“REDRESS:

DEBATES INFORMING EXHIBITIONS AND ACQUISITIONS IN SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC ART GALLERIES (1990 – 1994)”

VOLUME 1

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SHASHI COOK

Supervisor: Professor Brenda Schmahmann

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ABSTRACT

This thesis centres on the debates informing the progress of three public art galleries in South Africa between 1990 and 1994. This was a period of great change in the country, spanning from the unbanning of left-wing political parties and Nelson Mandela's release from prison, to the first democratic elections which resulted in his inauguration as President of South Africa. The study focuses specifically on the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the South African National Gallery, and the Durban Art Gallery, delineating the events and exhibitions held, the programmes initiated, and the artists represented by these galleries during this post-apartheid/pre-democracy phase of the country's history. The debates relevant to these galleries linked to those prevalent in the arts, museology, and politics at the time.

Many contemporary South African artists called attention to apartheid oppression and human rights abuses during the 1980s. After 1990, with these pressures alleviating, there was a stage of uncertainty as to the role, responsibility, and focus of visual art in a post-'struggle' context, however there was also an unprecedented upswing in interest and investment in it. On a practical level, the administration of the arts was being re-evaluated and contested by both independent and politically-aligned arts groups. Public art museums and sponsored art competitions and exhibitions made increasing efforts to be 'representative' of South Africans of all races, cultures, creeds, sexes and genders. The many conferences, committees, and conventions created during this transitional era focused on the creation of policies that would assist in nation-building; historical and cultural redress and regeneration; and the education and representation of previously disadvantaged groups.

This coincided with a revolution in museological discourses internationally, from the theorization of a museum as a place of commemoration and conservation, to a

forum for discussion and revision between both academic and non-academic communities. With the sharing of the process of constructing history and knowledge, came the challenging dynamics involved in the representation of identity and history. In all of these groups - the arts, museology, and South African politics - the predominant issue seemed to be a negotiation between the bid to open up control to more parties, and the reluctance of some parties to relinquish control.

While the emphasis is on significant changes that were implemented in the transitional period, the study locates the changes at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the South African National Gallery and the Durban Art Gallery within their historical, geographical, and socio-political context. Various artists working in these locations during this era are also discussed, as the changes in their status, and the progressions in their subject matter, materials, and concerns are interesting to examine more nuanced definitions of the 'political', probing the politics of identity, sexuality, gender, race, geography, and belief systems. Some artists also focused specifically on post-apartheid preoccupations with territory, trauma, conflict, memory and freedom. This kind of artwork was assiduously acquired during the early '90s by public art galleries, whose exhibitions and collecting focus and policies were undergoing considerable revision and redress. This thesis examines these changes in light of their socio-political contexts, as well as in light of shifting national and international imperatives and conceptions of museums and museum practice.

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CHAPTER 4:

ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	African Arts Centre
ACTAG	Arts and Culture Task Group
AEA	Art Educators Association
AIA	African Institute of Art
ANC	African National Congress
ASAT	Art South Africa Today
AWB	Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging (Afrikaans Resistance Movement)
BASA	Business Arts South Africa
CASA	Culture in Another South Africa
CBDP	Community-Based Development Programme
CDC	Culture and Development Conference
CMMH	Commission on Museums, Monuments and Heraldry
COSAW	Congress of South African Writers
CREATE	Commission for the Restructuring and Transformation of the Arts and Culture
CWC	Cultural Workers' Congress (The cultural wing of the UDF)
DAC (ANC)	ANC's Department of Arts and Culture. (The 'ANC Cultural Desk')
DAG	Durban Art Gallery
DACST	Department of Arts Culture, Science and Technology
FAK	Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurorganisasies (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organisations)
FAWO	Film and Allied Workers Organisation
FOSANG	Friends of the South African National Gallery
FOSACO	Federation of South African Cultural Organisations
FUBA	Federated Union of Black Artists
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IRR	Institute of Race Relations
JAF	Johannesburg Arts Foundation
JAG	Johannesburg Art Gallery
MOMA	Museum of Modern Art
NAC	National Arts Coalition
NAI	National Arts Initiative
NAPP	National Arts Policy Plenary
NAVAO	Natal Visual Arts Organisation
NMMAM	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PAWE	Performing Arts Workers' Equity
PWV	Pretoria Witwatersrand Vereeniging
SAMA	South African Museums Association
SANG	South African National Gallery
SAAAH	South African Association of Art Historians, now known as SAVAH
SHAWCO	Students' Health & Welfare Centres Organisation (UCT)
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front, of which the CWC was an affiliate.
VAG	Visual Arts Group (the visual arts section of the UDF's CWC)
WAG	Wits Art Gallery

