featured heavily in the Western perception of the discipline yet neither allows for the possibility that another methodology (that may, for example, be African in origin) exists with some combination of these approaches (see Chapter 2). It must be noted that the anthropologist de Jager and Hammond-Tooke did not attend SAAAH conferences in the nineteen eighties and the archaeologist Lewis-Williams attended for the first time in 1990. Therefore the division between art history and anthropology and their disparate views of African art were evident in South Africa.

The second SAAAH conference was held at the University of the Witwatersrand and had the title, *Art and Social Change* that would appear to indicate an awareness of the violent struggle against apartheid in South Africa but, while aware of the relevance, was in fact initiated to coincide with an exhibition on art from the Russian revolution that never materialised³³⁸. Michael Godby, who wrote the introduction to the proceedings, notes that a conference on Russian art would have been inappropriate in the context of the small community of South African art historians and also that very few papers were submitted “on traditional Black art, which now forms such a large part of academic research”³³⁹. This claim is interesting considering the degree to which Nettleton and others (including those at the conference) have noted the lack of historical South African art or contemporary work made in keeping with indigenous methods for art making in university curricula at that time³⁴⁰. The second SAAAH conference had a greater number of speakers (20 according to the proceedings) and was divided into five sessions³⁴¹. The first dealt with Russian revolutionary art the second with miscellaneous topics including Russian architecture, the nude in Nazi Germany and Indian Art. The third discussed ‘South African topics’ where papers on South

³³⁷ Anitra Nettleton, ‘The Visual Significance of Southern San Painting’, in *Proceedings of the 1st Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*, 1985, 50.

³³⁸ Michael Godby, ‘Introduction’, in *Art and Social Change: Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*, 1986.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ See: Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi".

³⁴¹ SAAAH, ‘Art and Social Change: Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’, 1986.

African graffiti, representation at the police museum, the paintings of white South African artist Penny Siopis and a discussion of the terminology used to describe black South African art were presented. The fourth session focused on education in the South African context while the last was a panel discussion titled ‘Cultures in Transition’ and was created to discuss what the organisers termed ‘traditional black art’. A number of relevant concerns became apparent in the papers from the 1986 conference, including the obvious recognition by white South African art historians that the art of black South Africans (historical and contemporary) had been ignored and that this situation was in dire need of change. Victor Honey from Stellenbosch University noted the very “limited opportunity for studying African art” at South African schools and concluded that “[t]he overall emphasis is clearly on art as it is practiced in Western Europe and the USA” and that the notion of art as “white” or “Western” in nature is perpetuated through such curricula³⁴². The acknowledgment of the structural inequalities in the South African education system were echoed by Rob McLeod from the University of the Witwatersrand who noted that “[f]or a very long time now, Black South Africans have been robbed of their history and culture to facilitate a situation of political, economic and cultural domination” and spoke, at a time when the word was certainly not in vogue, of “decolonising” art³⁴³. In the panel discussion on ‘Cultures in Transition’ participants discussed the problematic terminology used to create distance when describing art by black South Africans. Lize van Robbroeck discussed the use of the term ‘township art’ to describe art that was essentially created for a white market, Catherine Vogel and Anitra Nettleton discussed the problem with the term ‘traditional’ as assuming culture to be static while Rayda Becker discussed the term ‘transitional’ which was popular at the time as existing always in relation to something described as ‘traditional’³⁴⁴. The SAAAH conference of 1986 therefore demonstrated an academic field engaging at varying degrees with change and with varying degrees of acknowledgment that South African art history had until this point been dominated by a Western approach.

The continuing acknowledgment that the discourse of South African art history needed to

³⁴² Victor Honey, ‘An Analysis of the Art History Syllabus of Departments of Education and Culture in South Africa’, in *Art and Social Change: Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*, 1986, pp. 116–121.

³⁴³ Rob McLeod, ‘Bleaching or Teaching? The Issue of Cultural Domination in the Art Education of Black People with Reference to Some Johannesburg Art Schools and Centres’, in *Art and Social Change: Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*, 1986, pp. 137–142.

³⁴⁴ SAAAH, ‘Art and Social Change: Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’. See also Nettleton’s article on the term transitional: Anitra Nettleton, ‘Myth of the Transitional: Black Art and White Markets in South Africa’, *South African Journal of Cultural and Art History*, 2.4 (1988).

change was evident at the third SAAAH conference, held at the Afrikaans-medium Stellenbosch University in 1987 which was titled *Re-writing the Art and Architectural History of Southern Africa*. The 19 papers presented included: *Re-interpretation in South African Historical Writing*; *The Inherited Art History of a Museum*; *Ideas, ideals and ideology in the writing on South African sculpture*; '*...to what degree they are possessed of ornamental taste*': *The history of the writing on Black art in South Africa* and *Umlungu uthatha ifoto: The tale of a multi-disciplinary flirtation*³⁴⁵. As such this conference dealt largely with questions related to art historiography in light of the need to transform South African discourse. A full panel was devoted to a discussion of the *Teaching of Art History at South African Universities* but was unfortunately not transcribed for inclusion in the proceedings. The fourth conference in 1988 was held at the University of Pretoria under the title *Art and Copyright* but no conference proceedings were produced. In 1989 the conference was held again at the University of Natal under the title *Diversity and Interaction* and hosted both the first international speaker (from Indiana University) as well as the first black speaker from the University of Durban-Westville, an institution created for students of Indian descent during apartheid whose paper was titled: *Traditional Indian aesthetics and modern Indian painting: a correlation*³⁴⁶. A number of papers from this conference looked at Western art while a greater number discussed 'diversity' from a critical perspective in areas such as architectural styles, primitivism, 'transitional art' as well as *Diversity and Interaction as the South African lifestyle*, which was the title of the keynote address³⁴⁷.

The acknowledgement of change was prominent in the early years of the SAAAH conference and this coincided with a revision of South African art history on a larger scale. By the late nineteen eighties some of the first attempts to revise the biased history of South African art began with the Johannesburg Art Galleries' exhibition and catalogue *The Neglected Tradition* (1988), which attempted to reinsert black South African artists into the art historical canon, and coincided with anxious acquisitions of the 'neglected' artists work by various museums³⁴⁸. Gavin Younge also published *Art of the South African Townships* in 1988 and it was this text that cemented the term 'township art' as a distinct category but nonetheless

³⁴⁵ SAAAH, 'Re-Writing the Art and Architectural History of Southern Africa: Proceedings of the 2nd Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians', 1987.

³⁴⁶ SAAAH, 'Diversity and Interaction: Proceedings of the 5th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians', 1989.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Johannesburg Art Gallery, 'The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art (1930-1988)' (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1988).

showcased art by black South Africans which had otherwise not been written about³⁴⁹. The following year Sue Williamson published the seminal text *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1989) that looked at political, pointedly anti-apartheid work by some black and white “resistance artists”³⁵⁰. This book can be seen to have catalysed the era of ‘contemporary South African art’ that embraced the end of the cultural boycott and the entrance of South Africa into the international art market with its promise of capital consumption. At the same time Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke published *African art in southern Africa: From tradition to township* (1989) which looked at historical work as influencing the contemporary with the aim of “producing an edited volume that would bring together some of the latest knowledge and insights in the field of both indigenous and modern black art in South Africa”³⁵¹. These two books from 1989 established, to some degree, two different approaches to transforming art historical discourse in South Africa, which have tended to dominate the contemporary manifestation of the discourse. The first is the focus on contemporary production as part of a globalised form of art making supported by the international art market and with little attempt to emphasise diverse methods for production or truly disparate theoretical underpinnings. *Resistance Art in South Africa* allowed for a variety of artist’s work as well as a diverse set of forms (such as posters) to be considered under a thematic heading (resistance) and therefore provided a method that was to be adopted for subsequent art historians when discussing contemporary work. The second is an analysis of historical South African art as *African art* that focuses on the specific nature of African art as different to Western forms. *African art in southern Africa* created a method for looking at contemporary South African work that tied it to historical traditions for art making in southern Africa. Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke’s approach for studying southern African, African art was to combine and shift the established anthropological and art historical approach. As Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke put it, “an art object can only be fully understood by placing it within its wider context of cosmological ideas, utilitarian function and social and historical background, but it can only be appreciated as something artistically meaningful if it has appropriate form”³⁵².

An important part of attempts to address art historical memory in South Africa was an acknowledgement of the use of terminology outside of additive descriptions such as

³⁴⁹ Gavin Young, *Art of the South African Townships* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988).

³⁵⁰ Williamson, "Resistance Art in South Africa".

³⁵¹ Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke, "African Art in Southern Africa: From Tradition to Township", 7.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 9.

‘traditional’, ‘township’, ‘transitional’ or ‘black’ to the word art. A discourse on the classification of objects and activities as ‘art’ (as opposed to ‘craft’, ‘performance’, ‘artefact’, ‘popular culture’ or the broader ‘visual culture’) has an historical grounding that has been systematically entrenched through centuries of European ‘art history’ and capitalist markets³⁵³. The historical denial of the valuable category of ‘art’ for the material culture of Africa was transplanted into South African art historical writing resulting in a relative lack of research interest in the historical southern Africa art (what is also referred to as ‘traditional art’) from before the twentieth century³⁵⁴. In 1991 the Johannesburg Art Gallery produced the exhibition entitled *Art and Ambiguity: perspectives on the Brenthurst collection of South African art*, which showcased an impressive collection of artworks that may previously have existed only under other terminology: craft, artefact or traditional art. Despite the admirable insertion of historical work the exhibition was still framed under a rubric of difference with essay writers discussing issues of authenticity and classification³⁵⁵.

In the early nineteen nineties when the cloak of apartheid showed signs of lifting (released with the first democratic elections in 1994), SAAAH conferences appeared to focus on the nature of revision and transformation. The SAAAH conference from 1990 was held together by a theme that focused on the contemporary moment: *Current Perspectives in South African Art & Architecture* and included papers such as: “Architectural History: A Neglected Tradition”; “Democratising Culture”; “Challenges to Art History in South Africa in the nineteen nineties”; “Expanding Boundaries? Museums past and future”; “Visual Arts in the Culture of Resistance” and “Between Ideal and Reality: Some Thoughts on Township Art and Art Centres”³⁵⁶. Four papers, including one by Lewis-Williams discussed San Rock art/painting. Earlier in 1990 the Transvaal branch of SAAAH had its first conference on *Women and the Visual Arts* that centred around two exhibitions in Johannesburg. Elizabeth Delmont and Michelle Jersky delivered a paper titled “The South African Association of Art Historians: Between two stools?” that discussed the organisation of the conference as well as

³⁵³ One could argue that within the contemporary sphere the distinction of ‘contemporary art’ as the category of objects and practices with the highest value in visual culture relies on ‘Western’ notions of ‘high art’ as being distinct from commercial ‘popular culture’ and ‘craft’. This distinction has its roots in the nineteenth century German origins of art history as a formalized academic discipline.

³⁵⁴ Terminology is potentially problematic in this case. I use the word ‘historical’ to claim a place within the sanctioned realm of *history* for these works. The use of the adjective ‘traditional’ has been highly disputed but it does allow for a simple reference to artistic practices which are connected to historical cultural traditions when used appropriately. Again, see the writing of Anitra Nettleton for a longer discussion of these concerns.

³⁵⁵ Johannesburg Art Gallery, *Art and Ambiguity - Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art* (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1991).

³⁵⁶ SAAAH, ‘Current Perspectives in South African Art & Architecture: Proceedings of the 6th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’, 1990.

SAAAH as an organisation. Delmont and Jersky questioned the aims of SAAAH as an organisation and the way in which both politically engaged academics as well as how those focused on formal concerns could be accommodated given the changes that have occurred in the South African context³⁵⁷. The authors felt that “the Association [had] not gone far enough in addressing either the needs of the changing discipline of art history or the needs of the community within which this discipline functions”³⁵⁸. These concerns appeared to stem largely from a sense that SAAAH was a small association and that the discussion held at the annual conferences was not reaching a larger community. This concern was discussed at the Annual General Meeting of that year and, as Delmont and Jersky note, the constitution was amended to include a statement about the non-racist position of the organisation as well as its aim to serve the broader community, but that a proposal to extend voting rights to students and affiliate members so as to enlarge the membership base was hotly debated³⁵⁹. Their paper raises a number of points about SAAAH’s memberships, its aim and its attempts to transform in tandem with political changes in South Africa. The discussion marks one of many subsequent critiques of the organisations position and the way in which it serves a broader community. Another point that was raised in Delmont and Jersky’s paper was the global changes to the discipline of art history and how this manifested in the South African context. Their conclusion, however, was that “although attempts have been made to extend the traditional boundaries of art history, the status quo has for the most part remained the same”³⁶⁰. Occurring as it did six years after SAAAH’s formation this papers concerns are notable particularly because of the attempt to change the ‘status quo’ or rather the nature of a national art history with settler-colonial origins that continues in discussions on the nature of SAAAH / SAVAH into the present day.

In 1991 SAAAH had the highest number of black participants since its first conference though at three out of twenty one this was still a very small percentage. All of the black speakers came from the University of Durban Westville and dealt with Indian art³⁶¹. This conference in 1991 took place at the University of the Orange Free State under the broad title *The communication of World Visions* while the conference in 1992 was held at the University

³⁵⁷ Elizabeth Delmont and Michelle Jersky, ‘The South African Association of Art Historians: Between Two Stools?’, in *Women and the Visual Arts: Proceedings of the 1st Conference of the SAAAH (Transvaal Branch)*, 1990, 1–3.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁶¹ This may be noted because the apartheid government had declared the University of Durban Westville to be an institution for South Africans of Indian decent. As such the study of the art and culture of India was encouraged in line with a policy of separate development.

of South Africa in Pretoria and titled *Revised Frameworks and extended boundaries in research and education*. The papers at the 1991 conference showed a decline in a critical approach to South African art history with a large number of papers looking at topics typical in the Western canon such as Roy Richtenstein, ‘the picturesque’, Apollo and Dionysos, Marchel Duchamp, Surrealism and the relationship between art and nature³⁶². This may have been as a result of the broad theme (World Visions) but may also have been because of the conference venue, the University of the Orange Free State, which was perceived to be a rather conservative Afrikaans-medium institution. In Pretoria at the 1992 conference there were only a few papers that dealt with a transformation of South African art history such as Lize van Robbroeck’s paper *Urban 'Black Art' in South African Art Historical Literature: A discourse of Otherness*³⁶³. In 1993 the SAAAH conference was held at Natal Technikon, which was one of the very few times the conference has been held at an institution that is not a HWU in all 32 years of its existence (see Figure 10). The theme, *Democratising Art and Art/Architectural History in South Africa*, meant that the majority of papers discussed ways in which to change South African art history so that it represented all South Africans and could possibly be termed a national discourse³⁶⁴. Here the perception that South African art history was in need of change continues. What is worth noting is both that the continual acknowledgement that the discourse was inadequate in a South African context shows an awareness of the need for change but also that this acknowledged change appears to have been difficult to institute. SAAAH’s tenth annual conference was held at Stellenbosch University less than three months after South Africa’s first democratic elections but without a thematic title. Specific conference sessions were instead devoted to themes such as “theory”, “training”, “architecture and places”, “representation” and “collecting and art museums”. Some presentations such as Ian Calder and Juliet Armstrong’s paper on *Northern Nguni Ceramics in Natal-Kwazulu* looked at historical African art while others took a contextually relevant, critical stance with titles such as *Art and Culture in a Changing South Africa* and *Exhibiting Art in Post-colonial Africa*³⁶⁵.

Between 1995 and the turn of the new millennium in 2000 the annual SAAAH conference

³⁶² SAAAH, ‘The Communication of Worldvisions: Proceedings of the 7th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’, 1991.

³⁶³ SAAAH, ‘Revised Frameworks and Extended Boundaries in Research and Education: Proceedings of the 8th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’, 1992.

³⁶⁴ SAAAH, ‘Democratising Art and Art/Architectural History in South Africa: Proceedings of the 9th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’, 1993.

³⁶⁵ SAAAH, ‘Proceedings of the 10th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’, 1994.

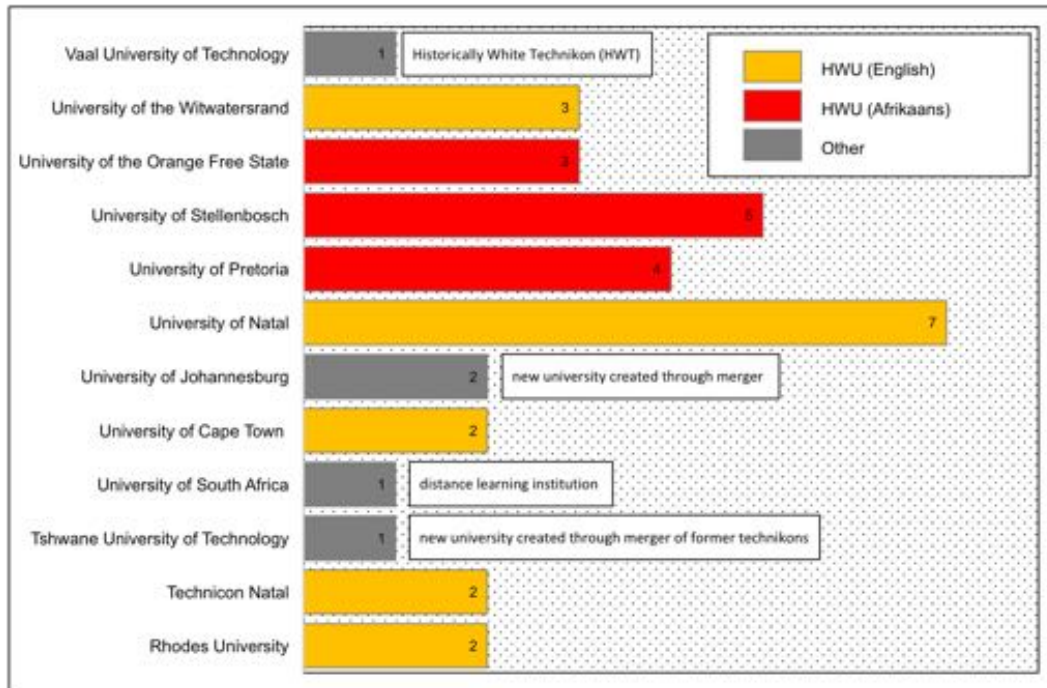


Figure 10: The number of SAVAH conferences hosted by each institution and their historical designation between 1985 and 2016.

was held at three English-medium HWUs, one Afrikaans-medium University and one distance-learning institution (the University of South Africa) and still very few (1-3) black academics participated. If we look at Figure 10 we see that HWUs have far outnumbered other institutions as hosts for the conference and that the hosted has oscillated between Afrikaans and English medium HWUs. As such the organisation has predominantly focused on these historically advantaged and historically white institutions. A larger number of international speakers were present in the period between 1995 and 2000 than were black South African delegates (see: Figure 9).

In 1995, in the conference titled *Mechanism of Power*, Ian Calder presented a paper that discussed the presentation of Zulu ceramics at public collections in KwaZulu Natal at the *Natal Museum*, *Killie Campbell Collection*, *Durban art Gallery*, *KZN Museum services*, *Tatham Art Gallery* and the *Local History museum*³⁶⁶. He noted that ceramics were not historically popular objects for museum collections and that many ceramics were part of

³⁶⁶ SAAA, "The Mechanisms of Power: Proceedings of the 11th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians", 1995.

ethnographic rather than art collections³⁶⁷. Of the thirty presentations some papers looked at modern or historical African art and discussed *Asumpa in Ceramics*, *The Figurative Tradition in Southern Sotho Sculpture*, *Nineteenth Century South African Leather Dolls* and the work of John Ndevasia Muafangejo³⁶⁸. Other papers were critical of the status quo in South Africa with papers such as *Affirmative Action: Force or Farce?*; *Towards and Enabling Environment for Art Education: Some Thoughts on the Transformation of Education in the Transitional Period* and *Art and Craft: The Ongoing Debate*³⁶⁹. As such some research into historical African art continued as did the sense that transformation was necessary. At the conference held at the University of Natal in 1996 three of the twenty delegates were black South Africans: Mduduzi Xakaza from the Tatham art gallery looked at the colonial empty land myth in *Aspects of landscape painting in northern KwaZulu-Natal: Newcastle* while Kiren Thathiah from the University of Durban Westville had a paper titled, *Is there Jabu in Lisa or is Lisa just Mona?* and Kwame Seade from Giyani Collge discussed *Prospects in African art*³⁷⁰.

In 1997 of the three black presenters from 1996 only Mduduzi Xakaza, then at the fine arts department of the University of Natal, returned to the conference held at Stellenbosch University. The conference was presented under the theme *Making Art Making Meaning* and held a session on Architecture, one on Education, three sessions on South Africa, one on “Art From History” which appears to have meant European historical art, one on sculpture, one on “Constructing Meaning”, which looked at visual culture and one called “Looking at Africa”³⁷¹. Although all three papers in the “Looking at Africa” session dealt with historical African art, on the whole the conference papers showed a move from historical study towards a greater number of contemporary art examples and case studies that would fit under the umbrella of ‘visual culture’: urban scenes, photographs of labour, Afrikaner identity in comics³⁷². This trend continued at the 1998 conference at the University of South Africa in Pretoria where the theme, *Negotiating Identities*, was taken up by most delegates (around thirteen of the thirty two papers) as an invitation to discuss identity politics on issues such as:

³⁶⁷ Ian Calder, ‘Zulu Ceramics in KwaZulu-Natal Public Collections: Pitermaritzburg and Durban’, in *The Mechanisms of Power: Proceedings of the 11th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*, 1995.

³⁶⁸ SAAAH, “The Mechanisms of Power: Proceedings of the 11th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians”, 1995.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ SAAAH, “Proceedings of the 12th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians”.

³⁷¹ SAAAH, ‘Making Art Making Meaning: Proceedings of the 13th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’, 1997.

³⁷² Ibid.

clothing and identity, post-human identities, Latvian immigrant identity in South Africa, alienation, ethnic identity, cyborg culture, the social construction of Identity, human identity in urban settings and gay identity and aids³⁷³. At this time identity politics was beginning to become a prominent theme in contemporary South African art and while conference papers continued to show some research on historical forms there was a perceptible increase in papers on critical theory and contemporary art. In 1998 there was, however, still a perception that South African art and art history was a largely white discourse and that the arts sector was still unequal. As mentioned in Chapter 1, an acknowledgement of the inequality in the arts sector came in 1998 from artist and writer David Koloane, who wrote that “[a]rt discourse is and always has been the prerogative of the privileged white community whose education system has been designed according to Western standards”³⁷⁴. As such, despite the continuing attempts to transform South African art history and discourse many, particularly black academics, perceived it to have maintained an elitist status and a Western framework.

In 1999 the book *Grey Areas* had drawn together essays by a large variety of South African authors in order to facilitate a multi-vocal text and yet the editors became the subject of great criticism for the foregrounding of white artistic practice that attempted to deal with race³⁷⁵. One might argue that such criticism came because of a perception that the inclusion of black South African artists in texts about contemporary art did little to address the persistent structural inequalities in the art world. Exhibitions such as *Coexistence* (2003)³⁷⁶, for example, celebrated the rainbow-like diversity of South Africa and described a renewed international interest in South African art. The proliferation of texts on contemporary art from urban gallery spaces coincided with fewer, but nonetheless persistent texts such as *Engaging Modernities*³⁷⁷ on artistic practice external to the formalised cultural centres of ‘democratic South Africa’. As is to be expected 2004 saw the production of numerous exhibitions and texts celebrating ten years of democracy³⁷⁸. These texts continued to expand the pool of artists from which they drew and a greater number of black artists were included, though not

³⁷³ SAAAH, ‘Negotiating Identities: Proceedings of the 13th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians’, 1998.

³⁷⁴ David Koloane, ‘Art Criticism for Whom?’, in *Art Criticism and Africa*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (London: Saffron Books, 1998), 69-70.

³⁷⁵ Brenda Atkinson and Candice Breitz, *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary South African Art* (Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill Press, 1999).

³⁷⁶ Pamela Allara and others, *Coexistence: Contemporary Cultural Production in South Africa* (Waltham, Mass.: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 2003).

³⁷⁷ Nettleton, Charlton, and Rankin-Smith, *Engaging modernities: Transformations of the Commonplace*.

³⁷⁸ See: Sophie Perryer and Emma Bedford, *10 Years 100 Artists: Art in a Democratic South Africa* (Cape Town: Bell-Roberts Publishing, 2004).

to the point of being even vaguely representative of South African demographics.

The period following the celebration of ten years of democracy coincided with a series of controversial critiques of the South African art world and in a sense a waning of the faith in the nation's political change to institute a structural change in organisations such as SAAAH. In 2003 the SAVAH conference at Stellenbosch University was held under the title *Visual Studies in Contemporary South Africa*, showing an increasing interest in moving away from art history as a discourse perceived to be narrow and traditional towards the new discipline of visual studies. Visual studies, as a discipline, works from the premise that our contemporary globalised world is one dominated by the realm of the visual. This ubiquity of imagery and its power to construct knowledge is in turn linked to concepts of Western ideological hegemony. As Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, “visuality and its visualizing of history are part of how the ‘West’ historicizes and distinguishes itself from its others”³⁷⁹. Mirzoeff goes on to acknowledge that the dismissal of the discipline of ‘art history’ in favour of ‘visual culture studies’ is therefore not only an attempt to enlarge the field of analysis but a movement very much aligned with a questioning of Western and patriarchal cultural authority³⁸⁰. In this sense moving away from art history towards visual studies has been perceived as an appropriate strategy to acknowledge the Western nature of the discourse. This perception becomes very apparent in the history of SAAAH as we see a change in the focus of papers away from what is referred to as art history in favour of contemporary concerns under the heading of visual culture or visual studies. At the same conference in 2003, however, many of the black delegates (5 of the 31) presented papers that were highly critical of South African art historical discourse. Some of these papers discussed the 2003 documentary by Vuyile Vuyiya and Julie McGee: *The Luggage is Still Labeled: Blackness in South African Art* which has already been mentioned in Chapter 1. The documentary took its title from a quote by the artist Peter Clarke who said in relation to democracy: “the journey has ended but the luggage is still labelled”. provided an outline of the inequalities experienced within the creative sphere in South Africa. The video solicited various, incisive responses – most notably it seems, from those who attended the 2003 SAAAH conference where the film and those presenting its findings were the subject of heated debate. McGee, who was at the 2003 conference, notes that “conference papers by the artist Vuyile Vuyiya on black curatorship and the artist Pro Sobopha on art competitions provided black, artist-centered perspectives

³⁷⁹ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), xiv.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

that implicitly critiqued white power dominance in the fine arts profession. But the absence of expected art historical language, documentation, and presentation methods caused some to question the academic integrity of the presentations and the presenters' 'credentials'³⁸¹. The accusation that the papers in question were not of the appropriate 'academic standard' therefore shifted the focus away from the issue of the demographic transformation of the association towards the methodology and academic content of the papers. Such a shift in focus, which has the potential to detract from the stated concerns around transformation, has been noted by many who have been critical of SAAAH as a recurring strategy (whether overt or unconscious) to deny critical engagement. In 2005, for example. Kiren Thathiah, a black academic who was then the head of the Department of Visual Arts and Design at Vaal University of Technology felt that his paper on "affirmative action and cultural ownership" delivered at the 1994 conference was not taken seriously because the audience was "preoccupied with content" rather than the issues he raised³⁸².

What amounted to fierce debate and controversy at the SAAAH conference in 2003 had a great effect on the association's members and their vision of SAAAH's role in establishing an inclusive, national discourse. In 2005, following the September conference, the association changed its name to the *South African Visual Art Historians* in an attempt to shift the focus of its discourse and to enlarge the potential case studies for analysis. As such the 2005 conference was held at Rhodes University under the title *New Readings of Visual Culture in Southern Africa* and coincided with a more fervent attempt to transform the association from a predominantly white institution catering to a small segment of the South African population to one which could rightly be referred to as a national association. In February 2005, prior to the conference held in September, a strategic workshop on the future of SAAAH was held at the University of Witwatersrand owing to a general feeling that the organisation was in crisis and lacked relevance in a changing society. The concerns raised at the workshop included establishing a vision for the association; the nature of art history as a discourse and the possibility of moving towards visual culture or visual arts as an alternative focus; the need to broaden the association's membership and therefore its relevance in the South African arts community and the opportunity to shape the art historical curriculum at universities³⁸³.The

³⁸¹ McGee, "Canons Apart and Apartheid Canons: Interpellations beyond the Colonial in South Africa", 297.

³⁸² Kiren Thathiah, 'Response to Robyn Sassen's Report on the Strategic Workshop on the Future of SAAAH (February 2005)', *South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians: Newsletter*, August (2005).

³⁸³ South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians, 'SAAAH Workshop Minutes', 03/02/2005 (University of the Witwatersrand School of Arts).

SAAAH chairperson at the time, Jillian Carman, attempted to engage the association with the pressing issue of transformation following heightened perceptions of the need for change following the controversial discussion at the 2003 conference. In the SAAAH newsletter from August 2005 she describes the year as “[o]ur first year of transformation” emphasising that despite the many conference papers that had discussed the need for change prior to this date real transformation of the association had not yet taken place³⁸⁴. In the same newsletter Kiren Thathiah (mentioned above) wrote a critique of SAAAH in response to the minutes of the strategic workshop held in February 2005. In his letter he writes that the primary cause of SAAAH’s lack of transformation was the belief “that it could carry on regardless of the changes that were taking place around it” which amounted to an attempt to continue with the status quo so as to control “the pace of change” rather than undergo the painful process of self-reflection³⁸⁵.

Subsequent to the annual conference that was held in 2005 SAAAH changed its name to SAVAH in an effort to mark a new era in the life of the association. Yet, the 2005 conference was not without its own controversy. In a now infamous article published in *Art South Africa* in 2006 Sharlene Khan reflected on her experience at the SAAAH/SAVAH conference at Rhodes University in 2005. She mentions a discussion on power dynamics in the visual art world and Thembinkosi Goniwe’s assertion that the South African art world had “displaced the art world’s patriarchal white daddy” with white women who now dominated academia³⁸⁶. Her article goes on to discuss the historical dominance of white South Africans in the visual arts sector and the way in which transformation in terms of gender (replacing white males with white women) has obscured the lack of transformation in terms of race. In Khan’s terms this results in “the replication of systems of privilege (read whiteness) at the expense of the periphery (read black people)”³⁸⁷. The article generated many fervent responses and was responsible for isolating Khan from the South African art world yet the main cause of the discussion, the lack of transformation in the arts, was in some sense obscured by what many perceived to be a personal attack on white, female individuals³⁸⁸. In 2011 Khan wrote a follow-up article for *ArtThrob* where she points to the fact that the visual arts continued to be

³⁸⁴ Jillian Carman, ‘Letter from the Chairperson’, *South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians: Newsletter*, August (2005).

³⁸⁵ Thathiah, ‘Response to Robyn Sassen’s Report on the Strategic Workshop on the Future of SAAAH (February 2005)’.

³⁸⁶ Sharlene Khan, ‘Doing It for Daddy’, *Art South Africa*, August (2006).

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ See: Nadine Botha, ‘Where Hypervisibility Meets True Transformation in the Arts’, *Mail and Guardian Online*, 6 March 2015 <<https://mg.co.za/article/2015-03-05-where-hypervisibility-meets-true-transformation-in-the-arts>>.

dominated by white practitioners³⁸⁹. This was also emphasised in the Department of Arts and Culture's report on the sector from the same date (2011)³⁹⁰. That Khan, and Goniwe's, criticisms of the South African art world (and SAVAH in particular) continued to have relevance in 2011 and into the present day points to a method for transformation that appears to have attempted superficial change without addressing the nature of the discipline. As Ruth Simbao points out in a response to Khan, discussions on race cannot be substituted for a superficial 'colour blindness' before institutions address their structures and the institutional cultures that form them³⁹¹. To this one might add that institutions and associations like SAVAH would need to address the nature of the art historical discourse that they either teach, write about or present on. In this sense a transformation in terms of race is undeniably connected to a decolonisation of discourse as both appear to have been stalled by controversies that shift the focus away from the issue at stake.

The critique of SAAAH/SAVAH and the atmosphere of tension that had characterised the 2003 conference continued in 2006 under the appropriate theme of *Transformation/s in Visual Culture*. The organisers from the Vaal University of Technology (previously an HWT – see Appendix A) invited prominent African art historian, Sylvester Ogbechie to be the keynote speaker and he spoke about the way in which indigenous African art is defined and incorporated into Western knowledge systems³⁹². Many other speakers engaged with the nature of South African and African art history. Richard Baholo (the artist whose work was discussed in the introduction after it was burnt in a Rhodes Must Fall protest), presented a paper titled *Creating Space for African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in the visual arts: a transformatory tool in the South African Higher Education system* which emphasised the need for a challenge to colonial forms through the emphasis on AIKS in the curriculum³⁹³. Other presenters discussed the acquisition of African art by South African museums, the definition of African art outside of race and community mural art³⁹⁴. Yet the conference was not without controversy and the first session which contained papers by

³⁸⁹ Sharlene Khan, 'But What's All Dis Here Talkin' 'Bout?', *ArtThrob*, 2011 <<https://www.artthrob.co.za/Reviews/But-Whats-All-Dis-Here-Talking-About.aspx>>.

³⁹⁰ The Human Sciences Research Council, *An Assessment of the Visual Arts Sector: Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations*.

³⁹¹ Ruth Simbao, 'Doing It for Comfort', *ArtThrob*, 2011.

³⁹² Sylvester Ogbechie, 'Rethinking African Art History, Reception and Canons', in *Transformation/s in Visual Culture: Proceedings of the 22d Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians*, 2006.

³⁹³ Baholo, 'Creating Space for African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) in the Visual Arts: A Transformatory Tool in the South African Higher Education System'.

³⁹⁴ SAVAH, 'Transformation/s in Visual Culture: Proceedings of the 22d Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians Title', 2006.

Brenda Schmahmann and Anitra Nettleton on *Representations of HIV/AIDS* and *Transforming our understanding of heritage* respectively merged into an opportunity to critique SAVAH by the session chair, Thembinkosi Goniwe (a black, South African academic). The debate that ensued at the conference again focused on the dominance of white women in the academic positions at South African Universities. In response Schmahmann and Nettleton (both white women) wrote an open letter to all SAVAH members expressing their distress at the manner in which their session had been chaired³⁹⁵. The authors of the letter spoke of Goniwe's views as "bigotry and misogyny", highlighting the critique of women holding positions of power, and further critiqued a paper by Thathiah and Siphon Mdanda (both black, male academics) for being "factually incorrect"³⁹⁶. Here again, the problem of underrepresentation by black academics in South African academia was obscured by a shift towards the problem of patriarchy and a focus on the academic quality of papers. Therefore, despite sustained acknowledgement that South African art history needed to change the SAAAH conference continued to be dominated by white practitioners (see Figure 9) and criticism of the organisation continued.

At this time published books and articles continued to spend an inordinate amount of time critiquing issues related to attempts to 'include' forms of art that had previously been neglected. Writing appears to have centred on the manner in which to include rather than on revolutionary attempts to integrate or in fact disrupt. As Jillian Carmen put it (in 2004):

*"This has resulted in revisions, rather than rewritings, in which the Western parameters of "What is art?" are broadened to include objects which are utilitarian or which were formerly classified as craft, artists whose skills were not acquired in (or aligned with) Western-type training centres..."*³⁹⁷

If South African art history's greatest problem has been to account for the diversity of artistic practice in South Africa then, I would argue, it appears that in the present moment diversity has been exchanged for homogeneity. In the 2014 debate held on the topic "20 years on: Is the luggage still labelled?", Raison Naidoo (former director of the South African National Gallery) spoke about the very international language of art making in works by artists like

³⁹⁵ Anitra Nettleton and Brenda Schmahmann, 'Open Letter to SAVAH Members: South African Visual Art Historians Conference', 14/09/2006.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ Jillian Carman, 'Arts and Crafts and Reconstruction', *Social Dynamics*, 30.1 (2004), 114–40, 115.

Nandipha Mntambo, Mary Sibande and Bernie Searle³⁹⁸. Naidoo continued by saying that the adoption of such an international language has meant losing something local in the process and that he feels the South African art scene is less diverse and less vibrant than it was 20 years ago³⁹⁹.

While there have been continued attempts to revise South African art history, and to insert historical art from southern Africa into the canon, it appears the discursive problem of difference has been painted over by a focus on the contemporary and the commercial so as not to have to deal with the past. The obliteration of difference translates in the post-apartheid context into a neo-liberal negation of all visual culture that does not adhere to the currently fashionable mode of art production suited to the ‘international exhibition’. In the South Africa art world, therefore, it may be argued that capitalism reigns and diversity is neglected.

For the organisation known as SAVAH the strategy to transform South African art history has largely been to include black artist’s work as case studies and to change the name and focus of the organisation so that it is perceived to look at a larger amount of art in the form of visual culture. This shift has, however, meant that historical African art has been focused on to a lesser degree (in favour of a focus on contemporary work through the discipline of visual studies) and that despite efforts to shift the organisation from one serving only the white population, and being comprised of largely white members, this has not occurred. In light of the recent student protests around decolonisation (see Figure 1) there has been some level of hope in recent years as SAVAH has seen a small increase in the participation of younger, black academics in both the conference and its council. Despite this, however, it is not widely accepted that the study of historical African art might provide a means to decolonise the discipline and at the same time attract a more diverse membership.

A recent interview with a black South African academic highlighted the perceived problems in the transformation of the discourse, the art sphere in general and of an organisation like SAVAH in particular. The academic mentions that SAVAH’s committee members often serve very long terms (up to 15 years) and that many of the same people continue to serve on the committee with few new members being included⁴⁰⁰. This is evidenced by the list of

³⁹⁸ Raison Naidoo in Iziko Museums of Cape Town, *Debate: 20 Years on: Is the Luggage Still Labelled?*

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Anonymous (black South African academic), ‘Interview’, *March 2017*.

committee members of SAVAH from 2009 until 2016 where particular individuals have continued to hold positions in the committee⁴⁰¹. The academic also emphasises the way in which the theoretical frameworks of the discipline have not been challenged so that any transformation in the discipline amounts to “revision” (inclusion) rather than real critique⁴⁰². While SAVAH conferences in the last ten years since 2006 have shown an increase in the number of black presenters (the largest to date being ten in 2015) this has also coincided with a greater increase in the overall size of the conference as well as the number of international delegates (see Figure 9). In 2007 the conference was titled *South African Art History in an African context* which showed an attempt to locate South African art history in the African continent though papers focused almost entirely on contemporary concerns⁴⁰³. The focus on contemporary concerns has characterised the SAVAH conference in the past ten years and there has been an increasing attempt to connect the association to the international art historical sphere. In 2011 the SAVAH conference was held as a colloquium organised by the Comité international d'Historie de l'Art (CIHA) which is the largest international association for art historians. As a result of the collaboration the 2011 conference had a record number of international delegates but only two black South African speakers of a total of 58 (see Appendix C). The SAVAH conference that has been organized for September 2017 will take place under the title *Rethinking Art History and Visual Culture in a Contemporary Context* and its organisers hope that it may “be a catalyst in reforming that destructive trend” that has led many art historians not to participate in the association’s conferences⁴⁰⁴. The 2017 conference may well be a ground-breaking event as it is being held at a former technikon rather than one of the HWU’s (see the trend for this in Figure 10) and has led to a number of young academics being elected onto the council so that there is some change in this regard⁴⁰⁵. The council for 2016 and 2017 has two black members while there has only been a maximum of one (in some years none) since 2009⁴⁰⁶.

The analysis of the establishment of art history in South Africa and its particular manifestation as a discourse through SAVAH allows us a view into the way in which the discourse has been framed in this context. As such, this chapter has attempted to present the

⁴⁰¹ South African Visual Art Historians, ‘SAVAH Council Membership 2009-2016’, 2017.

⁴⁰² Anonymous (black South African academic).

⁴⁰³ SAVAH, ‘South African Art History in an African Context: Proceedings of the 23rd Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians Title’, 2007.

⁴⁰⁴ Pfunzo Sidogi, ‘Email Correspondence’, *November 2016*.

⁴⁰⁵ South African Visual Art Historians, ‘SAVAH Council Membership 2009-2016’, 2017.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

framing of South African art history in relation to the proceedings of SAVAH's annual conference and the changing focus on the transformation of the discourse that has occurred since 1985. We saw that despite a continued emphasis on shifting South African art history away from its origins as a settler colonial discourse that the organisation remained largely white and there has not been a substantial increase in research into historical African art. The focus on contemporary visual culture rather than historical African art may be likened to the methodological strategy of including material into an existing paradigm rather than attempting to establish a new paradigm that can then be integrated, while remaining different, into a larger, heterogeneous discourse. As indicated above, what amounts to a superficial change (changing the discipline from art history to visual studies) rather than a real decolonisation of the discipline through the focus on African knowledge systems may be likened to the inclusion of black academics rather than an attempt to understand the structural limits to demographic transformation.

Chapter 4: Art History in South Africa: Finding Africa in the curriculum

The notion of the original has a prominent place in Western ideology and its position is always in relation to that defined as a copy, a fake or a replica. As discussed in Chapter 2 the split that was created between ‘fine art’ on the one hand and ‘craft’ on the other meant that in Western art history fine art was associated with genius, originality and individual authorship and ‘popular art’ or ‘craft’ with the devalued characteristics of skill, multiplicity and collaboration⁴⁰⁷. Many ideological assumptions in the contemporary space, including the notion of copyright, rest on the perceived value of the original in Western epistemology yet this perception is more complex than it appears. Postmodernists and Poststructuralists theoretically reject this notion of singular authorship; this has been elucidated most famously with Roland Barthes announcement of the ‘death of the author’ and correlatively the ‘birth of the reader’ in 1968, the ‘death’ has yet to impact the attribution of value to various cultural forms. Barthes notes in his 1984 *La Bruissement de la langue. (The Rustle of Language)*: “We now know that the text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of an Author-God), but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.”⁴⁰⁸. Yet, I would argue that this understanding of meaning as produced in a collaborative sense, in a ‘multi-dimensional space’, has yet to be practically transferred onto the structures of the visual arts market that still finds it difficult to account for collaboration. When Western art history encountered an African philosophical system for understanding art one of the primary dislocations in the perception of value was between the Western notion of the authentic original and the African

⁴⁰⁷ Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Jonathan D. Culler, *Roland Barthes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 71.

acceptance of the multiple. As such perceptions of originality have, since the colonial period, characterised the relationship between Western and African epistemologies and the subsequent hierarchy of objects that finds its home in art museums (this will be discussed in Chapter 6). Yet a number of contradictions exist in the Western perception of originality in art. Even if we acknowledge that the notion of the original and the individual author has its origins in Enlightenment thinking from Western Europe and that this understanding structured the perception of ‘art’ as a category of objects as well as the capitalist art market that grew out of it, the historical treatment of replicas complicates the matter.

One of the primary forms for the institutionalisation of art in Europe was the art academy. These institutions functioned as powerful mechanisms with control over the display, teaching and promotion of art and while they were in existence since the sixteenth century they became particularly entrenched during the nineteenth century when art history as a discipline was coming into being⁴⁰⁹. The first art academy was established in Florence Italy during the Renaissance period (in 1563) as the *Accademia e Compagnia delle Arti del Disegno* (Academy and Company for the Arts of Drawing), which was followed by the *Accademia di San Luca* in Rome. These Italian institutions provided the model for the French *Académie des beaux-arts*, which was founded in 1648, the Austrian Academy of Fine Arts, which was founded as the *Hofakademie der Maler, Bildhauer und Baukunst* (Imperial and Royal Court Academy of painters, sculptors and architecture) in 1693 and the English *Royal Academy of Arts*, which was founded in 1768⁴¹⁰. Many of these national academies used the study of art replicas as a basis in their teaching from the High Renaissance period onwards, as they were believed to be the most appropriate means for young artists to study the masters of the past⁴¹¹. The art replica can be defined as a direct copy of an existing, sculptural work often made using a mould to cast a copy in plaster. The plaster casts were used as models for students as a substitute for drawing from life as well as to provide examples of past styles in art historical teaching. Such plaster casts occupied such a prominent position in European, academic art that it began to be perceived as a genre in its own right. Sven Lütticken highlights the way in which these plaster casts came to be appreciated in their own right as aesthetic objects whose white surfaces were praised, in their newly cast state, for their clean whiteness⁴¹². As such the

⁴⁰⁹ See: *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁴¹⁰ Marjorie Garber, *Patronizing the Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 122.

⁴¹¹ Bettina Hagen, ‘The Cast Collection at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna’, *Visual Resources*, XXIII.1–2 (2007), 7–19.

⁴¹² Sven Lütticken, ‘The Imaginary Museum of Plaster Casts’, *Kunstverein München*, 2003, 2.

whiteness of the plaster cast was seen as augmenting the depiction of human flesh as well as enhancing the original it had copied. In the modern period these plaster cast collections have become museum collections in their own right such as those found at the *Reproductions Museum* in Bilbao, Spain which was created in 1927, the *Cast Court* at the *Victoria and Albert Museum* in England and the *Plaster Cast Collection* at the University of Göttingen, Germany. Copies of famous works of art have also been used historically in international museums to fill gaps in the collection when originals could not be obtained and in this way the replica has a rather distinct position within Western art history. The history of plaster casts in teaching art has meant that a complex relationship existed between the widespread practice of copying of canonised works of art and the perception that artists needed to produce original works within an individualistic, recognisable style. As Paul Duro notes imitation as pedagogical tool was a right of passage that showed the Academy to be rather “self-contradictory” in its perception of originality⁴¹³ as it had the potential to limit ingenuity and change, which were ostensibly highly prized values from at least the nineteenth century onwards⁴¹⁴. In other words, while the replica has historically been perceived as a cousin to the ‘fake’ and therefore without value beyond a pedagogical tool, the noble ‘original’ was ironically created through the careful observance of existing forms. In this sense, as is discussed by Barthes; the notion of the original has always had a questionable existence in Western art history.

If we perceive South Africa during the apartheid period as a settler colonial state (as outlined in Chapter 1), which attempted to replicate a version of European culture in the southern part of Africa, then the notion of ‘imitation’ becomes a useful frame through which to view the teaching of art history. In the context of colonialism the notion of the ‘original’ bears analogical resemblance to the colonial metropole with the ‘replica’ understood as the settled colonial periphery that attempts to model itself on a geographically distant prototype. As part of direct and explicit attempts to transplant Western art historical discourse into the South African context various institutions in South Africa imported plaster casts and replicas as pedagogical tools during the apartheid period. In 1963 Stellenbosch University established its first fine art department under the leadership of the German Professor Otto Schröder.

⁴¹³ Paul Duro, ‘The Lure of Rome : The Academic Copy and the Académie de France in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 146.

⁴¹⁴ William Vaughan, ‘Cultivation and Control : The “Masterclass” and the Düsseldorf Academy in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 152.



Figure 11: Replicas of various artworks housed in the department of Ancient Studies at Stellenbosch University (photograph: Danielle Becker, September 2015).

Professor Schröder organised the buying and importation of a series of statues and art replicas to function as teaching aids in art history classes (see Figure 11)⁴¹⁵. These replicas served to underline the focus of the course and were placed in the large lecture hall that used to exist in the centre of the department's building. The subsequent head of the fine arts department, Victor Honey, recalls the replicas being used as both examples in art history classes and as models for practical work⁴¹⁶. As such, they became central to the department's understanding of art and art history and provided a direct link to Western discourse both through pedagogical method and its replication of an art historical canon. These were not the only collection of plaster casts of Western art that made their way to the Cape. In 1908 a collection of forty-six plaster casts apparently including replicas of the Venus of Medici, the dying Gladiator and other classical works was given as a gift to the new National Gallery in Cape Town by the British gold and diamond magnate, Alfred Beit⁴¹⁷. Despite the feeling amongst the board of trustees of the *National Gallery* that contemporary British work would be more appropriate to collect, the plaster casts were delivered in what appears to have been

⁴¹⁵ Ernst van der Wal, 'Forward: The Visual Arts Department Archive', *Exhibition, Gallery Stellenbosch University*, 3–13 Dec (2014).

⁴¹⁶ Victor Honey, 'Interview', *September 2015*.

⁴¹⁷ Qanita Lilla, 'Classical Impressions, Modernist Aspirations: Shaping a Field of Contention at the South African National Gallery (1895 -1947)', in *Images of the Art Museum: Connecting Gaze and Discourse in the History of Museology*, ed. by Eva-Maria Troelenberg and Melania Savino (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2017), 195.

an attempt to connect Cape Town to the grand civilisation of ancient Greece via the imperialist ambitions of Britain⁴¹⁸. The perception that an art museum was the appropriate manner to create such a cultural connection further emphasises the way in which museums are able to function as sites of institutionalised power. The plaster casts were large, weighty and difficult to exhibit, particularly for a gallery that was housed at the time in an annex of the *South African Museum*, and in the time of their existence they were briefly displayed, then stored before being removed from the gallery and finally being “defaced, stolen or demolished”⁴¹⁹.

The replicas that formed part of the Stellenbosch University collection were, on the other hand, actively used in the department until the late nineteen seventies. Figure 12 shows Professor Schröder teaching in the old lecture hall with some of the replicas behind him. While the photograph is very likely to have been posed, considering it was part of the department’s first marketing brochure, it gives us some sense of the teaching methods employed. Schröder, with his suit and bow tie sits easily within the stereotype of the distinguished art professor who imparts knowledge to his, mostly female, all white, students. A later, more obviously posed image, from the 1970 brochure, shows him surrounded by attentive students examining a Victorian bedpan (Figure 13).

The replicas used as examples for teaching follow an art historical chronology that can be seen as having defined European art historical teaching up until the last decades of the twentieth century. Art historical surveys that originated in Western Europe typically create a narrative that sees art as a product of great civilisations. Horst Waldemar Janson’s highly influential text, *History of Art*, is one such survey of art history that, as mentioned in Chapter 2, served as a popular reference for courses in art history around the world, including South Africa, and as such was instrumental in establishing a particularly dominant art historical canon. The teleological and imperial view of Western art history espoused by Janson is a narrative that is rehearsed through replicas at Stellenbosch University. In a way that echoes Western understandings of cultural value the collection of replicas has ancient examples from Mesopotamia, Persia and biblical Babylon as well as ancient Egypt.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 196.

⁴¹⁹ Anna Tietze, ‘Classical Casts and Colonial Galleries: The Life and Afterlife of the 1908 Beit Gift to the National Gallery of Cape Town’, *South African Historical Journal*, 39.1 (1998), 70.



Figure 12: Art history classes at Stellenbosch University with plaster replicas in the background. Departmental brochure, *Department van Beeldende Kunste, Universiteit van Stellenbosch*, 1964.



Figure 13: Art history classes at Stellenbosch University. Departmental brochure, *Department van Beeldende Kunste, Universiteit van Stellenbosch*, 1970.



Figure 14: *Head of an Egyptian priest* (replica), green stone, 500 BCE housed in the department of Ancient Studies at Stellenbosch University. Original in Berlin. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, September 2015).

The Stellenbosch replicas affirm a nineteenth-century, Western anthropological and art historical notion of ‘civilisation’ as the ultimate measure of cultural worth and these geographical spaces were deemed to have developed civilisations that in some way influenced Europe or could be claimed as precursors to European empires and cultures. Throughout the period of modernity the African continent, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, has systematically been denied ‘civilisation’ within Western scholarship. As such, the understanding that Africa was without a credible history or civilisation is deeply entrenched within academic and popular writing from Western Europe. The influence of such a discourse can be traced through these statues and replicas since the examples included replicate the list of cultural groups thought to have gained civilisation. There are a number of replicas of ancient Egyptian works including a green stone head of Egyptian priest from 500 BCE (Figure 14). One could argue, from our contemporary perspective, that these Egyptian replicas constitute an example of an African civilisation within the art historical canon exemplified by these teaching tools. Yet, Egyptian civilisation has long been accepted as an anomaly on the Africa continent and its proximity to Europe led early anthropologists to erroneously assume that its culture belonged to a different category entirely. Victor Honey



Figure 15: Frieze with mythological beings and winged sun (replica) glazed bricks, Susa, 522 - 486 BCE as seen at the department of Ancient Studies, Stellenbosch University. Original in the Louvre, Paris. (photograph: Danielle Becker, September 2015).

(the past head of the Stellenbosch University fine art department) notes that “Egypt has so often been seen as a ‘preliminary’ to European art” rather than one of many ancient civilisations on the African continent⁴²⁰. European history has long sought to claim ancient Egypt as an outpost of European civilisation to the extent that contemporary, Hollywood depictions of ancient Egypt on film depict their characters as white or light skinned. The same logic does, however, not seem to apply to other civilisations with proximity to Africa. The fact that the figures represented in the friezes from ancient Susa (contemporary Iran) (see Figure 15) had dark skin and showed an of Egyptian visual style is an interesting point that appears to bear little mention in Western art history and does not result in ancient Susa being claimed as ‘African’.

Chronologically, the next set of replicas provide examples of archaic Greek sculpture (see Figure 11 and Figure 16), classical Greek figures (including a replica carved in marble – Mithras Slaying a Bull), Roman busts of Julius Caesar and Octavia, a Roman discus thrower and a set of wooden replicas of Medieval religious figures (see Figure 17). The figures

⁴²⁰ Honey, ‘Interview’.



Figure 16: *Archaic kouros statuette* (replica), bronze, Greece, 6th century BC. As seen at the department of Ancient Studies at Stellenbosch University. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, September 2015)

provide an illustration of a particular art historical curriculum at a South African university that mirrors the canonical chronologies taught in many institutions around the world during the twentieth century. It gives us an example of a curriculum that mirrors a particular, Western understanding of global cultural production and the assertion that not all cultures, particularly African cultures, can claim to have produced ‘civilisations’. Within the systematised framework of the new (in the nineteenth century) discipline of anthropology the study of civilisations was defined by the study of objects. The objects were seen as the remaining evidence of past peoples and as a tangible measure of progress from primitivism to civilisation⁴²¹. The Stellenbosch replicas give us an example of the way in which certain objects were defined as having a greater cultural worth than others and a catalogue of those objects worthy of replication clearly mirrors an historically entrenched view of cultural value. This reinforces the analysis of South African art history in Chapter 3 that discussed the way in which perceived cultural value as created through discourse can interpellate subjects and

⁴²¹ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 185.



Figure 17: Painted, wooden replicas of Christian religious figures currently housed in the store of the Sasol Art Museum in Stellenbosch. This is a replica of *St. John Resting on Jesus' Chest* in carved and painted walnut by an unknown German Master (ca. 1320.) found at the *Museum Mayer van den Bergh*, Antwerp. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, September 2015).

objects. While such a chronology has since been refuted and is widely acknowledged as problematic, it is its transplantation into the South African context that becomes interesting for the manner in which it illustrates how discourse and ideology move with the migration of people.

In Figure 18 and Figure 19 we see some of the plaster casts as they exist in their current position in the Visual Arts Department at Stellenbosch University. They form part of the spatial landscape of the department but very few students or staff members know anything about their origins or purpose. The male figure in the foreground of Figure 18 is a replica of a work that is itself a copy: a Roman copy of the Greek bronze. To complicate the narrative the Roman copy in London's British Museum on which the replica is based has had its head 'incorrectly' restored so that the figure looks up rather than down at the floor. This makes the Stellenbosch replica a rather comical copy of something twice removed from the original ancient Greek sculpture. As such these replicas serve as a metaphorical reminder of the discursive distance between Western art history and its South African counterpart. Like



Figure 18: Plaster cast replicas as seen in the department of Visual Arts, Stellenbosch University . The replica in the foreground is of the Townley *Discobolus* – a Roman copy of the original bronze Greek work by Myron 460-450 BCE (with incorrectly restored head) at the British Museum. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, September 2015).

colonial culture that becomes a fainter or perhaps exaggerated version of its original in the ‘motherland’. With each successive generation descendent from European settlers, the discourse of art history was transplanted into South Africa and left to erode, shift and mutate so that its contemporary form replicates something which has long since been lost.

Since the nineteen sixties the art history curriculum at Stellenbosch University’s visual art department has seen a number of shifts. When Professor Larry Scully took a post in the department in 1976 he attempted to change the focus of the art replicas from didactic tools to postmodern representations. He had them moved out of the classroom and into the foyer of the building where they were displayed in front of a wall painted bright red so as to fit more seamlessly within a postmodern predilection for intertextual irony and minimal aesthetics that would have been fashionable at the time⁴²². In 1996 many of the replicas were moved to the department of Ancient Cultures (where they can still be found), mirroring shifts away from chronological art history towards visual studies and art theory. Those that remain within the Visual Arts Department are frequently subject to graffiti and re-contextualisation by students.

⁴²² Honey, ‘Interview’.



Figure 19: *King and Queen*, plaster casts at the Visual Arts Department of Stellenbosch University.

(Photograph: Danielle Becker, January 2015).

In 2014 an exhibition curated by visual studies lecturer Ernst van der Wal was formed to celebrate the department's 50-year existence. Along with illustrations of the department's past, van der Wal decided to use some of the replicas in the exhibit (see Figure 20). In this context they serve as an appropriate reminder of the department's past and the way in which art history was taught at Stellenbosch and at other South African institutions.