INTRODUCTION

It was towards the end of my research that I found an article by well-respected artist and Artthrob[1] founder and editor Sue Williamson (2000) on South African art in the 1990s. The article proclaimed, by way of side-stepping an in-depth explanation on the topic: 'Museums and their changing role in the South Africa of the 90s is a subject worthy of a thesis.' In lieu of writing a thesis on the subject, Williamson (2000) supplied the summary:

> …all the major art institutions are struggling to come to terms with what a museum can or can't be. And with how, on a miniscule budget, one can draw in an audience which is not in the habit of museum-going, while at the same time fulfilling the traditional role of a museum in building up a sound and exciting collection of contemporary art which will be a fine reflection of the country's artists.

The aim of this thesis is to explain the debates informing the exhibition of art in public art galleries in South Africa between 1990 and 1994, as this is a crucial period of change in recent South African history - between the unbanning of left-wing political parties, and Nelson Mandela's release, to the country's first democratic elections. This transitional phase of South African history was a time of great policy change in South Africa generally, and it is thus apposite to look at the policy changes relevant to the arts and public art galleries.

I have used the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), the South African National Gallery (SANG)[2] in Cape Town, and the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) as case studies in focusing on two aspects of the topic. Firstly, I show how these art museums evolved with the socio-political changes in the country, and more specifically, how

[1] www.artthrob.co.za is an online journal which was founded by Williamson in 1997. Artthrob is updated weekly and has profiles on most of South Africa's dominant contemporary artists.
[2] The South African National Gallery was renamed the Iziko South African National Gallery in 2001 after the centralization of museums management under the name 'Iziko Museums of Cape Town'.

the art public galleries acquired for their collections at this time differed from earlier acquisitions. The primary differences were that art collected in the '90s was mostly South African, distinctly more 'contemporary', more overtly 'political', and more 'representative', and I will shortly unpack the implications underpinning these descriptions. Secondly, I will discuss the restructuring these art museums underwent in reframing their responsibilities and functions in the face of political change, and the motivations for and methods they used in trying to attract wider, non-racial audiences to enjoy and make use of them as cultural and educational facilities.

Doran Ross (1994: 1) writes on art and museums in South Africa before the elections: 'Not all art in South Africa is political; it just seems that way. If the art itself is not inherently political, then conversation about it or the contexts for displaying it are.' Artwork exhibited in public museums in the early '90s was more 'contemporary' and overtly 'political' than what had been collected previously because South African museums were going through a period of considerable restructuring at this time. National pressures demanded that they be more engaged with history as it was being made, and international changes in museum discourse, saw a shift from ideas of museums as conservators of history to facilitators of discourse in its making. South African public art galleries became more 'contemporary' in their historical focus: their acquisitions and exhibitions were of art made and collected within the preceding two decades, at the most. This focus was also specifically on the acquisition and exhibition of contemporary *South African* art.[3]

This kind of 'contemporary South African' art emerged in the 1980s, and was characterised initially by its socio-political content and relevance, and its adventurous use of materials which avoided or subverted 'traditional', 'western' art materials -

[3] An example here would be the SANG's *Recent Acquisitions exhibition 1990 – 1991* (1992).

such as oil paint and watercolour in painting, and stone, marble and bronze in sculpture. It was not that these materials were no longer used, but rather that they were used with a critical understanding of their history and implications. Often these materials or styles were incorporated in order to subvert their associations. For example, in Roger van Wyk's *South African Landscape Tradition* (1991: Fig. 1.) Van Wyk copies the distinctive style of landscape painter J.H.Pierneef whose paintings, for many, symbolised Nationalist control of South Africa. However, Van Wyk uses a sign displaying replica grenades and landmines as the surface for his painting, thus disrupting and challenging the associations underlying Pierneef's ordered and idyllic scenes (Van Wyk in *Panoramas of Passage* 1995: 92).

'Contemporary South African art' also tends towards very conscious depictions and awareness of the implications of its subject matter. For example, the 'western', 'traditional' genres of landscape and portraiture, which had been approved of on the basis of their technical skill or aesthetic merit, became somewhat problematical in view of the culture of white South African colonial dominion and conquest that they were created in and represented. 'Contemporary South African art' therefore placed a greater emphasis on the *concept* of an artwork than had been seen before: it signalled an increased consciousness of the complexities, implications, and methods of representing a subject. Artists increasingly realised that the act of representation was in no way straightforward and uncomplicated, especially considering the socio-political dynamics in South Africa. They began to work more consciously with the connotations of their chosen materials and imagery so as to render the possible interpretations of their works more sophisticated and multi-layered. An important step in the validation of this development in South African art was its acquisition and exhibition by public art galleries which brought it 'mainstream' and institutional

recognition, albeit belatedly. I discuss the emergence of contemporary South African art further in Chapter Two.

An interview between British art historian Annie Coombes and South African artist Penny Siopis is helpful in qualifying my earlier use of the term 'political' in reference to contemporary South African art. In this interview Coombes (1997: 127) poses a question central to my research on this period:

> Is there a kind of crisis in terms of representation for people working as visual artists here? Is there a way in which a whole body, a whole iconography, a whole way of framing one's work is now no longer viable? For example, the issue of gender can be raised in a way that wasn't something that many artists felt they could prioritize previously if they were committed to the struggle against apartheid. All those "grey" areas were politically and strategically not useful things to focus on at that time. So, it seems that now, there's both a crisis and a new freedom for artists.

Coombes (1997: 128) suggests that, post-apartheid, artists were 'being encouraged to see aesthetics and politics as necessarily autonomous realms… as a respite after the more explicitly "political" work during apartheid', and that Siopis' work 'which engages with the subjective and the private might easily be read as comfortably apolitical in this context?' Siopis (Coombes 1997: 128) acknowledges the possibility, but says: 'Just because one's not literally painting images of the liberation struggle does not mean that you are not political, or that you don't have a political positioning personally apart from the context of the work.' In fact, the major change in South African art from 1990 onwards is the broadening of the 'definition of the political' which Siopis calls for in the conclusion of the interview (Coombes 1997: 129).

South African artists began to make work that acknowledged and centred on their own 'positioning' in South African society, in terms of their race, colour, gender, sex, and beliefs. It was largely due to the draconian regulation and segregation of

these ‘personal’ qualities during apartheid, that these were all inescapably politicised positions. Sue Williamson (2000) explains:

> The new subject for artists to tackle became: identity. “Who am I in this new South Africa? How do the prejudices/privileges which came about because my family was black/white/coloured/mixed/Indian/other/ Afrikaans affect me now? How can I reflect these cross cultural influences in my work?” This is a somewhat simplistic way of presenting the problem, but in a country so deeply dependent on the complexities of heritage for one’s received identity, these questions are often hard and painful. The work that has emerged from this soul searching and perusing of family archives has often been sharp, honest and conceptually strong.

Artist William Kentridge defines ‘political art’ as ‘an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain ending - an art (and politics) in which optimism is kept in check, and nihilism at bay’ (Kentridge in Christov Bakargiev 1998).[4] During my interviews, most artists acknowledged that they were initially unsure as to what subjects to turn their attention to post-apartheid, but soon adapted to the change and enjoyed the freedom of working after 1990. Some, like David Koloane (2008) and Andrew Verster (2008), challenged the suggestion that they struggled to find direction in their art, saying that they did not consciously change the themes or conceits they were working with when the political tides changed, but that their work was often read and interpreted differently in light of the changes.

Andrew Verster (2004: 73) writes in his essay 'Ten out of Ten' in the Durban Art Gallery’s *ISHUMI/10:*

> The first surprise is that for many artists little has changed, and this is not because they have not been stimulated by democracy, but because they had anticipated the changes way before they happened. And in many cases were the very catalysts for the change.