The shift in the perception of the art replicas at Stellenbosch University creates a framework for analysing the art historical curricula taught at various South African tertiary institutions. At first, like the importation of art history, the replicas were perceived as sanctioned versions of a pre-eminent Western discourse that required faithful study. In the late nineteen seventies, when postmodernism began to influence art history, the replicas were perceived as ironic references to a distant and unfashionable history while by the late nineteen nineties they were removed from the fine arts department (what became the Visual Arts Department) altogether. This provides a possible metaphor for South African art history as initially attempting to replicate Western art historical discourse before treating it as a necessary but

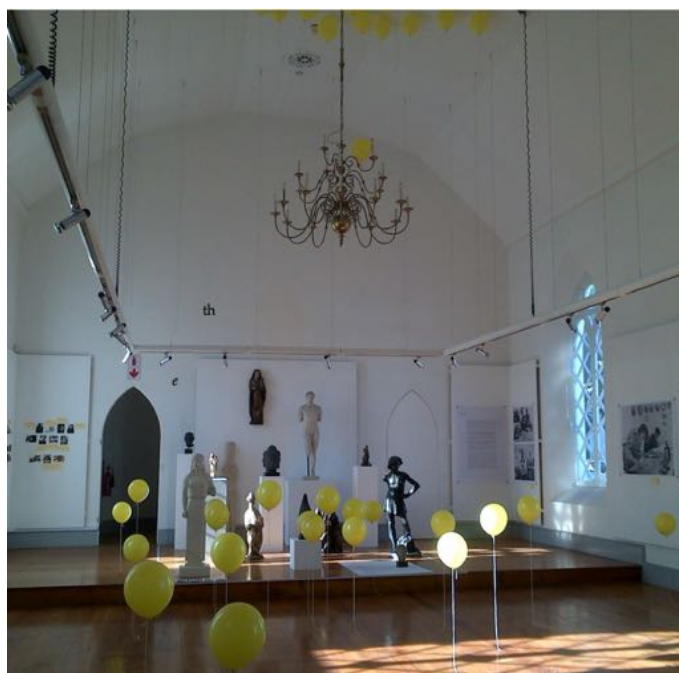


Figure 20: Exhibition curated by Ernst van der Wal showing the history of the Visual Arts Department at Stellenbosch University. The exhibition was held at the University Gallery in 2014 and made use of the art replicas in its display. (Photograph from: <https://gusgallery.wordpress.com/2014/12/03/forward>).

perhaps irrelevant narrative and finally removing the historical trace altogether to focus on the contemporary. As mentioned in Chapter 3, art history saw a global shift in favour of visual studies as a discourse that attempted to broaden the examples available for study and that moved away from the chronological nature of traditional art history towards an interdisciplinary criticality. In the process there has been an increasing focus on contemporary production rather than historical examples and as such the removal of the replicas from the Visual Arts Department into Ancient Studies is appropriate to this ideological shift. In Ancient Studies the replicas are still referred to in teaching and an assignment is given in the course on ancient Egyptian art that asks students to look specifically at the replicas⁴²³.

Art history as taught in South Africa in the apartheid period was most predominantly perceived as a support subject to fine art or practical art production (for a full overview see Appendix B)⁴²⁴. Stellenbosch University, for example, established its fine art department in

⁴²³ Department of Ancient Studies Stellenbosch University, 'Study Guide: Ancient Cultures, Egyptian Art', 2015.

⁴²⁴ Anitra Nettleton, 'Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi', in

1963 but only opened a formal post for an art historian opened in 1996. Prior to this fine art staff taught art history without specialist training in the discipline and this might account for the curricula's derivative nature in the early years of its existence⁴²⁵. Victor Honey, a previous head of fine art at Stellenbosch University, notes that very little historical or contemporary African art was taught in the art historical curricula at Stellenbosch in the early years of its establishment⁴²⁶. For many years in the later part of the twentieth century contemporary South African art was taught but there was almost no teaching on historical African art. Ironically students from the department of Ancient Studies were brought to the fine arts department to look at the replicas of ancient Egyptian art up until the nineteen eighties⁴²⁷. When Sandra Klopper was appointed in 2002 she introduced a greater focus on Africa and some sections on art outside of the Western Canon. I was taught by Klopper at Stellenbosch in 2003 and recall studying topics such as the veneration of the Mami Wata in the African, voodoo religion. The art history course at Stellenbosch University was subsequently renamed as 'visual studies' in keeping with a move away from art history and in the last few years critical theory as well as contemporary art and visual culture has been the focus⁴²⁸. The choice to call the course offering at Stellenbosch University 'visual studies' rather than art history allows the course to be seen as applicable to all the practical subjects offered by the department with the Bachelors of Arts degree: Creative Jewellery and Metal Design, Fine Arts, or Visual Communication Design⁴²⁹. For institutions that offer practical courses in design in South Africa, art history is often perceived to be an inappropriately narrow discipline for these students. As is the case with many South African art history or visual studies departments understaffing means that most often no choice is offered to students in modules and all students take the same modules each year. This also means that modules reflect lecturer's individual research interests and so are not chronological or structured in a way that attempts to create a broad overview of global art history. It also implies that courses are more easily maintained over the years as lecturers to some extent teach what was taught to them in an ancestral line of South African art historians that goes back to postgraduate study in Europe (see Chapter 3). Courses on topics such as photography, film and violence, semiotics in political mass media, post-colonialism, queer theory, cultural

Compression vs. Expression: Containing and Explaining the World's Art (Williamstown, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006), pp. 39–56, 40.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 54–55.

⁴²⁶ Honey, 'Interview'.

⁴²⁷ Sakkie Cornelius, 'Email Conversation', *September 2015*.

⁴²⁸ Stellenbosch University Visual Arts Department, 'Course Outlines', *2014–2017*.

⁴²⁹ 'Visual Arts Department Stellenbosch University Webpage' <<http://www.sun.ac.za/english/faculty/arts/visual-arts/>> [accessed 16 March 2017].

philosophy and concepts in identity and representation have been taught in the last few years in the Stellenbosch Visual Arts Department⁴³⁰. These topics are firmly in line with internationally applicable curricula in visual studies that looks typically at more recent history and is engaged in critical theory as it pertains to predominantly Western concerns rather than historical periods. In 2017, a new course was introduced that look at historical African art and plans are in place to extend this offering in the future.

At the University of Pretoria, a historically white Afrikaans-medium institution, the department is also referred to as the Department of Visual Arts and offers BA degrees in Fine Arts, Information Design and Visual Studies. Historically very little African art history has been taught at the institution with much of the research into historical southern African art having been the domain of other departments such as anthropology⁴³¹. In the early part of the twenty-first century most of the research conducted by staff in this department focused on contemporary South African art by either black or white artists. Between at least 1995 and 2009 two subjects were offered to students: visual communication and art history. Once the department shifted away from art history towards visual studies the curricula began to concentrate far more on popular culture. The visual studies course booklet from 2015 describes the discipline of visual studies as engaging with a wide range of visual material from “billboards, TV screens, in cinemas, magazines, newspapers, on the Internet, fashion, architecture and in malls”⁴³². Visual studies is also described as interdisciplinary in nature and as drawing on the disciplines of “Art History, Cultural Studies, Media and Film Studies, Aesthetics, Visual Anthropology, Material Culture Studies and Philosophy”⁴³³. In drawing on the broad range of material available for study under Visual Studies the courses focus predominantly on examples from the contemporary moment or the twentieth century. As such the visual studies course has undergone a number of changes over the years in line with the changing perception of the discipline as distinct from art history. The 2017 version of the course booklet uses very much the same wording and re-emphasises the focus on “critical thinking skills” however there is a noticeable change in the images chosen to illustrate the course offering⁴³⁴. In 2015, the booklet was accompanied by: an image of a man operating machinery presumably as an illustration of the industrial revolution, part of a drawing by

⁴³⁰ Stellenbosch University Visual Arts Department, ‘Course Outlines’, 2014-2017. Stellenbosch University Visual Arts Department.

⁴³¹ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 54-55.

⁴³² University of Pretoria Visual Arts Department, ‘BA Visual Studies Undergraduate Programme’, 2015.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ University of Pretoria Visual Arts Department, ‘BA Visual Studies Undergraduate Programme’, 2017.

seventeenth-century Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn, an image of the white South African band Die Antwoord and a design depicting a black women by Daniel Fabia. In 2017 the booklet is illustrated by a young black man wearing glasses made of beads and wire and a series of photographs begun in 1968 of the elaborate hairstyles of black women by Nigerian photographer Johnson Donatus Aihumekeokhai Ojeikere⁴³⁵. In the context of intense student protests calling for the decolonisation of curricula one wonders if this change is an attempt to provide a course with a greater focus on Africa. The course content also seems to have a greater focus on Africa though much of the material is still based in contemporary visual culture and relevant critical theory. In 2014 the courses offered covered topics such as the history and ideological evolution of photography and film using the theories of Sontag and Barthes (first year); design in the twentieth century from a predominantly Western perspective (first year); the representation of gender in visual culture (second year); new media in visual culture (second year); visual (post)colonialisms (second year); modernism and postmodernism (third year) and the “construction of space, place, and cyberspace in selected modernist and postmodernist cultural practices” (third year)⁴³⁶. While this offering remains largely the same in 2017 the first year course “images across media: current issues” adds that it looks at “an introduction into the ways in which images appear across media in contemporary visual culture from a specific African perspective within the global”⁴³⁷. In second year, students complete the same course in “gender, sexuality and visual representation” that looks at “the nude in late nineteenth century art, the femme fatale, hysteria, androgyny and transsexuality” in relation to contemporary visual culture⁴³⁸. The second module for second years, which has remained the same since 2014, focuses on what is referred to as “visual (post)colonialisms” which “investigates aspects of Africanness, Afrocentrism, multiculturalism, transnationalism and the African diaspora and studies a cross section of work including traditional art, tourist art and the hybrid aesthetics of contemporary African art and visual culture”⁴³⁹. In third year the students continue to discuss modernism and postmodernism with a theoretical focus on Kant, Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault before moving on to a course on “visual and virtual spaces” from the perspective of contemporary

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Department of Visual Arts University of Pretoria, ‘Visual Culture Studies Modules’, 2014.

⁴³⁷ University of Pretoria Visual Arts Department, ‘Yearbooks, Programme: BA Visual Studies’ <<http://www.up.ac.za/en/yearbooks/2017/programmes/view/01130133>> [accessed 16 March 2017].

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

critical theory⁴⁴⁰. Therefore, despite a noticeable attempt to shift the curricula away from a Western focus towards Africa this is done predominantly through contemporary art and visual culture as case studies rather than historical African art and much of the course structure remains unchanged.

The University of Johannesburg, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is a new university that was formed through an amalgamation of the former Rand Afrikaans University (an HWU), the Technikon Witwatersrand (an HWT) and some parts of Vista University (an HBU) in 2005. The art department of the Technikon Witwatersrand was previously known as the Witwatersrand Technical College and has its origins in the School of Arts and Craft that was established in 1926⁴⁴¹. The department's name changed over the years and the Witwatersrand Technical College eventually became the Technikon Witwatersrand in 1976 and in the nineteen nineties the previous Fine Art Department became the Faculty of Art and Design⁴⁴². In 1997 the faculty became known by its present name, the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (FADA), and housed the departments of Architecture, Jewellery Design and Fine Art⁴⁴³. When the merger with the Rand Afrikaans University and Vista University became apparent in 2004 the department decided to change its name to the Department of Visual Art "as it was felt that the name 'fine art' no longer reflected the dynamic contemporaneity of the visual arts world"⁴⁴⁴. It is the technikon that, in the case of this merger, became the dominant institution with regards to visual arts rather than the universities, which had a much higher academic status during apartheid and the early years of democracy. Despite its origins as a technical (practical) rather than academic college and its current practical focus on a broad range of disciplines the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture continues to offer courses in what is called the history of art. The dominance of the historical technikon in the formation of the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture owes much to the history of the Rand Afrikaans University. The Rand Afrikaans University established its art history department in 1969/1970 without the existence of a fine art department but was closed in the late nineteen eighties. Nettleton notes that during the period of its existence art by white South Africans was focused upon and no historical African art or

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Faculty of Art Design and Architecture University of Johannesburg, 'History & Context' <<https://www.uj.ac.za/faculties/fada/visual-art/Pages/History-and-Context.aspx>> [accessed 4 February 2017].

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

contemporary work by black South Africans was taught⁴⁴⁵. As such, without an existing department from the Rand Afrikaans University the Technikon Witwatersrand became the host institution for the new Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture following the merger. The current curriculum at the University of Johannesburg again has very little focus on historical African art and, in 2015, showed a dominance of Western discourse. In 2015 the history of art for second years course looked at the European Renaissance, Western modernism, feminist theories of representation and a module on business acumen for artists⁴⁴⁶. In third year students were presented courses on business studies as well as the history of photography, postmodern art in Europe and America and a course titled “Colonialism and Art in South Africa” which looks at discrimination and “the construction of ‘the other’” in relation to contemporary South African artists⁴⁴⁷. As is the case with a number of South African art history or visual studies departments, as of 2015, there is virtually no historical African art in the curricula at the University of Johannesburg. The focus is predominantly on Western art history, contemporary art and critical theory. In this sense ‘Africa’ is only dealt with through contemporary South African artists and a theoretical discussion of colonialism and post-colonialism.

South Africa’s oldest university, the University of Cape Town, was established in 1829 as the South African College and was a HWU and English-medium institution during apartheid. It’s fine arts department began as the Cape Town School of Art and in 1920 it had a fine arts chair endowed by the South African mining magnate Max Michaelis. When it was taken over by UCT in 1925 it therefore did so under the current name of the Michaelis School of Fine Art⁴⁴⁸. Michaelis (as it is known) had its art history courses taught by fine art staff up until the nineteen fifties and had a single post for a full-time art historian between the nineteen sixties and late nineteen eighties⁴⁴⁹. In a text celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Michaelis in 1975 it is noted that the school thrives despite its separation from the colonial metropole: “[a]lthough geographically isolated from the main centres of contemporary art, the School has, in recent years, shown a capacity to keep in touch with significant contemporary developments and it is this awareness that distinguishes the works of its students and

⁴⁴⁵ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 54-55.

⁴⁴⁶ Faculty of Art Design and Architecture University of Johannesburg, ‘Learning Guide: History of Art II (ARH21-1)’, 2015.

⁴⁴⁷ Faculty of Art Design and Architecture University of Johannesburg, ‘Learning Guide: Art History III (ARH32-1)’, 2015.

⁴⁴⁸ Esme Berman, *Art and Artists of South Africa: An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary and Historical Survey of Painters and Graphic Artists Since 1875* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1970), xiv.

⁴⁴⁹ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 54-55.



Figure 21: Staff of the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town in 1975. The photograph is taken from the book *50 years: Michaelis School of Fine Art* that accompanied an exhibition in honour of the event.

teachers” (see the staff from this time in Figure 21)⁴⁵⁰. Here the perception that South Africa remains a peripheral zone for art disconnected from its cultural centre at this time is emphasised. In 1988 an independent art history department was established but this became part of the department of historical studies in 1999⁴⁵¹. The incorporation into historical studies meant that art history moved to another campus in the suburb of Rondebosch away from the Michaelis school in central Cape Town. This situation meant that the fine art department began to establish its own courses in what was called ‘discourse of art’ and ‘art theory’.

In effect fine art students at Michaelis in the first decade of the twenty-first century (I was one between 2003 and 2006) studied art history and theory in support of their practical subjects with a heavy focus on contemporary art, Western modern and contemporary art and critical theory. As such virtually no historical African art was taught and fine art students did not necessarily take the courses offered by the history department. Following a series of

⁴⁵⁰ Michaelis School of Fine Art, *50 years: Michaelis School of Fine Art*.

⁴⁵¹ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 54-55.

heated and controversial debates the art history section of UCT's history department returned to central Cape Town and became part of Michaelis once again in January 2012. Despite efforts to the contrary the department is still rather understaffed. While some historical African art has been taught at various moments in the life span of UCT's art history department this was almost inconsequential as a percentage of the offering. In 2014 Professor Barbaro Martinez-Ruiz was appointed as the section head of art history at Michaelis and as a specialist in African art he has contributed several undergraduate and postgraduate courses in historical African art to the curricula but will be leaving the department in 2017. The remainder of the courses offered tend to focus, however, on modern Western art, contemporary art (Western or African) and critical theory.

In the curriculum from 2015 various courses at Michaelis attempt to focus some of their attention on African examples. The curricula for 'discourse of art' and 'art history' at Michaelis for first years in 2015 offered a course titled "Images of Conflict" that examined "visual culture from across the globe, including South Africa, Egypt, Germany, Rwanda, The United States of America and the Middle East" and a course on "The Emergence of Modernity" that looked predominantly at Western modernism with a final discussion of African modernism and contemporary South African art⁴⁵². In second year students discussed "Envisioning the Body: Representations of the Human in Art and Visual Culture" with a focus on the politics of representation in relation to theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Judith Butler. Other courses offered at second year level included "Visual Cultures: Space and Place" which looked at theories on space in relation to Western art movements and some local examples; "Art Narrative: Traditions and Tensions" that positioned the Western canon against movements in South African art since the mid-twentieth century and "Strategies for Art in Times of Change" that discussed the urban environment and contemporary practice citing the movements in Western public art and some contemporary African case studies as examples⁴⁵³.

The third years in 2015 took three courses: "New Perspectives" which looked at historical African graphic writing systems in relation to semiotics and structuralism; a course on Western art historiography and another on the domestic space of the home in relation to

⁴⁵² Michaelis School of Fine Art University of Cape Town, 'Course Outlines', 2015.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

Western discourse⁴⁵⁴. The need to change the curricula has become more pressing since the student protests of 2015 and 2016 that called specifically for a decolonisation of the curriculum and, at Michaelis, for a greater focus on African content. This discussion is not, however, an entirely new one. In 1989 the Centre for African Studies published a text titled *Rethinking UCT: the debate over Africanisation and the position of women* that discussed the pressing need at the time to reassess the role of the University of Cape Town as an African university that could “meet the needs of a changing society and a changing student population”⁴⁵⁵. The text understands this change to be necessary both in the composition of the student body and the nature of the curriculum, which makes it appear to have almost uncanny contemporary relevance⁴⁵⁶. The question remains, as it did in Chapter 3, as to why the pace of what may be termed decolonisation is so slow when many have acknowledged the need since the nineteen eighties. It seems a potential answer may lie in the methodology employed to transform the curriculum which has, to date, focused predominantly on including contemporary African art rather than historical forms.

The University of the Orange Free State, now known as the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein was founded as the Grey University College in 1906 and was initially and English-medium institution. Following the adoption of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in the nineteen forties the institutions was officially sanctioned as a university in 1950 and the names was changed to the University of the Orange Free State (the Orange Free state was an independent Boer republic between 1854 and 1902). While many white, English-medium universities had the discipline or art history as an adjunct to fine art it was most often an independent department at Afrikaans-medium universities such as the Rand Afrikaans University and the University of Pretoria⁴⁵⁷. The fine art department at the University of the Orange Free State was established afterwards in 1974 while the department of art history was founded in 1970 and its first Professor in art history, the Flemish immigrant Fred Teurlinckx, was appointed⁴⁵⁸. Teurlinckx was one of the first academics to submit a doctoral dissertation in Afrikaans and as such established a preference for the language at the institution⁴⁵⁹. In the late nineteen seventies the departments of art history and fine art merged but split again in

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ Glenn Goosen, Martin Hall and Caroline White, *Rethinking UCT: The Debate over Africanisation and the Position of Women* / Glenn Goosen, Martin Hall, Caroline White. (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1989), foreward.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁵⁷ Department of Art History and Image Studies University of the Free State, ‘The History of the Department’, 2015.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

1981⁴⁶⁰. In 2000 the name was changed to Art History and Visual Culture Studies to reflect, like so many South African universities, the global shift in disciplinary focus⁴⁶¹. The name was changed again in 2015 to the Department of Art History and Image Studies and the department describes its courses as focusing on “a wider range of image types than art” with an “emphasis on theory (understood as continental-philosophical and critical thinking) in the discipline of art history”⁴⁶². The focus on continental philosophy, particularly German philosophy (as mentioned in Chapter 3), was one that set the research and curricula of Afrikaans-medium universities apart from English-medium institutions when art history departments were formed across the country⁴⁶³. Early in the life of the department first years studied ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt before moving on to the Renaissance, Baroque art⁴⁶⁴. In 1987 the curriculum for second years focused on traditional, Western art history through the writings of Johann Winckelmann, Erwin Panofsky, Jan Bialostocki, Willem Juynboll, Giorgio Vasari, Plinius, Luigi Salerno and the white South African historians Heather Martienssen and Mr. A. Kuijers (who convened the course)⁴⁶⁵. Over the years some historical African art was taught but the focus was generally on Western art history. In 1999, for example, the second year course looked at “South African Rock Art”, the idea of the ‘primitive’, a discussion of terms used to describe black South African art and a study of ancient Greek civilisation⁴⁶⁶. The current modules under “History of Art and Visual Culture Studies” discuss “image interpretation in art history” (first year) which looks at the historical sources and roots of contemporary visual culture; “studying visual culture and media” (first year) which looks at film, photography, painting, installations, advertising; “visual narratives and fictive worlds” (second year) which looks at visual narratives from the past, and examines contemporary narratives from the Western world and Africa; “image translations in Africa” (second year) which looks at translations of art in Western and African contexts in South Africa; “forms of image interaction: Key texts in art historical interpretation” (third year) which looks at the ways in which spectators understand, use, and interpret images; “imagining the city in film and other media” (third year) that discusses changing perceptions of the city in art; “recent developments in visual art and culture” (fourth year) and

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Department of Art History and Image Studies University of the Free State, ‘Welcome to the Web Page of the Department of Art History and Image Studies’, 2015.

⁴⁶³ See: Nettleton, “Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi” 40.

⁴⁶⁴ Department of Art History University of the Free State, ‘KGK195: Introduction to Art History’, 1991.

⁴⁶⁵ Department of Art History University of the Orange Free State, ‘Study Guide: Art History II’, 1987.

⁴⁶⁶ Department of Art History University of the Free Orange State, ‘KGK215: Themes from Pre-Modern Art History’, 1999.

“contemporary South African art contexts” (fourth year)⁴⁶⁷. The curriculum at the University of the Free state follows an in-depth theoretical model and the contemporary courses show a degree of African content yet historical African art is still not a focus in the curriculum and Western paradigms remain.

North West University (NWU) is another amalgamated institution that was formed through a merger of the former Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and the ‘homeland’ institution of the University of Bophutswana in 2004. The University of Bophutswana was a remarkable case in that it was formed after the people in the North West province of South Africa raised funds to establish their own university in the nineteen sixties and seventies and then changed its name (through a vote) to the University of the North West in 1994⁴⁶⁸. As UB the institution opened a fine art department in 1970 but without specific posts for art historians and the department was closed in 1996⁴⁶⁹. In its current state NWU houses art history, graphic design and communication within the School of Communication Design⁴⁷⁰.

The history of art curriculum at North West University offered a larger amount of African art in the curricula than other institutions during the last 20 years due, in large part to the personal research interests of Professor John Botha who was a lecturer in the department for many years. Botha notes that throughout the history of the department African art had always been included in some way depending on the lecturer involved and that San rock painting was a particular focus⁴⁷¹. In 2001 (and perhaps prior to this) the first year curricula at North West University looked at art appreciation and the art of ancient cultures in Africa as well as visual art from the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque so that the content was equally divided between African and Western⁴⁷². This equal divide between the West and the ‘non-West’ continued into second year where they studied the history of ideas in *World Art* and looked at art from Meso-America, China, Korea, Japan before learning about nineteenth

⁴⁶⁷ University of the Free State, ‘History of Art and Visual Culture Studies’ <<http://www.ufs.ac.za/humanities/departments-and-divisions/art-history-and-image-studies-home/general/module-information>> [accessed 2 March 2017].

⁴⁶⁸ North West University, ‘THE NWU Recent History: Mafikeng Campus History, A Tribute to the People of the North-West Province’ <<http://www.nwu.ac.za/content/history-mafikeng-campus-mafikeng-campus-nwu>> [accessed 20 January 2017].

⁴⁶⁹ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 54-55.

⁴⁷⁰ North West University, ‘School of Communication Studies: About Us’ <<http://humanities.nwu.ac.za/communication-studies/about>> [accessed 12 March 2017].

⁴⁷¹ John R Botha, ‘Email Correspondence’, *July 2016*.

⁴⁷² North West University, ‘History of Art: Course Outlines 2001-2016’.

century European art⁴⁷³. The third years focused on twentieth century art including a discussion on colonialism, post-colonialism, Bauhaus, graphic design, late modernism, contemporary African art, contemporary South African art⁴⁷⁴. Between 2002 and 2009 the first year content remained rather similar with the addition of an introductory course in art history. Botha introduced a course into the department called World Art in 2002 that looked at the visual arts of world cultures in various parts of the world including Africa, India, Far East, Meso America and South America. Botha notes that this course had a major focus on Africa and, due to personal research interests, in west African art since the fourteenth century specifically⁴⁷⁵. The course on the nineteenth century remained for the second years as did the twentieth century focus for the third years⁴⁷⁶. An honours course was introduced in this period that offered courses on critical theory, film studies, visual arts in the social context and philosophy. In the period between 2010 and 2016 the course content shifted slightly so the first years looked at *Western art history* (ancient art, renaissance and baroque) while second years studied *World Art and World Culture* which discussed power, violence, mysticism, the role of ancestors; patriarchal communities; social ceremonies and religious beliefs⁴⁷⁷. The second years continued to look at the nineteenth century while the third years focused on the twentieth century from modernism to postmodernism. The fourth year curriculum appears to have remained the same. In some sense then, there has been less historical African art in the curriculum since 2010 as the first years no longer take the course *Art of Ancient Culture and Africa*. The contemporary second year course focuses predominantly on Western art and the third year course looks at African art only in relation to modernist or postmodernist themes such as Picasso's appropriation of African forms⁴⁷⁸. As such only the second year course on 'World Art', established by the now retired Botha, looks specifically at historical African art. At North West University the inclusion of historical African art in the curriculum has largely been the efforts of an individual staff member and has in fact declined as a percentage of the content in the contemporary period despite including a far greater focus on Africa in early years in comparison to other institutions.

The University of the Witwatersrand was defined as a white, English-medium University during apartheid and its staff members were instrumental in establishing SAVAH as an

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ John R Botha, 'Email Correspondence', *July 2016*.

⁴⁷⁶ North West University, 'History of Art: Course Outlines 2001-2016'.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ John R Botha, 'Email Correspondence', *July 2016*.

organisation. With its origins in 1896 as the School of Mines it is one of the oldest South African universities and gained its current name and its official University status in 1922. Shortly after this, in the nineteen thirties, the fine art department was established with history of art courses introduced to support practical subjects in 1946, a chair in art history was established in 1957 and a separate art history department formed in 1983⁴⁷⁹. In 1957 when the first art history chair was established Heather Martienssen, who had received her doctorate from the Courtauld and Maria Stein-Lessing, who had received hers from Berlin University headed the department⁴⁸⁰. Having two staff members with doctoral degrees was unusual in South Africa at the time and the fact that these were received from Western European institutions meant that the pedagogical styles were, to a large degree, imported into the South African context. An overview of the curriculum taught at the University of the Witwatersrand between 1960 and 2000 by Anitra Nettleton, who has taught art history at the University of the Witwatersrand since 1972, records that the University of the Witwatersrand introduced African art into the curriculum in 1978 when she became a full-time lecturer⁴⁸¹. Prior to 1978 the curriculum focused on European art in a largely formalist tradition with a first year survey course covering Ancient Greece to Cubism, a second year course on the Italian Renaissance, the Baroque period and Romanticism and a third year course on nineteenth century Realism as well as movements in Western art from Impressionism to Surrealism⁴⁸². In 1978 Nettleton was hired, unusually at the time, specifically to teach African art and this material was initially incorporated into the third year course as well as the postgraduate honours course⁴⁸³. In the third year course the historical African art that was looked at was largely from west and central Africa: Yoruba, Igbo, Ancient Ife, Benin, Igbo Ukwu (in contemporary Nigeria), Ashante/Akan in contemporary Ghana and Luba and Kuba in the contemporary Democratic Republic of Congo⁴⁸⁴. This was largely due to a lack of published material on historical southern African art since the Western art historical paradigm focused on the west and central African areas mentioned above. This focus was also found at North West University and again mimics a focus on these geographical spaces in global research on African art (see Figure 40 as an example). Nettleton notes that once the University of the Witwatersrand researchers began publishing material on southern African art in the late nineteen eighties through postgraduate study this material could then be

⁴⁷⁹ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 54-55.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 56.

⁴⁸³ Anitra Nettleton, 'Email Interview', *July 2015*.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

included in the curriculum⁴⁸⁵. During this period, between 1978 and 1986, students also continued to look at Ancient and Classical Europe, the Italian Renaissance, Baroque art in Europe and the United States of America as well as topics on Western modernism⁴⁸⁶.

In the nineteen eighties, in response to an increasing sense by younger staff at the University of the Witwatersrand that the curricula was still far too Western, a greater amount of South African (as opposed to only west or central African) art history was introduced into the courses in third year and honours⁴⁸⁷. This included material on contemporary South African art as was becoming popular in other art history departments in South Africa. In 1990 the curriculum remained much the same apart from the inclusion of Indian art into both the third and honours year courses at a time when the only other department to offer study on Indian art was the University of Durban Westville that was specifically established for South Africans of Indian descent in Durban⁴⁸⁸. It must be noted that during the lifespan of SAVAH papers presented on Indian art came almost exclusively from staff members of the University of Durban Westville⁴⁸⁹. The Indian art content in the curriculum did not last very long due to a lack of funding for a full-time staff member with expertise in this field⁴⁹⁰. Between 1996 and 2000 the University of the Witwatersrand's art history curriculum offered first year students a course in European art and visual culture between 1850 and 1960; a second year course on art in nineteenth and twentieth century Africa; a third year course on art since 1945 and another third year course titled "Constructs of the Renaissance, Constructs of Africa"⁴⁹¹. In 2010 and 2011 the African content, though still supported by the Western art historical canon, continued with second year students taking a course titled "Art, Power and Society" that looked at "art from different historical societies in Europe, Asia and Africa, in relation to social, political and religious conditions" and a course called "Art Historical Modernism" that looked at "modernism in Europe and the United States, as well as non-Western countries" where half the material was devoted to Western forms⁴⁹². The third years took a course titled "Constructs of the Renaissance" which looked only at Europe and another called "Constructs

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 56.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁸⁹ See: SAAAH, 'Diversity and Interaction: Proceedings of the 5th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians'. See also: SAAAH, 'The Communication of Worldvisions: Proceedings of the 7th Annual Conference of the South African Association of Art Historians'.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 56.

⁴⁹² Wits School of Arts, 'Course Outline HART 2002: Art Historical Modernism', 2011.; Wits School of Arts, 'Course Outline HART 2001: Art, Power and Society', 2011.

of Africa”⁴⁹³. The relatively large focus on African content at the University of the Witwatersrand was heavily supported by the establishment of the *University of the Witwatersrand Art Gallery* (which later became the *Wits Art Museum*) and its collection of African art funded by Standard Bank from 1979 onwards⁴⁹⁴. The *Wits Art Museum* showed African work as ‘art’ rather than as ethnography and included work from west, central and southern Africa and has expanded to include a large collection of contemporary African Art⁴⁹⁵.

Of the HWU’s that offer courses in art history the University of KwaZulu-Natal offers courses in practical art and art history through the Centre for Visual Art. The universities’ fine art department was established in the town of Pietermaritzburg in the nineteen thirties while a post for an art historian was only established in 1971 with modules on African art being offered, according to Nettleton, since the nineteen nineties⁴⁹⁶. In the contemporary moment (2017) its art history courses begin with “Western Art” in first year and a course titled “Africa: Art of a Continent” in second year which looks at both “traditional practice” as well as “post-colonial and contemporary production”.⁴⁹⁷ In third year students complete a course on “20th Century Art, Visual Culture and Theory” which focuses on Modernism and Postmodernism as well as a course on national and international museum practice⁴⁹⁸. Third year students also study “Contemporary African Art” where they contemporary work in relation to changes in the African continent since colonialism⁴⁹⁹.

Rhodes University in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa was named after Cecil John Rhodes after money from his trust established the institution in 1904 and, like the statue of Rhodes at the University of Cape Town, the university has been the target of student protests asking for its name to be changed. The fine art department there has its origins in the Grahamstown School of Arts which was established in 1881 and though it began as a practical institution it now offers courses in what it calls “Art History and Visual Culture”⁵⁰⁰.

⁴⁹³ Wits School of Arts, ‘Course Outline HART 3004: Constructs of the Renaissance’, 2011.; Wits School of Arts, ‘Course Outline HART 3003: Constructs of Africa’, 2010.

⁴⁹⁴ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 51.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ University of KwaZulu-Natal School of Arts, ‘Centre for Visual Art: Course Outlines’ <<http://soa.ukzn.ac.za/ClustersDisciplines/media-visual-art-drama-digital-arts/centre-for-visual-art.aspx>> [accessed 15 February 2017].

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Nettleton, "Shaking Off the Shackles: From Apartheid to African Renaissance in History of Art Syllabi", 51.

While it was noted in 2000 that no African art was taught in the art history courses there is now some focus on African art but this is almost entirely contemporary⁵⁰¹. Current courses begin with a focus on visual culture in first year with lectures on “film, clothing, advertising, performance and carnivals” as well as museum practice⁵⁰². In second year students look at Modernism and Postmodernism with a focus on Western art movements such as Pop Art though with some attention given to topics such as “African Modernism”⁵⁰³. The third year course is structured around the theme of “Art, Society and Power” and looks at some contemporary South African content through topics such as protest art and issues around race and identity⁵⁰⁴. Fourth year students focus their efforts on producing two research papers which again focus on contemporary art and applicable theory⁵⁰⁵. In summary, Rhodes University offers teaching on some African art but, like other universities such as the University of Pretoria, the focus is on visual culture which steers the curriculum towards modern and contemporary work rather than historical African art.

Apart from the University of South Africa which is a distance-learning institution three other universities offer art history courses. These are the University of Fort Hare which was an institution created for one of the TBVC countries (see Appendix A); Tshwane University of technology which was created through the merger of two historically black and one historically white technikons and the Durban University of Technology which was also created through the merger of an HWT and a HBT. The University of Fort Hare caters predominantly to black students and while it did not offer courses in art history during apartheid it now provides both history of art and philosophy of art⁵⁰⁶. As mentioned in Chapter 1 the University of Limpopo, Walter Sisulu University (formerly the University of the Transkei)⁵⁰⁷, the University of Zululand⁵⁰⁸ and the University of Venda (UV) offer no courses in art history⁵⁰⁹. Tshwane University of technology has made considerable efforts to include African art in its curriculum since its creation in 2004 and particularly since the

⁵⁰¹ Ibid. See also: Rhodes University, ‘Courses: Art History & Visual Culture’ <<http://www.ru.ac.za/fineart/arthistoryandvisualculture/>> [accessed 10 March 2017].

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ University of Fort Hare, ‘Department of Fine Arts: Undergraduate’.

⁵⁰⁷ Walter Sisulu University, ‘Arts Information Leaflet 2015’ (Department of Science, Engineering and Technology, 2015).

⁵⁰⁸ Mlotshwa, ‘Email Correspondence (University of Zululand)’, *July 2016*.

⁵⁰⁹ Ramaite-Mafadza, ‘Email Correspondence (University of Venda)’, *July 2016*. There are plans to offer courses in art and culture in 2018.

appointment of Nalini Moodley (currently assistant dean in the faculty of arts) in 2009⁵¹⁰. Current (2016) courses offer a steady focus on African art as well as art outside of the Western canon with ancient art including San art, ancient Egyptian art, Yoruba and Asante art as well as European and Islamic art being taught in first year⁵¹¹. In second year approximately half of the course is devoted to African art with topics such as the slave trade, ceremonial art practice, art of West Africa, contemporary African art and South African art from the apartheid period onwards⁵¹². This focus continues into third year where students look at postcolonial discourse from a global perspective with Western, Asian and African examples (third year)⁵¹³. At the Durban University of technology there is also a fair amount of focus on historical African art but this takes place predominantly in the first year. As of 2015 the first year students looked at Egyptian art, Nok art and Ife art as well historical Southern African forms such as rock art, the Lydenburg heads and the art of ancient Mapungubwe⁵¹⁴. In third year these students focus on contemporary South African art.

The curriculums of art history taught at South African universities shows, overall, a relative lack of teaching on historical African art. While some institutions, such as the University of the Witwatersrand have included this material since the nineteen seventies there is still a predominant focus on Western forms. The move towards visual studies and towards contemporary South African art as primary subject matter has meant that in some cases there has been a decline rather than an increase in historical African art content. Nettleton notes that interest in the field faded towards the end of the nineteen nineties and that the focus on African content at the University of the Witwatersrand has shrunk in recent years (as of 2015) and that she perceives a general lack of interest in historical art⁵¹⁵.

The above analysis of curricula corroborates this sense as the courses taught show an increasing focus on contemporary art and visual culture (see also Appendix B). This has meant that although in some departments the content on 'Africa' has increased this has largely meant contemporary African and South African art rather than historical forms or art

⁵¹⁰ Pfunzo Sidogi, 'Email Correspondence', *July 2016*.

⁵¹¹ Tshwane University of Technology Faculty of Arts Department of Fine and Applied Arts, 'Student Course Guide: Art Theory 1, History of Art and Design 1', 2016.

⁵¹² Tshwane University of Technology Faculty of Arts Department of Fine and Applied Arts, 'Student Course Guide: Art Theory 2', 2016.

⁵¹³ Tshwane University of Technology Faculty of Arts Department of Fine and Applied Arts, 'Student Course Guide: Art Theory 3', 2016.

⁵¹⁴ Durban University of Technology Faculty of Art and Design, 'Course Outlines: Art Theory', 2015.

⁵¹⁵ Nettleton, 'Email Interview', *July 2015*.

that does not fit within the international canon of the contemporary ('traditional' 'craft' or spiritual forms). Perhaps, as Nettleton suggests, this has something to do with the tie between art history departments and fine art or design departments in South Africa which see contemporary forms as most relevant for practicing artists⁵¹⁶. In some sense, it may also be a result of the way in which replicas of existing forms lose their connection to originals over time. The plaster casts that remain damaged and unacknowledged in Stellenbosch University's Visual Arts Department as ghostly reminders of a colonial past have lost their connection to their original referent. In an analogous sense the contemporary art history taught at South African institutions presents itself as a global form unhinged from any geographical or epistemological background yet it relies heavily on Western ideologies without, necessarily, remembering this past. When contemporary African art is taught as a category in its own right, without an established connection to historical African form, it too loses its original referent and is then in danger of being perceived as simply another part of Western art history rather than as part of a different tradition. Here we see in the plaster casts and the curriculum an example of the way in which colonialism creates ripples and echoes over time and space into the present moment.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 5: South African Art History: Access to institutions

In speaking of art historical discourse we may in turn speak of physical access to that discourse; to its conceptual frameworks, the institutions that govern its dissemination and the individuals who frame its existence in the future. Access to institutions and discourse is also about access to art schools, universities, libraries, conference venues, public spaces dedicated to intellectual exchange, galleries, museums and other physical buildings that allow for access to a particular kind of knowledge⁵¹⁷. For the purposes of this chapter, I seek to discuss access to art history from the perspective of physical access to institutionalised art historical knowledge. This depiction of South Africa's physical space continues the discussion put forward in Chapter 1 that outlined the historical creation (through apartheid) of spaces and institutions intended to function as part of the economic, cultural and geographical core of South Africa for use by white South Africans. I will begin by looking at how this manifests in the field of the arts through an analysis of the geographical location of museums and universities.

The field of academic art history in South Africa, though small, is supported by a number of institutional structures in the country. Many of the tertiary institutions have departments for the study of practical fine art or visual art, which are connected to or supported by departments of art history or what is increasingly called 'visual studies'. Despite the existence of an established art historical sphere the legacy of South Africa as a settler colonial

⁵¹⁷ In this instance, the kind of discourse referred to is art history. The specific form of art historical discourse that allows one access to the art market and to art institutions is the discourse that is taught at universities and that which dominates the global sphere. In other words that discourse is most often one that adheres to a Western philosophical framework.

nation and the historical creation of a privileged core and a disenfranchised periphery continues to plague the discipline⁵¹⁸. As outlined in Chapter 1, most of the HWUs that were culturally and economically advantaged during apartheid have art history departments and are also situated in economic centres with access to art galleries and museums – institutions with whom the art departments often have an established relationship⁵¹⁹. Of the HWU's the University of Cape Town's art campus is found in the city centre and is situated very close to the *Iziko South African National Gallery* and many contemporary art galleries. Stellenbosch University is situated in a small, historically conservative town in the Western Cape wine growing area and has a university museum called the Sasol Art Museum as well as the *Gallery University Stellenbosch* (GUS) within easy walking distance of the Visual Arts Department. The University of the Witwatersand (Wits) has the *Wits Art Museum* on its premises; the University of Pretoria has its own museum that houses the Mapungubwe collection; Rhodes University has the historical *Albany Museum* in Grahamstown and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (formerly the University of Natal) in Pietermaritzburg has a strong connection to the *Tatham Art Gallery* while its Durban campus has access to the *Campbell Collections* and the *Durban Art Gallery*. All of these institutions were designated as HWUs and as such were structured to support the white minority population. The historically black universities such as the University of Zululand or the University of Fort Hare are situated outside of economic centres and while some do have museums or galleries tied to their institutions such as the *De Beers Centenary Art Gallery* at the University of Fort Hare many of these institutions do not have affiliated museums or galleries. The location of museums and tertiary art institutions in economic centres in South Africa may appear to be a situation analogous to any country in the world since these institutions rely on and contribute to central business districts (CBDs).

⁵¹⁸ See Chapter 1 for a longer discussion on this historical inequality. The division was due to a series of laws that pushed black South Africans out of economic centers. The various Land Acts of 1936 created more reserves, prohibited black people from owning land and allowed for the removal of black-owned land in rural areas designated as white while the Union government's Land Act of 1913 pushed more black South African's into 'homelands' away from economic centres. See: Evans, "South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of 'Decolonisation'".

⁵¹⁹ In a foreward to the celebration of Michaelis' 50 year existence C.J du Ry notes the connection between the University of Cape town's Michaelis School of Fine Art and the National Gallery: "At an earlier stage these two institutions were completely linked to each other on more levels than just a purely administrative one, a bond which has been kept up. The school has frequently drawn members of its art history staff from that of the Nationals Gallery and we have always taken an active interest in all projects undertaken by the school." Michaelis School of Fine Art.

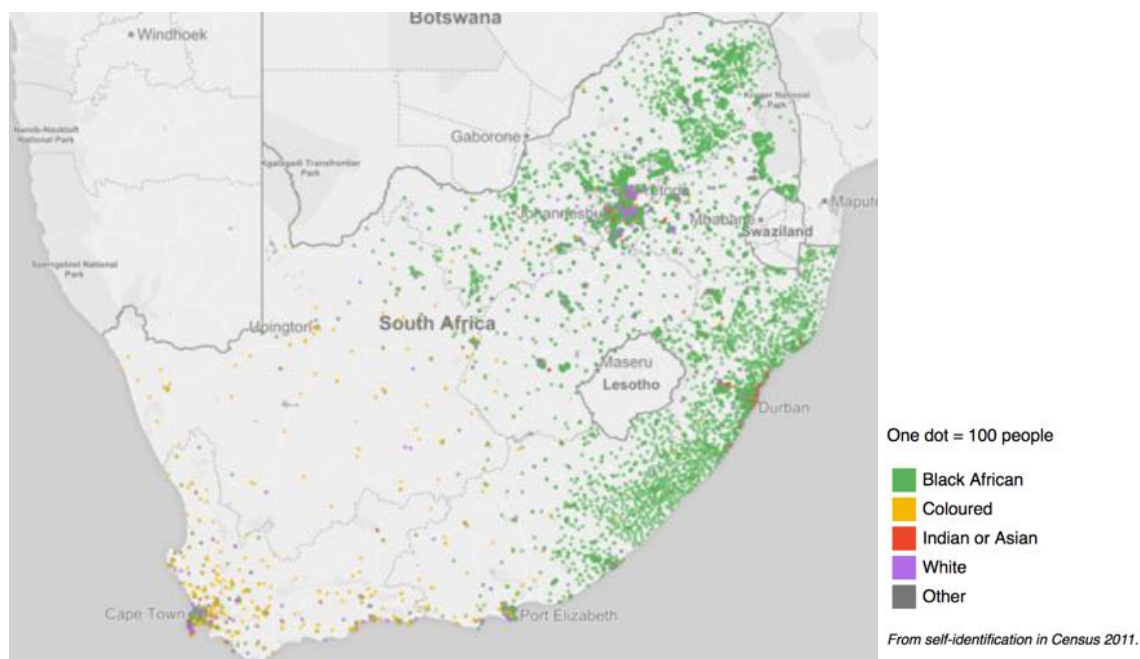


Figure 22: Map showing the demographic layout of South Africa. Map by Adrian Frith, based on data from the 2011 Census by Statistics South Africa. Available at: <https://dotmap.adrianfrith.com>.

What is relevant in the South African context is the manner in which the division between core and periphery has led to a contemporary situation where geographical proximity to economic opportunities and art institutions in particular is still largely determined by race. Two existing maps that are easily accessible online make this situation clear. The first is a map of South Africa created by Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) that shows the various institutions and amenities available within the South African art world in a geographical sense⁵²⁰. The second is an interactive map created by Adrian Frith that uses the 2011 census data to plot the South African racial demographics (among other attributes) onto geographical space so that it shows both the location of the various apartheid-designated race groups and the population density⁵²¹.

In attempting to use these maps to understand how inequality is manifest in the South African

⁵²⁰ The Art Map is described as such: “Art Map South Africa is aimed at providing artists, curators, writers and researchers from other countries with a first point of entry into the existing infrastructure for contemporary visual arts in South Africa, as a basis for networking, creative collaboration and research. It is also designed with the needs and interests of people entering the field in South Africa in mind. This website gives you an overview of a wide cross-section of key organisations and institutions, together with information about people working in the field as writers, curators and researchers. You will find information about museums, galleries, alternative art spaces, magazines, events, development organisations and tertiary institutions”. Available at <http://artmap.co.za/>

⁵²¹ Available at: <https://dotmap.adrianfrith.com/>. It is important to note that when it comes to racial categories these were taken from self-identification in the 2011 South African census.

‘art’ world and the way in which structural differences in the location of art institutions (for my purposes these are universities and art museums⁵²²) impact the access to and nature of art historical discourse it is useful to begin from a broad perspective of South Africa as a whole. The larger map of South Africa shown in Figure 22 gives an indication of the way that race and geography have been forcibly conflated by the system of apartheid outlined in Chapter 1. On the whole, small pockets of people classified as white live in city centres such as Cape Town, Johannesburg or Durban while people classified as coloured dominate the Western Cape and those classified as black dominate the remainder of the country. When we compare this to the location of tertiary art schools as well as museums and galleries from VANSAs art maps (see Figure 23 and Figure 24) it becomes clear that these institutions can, for the most part, be found in urban centres. It is in these urban centres where, as a direct result of apartheid’s spatial planning and subsequent forced removals, that the majority of the population classified as white can be found. South Africa’s primary urban, economic centres are Johannesburg and Pretoria in the Gauteng province, Cape Town in the Western Cape and Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. The South African census from 2011 documents 41.7% of South Africa’s white population as residing in the province of Gauteng accounting for 15.6% of the total population in the province and 19.9% of the white population residing in the Western Cape, which accounts for 15.7% of the total population in the province⁵²³. The point that I want to emphasise here is that while the location of museums and university art schools in urban centres may seem to be an inevitable occurrence replicated the world over, in South Africa where the racial demographics of the city geographically replicate apartheid’s ideology of a ‘white core and a black periphery’ this situation is relevant in attempting to understand access to art historical discourse.

⁵²² The difference between an institution referred to as a ‘gallery’ and those referred to as ‘museums’ is often difficult to determine. I use the term ‘museum’ here, and throughout this dissertation, to refer to an institution whose primary intention is to display a collection of artworks (either part of a permanent or temporary collection) rather than to display work with the additional intention of selling it to the public. The Iziko South African National Gallery is in this sense a museum rather than a gallery as its name suggests.

⁵²³ See: Statistics South Africa, *Census 2011: Census in Brief* (Pretoria, 2012), 21. The census data shows that 9.3% of the population classified as white resides in KwaZulu-Natal as the province with the third largest white population with only 3% of the white population in Limpopo (in the North of South Africa) and 1.8% in the Northern Cape. The census also notes that the white population is at its highest density in large cities.



Figure 23: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the primary art museum collections in the country.



Figure 24: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the tertiary institutions with art departments in South Africa.

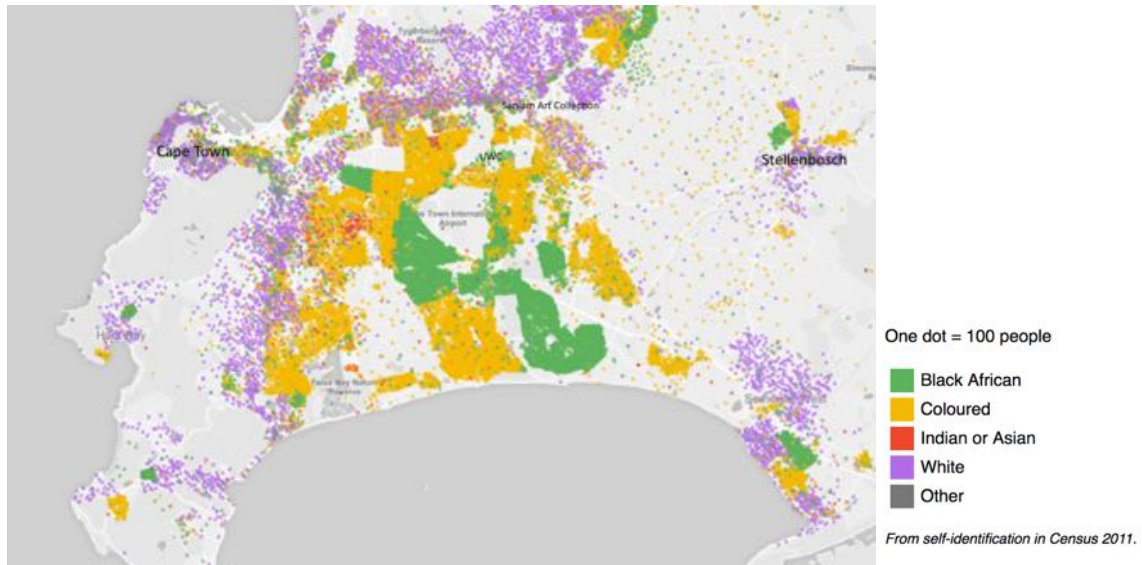


Figure 25: Map showing the demographic layout of Cape Town, including Stellenbosch, in the Western Cape Province. Map by Adrian Frith, based on data from the 2011 Census by Statistics South Africa.

Available at: <https://dotmap.adrianfrith.com>.

When we look at Figure 25 (particularly if you zoom in on the image online) we see a map showing the racial distribution of people in Cape Town and a number of factors become clear: that the policy of racial segregation enforced through apartheid laws remains apparent in the contemporary geographical division of race; that predominantly black areas are far more densely populated than white areas and that the white population resides in the areas closest to the city centre while the black population lives furthest from these locales. The map shows that the white population is clustered around Cape Town city centre, Stellenbosch town and Somerset West while the black population reside predominantly in the economically impoverished area known as the ‘Cape flats’. Within the economic centres of Cape Town and Stellenbosch designated as white areas during apartheid and still with a proportionately large white population (as evidenced by Figure 25) we find the University of Cape Town’s Michaelis School of Fine Art and Stellenbosch University’s Visual Arts Department as well as a large number, of museums (see Figure 26 and Figure 27) and most of the contemporary art galleries (see Art Map online). As the exception to this rule the Sanlam Art collection in Bellville is situated in an area on the fringe of a ‘white zone’ and an area dominated by coloured people (see: Figure 25) that hosts the University of the Western Cape.

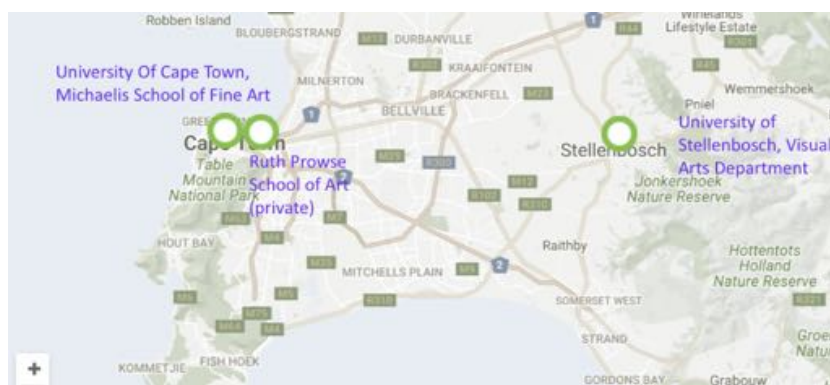


Figure 26: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the university and prominent private art schools in the Western Cape.

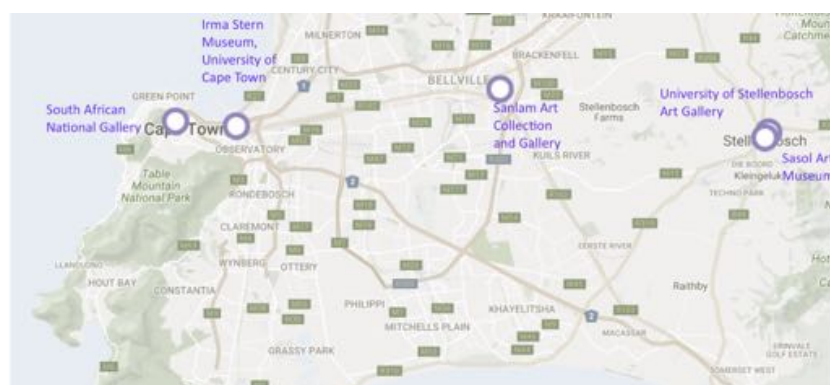


Figure 27: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the art museum collections in the Western Cape.

The University of the Western Cape was designated a ‘coloured’ university by apartheid legislation. While the University of the Western Cape is situated in an area with a dominant coloured and black population (see Figure 25) it does not have a fine art or an art history department. Despite this historical lack the University of the Western Cape launched the Centre for Humanities Research in 2006, which has begun to include an increased focus on art and visual culture. A SARChi (South African Research Chairs Initiative) Chair in visual history and theory was awarded to Patricia Hayes in 2015 and the Flagship on Critical Thought in African Humanities was launched. Under these research initiatives the Centre for Humanities Research offers new postgraduate courses in what is referred to as Visual History

through the SARChi⁵²⁴. The new postgraduate module in Visual History is described as offering both a practical and theoretical approach to photography and “its relationship to African history”⁵²⁵.

The Centre for Humanities Research also launched the Factory of the Arts based in District Six to provide practical arts education to those lacking other opportunities to do so and to “reconstitute ... the study of the humanities in Africa”⁵²⁶. The launch of such projects and endeavours emphasises the perceived historical lack of both practical and theoretical knowledge of art at universities and in areas not defined as ‘white’ during apartheid. In part the launch of ‘visual history’ courses (as opposed to art history) at the Centre for Humanities Research may be seen as an attempt to rectify this imbalance but through approaches based in the disciplines of critical theory, history or the social sciences rather than within the framework of art history. Here the more widely known disciplines of visual studies; as the study of contemporary manifestations of imagery in all forms and art history; as the study of historical and contemporary work defined as ‘art’. Art history and visual studies remain as fields to be studied at the HWUs in the Western Cape while the University of the Western Cape has chosen to offer a different course under the framework of visual history. As such, despite efforts to transform, the spatial demographics of access to art historical discourse in the Western Cape can be seen to emphasise the way in which race and geographical access to the institutional structures of the South African art world were historically instituted by apartheid laws and continue to impact the ideological apparatus of the present as well as the continuing differentiation between institutions differentiated during apartheid.

Demographically, the situation as it manifests itself in the Western Cape with university art departments and major art museum collections located in city centres where the majority of the white population can be found, is seen with less stark division in Durban and Johannesburg. In Durban the white population is found within a short distance from the city centre but does not dominate the CBD and surrounding areas to the same extent as is evident in Cape Town (see Figure 28). A closer look at the interactive map shows that the location of the Durban University of Technology and the Durban Art Gallery are found in areas with a more racially mixed population than in Cape Town, and while there are still areas that are

⁵²⁴ Centre for Humanities Research, *Annual Report: Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape*, 2015.

⁵²⁵ See: <http://www.chrflagship.uwc.ac.za/centre-for-humanities-research/national-research-foundation-nrf-south-african-research-chair-initiative-sarchi/postgraduate-module-in-visual-history-2016/>

⁵²⁶ Centre for Humanities Research, 2015, 2.

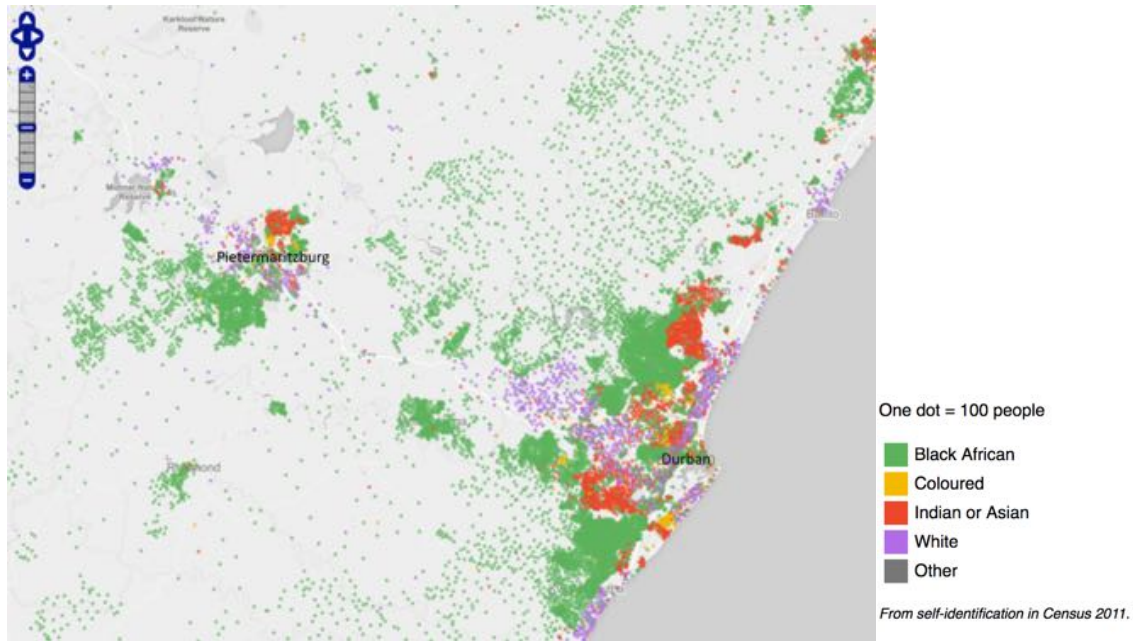


Figure 28: Map showing the demographic layout of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Map by Adrian Frith, based on data from the 2011 Census by Statistics South Africa. Available at: <https://dotmap.adrianfrith.com>.

dominated by single race groups these are not located in concentric bands of relative proximity to amenities as they are in Cape Town. A similar analysis can be made of Pietermaritzburg where the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Arts and the Tatham Art Gallery can be found (see: Figure 29 and Figure 30).