[4] These quotations are cited on Kentridge’s Art Biography on Artthrob, as coming from the text *William Kentridge* by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (1998), Societé des Expositions du Palais de Beaux-Arts de Bruxcelles (www.artthrob.co.za/99may/artbio.htm).

It can be argued however, that post-Cultural Boycott exposure to international art at Biennales from 1991 onwards did gradually influence the kind of art being made in South Africa, as I will show in Chapter One. Of course, the question of what role art had to play in a democratic society had a knock-on effect in public art galleries, which were supposed to be artists' national and regional forums for exhibition. However these galleries had a considerable amount of catching up to do, which they had to negotiate in an interesting and dynamic time - both in terms of museum ideology and in the light of evolving ideas of nationhood and shifting political ideologies.

The first step was for public galleries to 'de-racialise'. David Koloane (1996: 54) clarifies this:

> The Separate Amenities Act of 1955 prohibited different racial groups from sharing facilities such as cinemas, theatres, swimming pools, and art museums. In other words the nationalist government employed culture as a tool of racial discrimination. By denying communities facilities and related resources, the government deliberately attempted to foster illiteracy not only in education but in the creative spheres as well. It is not difficult to realize that public institutions were conceived to reflect the cultural domination of one racial group. To most blacks these institutions often represent citadels of Western Culture.

As I will further explain in Chapter One, racial attitudes within institutional structures had thawed considerably by the '80s. This is observable in exhibitions such as *The Neglected Tradition* (JAG 1988), which sought to establish a place for art by black South Africans in art museums. According to Jillian Carman (2003: 250), museums, while being subject to laws which mandated social divisions along racial lines, often did not enforce these laws, as was the case with the Johannesburg Art Gallery and Durban Art Gallery. However, Carman (2003: 250) also says: 'Neither the Pretoria Art Museum nor the Johannesburg Art Gallery was a vociferous opponent of government policy. They would not have received funding if they had been.'

Totalitarianism won out, and the museum environment was at best oblivious of black visitors, and at worst suspicious of them. The museum experience thus became one anathemic for black visitors, preventing a culture of museum-going from being engendered amongst the black population.

Apart from staging innovative exhibitions, public art galleries in the late ‘80s and ‘90s were attuning themselves to the needs of a broader South African constituency, concentrating primarily on art education to compensate for the lack of resources amongst teachers. Art made at this time was often a harbinger of social change, putting across the need for political and social respect outside racial categories, better living conditions, and basic humans rights and freedoms. It could thus serve to highlight societal issues for students and suggest ways to cultivate and maintain a more egalitarian social system. Museums attempted to reinvent themselves as institutions representative and encouraging of new pluralistic understandings of South African culture and identity, rather than as elite strongholds of a visual history with a Eurocentric bias.

To say that South Africa changed enormously between the years 1990 and 1994 seems an inadequate description of the evolution and transformation that the country underwent during that period. The catalyst for the shift and fall of hierarchies was long-awaited political change, with the stepping down of the Nationalist government who had regulated the despised apartheid regime. The resignation of this 'old guard' instigated a social, economic and cultural revision of what 'South Africa' constituted. The consequent redressing of the cultural identity of the country is particularly interesting to study in terms of individual and institutional approaches to its representation: by those involved in both art-making and museum management between 1990 and 1994.

This study is framed not only around this short, tumultuous period in South African history but also around particular geographies. While artists and institutions throughout the country were doubtless affected by emerging debates and political changes, and all had to tackle the task of becoming representative of the new, pluralistic cultural character of the nation, it would not be possible to provide comprehensive coverage of all of South Africa within a Master's thesis. I have therefore focused my study on artists working in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban between 1990 and 1994, as well as the three major art museums in these cities, which I will hereafter describe as the JAG, the SANG and the DAG. JAG and DAG were under municipal auspices, while the SANG, as a national gallery, was initially under the administration of the Department of Education and later the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), and had little or no municipal funding.[5] These galleries were, to some degree, affected by their municipal and governmental links - in terms of their overarching ministries changing hands, in adjusting their policies to fit shifting South African needs and ideals, and in the financial implications of political change.