In Johannesburg people classified as black dominate the city centre while the population classified as white tends to live in more affluent areas within commuting distance of the CBD (see Figure 31). The University of the Witwatersrand's School of Arts with the Wits Art Museum, the University of Johannesburg's Department of Visual Arts, the Johannesburg Art Gallery and Museum Africa are all situated in the densely populated city centre (see Figure 32 and Figure 33). Such a context, so different to the geographical structure of Cape Town, with the location of universities and museums areas dominated by the black population, was not part of the intention when the historical precedents of these institutions were created prior to democracy⁵²⁷. The history of Johannesburg's CBD is one that physically shows the scars of apartheid's Group Areas Acts (1950 -1991) as it was classified as a white area by the

⁵²⁷ See: Christopher, *The Atlas of Changing South Africa*. There are multiple references to the spatial layout of apartheid in this text.

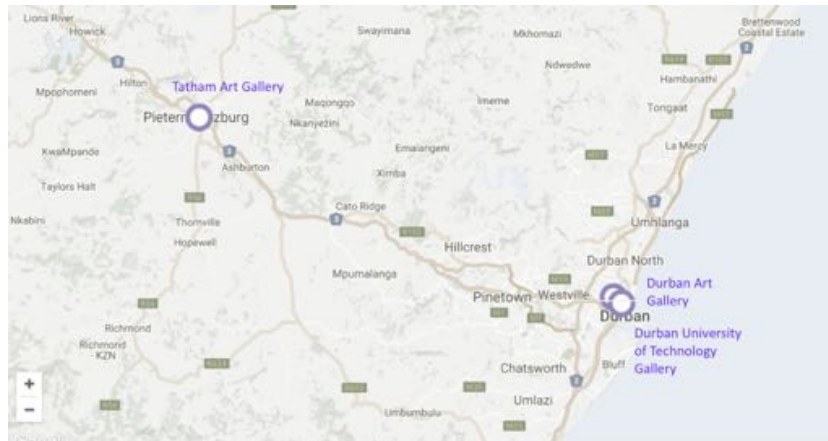


Figure 29: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the art museum collections in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

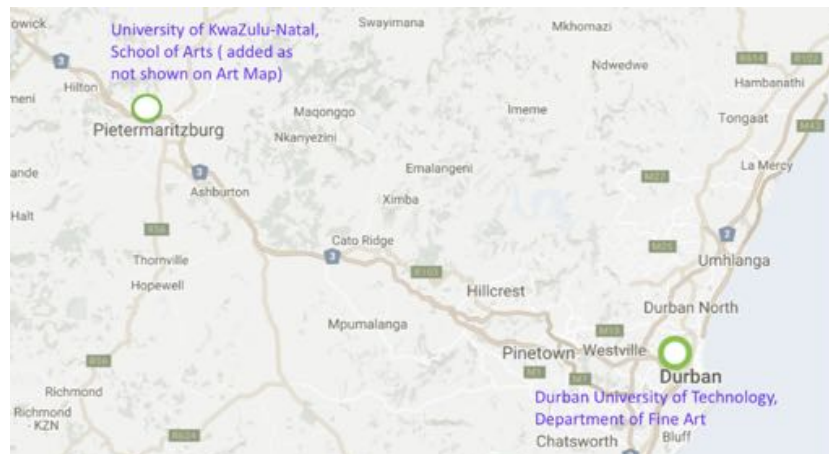


Figure 30: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the university art schools in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

apartheid government and subject to forced removals in the nineteen fifties in order to remove black residents from the CBD into the collection of townships referred to as SOWETO (South Western Townships). Following the dissolution of apartheid and the repeal of its laws of segregation more and more black people began to move into Johannesburg's CBD and the white population began to move out so that today it shows a predominantly black demographic⁵²⁸.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 213.

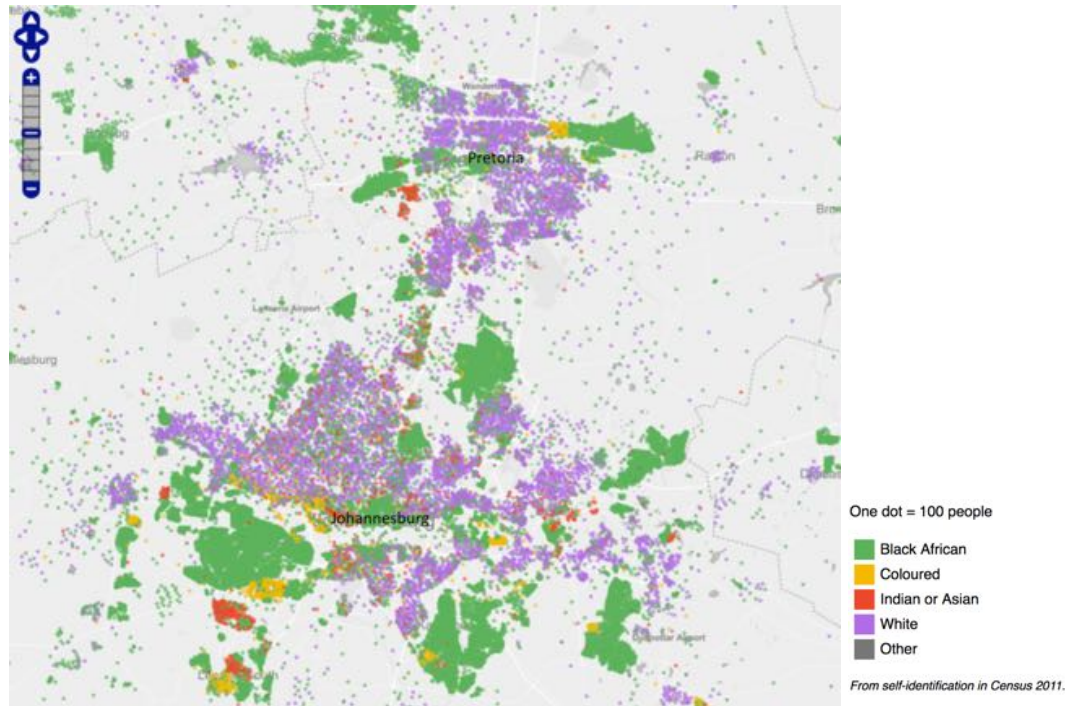


Figure 31: Map showing the demographic layout of Johannesburg and Pretoria. Map by Adrian Frith, based on data from the 2011 Census by Statistics South Africa. Available at: <https://dotmap.adrianfrith.com>.

In Pretoria the demographic of the CBD is analogous to Johannesburg yet with greater contrast as the CBD is dominated by black people with a surrounding ring of suburbs dominated by white people. The University of Pretoria is located just outside of the CBD in the suburb of Hatfield, which has a mix of population groups but is surrounded by residential areas where the white population dominates. The new institution called the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)⁵²⁹ that was established in 2004 is located closer to the CBD and therefore closer to an area dominated by black South Africans. Tshwane University of Technology has a thriving Department of Fine and Applied Arts where courses in art history can be taken and where the curriculum attempts to focus on Africa (see Chapter 4). As such in Pretoria and Johannesburg while universities and museums are spatially accessible to the urban, black population there is still a concentration of those classified as white with a higher degree of geographical access to these amenities.

⁵²⁹ Tshwane University of Technology was created following a merger of Pretoria Technikon, Technikon Northern Gauteng and North-West Technikon. See Hall, Symes, and Luescher.



Figure 32: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the university and prominent private art schools in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

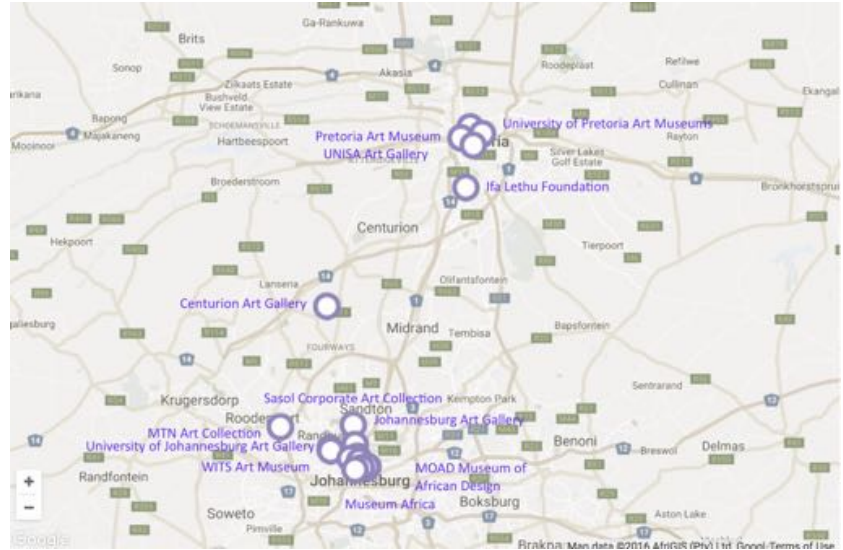


Figure 33: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the art museum and major gallery collections in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

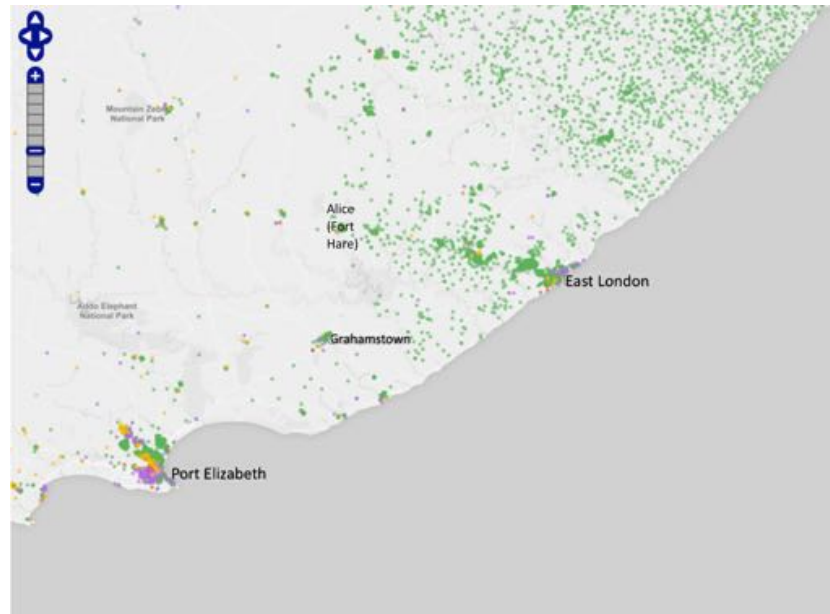


Figure 34: Map showing the demographic layout of the Eastern Cape Province. Map by Adrian Frith, based on data from the 2011 Census by Statistics South Africa. Available at: <https://dotmap.adrianfrith.com>.

In the Eastern Cape, a province where 78.8% of the population were recorded as speaking IsiXhosa as a first language in 2011 and where 86.3% of people self-identify as ‘black African’ the towns of East London, Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown and Mthatha predictably have high population density while the remainder of the province is sparsely populated (see Figure 34). The province’s four tertiary institutions are found in these towns as are the major galleries and museums (see Figure 35 and Figure 36). As may be expected, considering South Africa’s apartheid history and the arrival of white people as settlers to the nation, the white population is found predominantly within the towns of Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown and East London. This makes the university of Fort Hare, an institution located in the very small missionary town of Alice (formerly Lovedale) which is far from any economic centre and without a significant white population, highly unusual in the South African context as it has an established fine art department and the De Beers Centenary Art gallery with a significant collection of both historical and contemporary African art focused specifically on that produced by black artists⁵³⁰.

⁵³⁰ The De Beers centenary gallery was built in 1989 to house the collection of African art put together by Eddie de Jager. See: E Rankin, ‘Creating/Curating Cultural Capital: Monuments and Museums for Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *Humanities*, 2.1 (2013), 72–98, 76. In 1992 de Jager published a text that looked at modern and contemporary work by black artists from the collection. See: University of Fort Hare and EJ De Jager, *Images of Man: Contemporary South African Black*



Figure 35: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added by the author. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the university art schools in the Eastern Cape.

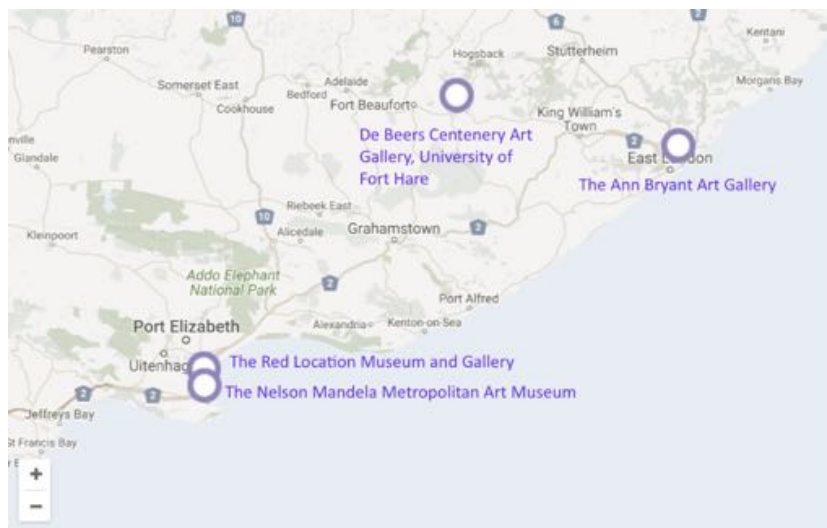


Figure 36: Art Map South Africa created by the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) with text added. Available at <http://artmap.co.za>. This particular map shows the geographical location of the art museum and major gallery collections in the Eastern Cape.

One can see, therefore, that in the Eastern Cape, the small population of white people is concentrated in town with the greatest access to universities and museums with the notable exception of the University of Fort Hare. This institution was an anomaly during the colonial and apartheid period and it seems, continues to be so despite gross underfunding.

The spatial and physical access to art historical discourse may be seen to correlate with the content of that discourse and the audience it addresses. The location of universities with art history departments and South African art museums speaks to a physical access to art historical knowledge and to art objects. Art departments at tertiary institutions provide specialised knowledge that allows for an understanding of art practices and the general ability to read images while museums provide physical access to curated art objects. If one is to continue the use of Louis Althusser's notion of ideological state apparatuses as being exercised through institutional practices, then it is possible to understand the knowledge production within universities and the physical access to art as connected. If we speak about 'access to art' that access is determined by multiple points: physical access in the form of proximity to educational institutions, the learned ability to understand a particular discourse, physical access to artworks (particularly those deemed to have social and cultural importance) and the ability to read those works through the lens of specialised knowledge. As we have seen in the previous chapters, physical access to art and knowledge production is tied to larger structural apparatuses that are in turn governed by power relations.

The impact of the historical and political division laid out in Chapter 1 is manifest in the ability of subjects to physically access the institutional structures of art and art history (illustrated through Figure 22 to Figure 36) while the power imbalances within the discipline of art history discussed in Chapter 2 impact the content of and access to the discourse. In order to access particular kinds of discursive structures that frame the manner in which artworks can be read one needs to have an understanding of specialist knowledge, in this case the knowledge is referred to as 'art history'. However, that discursive access is underpinned by a physical access to institutions and if, as we can see in the maps illustrated above, this access is curtailed by the spaces orchestrated by apartheid legislation to create a white, urban centre and a black, rural periphery then this physical access takes the form of structural violence. An awareness of the lack spatial location of art institutions is felt by members of the art community and it is this awareness that provided the catalyst for initiatives like *Maboneng*. The 2012 launch of *Art Week Cape Town* held between the 24th of November and

4th of December showcased ‘art’ at various venues within the city bowl as well as in Gugulethu so that the location of art was moved outside of its usual position close to the Cape Town CBD. During the week participants were invited to attend gallery openings in Cape Town, view artists studios, attend performances as part of GIPCA’s (Gordon Institute for performing and creative arts) Live Art Festival and view performance and art in domestic spaces in the township of Gugulethu in an area with a dominant black population outside of the city centre. The Gugulethu section of Art Week was facilitated by *Maboneng: Township Arts Experience* an organisation that hosts events in areas previously excluded from the exhibition of art such as Alexandra township, Newcastle and Gugulethu. *Maboneng* was founded by Siphiwe Ngwenya, an artist who “...realized that there was a perception of art as being an outsider like a giant living in the hills” in township areas⁵³¹. *Maboneng*’s activities continue into the present day and focus on training people to create galleries in their homes in communities located far from the primary art museums and universities. Since these institutions tend to exist in CBDs as a result of apartheid spatial planning, *Maboneng*, provides an opportunity to shift the inaccessibility of art and its association with a privileged, white centre. If we liken the lack of historical African art taught in the curriculum at HWUs that are located (as explained in Chapter 4) in areas with a greater concentration of the white population then we can perceive access to African art as denied both spatially and discursively.

⁵³¹ Siphiwe Ngwenya, ‘Maboneng’ <<http://www.maboneng.com>> [accessed 8 September 2013].

Chapter 6: Museums and Galleries: African art on display in South Africa

“The idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes. The idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. The museum and the library are heterotopias that are proper to Western culture in the nineteenth century”⁵³².

A museum is characterised as a container for preserving and deciphering the material products of humanity and it may be seen to follow that the art museum is the institution perceived to hold the most culturally valued amongst those products. Evidence of the global importance placed on museums that display art can be seen in the annual report created by the *Themed Entertainment Association* that lists the Louvre in Paris as having the highest visitor numbers with the National Museum in Beijing coming second despite China’s large population⁵³³. This report also sees museums as key creators of economic revenue for their host countries and regions. Both these institutions display a collection of historical artworks predominantly from their geographical locations and are perceived to be major tourist attractions in the area. The Louvre, in particular, has an iconic status as an institution that houses some of the world’s most valuable art and its curatorial departments follow a narrative largely in line with the Western art historical canon: European painting, drawing, prints and

⁵³² Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 26.

⁵³³ TEA/AECOM 2015 *Theme Index and Museum Index: The Global Attractions Attendance Report*, 2016.

sculpture, “Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities”, “Decorative Arts” and the geographical inclusion of what is referred to as “Egypt Antiquities”, “Near Eastern Antiquities” and “Islamic Art”⁵³⁴. A revolving exhibition in the *Pavillon des Sessions* shows other ‘non-European’ art and displays work from the collection of the new *Musée du quai Branly*. Apart from this revolving exhibition the Louvre shows African art only in the form of ancient Egyptian art which, as has been discussed above, has historically been claimed as a cultural precedent to Europe rather than belonging to Africa⁵³⁵. The function and meaning of the Western concept of the ‘museum’ has shifted over time from the ancient Greek ‘mouseion’ or ‘seat of the muses’ to the seventeenth century reference to a collection of curiosities and finally to the contemporary public building that is perceived to be the foundation of any great modern nation. The art museum may be perceived as a visual and spatial text: an institutional space where curated objects can be viewed and particular kinds of knowledge about humanity can be disseminated. When visiting an art museum a host of visual clues, that often make the experience appear somewhat theatrical, present themselves to the patron. The environment in which the museum is situated, the architecture of the building, the interior design, the lighting, the quantity and spatial arrangement of the artworks – all these provide a framework for how the art objects are intended to be read. In this sense, the museum can be perceived as another of Louis Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses, as outlined in Chapter 2, which structures a particular kind of institutional power through the repetition of curatorial strategies⁵³⁶. As an ideological apparatus, the museum provides a rather useful example to discuss the correlation between discourse, power and knowledge so famously discussed by Michael Foucault. The art museum can be perceived as the physical manifestation of discourses on culture and therefore has a particular kind of institutional power. Tony Bennett describes the formation of the public museum or art museum as being linked to other broader cultural developments in the West, which allowed nations to begin to see culture “as useful for governing ... as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power” that created the opportunity where “the working classes ... might be exposed to the improving influence of the middle classes”⁵³⁷. This line of thinking allows us to see the art museum as an important means for the dissemination and display of knowledge but also as a means to endorse particular kinds of art and culture. The particular ways in which museums display art are

⁵³⁴ For descriptions of the museum’s collections see: Louvre Art Museum, ‘Louvre: Curatorial Departments’ <<http://www.louvre.fr/en/departements>> [accessed 5 November 2016].

⁵³⁵ The perception of Egypt as belonging to Europe is emphasised by Hegel. See: *Hegel, The philosophy of history*.

⁵³⁶ Althusser, *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*.

⁵³⁷ Tony Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 19 and 29.

tools through which they are able to create perceived value for some objects and to undermine the value of others. As such a study of the art museums in South Africa appears to be important in understanding the nature of art historical discourse in this particular context. Since the world's most popular art museums are still housed in Western Europe and very few art museums exist in Africa, the power dynamic in disseminating knowledge through the museum is far from egalitarian⁵³⁸. The display of African art in the Western and in Westernised contexts has a fraught history and can be seen as undeniably tied to the continuing devaluation of African art on the global market⁵³⁹. What follows is a discussion of the way in which historical African art is displayed in prominent museums around the world and a particular case study of South African art museums and their display of African art.

In continuing the discussion from Chapter 2 of how an understanding of cultures as having greater or lesser degrees of 'civilisation' has impacted the discourse of art history, we can now turn to how this perception has impacted the art museum. Throughout the period of modernity the African continent, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, has systematically been denied 'civilisation' within Western scholarship despite evidence to the contrary. As such, the understanding that Africa was without a credible history or civilisation is deeply entrenched within academic and popular writing from Western Europe and therefore global discourse that attempts to mirror the West. Furthermore, it is this writing that has most systematically been used to construct educational frameworks throughout the globe and which can be seen to underpin the global structure of the art museum. For Stocking the assumption that civilisation (as defined by European scholars) was the measure of humanity came about after 1860 when the systematic study of the world's people (what became anthropology) was integrated with the study of civilisations⁵⁴⁰.

So entrenched was the assumption that African people lacked a history of civilisations that when European colonisers 'discovered' evidence to the contrary commentators went to extreme lengths to find alternative explanations for the material⁵⁴¹. The Benin Empire, for

⁵³⁸ The *TEA/AECOM 2015 Theme Index and Museum Index* indicates that 14 of the top 20 most visited museums worldwide are in Western Europe or North America while the remainder are in China, Taiwan or Russia. The report divides the globe into the three geographical areas of The Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA). There are no museums on the African continent listed in the list of top 20 EMEA museums by visitor numbers.

⁵³⁹ Sylvester Ogbechie has written about the true state of African art on the global art market in a variety of publications. See: Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, 'Who Owns Africa's Cultural Patrimony?', *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, 4.2 (2014), 2-3.

⁵⁴⁰ George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (Ontario: The Free Press, 1991), 142.

⁵⁴¹ I have placed 'discovered' in inverted commas here to indicate the false perception that Europeans had not had contact

example, was a grand kingdom that existed in its historical sense between the twelfth and nineteenth century and produced a great number of bronze sculptures. These works fascinated the British, colonial administration but were also (along with the structured nature of the society at Benin in general) at odds with the anthropological and colonial perspective that required ‘savage, African society’ to remain the dialectical opposite of ‘European refinement’.

In her analysis of the way in which ‘Africa’ became an ideological construct in the Western imaginary, Annie Coombes explains the use of descriptions such as ‘decay’ and ‘degradation’ as terms used to account for the gap between the sophistication present in Benin and the dominant image of primitive Africa. For Coombes these descriptions were a “convenient means of undermining the all too substantial evidence ... of an ancient and thriving society in Africa, which displayed all those signs associated with European definitions of civilisation”⁵⁴². For many other authors the description of Africa as lacking civilisation takes on a more intentional and malicious valence as a strategy for colonisation. Jonathan Hart describes the legal understanding of ‘terra nullius’ (land belonging to no person) and its use by colonial powers over centuries to describe Africa⁵⁴³. Here the discourse of the African continent as empty sanctioned the taking of land by colonial powers. In a reversal of descriptions of Africa as ‘the dark continent’ without civilisation, Walter Rodney describes the deliberate destruction of many African cities in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972). Rodney and others such as Cheikh Anta Diop point to a distortion of African history by colonial powers in an effort to create the perception of an uninhabited territory that would allow for state sanctioned colonisation⁵⁴⁴. This is thought (not uncontroversially) to have extended to the deliberate killing of African intellectuals and elites in order to destroy signs of civilisation and to aid in descriptions of African people as ‘primitive’⁵⁴⁵.

The remains of the historical Benin Empire in west Africa and the artefacts that were taken

with Africans until modern colonisation. Extensive evidence of trade and interaction between Europe and Africa has existed for thousands of years. For further references see *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought*, ed. by Abiola Irele and Biodun Jeyifo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 365. See also: Charles Gesheker, ‘Somali Maritime History and Regional Sub-Cultures: A Neglected Theme of the Somali Crisis’ (Fremantle: Australian Association for Maritime History, 1993).

⁵⁴² Annie E Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 11.

⁵⁴³ Jonathan Hart, *Empires and Colonies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

⁵⁴⁴ See: Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Washington, DC: Howard* (Washington, D.C: Howard, 1972). Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1989).

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid.

from it provide an example of the disparity between hegemonic discourse and physical reality. As a result of such an incomprehensible gap between the Africa of the Western imagination (as created by the discourse of the civilized versus the primitive) and the Africa of reality, commentators sought to find alternative explanations for the existence of the Benin bronzes and turned to theories such as an ancient connection to Europe or a migration of people from Egypt⁵⁴⁶. Egyptian civilisation has long been alleged to be an anomaly on the Africa continent and its relative proximity to Europe led early anthropologists and art historians to erroneously assume that its culture belonged to a different category entirely – one belonging culturally to Europe⁵⁴⁷.

The perceived lack of history (in the Enlightenment sense of a history of civilisation) in Africa became more extreme the further south one went, that is the further one went, geographically, from Europe. The discovery of the ruin of Great Zimbabwe, for example, again confounded colonial explorers who could not understand the existence of gold objects from southern Africa⁵⁴⁸. The search for the ‘African primitive’ prevented these early twentieth century groups of European archaeologists and anthropologists from reaching the (accurate) conclusion that southern African people had mined gold within the kingdom and had established extensive trade routes to north eastern Africa and China⁵⁴⁹. In 1871 the German geologist, Carl Mauch, came across the ruins of Great Zimbabwe and concluded that European outsiders must have built the city because it was clear that “a civilized nation must once have lived here”⁵⁵⁰. Civilization and African society could not, in Mauch’s mind, exist in the same space.

Similarly, the existence of Islam along the east African coast and the physical remains of many ancient cities is still assumed to point entirely to the Arab origins of these civilisations. Guidebooks to east Africa continue to describe historical sites of any significance as being

⁵⁴⁶ Coombes, *Reinventing Africa*, 23. The existence of a sophisticated culture in ancient Egypt and the undeniable physical evidence of the pyramids has been explained by its proximity to Europe and the assumption that lighter skinned people must have occupied the area. In “The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality” (1989), Cheikh Anta Diop seeks to debunk the myth of ancient Egyptians as white (or light skinned) people and returns the notion of civilisation to Africa and black African people. It must also be noted that even without speaking about skin colour the discipline of art history has historically claimed Egypt as part of Western art history’s narrative.

⁵⁴⁷ See: Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 91-99.

⁵⁴⁸ See: Joost Fontein, ‘Silence, Destruction and Closure at Great Zimbabwe: Local Narratives of Desecration and Alienation’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32.4 (2006), 771–794.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Gus Casely-Hayford, *The Lost Kingdoms of Africa* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2012), 126.

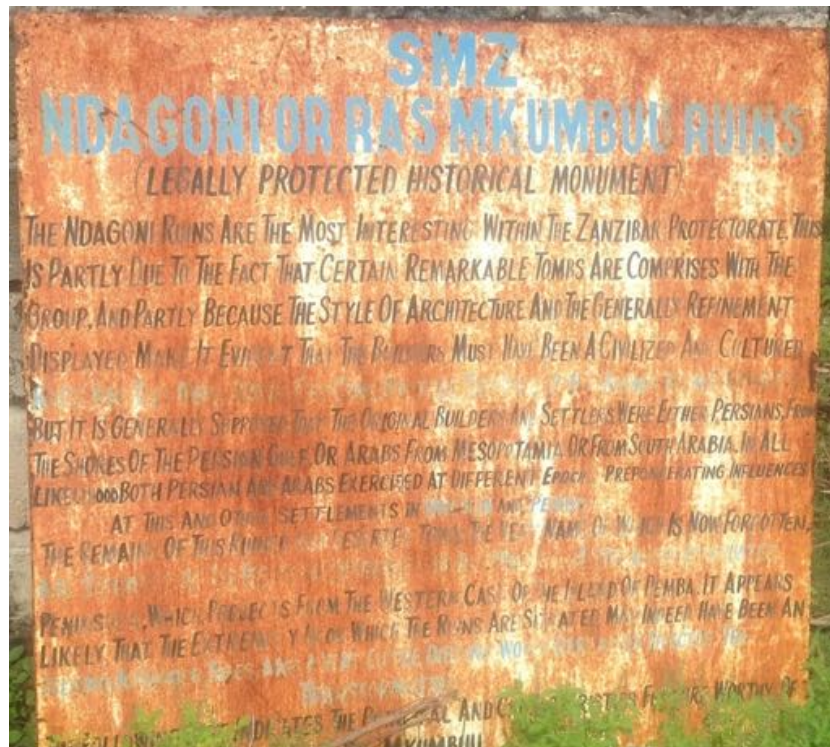


Figure 37: Sign at the Qanbulu ruins in the village of Ndagoni, Pemba. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, June 2015).

Arab in origin⁵⁵¹.