Museums keep relatively good hardcopy records of these kinds of evolutions, and it is interesting to examine whether, and how, the political and governmental upheaval affected galleries' management at this time. These records are thus an excellent way to track the debates surrounding the developments in South African art during this period. It can be argued that the JAG, SANG, and DAG were initially (and to differing degrees) catering primarily for first-language English-speakers, which would not have been as true of museums based in cities like Pretoria and

[5] SANG's only funding from the Cape Town City Council in the early '90s was a grant of R22 000, which they at first used to buy pictures and then to cover their running costs (water, electricity). With the formation of the Unicity this funding was withdrawn (Correspondence: Hayden Proud, 4 December 2008).

Bloemfontein, where Afrikaans was more predominant. Galleries only started making provision for speakers of South African black languages - mainly Zulu, Sotho or Xhosa speakers - in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

I will often mention other organisations operative during this transitional period, as there were many links between these organisations and the public galleries I have researched. These include: certain commercial galleries such as the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg; non-government arts foundations or community project such as the Community Arts Project (CAP), the Rorke's Drift Art Centre, the African Arts Centre (AAC), the Bag Factory or Fordsburg Artists Studios, the Thupelo Project, and FUBA (the Federated Union of Black Artists); independent arts activism groups like the National Arts Initiative (NAI) and the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW); and those affiliated to political parties like the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG), and the Visual Arts Group (VAG). A relationship between public art museums such as the JAG, SANG and DAG and galleries like the Goodman Gallery and the AAC, as well as other arts institutions or community centres, was necessitated by the increasing need of the public institutions to exhibit artworks that commercial and independent institutions were showcasing, and to support ‘grassroots’ initiatives. In exploring this, as well as looking into corporately-sponsored art competitions, I investigate the degree to which the exposure given to artists in the commercial sphere is linked to that offered by museums.

In focusing on the way public galleries negotiated this transitional period and addressed the gaps in their permanent collections, I also show how public galleries ‘redressed’ their existing collections - which had a bias towards Western, European, and ‘high’ or modernist art - in a way that would exhibit their relevance to the ‘new’ South Africa. Prior to this, public galleries had taken tentative steps towards

addressing this bias by rearranging their collections, so that international art was not prioritised over African or South African art. This is evident, for example in the JAG's decision to assign numbers to the pieces in their permanent collection, rather than dividing them according to their national origin (for example, the 'French' School or the 'Dutch' school). This system would have placed less emphasis on the particularities of where the works came from, than on their places in the permanent collection as a whole. Existing collections and exhibitions were also rearranged along thematic lines, rather than chronologically. Curating exhibitions of artworks from diverse areas and origins was a way of encouraging comparison and dialogues between them.

In the early '90s sweeping suggestions came from left wing and liberal quarters that parts of the collections which were seen as a remnant of the old colonial identity of the country should be sold off in order to buy artwork that was more multiculturally representative. Art museums were quick to staunch the flow of these sentiments with the argument that old cultural priorities of the country were important to document, as markers of where the country had departed from, how much it had changed, and all the histories that constituted it. Museums thus made good use of the collections they already had by exhibiting the pieces relevant to the past historical identity of the country alongside more contemporary South African art. With the SANG's *Affinities* exhibition (1992) for example, this juxtaposition was intended to form interweaving commentaries that would be of use in probing exactly what the nature of the 'new' South Africa was. All the while, galleries assiduously built up their collections of African and South African art, simultaneously meeting the mandates of the changing government and compensating for their financial inability to afford international art to build up their other collections.

Nothing could be taken for granted in the reconstruction of the constitution of the country. I use 'constitution' deliberately here, as South Africa is well-known for having one of the most comprehensive Constitutions in the world, and the sense in which I use the word is closely linked to the reasons for that. Having emerged from apartheid, policy-makers were anxious not to reinstate laws which discriminated against or condemned any societal group. Because the country had been subject to, and thus made acutely aware of, the power of words in this respect, terminology was a hugely contested area. Taken-for-granted language was now subject to scrutiny, and terms could not be presumed innocent of problematical implications, which had to be carefully unpacked.