At the village of Ndagoni, on Pemba Island off the Tanzanian coast, one finds the ruins of the ancient settlement believed to be Qanbulu (this name is also thought to refer to the entire island now known as Pemba) (see: Figure 38 and Figure 39). The site was occupied from the eighth century CE until it was apparently abandoned in the sixteenth century⁵⁵². Tenth century travellers record the settlement as an established centre for trade in the region⁵⁵³. Many historians researching the area quote the tenth century traveller known as Al-Mus'udi who travelled from Oman to the place he called Qanbulu (Pemba)⁵⁵⁴. Al-Mus'udi describes Qanbulu as being part of the kingdom of the Zanj people (an earlier name used to refer to

⁵⁵¹ The Globetrotter travel guide to Zanzibar and Pemba states, for example, that Qanbulu is a “Islamic settlement”. Graham Mercer, ‘Globetrotter Travel Guide: Zanzibar’ (London: New Holland, 2013), 90.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ John Donnelly Fage and Roland Oliver, *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 190.

⁵⁵⁴ See: Fage (1975), Reid and Lane (2014), Fage and Oliver (1970), Loimeier (2013).



Figure 38: Grave site at the Qanbulu ruins, Ndagoni, Pemba. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, June 2015).

Swahili people) with a mixed population of Muslims and “Zanj idolotors”⁵⁵⁵. The people he encounters are said to be governed by a royal family, speak the Zanj language and reside in a walled city heavily involved in trade⁵⁵⁶. The existence of a Muslim population is taken as evidence that the people who created the city and occupied it were foreigners (rather than Africans or a people of mixed ancestry) who may have ruled over an African underclass. This is emphasised by the information given to visitors to the site. A large sign (Figure 37) describes the ruins as follows:

“The Ndagoni ruins are the most interesting within the Zanzibar protectorate. This is partly due to the fact that certain remarkable tombs are comprises with the group, and partly because the style of architecture and the generally refinement displayed make it evident that the builders must have been a civilized and

⁵⁵⁵ Adria LaViolette, "Swahili Archaeology and History of Pemba, Tanzania: A Critique and Case Study of the Use of Written and Oral Sources in Achaeology", in *African Historical Archaeologies*, ed. by Paul J. Lane Andrew M. Reid (New York: Springer, 2014), 135.

⁵⁵⁶ Fage and Oliver, *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 3*, 192.



Figure 39: Qanbulu ruins at the village of Ndagoni, Pemba. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, June 2015).

cultured... [text illegible]...but it is generally supposed that the original builders and settlers were either Persians from the shores of the Persian Gulf or Arabs from Mesopotamia or from South Arabia...”.

The assumption that the impressive architecture evident in the ruins must be a result of a foreign settler culture springs from the perception that to reconcile ‘civilized and cultured’ with an African community is an ideological impossibility: one that has also affected the contemporary population’s view of themselves. Yet, we are told that the people who occupied this place spoke the Zanj language common on the east African coast and that while some people practiced Islam others were ‘Zanj idolaters’ (Al-Mus’udi), which would suggest they practiced traditional African religions⁵⁵⁷. Sigfried J. de Laet goes to some length to debunk the myth that the founders of east African settlements were Arabs or Persians. Using a tracing of the system of inheritance he asserts that rulers in the twelfth century were African, Swahili people whose language and culture had developed over the past five centuries in response to contact with Arabic people and others⁵⁵⁸. Writing in 1978, Randall Pouwels confirms the

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Sigfried J. de Laet, *History of Humanity: From the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century* (Routledge; UNESCO, 1994), 1274-1275.

historically entrenched notion that Arab and Persian people were responsible for the cultural and religious character of east African settlements and notes that within these narratives African people are viewed as a subdued race who did not contribute to the civilisation existing in their own lands. Pouwels debunks such a myth by pointing to the following: the powerful nature of African religions and their contribution to the specific character of east African Islam; the fact that migrations of Arab and Persian people to east Africa resulted primarily in a transfer of ideas rather than people and that when immigrants did settle they did so in existing cities only with the consent of the local population⁵⁵⁹. While Pouwel and de Laet's research may prove the African origin of the ruins on Pemba such knowledge has clearly not been disseminated to the authors of travel guides, the institutions protecting historical sites or the people who may claim this history as part of their own ancestry (including the man who has acted as a guide to the ruins for the past 30 years). While this site is not a museum it functions as an underfunded version of one and so provides an example of the way in which discourses about culture and civilisations disseminate through ideological apparatuses and may, therefore, perpetuate a colonial view of Africa even within the continent itself.

A Western perception of Africa as lacking civilisation has entered the arena of museum curating through the manner in which objects are displayed. In Chapter 2, I discussed the value system that structures Western art historical discourse where individual authorship; a lack of perceived function; a removal from everyday life; a denial of existence in the capitalist market system and a focus on originality is perceived to confer the status of 'art' onto an object. This can be contrasted with the designation of the term 'artefact' where the object is typically ascribed to a culture at large rather than an individual; perceived to be functional; perceived to be intimately connected to various aspects of social life; perceived as having the potential to be included in the market system and as being one of many similar objects rather than an original or 'one of a kind'. The discussion on the appellation of 'art' or 'artefact' for particular objects is well known and various authors have written about it in detail – specifically as it pertains to the inclusion of objects in either the art museum or the ethnographic museum, which at times has overlapped with the natural history museum⁵⁶⁰.

⁵⁵⁹ Randall L Pouwels, 'The Medieval Foundations of East African Islam', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 11.2 (1978), 201-203.

⁵⁶⁰ See: Inge E. Boer, *Uncertain Territories: Boundaries in Cultural Analysis* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006). See also: Kate Sturge, *Representing Others: Translation, Ethnography and Museum* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

The discussion is, at its base, one of cultural collision that appears to be problematic since it seems to require a discussion of essence and authenticity. For example, James Clifford's well known text *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* analyses the West's relationship to other cultures and attempts to debunk the notion of lost cultural authenticity in the face of modernity⁵⁶¹. The general debate is one of discursive boundaries and the way in which labels and curatorial strategies perpetuate an imbalance of power and a language prone to oppositions: art versus artefact, tradition versus modernity, culture versus nature. This ongoing discussion is important not only because it highlights difference but also because it highlights the result of multiple cultural systems for understanding art being subsumed into one. Here, then, is a nuanced distinction between reducing cultural difference to fictions of authenticity (which Clifford argues against) and distinguishing cultural difference in order to reify cultures that have been epistemologically undervalued. In order to 'decolonise' a discipline such as art history cultural difference does first need to be named.

Let us look briefly at the Western system for the display of objects by noting the difference in display between the ethnographic/natural history museum that shows objects referred as artefacts and the art history museum that shows objects called 'art'. One of the most famous examples of the 'crisis of category' manifest in the space of the museum is the controversy surrounding the exhibition of African art in that most famous of art museums: the *Louvre* in Paris. Sally Price discusses the creation of a separate museum in Paris for the art of Africa, the Near East, Asia, Oceania and the Americas called the *Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac* that arose after Jacques Chirac and Jacques Kerchache demanded that African art be shown at the *Louvre*⁵⁶². African art, principally derived from colonial conquests, was initially shown in Paris in the Louvre (in the *Musée Dauphin*) as ethnographic collections in the early nineteenth century before being moved to the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro* that was created in 1878⁵⁶³. The *Trocadéro* birthed the *Musée de l'Homme* in the style of a natural history museum and eventually a museum showing African art as art: the *Musée national des*

⁵⁶¹ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁵⁶² Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2007). Jacques Kerchache wrote a manifesto in which he asked for "the masterpieces of the whole world to be born free and equal".

⁵⁶³ See: <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/collections/all-collections/history-of-the-collections/>

Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie (MAAO or *National Museum of the Arts of Africa and Oceania*). The collections from both of these museums – one defined as ethnography and one as art – were combined to create the *Musée du quai Branly* which opened in 2006. While the *Musée du quai Branly* is a noble effort to create a place for non-European art in the Western imaginary it has garnered critique because it is still founded on the basis of difference and may in fact be perceived as another ethnographic museum rather a space for art.

If one compares the strategy for display at the *Louvre* with the one at the *Musée du quai Branly* there are visible differences. To begin with the *Louvre* museum is housed in the grand *Louvre Palace*, which traditionally housed the French Kings and has displayed the royal collection of ancient Greek and Roman sculpture since the building was occupied by the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1692. Visually the *Louvre* is undeniably a signifier of grandeur with its large central courtyard preceded by formal gardens that lead to the iconic glass pyramid (completed in 1989) and surrounded by historical buildings in a U-shape. The *Musée du quai Branly*, situated behind the iconic Eiffel Tower, is housed in a building which was completed 2006 by French architect Jean Nouvel who is known for designs that push architectural limits. The building speaks of contemporary technological innovation and the fashion for urban green space, with its garden that grows up the museum walls, its colourful boxes that protrude beyond the external façade and its large curved glass wall that shields the museum and garden from traffic. According to one critic; “the museum evokes an abandoned city, sprinkled with French modernist landmarks ... an informal warehouse packed with unexpected treasures”⁵⁶⁴. When one turns to the internal display the differences continue. The *Louvre* has artwork displayed in rooms dedicated to particular sections of the collection and largely divided by geography and time period (such as ‘French painting 1350 – 1850). Each room is well-lit with both artificial and natural light, has high ceilings and displays artworks fairly sparsely on the walls or on plinths. The *Musée du quai Branly*, on the other hand has a convoluted display as a result of the non-linear shape of the building so that the overall feeling is of being underground in a maze of pathways and caves. The exhibitions are divided into Asia, Oceania, the Americas and Africa and within the Africa exhibition the arrangement is geographical, moving from north Africa to west Africa to southern Africa and back up to east Africa (see Figure 40).

⁵⁶⁴ Nicolai Ouroussoff, "For a New Paris Museum, Jean Nouvel Creates His Own Rules", *New York Times* <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/27/arts/design/27bran.html>> [accessed 12 December 2016].

The map seen in Figure 40 shows a clear concentration of art in west and central Africa in line with Western perceptions of the art made in that region as most valuable. Within each geographical region the displays are typically arranged by country although at times by theme as can be seen in Figure 41 which shows an arrangement of fertility figures (described as ‘dolls’ at the museum) from a variety of African countries. The arrangement of work in the *Musée du quai Branly* is typically within glass cases and most often as multiple works per case. In an apparent effort to show as many works from the collection as possible, the works are rather densely packed into the museum space. If we compare the labelling system used by the *Musée du quai Branly* to that used by the *Louvre* through the examples of the early twentieth century *Baoule mask* (Figure 43) and Leonardo da Vinci’s sixteenth century painting commonly known as the *Mona Lisa* (Figure 44) we see a number of differences. The artworks are both identified by numbers with the *Baoule mask*’s number allowing the visitor to locate it in the class display cabinet and the *Mona Lisa*’s number used to refer the visitor to an audio guide. The information given about the *Mona Lisa* tells us the artist’s name, the artist’s date and place of birth, the title, the medium (wood – paint seems to be implied), the date it was created and the date it was acquired by its first collector (Francois the 1st). The information given about the *Baoule mask* tells us the mask is of a particular kind (a Gou mask), the group of people who created the work, the country of origin, the approximate time period of creation (early twentieth century), the medium (wood and pigments) and the collector (M. Prouteau). These differences in the overall design of the two museums, the way in which artworks are displayed within them and the system used for labels betrays the legacy of the historical division in Western discourse between the art museum and the ethnographic museum. The art museum displays objects as isolated works attributed to singular creators so that the notion of individuality is highlighted, while the ethnographic museum displays objects as multiples attributed to groups of people so that the cultural characteristics of the object are highlighted.



Figure 41: The display case for “fertility dolls” at the *Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac*. The display shows a large number of these figures with the following description (translated from French): “The fertility dolls are carried by the future mothers to promote the pregnancy and to protect the child to come”.

(Photograph: Danielle Becker, December 2015).



Figure 42: The display at the *Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac* in Paris showing a “Masque Gou, Population Baoule, Cote d’Ivoire” (as worded in the exhibition label), early twentieth century, from the collection of M. Prouteau. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, December 2015).

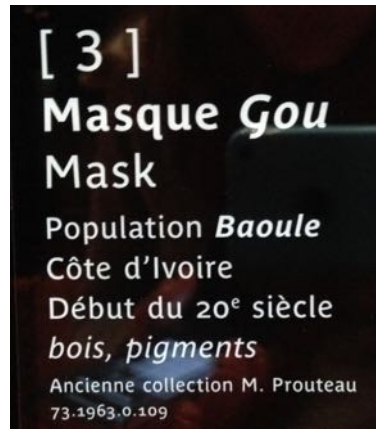


Figure 43: The label for the *Baoule mask* at the *Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac*. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, December 2015).



Figure 44: The label for Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in the *Louvre*, Paris.

To a large extent the differences between the *Louvre* and the *Musée du quai Branly* emphasise the Western ideological system for understanding objects and for defining objects as artworks or artefacts. In other words difference when transcribed within a dominant ideology results in a certain set of objects (non-European/ non-Western art) being perceived as less valuable than another (European/Western art). An alternative way to perceive the display of difference that occurs in the space of the museum would be to see it as allowing alternative ideological systems for understanding objects to be highlighted through different display tactics. If one considers that both these display strategies occur in the geographical space of Europe and that one museum (the *Louvre*) shows art predominantly from one continent while the other museum shows work from the rest of the globe (Africa, the Near East, Asia, Oceania and the Americas), it seems impossible that these multiple systems for understanding objects could possibly be seen on equal terms. The narrative is, however, not

quite so definitive as the *Musée du quai Branly* displays non-European art with great respect and in a manner that defines the work on display as masterpieces.

The difference in museum space and display strategies for Western or African art exists in many other global economic centres and often with a great awareness of the way in which their strategies replicate or complicate historical conventions that separated art from artefact. In Washington D.C, as part of the large museum complex that exists on the national mall in the United States of America's capital city there is the *National Gallery of Art* which houses a collection of European and American art. "American art" is the term used on the institution's official website⁵⁶⁵. As the collection demonstrates this is taken to mean art made in keeping with the European tradition, made by predominantly white Americans in a settler colonial context. If nothing else such a distinction illustrates the way that 'art' continues to be a term used selectively in a complex dynamic of power relations. The *National Gallery* collection is displayed in a large and intimidating neo-classical building that clearly uses architecture to confer a sense of grandeur and value on the works it houses (see Figure 45). In displays rather similar to those found in the *Louvre* the *National Gallery* also spaces work rather sparsely so as to highlight each object as a masterpiece by an individual genius. A few minutes walk away on the national mall we find *the National Museum of African Art*, which shows a large collection of work in a far more understated building. The galleries of African art are below the level of the street and as such one has to walk down a flight of stairs to reach each display room. While the *National Gallery* makes use of high ceilings and a large amount of natural lighting the *Museum of African Art* has no natural light and artworks are dramatically highlighted by spot lighting (see Figure 45 and Figure 46). The Western art in the *National Gallery* is also divided by time period while the African art in the museum is shown with a variety of pieces from vastly different time periods within the same room. In a manner rather similar to the *Louvre* and the *Quai Branly* the effect of the comparison, while certainly displaying the African art as masterpieces, can still be said to emphasise difference; to depict African art as somehow part of a dark past and to exasperate an existing perception of African art as timeless.

One might argue that an alternative strategy that does not emphasise the existing power imbalance in global cultural value would be difficult to find. On the other hand, perhaps a

⁵⁶⁵ 'National Gallery of Art: About Us' <<http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/about.html>> [accessed 11 August 2016].



Figure 45: An example of the display in the foyer at the *National Museum of Art* in Washington D.C, United States of America. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, February 2016).

difference in display strategies is appropriate in emphasising the different philosophical systems for understanding art.

Considering the way in which international museums in prominent economic and cultural centres display African art in relation to Western art lays the groundwork for how historical African art is displayed in the South African context. In order to access this state of affairs one first needs to find some way of defining what ‘African art’ might be in South Africa and if it is indeed something different to South African art in general. Here we enter an existing mine field of terminology that attempts to signal difference and, as discussed in Chapter 3, a historical tendency in art writing to reluctantly bestow the term ‘art’ onto objects made by black South Africans without qualifiers such as ‘traditional’, ‘township’, ‘transitional’ or ‘black’. Considering this discursive history in South Africa and the manner in which it echoes a global devaluing of African art any attempt to discuss the way in which art, made in an ideological system different to that of the West, is displayed is in danger of replicating this history. Yet, to subsume all art into the same category is also to allow hegemonic practices to continue and to ignore existing problems in a manner akin to declaring a ‘colour-blind’ rainbow nation before inequality has been dealt with. Suffice it to say for my purposes here I will use the term ‘historical South African art’ to refer to art made prior to the early twentieth



Figure 46: An example of the display at the *National Museum of African Art* in Washington D.C, United States of America. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, February 2016).

century in a manner which shows the influence of indigenous and historical southern African social, philosophical and religious traditions for the making of artworks.

A lack of knowledge about historical African civilisations outside of specialised academic circles undermines many nations' views of their own history and contributes to the perception of Africa as a continent of low cultural worth. This can also be said to be relevant in a South African context where knowledge about historical South African art and cultural history prior to the twentieth century and its link to the present is scant and inaccessible. As a reflection of the global situation on a local scale the lack of knowledge about the African continent's art and culture is evident in South African museums.

The medieval city of Thulamela in the north of South Africa provides a local example akin to perceptions of Great Zimbabwe and Qanbulu. The site exists in what is now the Kruger National Park and was revealed fairly recently when stonewalls were 'discovered' (by outsiders) in 1983⁵⁶⁶ and gold beads in 1990 which led to the excavation of two graves

⁵⁶⁶ Tshimangadzo Israel Nemheni, "The Reburial of Human Remains at Thulamela", in *The Dead and Their Possessions: Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice*, ed. by Paul Turnbull Cressida Fforde, Jane Hubert (London; New York: Routledge), 256.

containing a great number of gold items⁵⁶⁷. Since then it has become known that Thulamela (which in Venda means ‘place of giving birth’) was a city occupied between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries that hosted a people who engaged in metal smelting (iron, copper and gold), traded through the east African coast and obtained goods from a far afield as China⁵⁶⁸. The city is also thought to have been related to Great Zimbabwe, as there are similarities in the structure of buildings and evidence of trade relations⁵⁶⁹. The site can be seen when one visits the Kruger Park and one can learn more about its existence at the small Steven-Hamilton museum at Skukuza camp whose current display aims to take visitors through the history of the region (now part of the Kruger National Park) from the thirteenth century until the present day. The creation of the Kruger National Park is itself contentious since the people living there were forcibly removed in order to make way for animal conservation in the nineteen fifties and sixties.

The museum displays various objects found at Thulamela, explains the existence of mining in the area and describes the history of the conservation park in more recent times including the removal of the local population and the present concern with poachers. What appears to be missing, however, is an explicit connection made between the contemporary population and the prosperous medieval city or the objects displayed and their religious or artistic value. Many school groups are brought to the museum yet the extent to which Thulamela is depicted as an ancestral home worthy of great cultural pride for the contemporary population is limited. The objects found are also classified as archaeological artefacts rather than artworks. This can be seen in the placement of objects as multiples within glass cases, the labelling that describes the objects as examples of general cultural traits and the broader context of the museum (Figure 47 and Figure 48). An image described as the “layout of a typical traditional village” from which people were evicted in the nineteen fifties and sixties (Figure 49) shows a haunting similarity to the layout of historical Thulamela itself (Figure 50) but this is not emphasised as evidence of the continuing evolution of Thulamela culture in the area. The small museum that shows the history of the area, now part of the Kruger National Park, appears not to display the historical objects from Thulamela as ‘art’

⁵⁶⁷ Maryna Steyn and others, ‘Late Iron Age Gold Burials from Thulamela (Pafuri Region, Kruger National Park)’, *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, 53.168 (1998), 73.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.



Figure 47: Thulamela display case at the Kruger National Park including Chinese Ming Dynasty porcelain fragment and glass trade beads. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, June 2015).



Figure 48: Thulamela display case at the Kruger National Park museum showing gold body jewellery found in royal graves. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, June 2015).

but rather as artefacts relevant to the field of archaeology. One might imagine how a different strategy for display could change the perception of these works.

The medieval and early modern site of Thulamela (thirteenth– seventeenth century) can also be connected to the more widely known site of Mapungubwe which is situated some 300 kilometers away in the Limpopo province of South Africa at the meeting point of the border shared with Botswana and Zimbabwe. It is believed to have been occupied from the early thirteenth century⁵⁷⁰ while its geographical predecessor, a site called ‘K2’ which can be found two kilometers away, was occupied from CE 1 000⁵⁷¹. The people who occupied the kingdom of Mapungubwe were believed to have moved some 400 kilometers north to found Great Zimbabwe and gained wealth from a thriving trade in gold and ivory along the east African coast and further east as far as China⁵⁷². The discovery of a multitude of gold objects (see Figure 52) at the Mapungubwe site has increased the fame of the area and its status as a medieval kingdom housing the oldest indigenous gold objects has meant that it is now a UNESCO (The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) World Heritage Site and a South African ‘national treasure’⁵⁷³.

Despite the incredible cultural and historical value bestowed upon the many objects found at Mapungubwe the works still straddle the grey area between archaeological artefacts and art and are housed in a rather small museum. The Department of Arts at the University of Pretoria which curated the museum collection at the University of Pretoria, is responsible for the management of the university’s art collections yet the objects are referred to as the Mapungubwe archaeological collection (see the museum’s display in Figure 51)⁵⁷⁴. The majority of academic papers related to Mapungubwe can also be found within journals serving the field of Archaeology. An important article by Alexander Duffey titled, *Mapungubwe: Interpretation of the Gold Content of the Original Gold Burial M1, A620* was published in 2012 in the *Journal of African Archaeology* and discusses the possibility that the

⁵⁷⁰ Alexander E Duffey, ‘Mapungubwe: Interpretation of the Gold Content of the Original Gold Burial M1, A620’, *Journal of African Archaeology*, 10.2 (2012), 5.

⁵⁷¹ Stephan Woodbourne, Marc Pienaar and Sian Tiley-Nel, ‘Dating the Mapungubwe Hill Gold’, *Journal of African Archaeology*, 7.1 (2009), 100.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 2. Woodbourne et al cite the South African Government Gazette of 1997 that declared it a national treasure and an important record of cultural heritage.

⁵⁷⁴ See: University of Pretoria, ‘Mapungubwe Archaeological Collection’ <<http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/21577>> [accessed 5 October 2016].



Figure 49: Photograph displayed in the Kruger National Park museum showing the 'layout of a typical traditional village' from which people were evicted in the nineteen fifties. (Photograph of display: Danielle Becker, June 2015).



Figure 50: Image of the Thulamela site from above at the Kruger National Park museum. (photograph of display: Danielle Becker, June 2015).

gold animal figures found at Mapungubwe were part of an unusually large, gold divining bowl that would make them a historical precursor to the divining bowls still used by the BaVenda people of contemporary South Africa (see Figure 63)⁵⁷⁵. While the paper was published in a journal of Archaeology a version of it was also delivered at the SAVAH conference in 2015, which confirms at least the author's view that these objects can be viewed as 'art'. Duffey convincingly argues that the complex process of divination as practiced by the BaVenda people and many other African cultural groups points to a link between the thirteenth century Mapungubwe divination bowl (if that is indeed what the various gold objects were part of), the divination practice of the ancient Shona people and therefore with the culture that existed at Great Zimbabwe⁵⁷⁶. Mapungubwe is still viewed as a sacred site and the excavation of objects from its graves upset many of the contemporary people who live near it. The argument that the gold objects found there were part of a sacred divination bowl further emphasise the site and the object's importance and cultural power. Like the many sacred and religious objects found within the category of European art these works would seem to have their status appropriately elevated through their categorisation as art rather than only artefacts. A recent exhibition at the British Museum in London titled, *South Africa: Art of a Nation* puts together 100 000 years of South African art with historical works such as the Makapansgat pebble (3 million years old), San rock painting from 7000 BCE, the Mapungubwe Rhinoceros (CE 1250 -1290), an early nineteenth century clay sculpture of an Ox creating the historical precedent for twentieth century paintings by Gerard Sekoto and contemporary works by Mary Sibande (see Figure 67 to Figure 70)⁵⁷⁷. This exhibition does what has been lacking in South African museums, which is to connect ancient and historical South African art with contemporary work so as to create a South African art historical narrative that does not simply begin with the introduction of a Western system for understanding objects. It is only a pity that such an exhibition has not occurred within South Africa. For as Ian Chambers and others note the process of reimagining the museum in the postcolonial moment is one of undoing the "self-colonisation" that has

⁵⁷⁵ Duffey, "Mapungubwe: Interpretation of the Gold Content of the Original Gold Burial M1, A620", 5.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷⁷ See: The British Museum, 'South Africa: The Art of a Nation' <https://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/south_africa.aspx> [accessed 12 December 2016].



Figure 51: Mapungubwe museum at the University of Pretoria. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, November 2015).



Figure 52: Gold Spectre on display at the Mapungubwe museum in Pretoria. The headline of the caption reads: AD 1250 – 1290, ‘Sceptre burial’, (M5 No. 10 – A619) Mapungubwe Hill (1934). Woodborne et al write in 2009 that this spectre was found in the grave of a middle-aged man whose body was found grasping the spectre. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, November 2015).

occurred in the neo-liberal capitalist space⁵⁷⁸. If the inclusion of the art of previously colonised nations in the “Western art system and market” has the potential to re-inscribe colonial hegemony then the task of repositioning the museum within the border of the ex-colony is a task of “re-historicisation”⁵⁷⁹.

In Cape Town two museums exist within a few hundred metres of each other: the *Iziko South African National Gallery* and the *Iziko South African Museum*⁵⁸⁰. The *South African Museum* opened its doors in 1825 and moved to its present location at the start of the colonial company gardens in central Cape Town in 1897. The *South African Museum* houses what it calls “specimens of scientific importance”⁵⁸¹ akin to natural history museums around the world. The *National Gallery* grew out of the *South African Museum* with a small collection begun in 1871. At the time it was housed in a temporary premises and then moved to two rooms of the museum in 1897 until the opening of the current building in 1930⁵⁸². At its inception the *National Gallery* housed a collection of exclusively European art, including plaster cast replicas, while most art by black South Africans was categorised as ‘artefacts’ and housed in the museum⁵⁸³. The gallery acquired its first works by a South African artist, by white South African artists Anton van Wouw and Neville Lewis, in 1926, but spent a large portion of the twentieth century without any work by black South Africans. In 1980 the *South African National Gallery* elected to become an institution with a “general” rather than a “white own” status and began attempts to serve the interest of a larger segment of the population⁵⁸⁴. The *National Gallery* first acquired historical African art pieces, predominantly work from west and central Africa (again replicating this focus), in the nineteen seventies with the purposeful mandate to collect African art occurring in the nineteen nineties. As its current website acknowledges; “besides a few exhibitions that included central and west African sculpture, ‘non-Western’ art was treated as ethnography and housed in the appropriate collections of the *South African Museum* across the park”⁵⁸⁵. Despite the

⁵⁷⁸ Iain Chambers and others, *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History* (Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2016), 142.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ For a longer discussion see: Andrew Crampton, ‘The Art of Nation-Building: (Re)presenting Political Transition at the South African National Gallery’, *Cultural Geographies*, 10.2 (2003), 218–42.

⁵⁸¹ See: Iziko Museums of Cape Town, ‘Iziko South African Museum’ <<http://www.iziko.org.za/museums/south-african-museum>> [accessed 1 September 2016].

⁵⁸² Hayden Proud, ‘Our National Gallery: The “Book” of Our Art?’, *Focus 61*, 2011, 39.

⁵⁸³ Crampton, ‘The Art of Nation-Building: (Re)presenting Political Transition at the South African National Gallery’, 224. A longer discussion of the plaster casts exhibited in the *National Gallery* can be found in Chapter 4.

⁵⁸⁴ Proud, ‘Our National Gallery: The “Book” of Our Art?’, 40. A ‘white own’ status implied that only the white population should use the institution.

⁵⁸⁵ Iziko Museums of Cape Town, ‘Iziko African Art’ <<http://www.iziko.org.za/static/page/african-art>> [accessed 1

efforts to transform the *South African National Gallery* since the nineteen nineties, some with great success, there remain objects, such as sculpture from Great Zimbabwe, that are housed in the *South African Museum* which would do well to be housed in an institution whose framing allows for its objects to be called ‘art’.

The *South African National Gallery* is situated in central Cape Town and falls under the umbrella of Iziko, Museums of South Africa. ‘Iziko’ means ‘hearth’ in IsiXhosa and the title seeks to emphasise the central role that such a gathering place plays in Xhosa culture. As such the *National Gallery* and *South African Museum* collectively attempt to position themselves as an institution central to the gathering of resources that celebrate South Africa’s diverse cultural heritage. When people gather around a ‘hearth/iziko’ they engage in collective dialogue and cultural activities and it appears that the *National Gallery* intends to extend such an ethos to the collection and display of South African art. The department of Arts and Culture describes it as follows:

“The hearth is traditionally and symbolically the social centre of the home; a place associated with warmth, kinship and the spirits of ancestors. Iziko was thus envisaged as a space for all South Africans to gather, nourish body and soul, and share stories and knowledge passed from one generation to the next. Iziko seeks to celebrate our heritage whilst generating new cultural legacies in all spheres for future generations and a society that has moved beyond the shackles of the past. The three ‘flames’ in our hearth logo represent the three collections brought together in our museums: Social History (ochre); Art (red); and Natural History (green)”⁵⁸⁶.