Marilyn Martin writes (1997: 19):

> There are many divergent opinions and positions regarding the meaning, role and future of our art, a situation which has been brought into sharp focus by the end of the academic and cultural boycott, and years of isolation. The discussions and debates are local and specific, but they are also situated in the global context of post-colonialism and neo-colonialism, as well as post- and late-modernism, multiculturalism and pluralism. There is no consensus on the exact meaning and application of such nomenclature in South Africa: no word, concept or construct can be taken at face value, or be dissected or theorised upon any objective, academic or distant manner - our history is too painful, our challenges are too great.

In their respective interviews, former JAG employees Julia Charlton and Lesley Spiro-Cohen explained with exasperated delight, that everything in the early 1990s was up for debate, renewal and reordering, including the very language and terminology used in framing the debates. With regards to language, the dominance of English and Afrikaans in governmental and policy affairs and documents was seen as an extension of the oppression of other cultures and languages, and efforts were made to open the way for multilingual communication. As far as terminology was

concerned, no sooner had a phrase had been tried on for size, than it was interrogated and discarded as unfitting, usually due to problematic implications or connotations.

Steven Dubin (2006: 256) discusses this hyper-sensitivity to language and outlines some of its pros:

> One of the de rigueur features of contemporary South African museum practice is the avoidance of language that could suggest dogma of any sort. Declarations of "fact" have been replaced by tentativeness, open-endedness, relativity, and the deference for multiple perspectives. But what has been gained, and what has been lost in the process? On the positive side, the humanly constructed and interpretative nature of history has become more self-evident, and people are encouraged to exercise (or suspend) their own judgement; museums have become more accessible and less intimidating as a result.

'However,' Dubin (2006: 256) also suggests, 'by making everything seem partial, provisional, and a reflection of subjective factors, museums may retreat from saying anything definitive and forfeit any distinctive claims to knowledge they may have'. The latter point is not unwarranted, especially in light of an uninitiated art-viewing public that often yearns for some definitive interpretative guidance as to what they are looking at and experiencing when visiting an art museum. It is nevertheless inevitable that categorisations would be blurred and challenged in post-apartheid South Africa, considering its history of militantly segregating, blocking, and labelling people and spaces.

One example of terminology that has been forfeited in the arts is the descriptive label 'transitional' artists, which was used in the late '80s and early '90s as a catch-all phrase for black South African artists working with a mixture of 'traditional' and 'modern' materials and between rural and urban contexts. The term was used with abandon until art historians such as Anitra Nettleton and Elizabeth Dell pointed out that it implied that the art of black South Africans was static. In labelling this work as

'transitional' the implication was that it lay between constructs of an eternal and unchanging 'tradition' and a western 'modernity', as though these were finite rather than being in a state of constant flux and renewal. In response, I would like to assert that the sense in which I use the word 'transitional' throughout this thesis refers only to the period of transition between apartheid and post-apartheid governance.

Some other terms that I use require clarification. When I speak of democracy in the course of this thesis, I am referring to standard definitions such as:

> …government by the people; that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole, and is exercised either directly by them… or by officers elected by them... vaguely denoting a social state in which all have equal rights, without hereditary or arbitrary differences of rank or privilege.[6]

When using the word 'democratic' in relation to galleries, in terms of selection processes or other previously autocratic processes, I am referring to the inclusivity evident in the country at the time: an impetus towards opening debates to all interested parties, and making decisions that were in accord, if at all possible, with the wishes of those represented (and even those who were not). At this time, much effort went into ensuring that democratic processes be of particular benefit to groups disenfranchised and marginalised by apartheid.

A reference often made in this context was to addressing the needs of 'the community'. This designation was ambiguous enough, arguably, to refer to both black and white residents, but it was particularly applicable to groups founded from the 1960s onwards to foster the arts of black South Africans. These included, amongst many examples, the Polly Street Art Centre, the Thupelo Project and CAP - the latter

[6] Oxford English Dictionary. (www.oed.com).

being the most obvious example of how these groups were broadly defined as 'community' arts projects and centres. Andrea Witcomb (2003: 79) asserts:

> The centrality of "community" in… accounts of the purpose of museums tends to associate the concept of community with radical democracy and resistance to the dominant culture. Communities tend to be understood as existing outside of government and even in opposition to it. By placing "community" at the heart of the museum enterprise, the argument runs, it will be possible to overcome the role of museums as hegemonic institutions.