These attempts at social cohesion through the display of heritage are exemplified by the changes that have occurred in the gallery since the nineteen nineties yet the extent to which, in the contemporary moment, they adequately reflect the nation’s cultures and artistic productions is questionable. The modes of knowledge production and models used for display in the *National Gallery* reflect a pervasive bias in cultural institutions towards European understandings of the museum as ideological institution, particularly the ‘art

September 2016].

⁵⁸⁶ Department of Arts and Culture South Africa, ‘Iziko Museum’ <https://www.dac.gov.za/iziko_museum> [accessed 1 September 2016].

museum'. The frameworks that were established by Enlightenment-era thinkers for the disciplines of anthropology or archaeology and art history as separate spheres of knowledge still impact the way in which objects are displayed in South Africa. In many ways South Africa's academic frameworks have been modelled on British institutions so that their practices reflect the colonial perceptions that still exist in Western academic structures and museums.

A recent *World Design Capital*⁵⁸⁷ exhibition at the *National Gallery* entitled, "Symbols of South African Cultures" provides a relevant case study for the frameworks used in the display of historical African art in South Africa. The exhibition opened on the 24th of September 2014 to celebrate heritage day and is described as showing "a series of commemorative stamps depicting local cultural artefacts, as captured by local photographer Hein Botha" along with many of the 'artefacts' themselves⁵⁸⁸. The Iziko website describes the exhibition as follows:

*"The objects depicted on the stamps were selected by Dr Johnny van Schalkwyk, anthropologist at the Ditsong National Museum of Cultural History in Pretoria. Each symbol was chosen to represent an ancient South African culture. 'All the objects are decorated with colours and patterns, which add very much to their meaning,' says Dr Van Schalkwyk"*⁵⁸⁹.

Here, as with the title of *Iziko*, we have the specific emphasis on the objects' ability to exemplify South African cultures, in this case through the objects' visual attributes ('colours and patterns') and their allied culture's age ('ancient', despite the fact that some are relatively recent creations), which is perceived to bestow a certain amount of authenticity. The objects have all come from a museum of cultural history rather than an art gallery or art museum and were selected by an anthropologist. This provides us with an understanding of the manner in which such objects are and have most frequently been framed in South Africa: as ethnographic objects of anthropological interest whose meaning is enhanced by visual attributes but whose value lies in their being emblematic of a particular culture rather than in an aesthetic, conceptual or spiritual meaning. Such objects have historically been defined as

⁵⁸⁷ WDC, 'World Design Capital Cape Town 2014' <<http://www.wdccapetown2014.com>> [accessed 1 September 2016].

⁵⁸⁸ Iziko Museums of Cape Town, 'Symbols of South African Cultures' <<http://www.iziko.org.za/news/entry/symbols-of-south-african-cultures>> [accessed 1 September 2016].

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

‘artefacts’ rather than artworks.

The inclusion of the historical South African artwork in question, in a space reserved for ‘art’ (the *Iziko South African National Gallery*), already goes a long way towards transforming the gallery’s display and establishing a much-needed space for historical South African art. Carol Kauffman, who curated the African Art Collection at Iziko in 2014 (which, notably, is a separate collection to others within the gallery structure) notes that the galleries’ collection of African Art was only begun after 1980 when it included “a small incipient collection of west African sculpture” that mirrors the Euro-American paradigm of what is principally defined as historical African Art (see for example the concentration of work from this geographical space at the *Musée du quai Branly* in Figure 40)⁵⁹⁰. Since then the collection has grown considerably in tandem with attempts to transform Iziko into a truly post-apartheid organisation. The objects included in the exhibition from 2014 are part of such an attempt both to expand the institution’s collection and to provide the public with more frequent opportunities to learn about South African art and cultural practices. The same distinction between art and artefact can be said to have existed in other museums throughout South Africa. For example, when a collector donated a collection of early twentieth century Zulu-Sotho beadwork in 1933 it was given to the *Local History Museum* in Durban for display rather than to an art institution⁵⁹¹.

The room for the exhibition *Symbols of South African Cultures* is situated outside of the primary exhibition spaces, to the right of the main entrance where there used to be a gallery shop. The information boards (see Figure 53) are reminiscent, in style, of those commonly used in historical or natural history museum contexts or educational displays as opposed to the rest of the art gallery which tends to use minimal, discreet labelling focusing on creators and titles in line with the Western art gallery framework. The labels included inside the glass cases (Figure 54 and Figure 55) are more easily recognisable as ‘gallery labels’. The glass cases themselves are also uncommon within the typical Western gallery or art museum space (a model used within the *Louvre* in Paris or the *National Gallery of Art* in Washington). It is

⁵⁹⁰ Culturoid, ‘Interview with Carol Kaufmann at the South African National Gallery’ <<http://culturoid.com/2013/09/interview-with-carol-kaufmann-curator-at-the-sa-national-gallery/>> [accessed 10 January 2015]. West African sculpture has long held a more dominant perception within Western collections of African art and is often the example of historical African art most readily given in discourse. This is in part due to the greater number of these pieces that exist in European collection and also because artists like Pablo Picasso and other modernists were fascinated by art from this region in particular.

⁵⁹¹ Karel Nel and Nessa Leibhammer, ‘Evoations of the Child’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 151.



Figure 53: Display at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town that was part of the *Symbols of South African Cultures* exhibition showing the information boards and glass display cases. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, December 2014).

apparent, therefore, that these objects are treated differently to other objects (particularly contemporary artwork) within the *South African National Gallery* space and that this mirrors a particular and historically entrenched classification system that originated in Europe and has dominated modes of global display: one that views European art as different and/or superior to the art or material culture of others.

The difficult observation, however, is that the historical objects from South African cultures on display *are* different from the colonial paintings that form part of Iziko's collection or the contemporary paintings, sculptures and installations that otherwise dominate the spaces. The paintings and the objects in question originate from a different value systems in terms of meaning and classification. The observation that the very term 'art' (as the contemporary, globalised world uses it) is a European invention that has been used to support a difference in modes of display when it comes to non-European, historical objects. Yet, I would argue, that perceived difference is often left unchallenged and without in-depth knowledge about such objects' individual use and meaning in their particular cultural system. It appears that a greater knowledge about the contextual meaning of historical African objects would assist in creating alternative modes of display that do not sit easily within either the anthropological



Figure 54: Display case at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town that was part of the *Symbols of South African Cultures* exhibition. In the center of the display case is a divination bowl. The text on the label seen in the foreground says: “Divining bowl, Limpopo, Collected and presented by H.A. Stayt, 1929”. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, December 2014).

sphere or the art sphere but rather borrow from existing models to create a new form, a form that is ‘African’ in origin and that acknowledges the hybrid, contemporary context.

In an effort to enable a discourse on what might be a more appropriate manner in which to display historical objects of cultural significance in South Africa I focus on the objects known as ‘fertility figures’ (Figure 55) that dominate one of the glass cases in the exhibition “Symbols of South African Cultures”. The label for the central figure in the image (Figure 55) reads: “Fertility figure, Mid 20th century, KwaNdebele, Glass beads, fibre, thread”. We are told that the figure on the right is also a “fertility figure” called *Amapopi* from Dennilton in Mpumalanga and was purchased in 1982. The *Amapopi* can also be identified as one made by the Ntwane people (who have close ties to the Ndebele) and is called a *gimwane* or a *popenyane /amapopi* (a word derived from the Afrikaans for doll, *pop*)⁵⁹². The figure on the left is a twenty-first century *Mangwana* from the Limpopo province.

These three figures form part of a category of objects that has been called *fertility dolls* and

⁵⁹² Hazel Friedman, ‘Ntwane Gimwane: Ntwane Grass Figures’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 131.



Figure 55: Display case at the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town that was part of the *Symbols of South African Cultures* exhibition. The figure in the middle is described as: “Fertility figure, Mid 20th century, KwaNdebele, Glass beads, fibre, thread”. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, December 2014).

these examples from South Africa are often related to others within southern Africa and similar objects from the rest of the continent, as seen in the exhibition at the *Musée du quai Branly* where fertility figures from around the continent are shown together in a glass case (Figure 41). A book published in 1998 in tandem with an exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery called “Evocations of the Child: Fertility figures of the southern African region” details various author’s research into this category of objects and begins with a discussion by Dell about the dominant ways in which these objects have been discussed in academic and non-academic circles:

*“The widely used term ‘fertility doll’ has obscured the study of these forms, shrouding them in mystery for some, and rendering the objects profane for others. For while ‘fertility’ could conjure up images of sympathetic magic, the associations of the term ‘doll’ allowed them to be dismissed as lightweight, the plaything of a child.”*⁵⁹³

Dell also notes that while these figures were (and to a lesser extent still are) widely produced

⁵⁹³ Elizabeth Dell, ‘Introduction’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 11. It is also noted by van Wyk that fertility figures represent mature women rather than children which makes the term ‘doll’ even more misleading and inappropriate. Gary Van Wyk, ‘Fertile Flowers of Femininity : South Sotho Fertility Figures’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 55.

there were very few that existed in museum collections and a scarcity of knowledge about them existed: both because of a trend for large, masculine, west or central African sculpture and because the figures are viewed as personal and therefore shrouded in secrecy⁵⁹⁴. Veliswa Gwintsa emphasises the barriers to research that occur because of secrecy and a sense of the sacred nature of some of these figures. Gwintsa's own research showed that the fertility figures often assumed to be the equivalent of Western dolls are in fact objects with a deeply personal ritual function⁵⁹⁵.

Gwintsa conducted research in various urban centres in Johannesburg in order to highlight the erroneous assumption that such figures have become extinct or that the practice of indigenous religions occurs only in isolated rural spaces⁵⁹⁶. The view that religious practices are becoming defunct is linked to those by researchers such as Friedman who claims that the Ntwane fertility figure "... is no longer invested with cultural symbolism" and serves only as a commodified object for the tourist market.⁵⁹⁷ Yet, as Gwintsa emphasises, most researchers are simply not given information about the more personal functions of the figures by those who use them. The assumption that the contemporary, urban population in South Africa has lost a connection to such figures and their sacred meaning is interestingly contrasted to the impact such figures have on public discussion when they are viewed in museums or in public spaces.

The image in Figure 56 shows an intagram user who has photographed a collection of Ndebele figures and labelled the image with tags such as '#MyCulture' and #Imvelaphi Yam (My roots) that indicate a certain pride despite the potentially commodified nature of the figures. The particular figures in question take the form of those commonly sold to tourists yet are based on those used for religious purposes. The other tags indicate the users specific Ndebele clan names and give us a clear sense that these figures conjure feelings of cultural belonging. These figures, in other words, have contemporary significance for individuals even if it is simply one of cultural recognition.

⁵⁹⁴ Dell, 'Introduction', in *Evocations of the Child*, 12.

⁵⁹⁵ Veliswa Gwintsa, 'Double Talk: Problems of Translation, Interviewing and Secrecy', in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery; Human & Rousseau, 1998), 31.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁹⁷ Hazel Friedman, 'Ntwane Gimwane: Ntwane Grass Figures', 135.



Figure 56: Instagram image whose caption reads, “I love being Ndebele. Lol. #Ndebele #NdebeleDolls #Culture #Colorful #MyCulture #Love #ImvelaphiYam ngi ngu NaMthimunye, uNomaziyane umngoma (2014).

Research conducted about South African fertility figures has, therefore, been subject to a host of assumptions about what constitutes collectable African Art, about the trust placed in publically available information (as opposed to insider knowledge), about the perceived dichotomy between the urban and the traditional and about the applicability of such figures to contemporary, urban populations. How then, can these figures be viewed when they are exhibited in a public, institutionalised space such as the *National Gallery*? Dell notes that fertility figures would, until at least 1990, have been viewed as domestic craft items rather than artworks or figures of serious anthropological interest⁵⁹⁸. Their status as craft would have been linked to a perception that they were simply decorative items whose cultural value was no more significant than a Victorian, porcelain doll. Such a perception is exasperated by the female gender of the creators in a system where the dominant narrative of the European, artistic genius is undeniably linked to masculinity. Large, west and central African sculptures and masks fitted well into such an historically European agenda and so have become synonymous with ‘African Art’ for the uninformed majority.

⁵⁹⁸ Dell, ‘Introduction’, in *Evocations of the Child*, 12.

The historical tendency to label beadwork or other objects made by women in South Africa as craft and to place historical objects in local history museums (as noted above) rather than institutions designed for art reflects a tendency to project a European value system onto historical South African art⁵⁹⁹. In the contemporary period where many of these historical objects, including the fertility figures, have been moved to art museums, such as the *Johannesburg Art Gallery*, the market for these items outside the gallery space has forced production to focus continually on the objects as ‘craft’. Ndebele figures such as those in Figure 56 are identified as craft for tourist markets which adhere to an erroneous perception of these figures as simply decorative and so fuel production that is in line with such a category. Many of those making figures have adapted their production so that they produce both ritual artworks for their communities and similar but adapted objects for an external tourist market⁶⁰⁰. The existence of objects as ‘craft’ (in the sense of being decorative rather than conceptual) for the purpose of tourism has led to a dismissal of the similar objects and figures used for cultural rituals.

The *Johannesburg Art Gallery* in central Johannesburg begun its collection in 1910, the year that South Africa gained nominal independence and became a Union. It was put together by Sir Hugh Lane and exhibited in London before being moved to a new building in Johannesburg in 1915. Initially the collection consisted entirely of European art with works by artists such as Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Pablo Picasso and Camille Pissaro before being expanded to include South African art⁶⁰¹. As a museum space the *Johannesburg Art Gallery* is situated in central Johannesburg surrounded by informal markets and congested traffic next to the railway. In 2011, in a review of Jillian Carman’s book on the galleries *One Hundred Years of Collecting*⁶⁰², Elizabeth Rankin describes the context of the gallery as being “in a part of downtown Johannesburg that is notoriously ‘unsafe’ and teeming with informal trading stalls and taxis, a world seemingly oblivious of the grand old institution in

⁵⁹⁹ Another example of a collection of figures likened to the fertility figures used by the Ndebele are the clay initiation figures traditionally made by Venda people. Examples of these were housed in the *National Cultural History Museum* in Pretoria rather than an art museum. See: Karen Harber, ‘Venda and Pedi: Clay Initiation Figures for the Domba and Khomba Ceremonies’, in *Evocations of the Child: Fertility Figures of the Southern African Region* (Cape Town; Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1998), 111.

⁶⁰⁰ Dell, ‘Introduction’, in *Evocations of the Child*, 12.

⁶⁰¹ For a detailed discussion of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) and its collection see the writing of one of its previous curators, Jillian Carman: Jillian Carman, ‘Johannesburg Art Gallery and the Urban Future’, in *Emerging Johannesburg*, ed. by R Tomlinson (New York: Routledge, 2003). See also: Jillian Carman, *1910-2010 One Hundred Years of Collecting: The Johannesburg Art Gallery* (Pretoria: Design Magazine, 2010). See also: Jillian Carman, ‘Acquisitions Policy of the Johannesburg Art Gallery with Regard to the South African Collection, 1909-1987’, *South African Journal of Cultural and Art History*, 2.3 (1988), 203–13.

⁶⁰² Jillian Carman, *1910-2010 One Hundred Years of Collecting: The Johannesburg Art Gallery*.



Figure 57: Display room at the Johannesburg Art Gallery showing European painting and sculpture.
(Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).

its midst⁶⁰³. The building itself appears to be physically inaccessible to the public surrounding it, as noted by Rankin and others, with its high security fences and austere architecture⁶⁰⁴. Within the gallery space one is greeted by a series of large rooms each displaying a portion of the collection (see Figure 59 and Figure 57).

When I visited in March 2015 a number of the rooms showed the collection of European painting and sculpture while others showed twentieth century South African art. At the one side of the gallery, in a room somewhat less architecturally impressive than the room for European art, was an exhibition entitled “Matters of the Spirit” which showed a collection of artworks relating to spiritual use in southern Africa. The art on display was a selection of work from the galleries very large collection of African art and included headrests, snuff containers, baskets, fertility figures and beadwork (see Figure 58). The exhibition label on the wall of the exhibition space described the work as “made within, and for, traditional southern African contexts [that] often embody a sacred dimension” and went on to discuss the connection between African art and modernism, the fluidity of terms such as ‘art’ and ‘craft’

⁶⁰³ Elizabeth Rankin, ‘Book Review: 1910-2010: One Hundred Years of Collecting - the Johannesburg Art Gallery (Jillian Carman)’, *De Arte*, 83 (2011), 91–94.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.



Figure 58: Fertility figure at the Johannesburg Art Gallery as part of the exhibition *Matters of the Spirit*. The display label reads “Artist unrecorded, Nwana/child figure, Tsonga-Shangaan, early twentieth century, textile, glass and plastic beads, metal disks, wood, thread. On long-term loan from the Brenthurst Collection”. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).

and the danger in perceiving tradition as a static phenomenon⁶⁰⁵. The South African art in the “Matters of the Spirit” exhibition therefore attempts to situate the work within discourses about the value of African art in global frameworks while being aware of how the work might be seen from a Western perspective.

The curatorial strategies employed in the exhibition allow each work to be seen as an artwork while drawing attention the particular religious contexts in which they were used. The room for historical European painting and sculpture, however, displays its work unapologetically as work that is valued within a Western system of understanding with the focus on individual works, the emphasis on aesthetics through limited labelling and the clean, uncluttered display that points to the importance of each artwork as an original masterpiece (see Figure 59). In essence the display mimics similar displays of European art from around the world. The exhibition for “Matters of the Spirit” is similar in structure to the convention, Western art display in its positioning of sculptural work on plinths but the room is far more densely

⁶⁰⁵ Johannesburg Art Gallery, *Label for the exhibition ‘Matters of the Spirit’*.

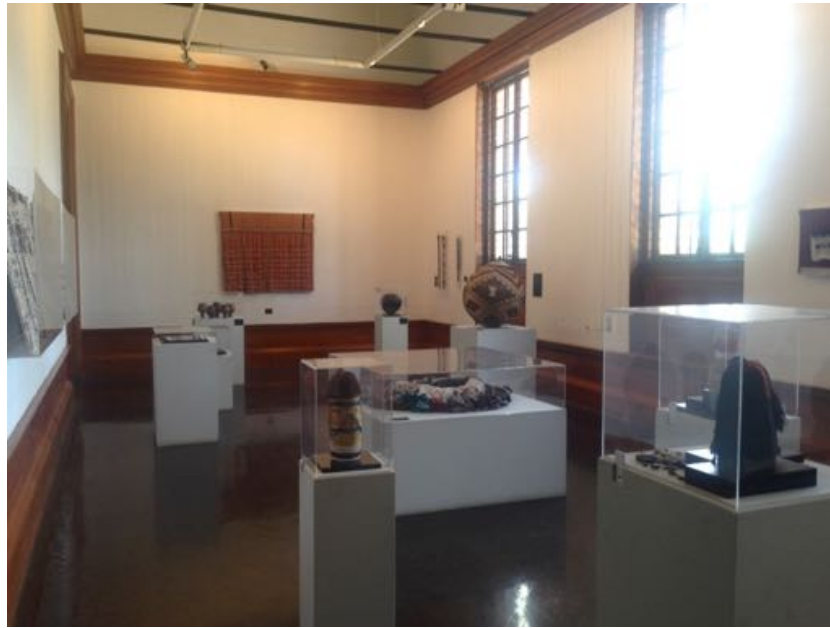


Figure 59: Display at the Johannesburg Art Gallery as part of the exhibition *Matters of the Spirit*.
(Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).

packed (see Figure 57). The labelling is more extensive and generally points away from individual makers towards the broader cultural context of production. While these differences may be seen to be in line with the different nature of the African and Western art systems, the display does seem to position itself as an alternative to the Western convention rather than a different framework in and of itself. This sense is emphasised by the descriptive information for the exhibition which asks its viewers to be weary of how the art in question may be seen: “focus should not only be directed to matters of spirit, nor should tradition be thought of as a static phenomenon”⁶⁰⁶. There appears to be, in the way this text frames the exhibition, a pre-emptive warning for how a potential viewer should see the work, which reads almost like an apology or warning rather than allowing the work to exist in its own right. Such a framing would seem most appropriate for an audience unaccustomed to African art and coming from a Western cultural perspective. One might wonder then who such an expected or intended audience might be in the context of downtown Johannesburg and what assumptions can be said to exist in the perspectives of South African audiences.

The city of Johannesburg, also known as the economic centre of South Africa, has another

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.



Figure 60: The exterior of Museum Africa in Johannesburg, South Africa. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).

two museums that show South African art (*The Wits Art Museum* and *Museum Africa*) and have substantial collections of historical work, including work made within the African art value system. *Museum Africa* is, like the *Johannesburg Art Gallery* which is a few minutes walk away, also situated in the throbbing city centre in the suburb of Newtown and was built on the site of the city's former fruit and vegetable market (see Figure 61 and Figure 60). Within the same block of the museum one now finds a busy shopping mall, the well-known Market Theatre and the offices of the National Arts Council of South Africa. The museum opened as *Museum Africa* in its central position in 1994 soon after the country's first democratic elections were won by the African National Congress (ANC) and was seen by many as a powerful symbol in the country's transformation from apartheid state to democratic nation⁶⁰⁷. Prior to 1994 *Museum Africa* was known as the Africana Museum and

⁶⁰⁷ See: Sara Byala, *A Place That Matters Yet: John Gubbins's Museum Africa in the Postcolonial World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1. Byala's book is one of very few texts available about the museum and its history and certainly the first institutional biography.

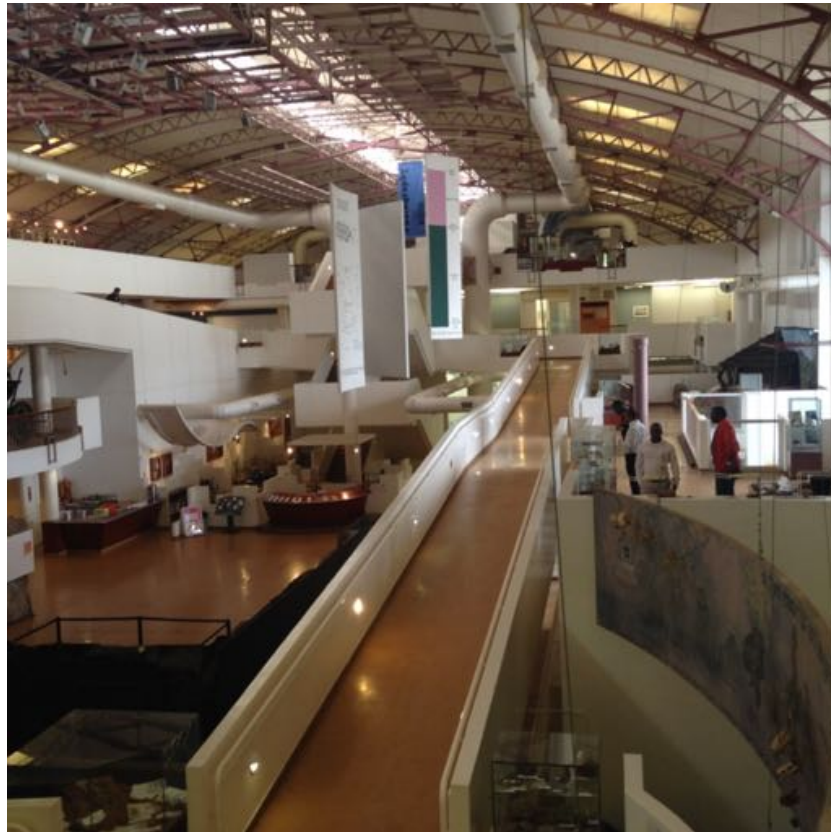


Figure 61: The interior display area of Museum Africa in Johannesburg, South Africa. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).

was created to house the collection of John Gubbins, which was bought by the Johannesburg Public Library in 1933. As the term ‘Africana’ tends to denote, the museum was set up as a cultural history museum and has a vast and heterogeneous collection of books, photographs, musical instruments, visual art and geological specimens. As Sara Byala notes, *Museum Africa* carried with its renovation the hope of a new museum that would proudly showcase black African culture in an Africanist, postcolonial climate and was supported by celebrities and celebrated for its position through the hosting of part of the Johannesburg Biennales in 1995 and 1997⁶⁰⁸. Unfortunately *Museum Africa* has since been neglected; its building is run down, it is understaffed and the over-worked curator bemoans the lack of funding and inadequate facilities. The collection, however, is rich and contains objects not frequently seen in other museums. The interior of *Museum Africa* consists of various levels open to the roof with the metal beams of the warehouse-like structure exposed (see Figure 60). The vast space

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 1-3.



Figure 62: Display for the exhibition “With the Help of the Spirits: Divination and healing in southern Africa” at *Museum Africa* in Johannesburg. The first section of the label reads: “Ndaun spirit figure carving of a lion, with carved medicine containers (nhunguvani) used by the Sangoma John Bombi from the 1960s or earlier until his death in about 2009. The carvings were kept inside his divining hut”. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).

contains various diverse exhibitions at any given time so that it reads like a cultural history museum rather than an art gallery.

In 2015 *Museum Africa* put on an exhibition entitled, “With the Help of the Spirits: Divination and healing in southern Africa” which showed a collection of artworks connected to divination. As this exhibition was held over the same period as the *Johannesburg Art Gallery’s* “Matters of the Spirit” show it may be said to indicate an increasing impetus to show the historical spiritual qualities of South African art. The *Museum Africa* exhibition is, however, different to the *Johannesburg Art Gallery* exhibition in the way it chose to approach the religious theme. While “Matters of the Spirit” displayed spiritual art works on plinths and in glass cases that were evenly spaced throughout the exhibition room “With the Help of the Spirits”, owing in part to the nature of the space, chose to show a far larger amount of work in a more clustered fashion. The *Museum Africa* exhibition also focused on the life and works of specific diviners, who are, where possible, named. In Figure 62, for

example, we see the apparatus of a specific person, Sangoma John Bombi, whose medicine containers are shown alongside the large Ndau spirit carving. In mimicking the practice of many museums around the world the *Johannesburg Art Gallery* did not show the apparatus or context in which the diviner or Sangoma worked or the apparatus that was used along with the sculptural items. In Figure 63 and Figure 64 we see more work that was part of the *Museum Africa* exhibition showing sacred divining bowls and medicines confiscated by officials of the apartheid government who banned the practice of African religion. Again, the actual medicines or apparatus used by diviners are rarely shown in international exhibitions of African art as they are in *Museum Africa* and elements with spiritual power such as nails have a history of being removed before the items are displayed. We may read this practice as being part of an ideological apparatus that subsumes alternative art historical value systems into the dominant, Western discourse. As such, *Museum Africa's* exhibition offers an alternative practice and display strategy which focuses on the art works own function and value despite the institutions other failings. This different strategy may be as a result of its origins as a cultural history museum rather than an art museum and the heterogeneous collection it still displays.

Various strategies exist within South Africa for the display of South African art that focuses on an indigenous African value system. The *Wits Art Museum* shows work in a well-lit, sophisticated setting that mimics the convention of the international gallery of contemporary art (see Figure 66). In the small town of Pietermaritzburg, which hosts the University of KwaZulu-Natal's art history department, the *Tatham Art Gallery* shows contemporary and historical work in democratic exhibitions that seem not to emphasise difference but rather to focus in a celebratory manner on each artwork in question (see Figure 65). The display strategy of these two institutions can be said to be one of conferring status on South African art through the visual connection to global discourse on contemporary art where museums and galleries around the world show art in an analogous manner. The question might be, however, to what extent this global convention is a new version of the existing Western system that includes difference rather than allowing for a diversity of strategies that speak in turn to a diversity of art histories.



Figure 63: Display for the exhibition “With the Help of the Spirits: Divination and healing in southern Africa” at *Museum Africa* in Johannesburg. The caption reads: “Venda divining bowls confiscated by Charles Manning at a witchcraft trial. Rev Noel Roberts bequest”. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).



Figure 64: Display for the exhibition “With the Help of the Spirits: Divination and healing in southern Africa” at *Museum Africa* in Johannesburg. The caption reads: “Divining bones and medicines confiscated by Sgt Ungerer of John Voster Square (now Johannesburg Central) police station from a Zulu sangoma charged with witchcraft, 1960s. George Gray collection”. (Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).



Figure 65: Display at the *Tatham Art Gallery* in Pietermaritzburg (Msunduzi Municipality). (Photograph: Danielle Becker, September 2015).

This chapter has attempted to discuss the way in which African art is displayed in Western museums and the various implications of curatorial strategies used. A narrative of difference in the display of African art as opposed to Western art has been established and the extent to which this difference in treatment equates to a difference in perceived value was discussed. When turning to the curatorial strategies and forms of display employed at various South African museums a variety of methods were highlighted: some that mimic the display of African art in Western institutions, some that employ curatorial strategies akin to conventions used in cultural history or anthropological collections and others that use methods that may be described as a combination of existing conventions. Chapter 5 discussed the way in which the geographical location of museums created a differentiated physical access to art that owes much to the legacy of apartheid spatial planning. This chapter extends this discussion to the manner in which art, particularly historical African art, is displayed in South African museums and the way in which these curatorial strategies have the potential to perpetuate perceptions of historical African art as less valuable than its Western counterparts.

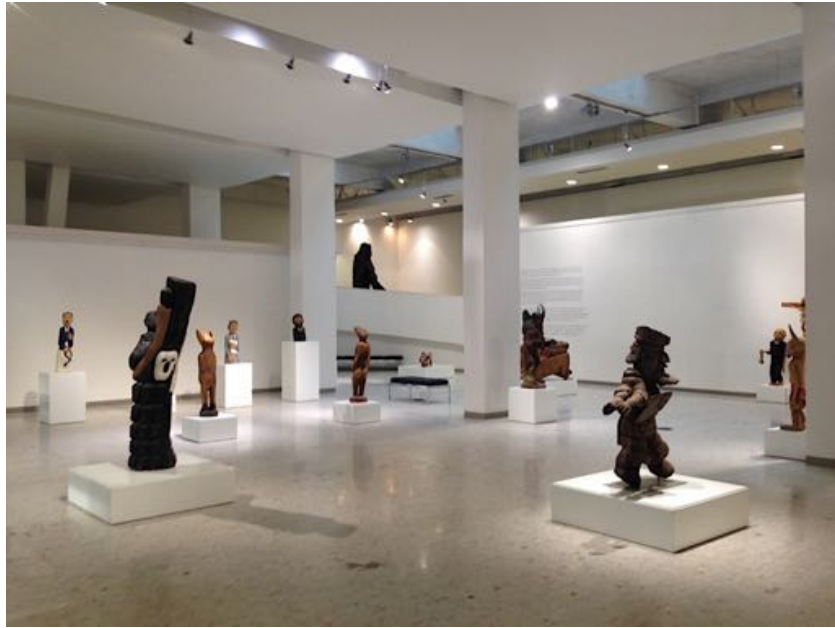


Figure 66: Display at the University of Witwatersrand's (Wits) Art Museum in Johannesburg showing the exhibition, "Stars of the North: Revisiting sculpture from Limpopo". (Photograph: Danielle Becker, March 2015).

Conclusion

My aim in this dissertation was to understand the particular character of South African art history when perceived as part of a nation building project that ostensibly seeks to aid in the creation of a post-apartheid, democratic nation. This nation has been subject to a particular set of ideological, institutional and individual forces that have left traces of its colonial and apartheid history entangled in the present. A historiographic analysis of South African art history since 1984 showed a discourse shaped by the historical context of settler colonialism and apartheid (Chapter 1); by the broader discourse of art history as a discipline (Chapter 2); by South African art historians and the character of this national discourse (Chapter 3); by the way in which art history (and visual studies) is taught in university courses (Chapter 4); by the geographical location of art museums and universities (Chapter 5) and by the manner in which artworks are displayed in museums and galleries (Chapter 6). These various elements have each shaped the discipline in the South African context and speak to the way in which a multitude of transnational elements have impacted the creation of a national discourse: the migration of people; the forced or voluntary transplantation of cultural practices; the oppression of cultural groups; the establishment of powerful globalised discourses and institutions; the creation of educational curricula; the spatial distribution and structuring of resources and the display of cultural assets.

In the introductory chapter I asked how this discourse is framed within the global discipline and in what ways it is particular to South Africa in the context of fervent calls to decolonise the university. I noted that one of the major tensions in art history's *global turn* has been between an additive approach that seeks to expand the historical Western system of art history to 'include' examples of art from contexts outside Western Europe and North America and an approach (integration) that acknowledges established alternative systems of

art making outside of the Western canon whose ideological frameworks can be differentiated from the Western. If we take the analysis put forward in Chapter 1 that describes the movement in South African history, from colonialism towards settler colonialism, where the apartheid state (governed by a minority white population) divided the nation into a geographical and ideological centre and periphery (illustrated in Chapter 1 and 5), then the process of either inclusion or integration can be said to apply to the South African context in a manner analogous to the global. In other words, while art history has been attempting in the last few decades to grapple with a diversity of approaches to art and the global expansion of a discipline tied to European history, South African art historians have been struggling with how to expand an art history that began as a settler colonial project dealing only with the products of settler colonial culture. Here again is the difficulty in aligning the local call for cultural specificity with the global trend towards the universal and the transnational. In being able to name the particular without reverting the essentializing or fetishizing cultural practices that are always, already complex and dynamic. As we saw in Chapter 4, while the struggle in South Africa may also be seen as one between inclusion and integration where there was a continuous acknowledgment that South African art history needed to change but an inability to see how this could be done beyond the methodological practice of including previously excluded black artists.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the historical legacy of art history as an academic discipline and the way in which 'art' is seen as a term and category with a specifically European history that places value on individualism and originality. My aim in that chapter was to describe art history as being comprised of multiple epistemologies and systems for understanding objects to the degree that we can speak of a Western art historical system and an African art historical system as different but equal epistemological frameworks. Perceiving art history as comprised of multiple systems rather than simply one, hegemonic Western system means that in order for art history to adequately describe different social and cultural manifestations of art it needs to maintain a perception of that difference so that these systems can be integrated on equal terms. To that end, if art history is truly perceived as multiple then additional case studies and artists cannot, in the South African context, simply be included into an existing, settler colonial discourse. South African art history needs, as a discipline to be perceived as having multiple ancestral discourses that require integration and methodological diversity. Since the epistemological basis of historical African art has been neglected in the writing of South African art history, it is an acknowledgment of that system for understanding objects as

an alternative philosophical basis that requires greater analysis. A new epistemology for the South African and indeed global context can therefore be imagined as one that would use the methodology and conceptual frameworks of historical African art as the basis to analyse not only the historical but also the contemporary. As such, one can image a contemporary African artist's work being analysed through a concept found in nineteenth-century African art in a manner analogous to the way in which historical Western concepts such as iconography are used as tools for the analysis of contemporary forms. In South African this may manifest in using the symbolism evident in Ndebele beadwork as the conceptual basis for the analysis of contemporary artists referencing this historical form.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the nature of South African art historical discourse through an analysis of some of the principle art historical associations and their discursive products. It was noted that South African art history began with what can be described as a settler colonial perspective, before moving to an acknowledgement of necessary change and inclusion of African forms and finally a focus on contemporary practice in line with a shift towards visual studies rather than 'traditional' art history. Through an analysis of SAAAH / SAVAH and its conference proceedings we saw that while historical African art had been discussed in the early years of the association there was a notable decline over time in a focus on the historical in favour of the contemporary. What this has meant is that 'African' art has largely come to mean contemporary African art in the way in which it is prioritised in writing and conference papers. Contemporary African art is then analysed through contemporary critical theory and existing methodologies in Western art history rather than through methods historically formed on the continent. To this end the project of attempting to create a new art history that is philosophically and methodologically based in an African epistemology is not heavily prioritised or acknowledged as such.

In the chapter that followed, on the curricula at various South African universities (Chapter 4), I discussed the case study of colonial replication through the art replica as form. This chapter further emphasised the focus on visual studies as a discipline and the correlative focus on contemporary South African art as opposed to historical forms. What this has meant is that many students lack an understanding and appreciation of historical African art and so perceive contemporary forms to be based either in the Western canon or as separate from any historical referent. While some university department's include historical African art in their curriculum very few do this in a way that seeks to create a link between the past and the

present. To do this would mean seeking to establish a form of African art history that perceives contemporary work as connected thematically, conceptually and formally to historical forms. If this is done in a way that perceives art history as being comprised of multiple systems for understanding objects then it would be an ‘integration’ of African art history into the curricula rather than simply an ‘inclusion’ of art by black South Africans. For curricula this would mean teaching students about contemporary manifestations of genres such as performance art or conceptual art, for example, as connected to historical African forms. It would also mean instilling knowledge about the great civilisations that have lived on the African continent so that students perceive ancient art history not to mean only a study of ancient Greece and may develop a certain cultural pride in historical South African art.

In Chapter 5, I discussed the geographical and discursive access to institutionalised art historical discourse, by looking at the spatial location of prominent South African museums and galleries. These institutions have been defined by apartheid legislation that created the division between a white, urban centre and the black, rural periphery so that physical access to art collections and university-level courses in art history is curtailed by a geographical legacy. The ability to physically access institutionalised and sanctioned forms of art practice does not imply that other forms of art making are absent or inaccessible in rural, peripheral areas but it does mean that ‘art’ as understood in a global sense exists in South Africa in spaces historically decreed to be ‘white’ and culturally Western.

Following on from this geographical analysis, Chapter 6 discussed both the historical perception of Africa as lacking ‘civilisation’ and the way in which this manifests in both international and national museum displays. This chapter focused, in particular, on the way in which historical South African art is displayed in prominent museums and discussed the way in which this reflected existing assumptions about value in art historical discourse and a Western understanding of cultural objects. In many South African museums, historical African art is still displayed in a way that separates it from historical Western or contemporary practice but does not, in all cases, display this difference with a sense of equality. This practice mimics the way in which historical African objects are displayed in international museums such as the Quai Branly so that transnational practices and norms can be seen to have impacted the local sphere. To this end a Western epistemological system is maintained as the dominant approach to the exhibition and display of objects. Put differently, we see the echoes or trances of colonialism in the contemporary display of artwork in South



Figure 67: “Mapungubwe gold figurines. Artist names unrecorded, about 1250 -1290”. As exhibited in the exhibition, *South Africa: the art of a nation* at the British Museum 27 October 2016 – 26 February 2017. Part of the extended caption reads: “From 1220 to 1290 Mapungubwe was the capital of the first kingdom in southern Africa. These gold sculptures, discovered in three gold graves are among the most iconic in African today ... These artworks were discovered alongside hundreds of gold bracelets and beads at Mapungubwe. Gold was mined in the regions around Mapungubwe and traded with the coast as part of a wider international network, and became a status symbol for the kingdom’s rulers”. (Photograph: Jean de Kock, January 2017).

Africa. Controversial debates in this area have meant that historical work is often ignored for fear of displaying it in such a way that undermines its value.

In September 2017 a new museum will be opened in Cape Town called the *Zeitz MOCAA* (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa) that promises to be one of the largest art museums on the African continent. While such a project is admirable and exciting for the growth in African art on the international market the museum will focus only on contemporary art and as such will not engage with the historical art of the continent. In light of this most of the major collections of African art will remain in Western museums such as the *Musee du Quai*

Branly in Paris. The focus of this new museum in Cape Town illustrates the trend for South African and international museums, as well as discourse, to focus on the contemporary rather than the historical which has meant that the elevation of historical South African art as a field worthy of study remains undeveloped. The new *Zeitz MOCAA* will open as a well-funded museum that has received substantial donations from a variety of private sources while museums such as the National Gallery in Cape Town and Museum Africa in Johannesburg lack government support and funding and acknowledge that privatisation may be the only way forward⁶⁰⁹. As such museums created to represent the nation of South Africa, and specifically those that show historical African art, find themselves without support in the historical moment of democratic South Africa while private institutions whose offerings focus on contemporary, globally applicable practice flourish.

An example of a contemporary exhibition that seeks to create a narrative of South African art that connects the contemporary to the historical is the large exhibition *South Africa: the art of a nation* at the British Museum between October 2016 and February 2017. The exhibition was curated by John Gibling and Chris Spring and showcases an impressive range of art from a painted stone known as the Coldstream Stone that is from approximately 7 000 BCE to contemporary art from the last decade. What is impressive about the exhibition is the way in which it draws a narrative line between historical South African art and contemporary work without the need to separate historical forms into a less-valued category such as ‘artefact’ or ‘craft’ and without fetishising their difference as forms unequal to Western masterpieces. The exhibition showed the gold works from medieval Mapungubwe (see Figure 67) as artworks rather than artefacts and as evidence of a grand civilisation in southern Africa. The caption describes the work as “gold sculptures” so that the status of ‘art’ is fully prescribed upon them. This strategy is also evident in the exhibition of other work such as Ndebele beadwork (see Figure 68) that describes these forms not as craft (as they have been historically) but as ‘artworks’. These late-nineteenth, early twentieth century artworks are presented in an exhibition along with more contemporary work by Ndebele artists such as Ester Mahlangu, which draw a narrative link between past forms and contemporary ones so that the more historical art is not perceived as part of a lost, static tradition irrelevant to contemporary practice (see Figure 69). As such an exhibition in a museum associated with the colonial

⁶⁰⁹ See: ‘Roger Ballen Foundation and Eiger Foundation Establish Centre for Photography at Zeitz MOCAA’, *ArtThrob*, February 2 (2017). See also: Steven Sack, ‘Jo’burg Museums Are Decaying, but Will Privatising Them Create More Problem’, *Mail and Guardian Online*, 2017.

heartland of object pillaging manages on some level to do what others in South Africa have not perhaps despite the well-known criticism of ahistoricism and spectacle of such large all-encompassing exhibitions. The key in avoiding such spectacle appears to be in the depth of research and respect afforded the historical artworks in question. An international exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York titled *Kongo, Power and Majesty* was curated by Alisa Lagamma in 2016. This show managed to highlight the history and artistic production of the Kongo kingdom with dense cultural specificity and with an acknowledgment of the artist's adaption to external forces such as European cultural contact⁶¹⁰

The way in which historical forms create a line of descent to the contemporary is emphasised by how young South African artists and designers responded to the exhibition. One example can be found in Laduma Ngxokolo, a South African designer and art director for the brand *MaXhosa*, who gave a talk at the exhibition, posted a photograph of himself in his *MaXhosa* fashion in front of Mhlangu's artwork (see Figure 70). Ngxokolo is a successful fashion designer who strives to represent Xhosa art and culture in the form of contemporary fashion. His designs began with the aim to "create a modern Xhosa-inspired knitwear collection that would be suitable for Xhosa initiates, who are prescribed by tradition to dress up in new dignified formal clothing for six months after initiation" as well as historical art forms and designs used by Xhosa people⁶¹¹. A such Ngxokolo creates a contemporary form that is directly influenced by the historical and therefore sees Mhlangu's work as a similar manifestation of South African art founded in indigenous art history. To this end the future of South African art history and its potential decolonisation appears to rest on the degree to which the discourse embraces historical South African art as its own epistemology worthy of study and essential to understanding contemporary forms in their own context. This need is in tandem with an attempt to build a democratic nation where a diversity of cultural practices is represented and respected. My dissertation has sought to discuss various aspects of South African art history so as to establish the nature of the discipline and has shown that in each of its components historical African art and African epistemology has been neglected and that it is a focus on this aspect of South African art history that may be the way in which to decolonise the discourse.

⁶¹⁰ See: Alisa LaGamma, *Kongo: Power and Majesty* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015).

⁶¹¹ Laduma Ngxokolo, 'Maxhosa by Laduma' <<http://www.maxhosa.co.za/>> [accessed 2 February 2017].



Figure 69: Display case with Ndebele beadwork. As exhibited in the exhibition, *South Africa: the art of a nation* at the British Museum 27 October 2016 – 26 February 2017. The artworks from left to right are described as: “*Beaded Cape*. Name(s) of artist(s) unrecorded. 1890 -1910. Recorded as Ndebele. Beadwork, vegetable fibre, leather. H. 150cm, W. 158cm’. Karel Nel, Johannesburg; *Beaded wedding train*. Name(s) of artist(s) unrecorded. 1890 – 1910. Recorded as Ndebele. Beadwork, vegetable fibre, metal crottals. H. 172cm, W. 26cm. Karel nel Johannesburg; *Beaded blanket*. Name(s) of artist(s) unrecorded, c. 1950. Recorded as Ndebele. Beadwork, synthetic fibre, cotton. H. 107cm, W. 148cm. British Museum 2015, 2011.1; *Mapoto*. Name(s) of artist(s) unrecorded, 1900-25. Recorded as Ndebele. Leather, beadwork. H.54cm, W. 46cm. British Museum Af1986,09.4”. (Photograph: Jean de Kock, January 2017).



Figure 68: Entrance to the exhibition, *South Africa: the art of a nation* at the British Museum 27 October 2016 – 26 February 2017. The artwork here is captioned as follows: “BMW Art Car 525i Number 12. Ester Mahlangu, 1991. Metal, paint and plastic. H. 141cm. L. 472cm. The BMW Museum, Munich 869759”. (Photograph: Jean de Kock, January 2017).



Figure 70: Instagram photograph publically posted by Laduma Ngxokolo, designer and art director for the brand *MaXhosa* at the exhibition *South Africa: the art of a nation*. He is wearing a *MaXhosa* scarf and jersey.

The caption reads: “Just got nominated for the SA @dircoza Ubuntu Arts & Culture Diplomacy Award (Youth) for promoting a positive image of South Africa globally, along #EsterMahlangu #JohnnyClegg etc.

Please press link to my bio. To vote. Photo: @jennifermoyesphotography #inspiredbymyconstitution”.

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Appendix A: List of South African universities

South African universities and technikons during the apartheid period.

Historical White Universities (HWU).

The white Afrikaans-medium universities:

- University of the Orange Free State
- Potchefstroom University
- University of Pretoria
- Rand Afrikaans University
- University of Stellenbosch
- University of Port Elizabeth - dual-medium but dominated by Afrikaans executives

The white English-medium universities:

- University of Cape Town
- University of Natal
- Rhodes University
- University of the Witwatersrand

Historically Black Universities (HBU).

The universities for black students in the RSA (Republic of South Africa):

- Medunsa University
- University of the North
- Vista University
- University of Zululand

Universities for other race groups classified as ‘non-white’ (houses in the tricameral parliament):

- University of Durban Westville (Indian)
- University of the Western Cape (Coloured)

Universities in TBVC countries (‘homelands’):

- University of Transkei
- University of North-West / University of Bophuthatswana
- University of Venda
- University of Fort Hare

Historically White Technikons (HWT):

- Cape Technikon
- Free State Technikon
- Natal Technikon
- PE Technikon
- Pretoria Technikon
- Vaal Triangle Technikon / Vaal University of Technology
- Technikon Witwatersrand

Historically Black Technikons (HBT):

- Mangosuthhu Technikon
- Technikon Northern Transvaal
- Border Technikon
- Eastern Cape Technikon
- North West Technikon
- ML Sultan Technikon (intended for Indian students)
- Peninsula Technikon (intended for coloured students)

New South African universities and technikons created since democracy.

(The new university name is given in bold)

- The Rand Afrikaans University (HWU- Afrikaans) merged with the Technikon Witwatersrand (HWT) and the remaining parts of Vista University (HBU) to form the **University of Johannesburg**
- Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (HWU-Afrikaans), merged with the ‘homeland’ institution of the University of North-West / University of Bophuthatswana (HBU- TBVC) to create **North West University**
- The University of Port Elizabeth (an HWU- dual) merged with the Technikon of Port Elizabeth (HWT) to create **Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University**
- The **University of Pretoria** (HWU- Afrikaans) absorbed the now defunct Vista Universities’ Mamelodi campus (HBU) in 2004
- The University of the Orange Free State (HWU- Afrikaans) changed its name to the **University of the Free State** in 2001 and absorbed the Bloemfontein campus of the former Vista University (HBU) as well as the QwaQwa campus of the University of North-West / University of Bophuthatswana in 2004 (HBU - TBVC)
- University of the Transkei (HBU - TBVC) was merged with Border Technikon (HBT) and Eastern Cape Technikon (HBT) to form the **Walter Sisulu University of Technology and Science**
- **Tshwane University of Technology** was created through a merger of three former technikons: Technikon Northern Gauteng (HBT), Technikon North-West (HBT) and Technikon Pretoria (HWT)
- Vaal Triangle Technikon was renamed as **Vaal University of Technology** and gained university status
- **Durban University of Technology** was created through the merger of ML Sultan Technikon (HBT intended for Indian students) and Natal Technikon (HWT).

Source: Ian Bunting, ‘The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid’, in *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*, ed. by Nico Cloete and others (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 64-85.

Appendix B: Overview of curriculum at South African universities

Table key:

HWU - historically white university
HBU - historically black university
Merger - created in 2004 through the merger of existing institutions
TBVC - in one of areas designated as a 'homeland' during apartheid
Former technicon - an institution that has recently gained university status

	Institution type*	Department name	Courses Offered	Undergraduate course content that looks at African art (as of 2015)
Universities with Art and Art History				
University of Cape Town	Traditional, HWU-English	Michaelis School of Fine Art	Fine Art and Art History	Some new courses offered focusing on African art both historical and contemporary including African graphic writing systems.
University of Witwatersrand	Traditional, HWU-English	School of Arts	Fine Art and Art History	African content driven by Anitra Nettleton since 1978. 3rd year course “constructs of Africa” modern & contemporary. 1st year course: “Art, Power & Society” looks at Yoruba, Luba, Igbo, Fang, Kota, Southern Africa, rock art. 2nd year: Yoruba, Luba, Venda, Igbo, Ndebele.
University of KwaZulu-Natal	Traditional, HWU-English	School of Arts	Fine Art and Art History	In 2 nd year students complete a course called “Africa: Art of a Continent” and in 3 rd year students study “20 th Century Art, Visual Culture and Theory”, “Art and Museum Practice” as well as “Contemporary African Art”.
Rhodes University	Traditional, HWU-English	Department of Fine Art	Fine Art and Art History, Visual Culture	Some African art is taught but the focus is on contemporary work. In 2006 Anitra Nettleton noted that no African art was taught.
University of Pretoria	Traditional, HWU-Afrikaans	Department of Visual Arts	Fine Art and Visual Studies	2nd year: looks at concerns in contemporary African art in a postcolonial framework with some examples of historical work.
Stellenbosch University	Traditional, HWU-Afrikaans	Department of Visual Arts	Fine Art and Visual Studies.	Focus is predominantly on Visual Studies and critical theory with African art being studied via contemporary African art. There are plans in place to add historical African art to the curricula in 2018.
University of the Free State	Traditional, HWU-Afrikaans	Department of Art History and Image Studies	Fine Art and Art History, Image Studies	General Visual studies material with a focus on the contemporary. 2nd year: “Image translations in Africa”, looks at intersections between western and African art.
University of Fort Hare	Traditional, HBU-TBVC	Department of Fine Art	Fine Art, History of Art, Philosophy of Art	Information on curriculum is incomplete. Some African art (historical and contemporary) is taught through the De Beers collection.
North West University	Traditional (merger)	School of Communication Studies	Graphic Design and Art History	2nd year, 1st semester course on “World Art” including African art. In the past the course has included San rock art, West African art going back to the 14th century, Ife-Ife sculpture.
University of Johannesburg	Comprehensive (merger)	Faculty of Art Design and Architecture	Visual (Fine) Art and Art History	3rd year: 'colonialism and art', othering, 20th century South African artists (Sekoto, Bhengu, Pemba, Resistance art etc.).
University of South Africa (UNISA)	Comprehensive (distance learning)	Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology	Visual Arts and Art History	Information on curriculum is incomplete. Some African art (historical and contemporary) is taught and has been so since the 1980s.
Tshwane University of Technology	Former technikon	Faculty of Arts	Fine Art and Art Theory	Historical African art taught throughout (Diploma in Fine Art, Btech in Fine Art). 1st year: prehistoric art (San, rock art, Asante court art, Yoruba

* In contemporary discourse universities are defined as either traditional or comprehensive. Comprehensive most often refers to a new institution created through merger in 2004.

				art, classical Egypt, Islamic art - North African included. 2nd year: half of the 2nd year course is on African art - historical and contemporary, particularly South African Art from the 20th century onwards. 3rd year: Postcolonial discourse, debate on art vs craft, African feminism, Islamic feminism. 4th year (BTech): Postcolonial theory, African philosophy, talks by current SA artists. New curriculum planned for 2018.
Durban University of Technology	Former technikon	Faculty of Art and Design	Fine Art and Art Theory	4 years. 1st year: Rock Art, Nok & Ife, Lydenburg Heads, Mapungubwe, Zimbabwe ruins, Egypt. 3rd year: South African contemporary art.
<u>Universities without Art History/Visual Studies</u>				
University of Limpopo	Traditional, HBU - RSA [†]		Offers communication studies, no Art History	
University of the Western Cape	Traditional, HBU - RSA		Has department of History, including Visual History	Through historical studies - 1st year: Societies on the East and West African Coast. 2nd year: African History, Slave trade, colonialism. 3rd: South African focus. Some contemporary African art in the new Visual History courses.
University of Venda	Comprehensive, HBU - TBVC		No visual arts - does have a University gallery showcasing local art and offers performance art.	Plan to create visual art and art history courses in 2018.
Walter Sisulu University	Comprehensive (merger)		Offers Fine Art, not art history	
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	Comprehensive (merger)		Fine Art, Design and Broad 'communications' subject	
University of Zululand	Comprehensive (merger)		Visual Arts no longer offered	BA in performing arts only started in 2016 and Visual arts was dropped a few years ago.

[†] RSA - in the Republic of South Africa during apartheid.

Appendix C: Summary of SAVAH conferences 1985 to 2017

Table Key:

SAAAHA – South African association of Art and Architectural Historians
SAVAH – South African association of Visual Art Historians

Year	Venue	Historical institution category	Dates	Conference title	Black presenters SA	White presenters SA	International speakers	Total number of speakers
1984	no proceedings, no conference							
1985	University of Natal	HWU - English	1-3 July	1st annual conference	0	10	0	10
1986	University of Witwatersrand	HWU - English	17-19 July	2nd annual Conference: <i>Art and Social Change</i>	0	20	0	20
1987	Stellenbosch University	HWU - Afrikaans	10-12 September	3rd annual conference: <i>Re-writing the Art and Architectural History of Southern Africa</i>	0	19	0	19
1988	University of South Africa, Pretoria		No proceedings	4th annual conference: <i>Art and Copyright</i>				
1989	University of Natal, Durban	HWU - English	17-19 July	5th annual conference: <i>Diversity and Interaction</i>	1	19	2	22
1990	University of Cape Town	HWU - English	11-13 July	6th annual conference: <i>Current Perspectives in South African Art and Architecture</i>	1	25	0	26
1991	University of the Orange Free State	HWU - Afrikaans	17-19 July	7th annual conference: <i>The communication of world visions</i>	3	18	0	21
1992	University of South Africa, Pretoria	distance learning	13-15 July	8th annual conference: <i>Revised Frameworks and Extended Boundaries in Research and Education</i>	0	16	0	16
1993	Technikon Natal	Technikon	7-9 July	9th annual conference: <i>Democratising Art and Art/Architectural History in South Africa</i>	3	15	2	20
1994	Stellenbosch University	HWU - Afrikaans	14-16 July	10th annual Conference	0	18	0	18
1995	University of Witwatersrand	HWU - English	July	11th annual conference: <i>The Mechanisms of Power</i>	1	26	3	30
1996	University of Natal	HWU - English	9-10th August	12th annual conference	3	16	1	20
1997	Stellenbosch University	HWU - Afrikaans	11-13 September	13th annual conference: <i>Making Art Making Meaning</i>	1	30	0	31

1998	University of South Africa, Pretoria	distance learning	15- 18 July	14th annual conference: <i>Negotiating Identities</i>	1	29	5	35
1999	University of Natal	HWU - English	24-26 September	15th annual conference	1	22	2	25
2000	Rhodes University	HWU - English		16th conference: <i>Art: Spaces and Contexts of Display</i>	1	12	4	17
2001	University of Natal	HWU - English		17th annual conference: <i>Reception / Perception</i>	4	19	1	24
2002	University of Pretoria	HWU - Afrikaans	12-13 July	18th annual conference: <i>Current Issues in Art, Art History and Architectural History in South Africa</i>	3	24	1	28
2003	Stellenbosch University	HWU - Afrikaans		19th annual conference: <i>Visual Studies in Contemporary South Africa</i>	5	26	inconclusive	31
2004	University of Natal	HWU - English	23-25 September	20th annual conference: <i>New Dep(art)ures: Recent Developments in Art and Architectural Research</i>	1	12	inconclusive	13
2005	Rhodes University	HWU - English	8-11 September	21st annual conference of SAVAH (An organisation known formerly as SAAAH): <i>New Readings of Visual Culture in Southern Africa</i>	2	19	2	23
2006	Vaal University of Technology	Former technikon		22nd annual conference: <i>Transformation/s in Visual Culture</i>	1	19	4	24
2007	University of Witwatersrand	HWU - English	13-16 September	23rd annual conference: <i>South African Art History in an African Context</i>	2	18	4	24
2008	Stellenbosch University	HWU - Afrikaans	4-6 September	24th annual conference: <i>Past the Last Post: The Post(s) in South Africa</i>	1	19	2	22
2009	University of Pretoria	HWU - Afrikaans	9-11 July	25th annual conference: <i>The Politics of Change: Looking backwards and forwards</i>	5	39	9	53
2010*	University of Johannesburg	New merged institution	1-2 October	Dialogues: a SAVAH Postgraduate Symposium	4	11	0	15
2011	University of the Witwatersrand	HWU - English	12-15 January	<i>Other Views: Art History in (South) Africa and the Global South. A</i>	2	27	29	58

* Symposium held instead of conference as large CIHA conference was held in 2011.

				colloquium organised by SAVAH under the aegis of the Comité international d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA)				
2012	University of South Africa, Pretoria	distance learning	4-7 July	27th annual conference: <i>Visual Dialogues: South Africa in Conversation</i>	0	12	1	13
2013	University of Cape Town	HWU - English	5-8 September	28th annual conference: <i>Visual Arts and Art History Now: What? How? Why?</i>	7	32	11	50
2014	University of the Free State	HWU - Afrikaans	3-5 July	29th annual conference	3	22	3	28
2015 [†]	University of KwaZulu-Natal	HWU - English	10-12 September	30th annual conference: <i>Power and Visual Culture</i>	10	37	3	50
2016 [‡]	University of Johannesburg	New merged institution	28-31 July	31st annual conference: <i>Rethinking Art History and Visual Culture in a Contemporary Context</i>	8	36	9	53
2017 [§]	Tshwane University of Technology	Former technikon	28-30 September	32nd annual conference: <i>Alternative and Current Visual Discourses in South Africa and the Continent</i>				

[†] No proceedings yet, information from programme.

[‡] No proceedings yet, information from programme.

[§] Planned conference.