Most of the arts projects mentioned above were underpinned, implicitly rather than overtly, by an impetus to subvert the apartheid government's racist education policies. In the early '90s public art museums such as the JAG, SANG, and DAG worked consciously to represent these 'communities'. However, as Witcomb's use of quotation marks implies, theorists have since shown that references to 'the community' and 'the public' as finite, unified entities are based on perception rather than fact, as I will further discuss in Chapter Two.

Finally, the last term that requires greater explanation is the designation of those working in some arts organisations as 'cultural workers'. This term suggested a socialist emphasis on equal status for left-wing art makers and art activists working under the umbrella of the arts at the time. During the '80s and early '90s it was particularly *en vogue*, as those in the South African art world often doubled or tripled as arts practitioners, administrators and academics, and thus the term was a convenient cover-all as well as having egalitarian sentiments behind it.

My examination of this topic was motivated in part by a dearth of literature concentrating exclusively on this crucial era in South African visual arts history. Publications on the arts in the years that I am reviewing were not as prolific as they are now, and those that did exist were often situated from different 'schools of

thought' or ideological standpoints. For example, literature issued by politically-affiliated arts groups would have differed in its scope and conclusions to the literature of non-affiliated ones; left-wing arts groups would have emphasised different objectives to those emphasised by conservative ones; and, even regionally, a publication written by academics in Pretoria would have brought different concerns to the fore than one from Durban. Today's arts literature is no less partisan, but there is more of it and one is thus able to read critically and compare the authors' findings.

Following the pattern in the country at the time, articles or publications, were often not inclusive or representative of a wide spectrum of South African visual art, although arts literature became more common and varied in the 1990 to 1994 period and thereafter. It was only in the late '80s, and more particularly the early '90s, that South African public galleries began to publish exhibition catalogues in the scholarly, explanatory forms that are now standard. While there is increasingly more information being written about the arts and culture industry in South Africa, and there are good publications concerning individual artists and artistic programmes, there is little comprehensive literature on visual art that encapsulates the cultures, themes and trends informing art production and display in this transitional phase. Nor is there much that details what values underpinned these trends and what patterns and doctrines informed them, whether overtly or implicitly so.

In Rose Korber's 1990 article on South African art historian Esme Berman, Berman mentioned that her publishers, Southern Books, had asked her to plan towards a revision of her well-known text *Art and Artists in South Africa* (1970; revised and enlarged in 1983). Berman said of the request:

> ...that will not be in the immediate future, because the revised book is only six years old and is still very valid. Also, I feel that we are in the midst of an amazingly volatile phase in South African history: there have been

> such profound changes in the cultural scene over the last few years, that it would be wiser to let some time pass and then retrospectively examine what has taken place.

One can see that, given the political situation, it was difficult to write conclusively on the arts at the time, which is why this era remains inadequately covered. Arguably Berman's framing of this may also have been tied into traditionalist understandings of art history current in 1970s History of Art curricula at universities in South Africa, which urged art historians not to focus on the present as one needed the 'distance' of a few years to acquire 'objectivity'. By 1990, this argument was fairly passé, as people had recognised that art history could be involved with the present.[7] Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that many of the publications I cite are written, at the earliest, in 1996 - perhaps because many writers, like Berman, were reluctant to publish texts before the 1994 elections lest their conclusions miss the mark. Indeed, most of the publications and articles written in the 1990 to 1994 period conclude with variations of 'we'll just have to wait and see'.

I have used Albie Sach's 1989 seminar 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom', which provoked a profusion of discussion when it was initially delivered, as a departure point for my discussion of the prevalent debates about the role and responsibility of art in a post-apartheid South Africa. Despite their concentration on broader time periods and differing aspects of art history, other useful texts I have consulted include: Carol Brown's 2005 MA thesis 'Museum Spaces in Post-Apartheid South Africa: the Durban Art Gallery as a Case Study'; the catalogue essays in the DAG's retrospective publications *Umbukiso* (2001) and *Ishumi/10* (2004), and catalogue essays from the SANG's exhibitions, such as *Ezakwantu: Beadwork from*

[7] During informal correspondence Brenda Schmahmann (16 September 2008) suggested that this could be part of the reason why more was not written on the 1990 to 1994 period during those years.

the Eastern Cape (1993) and *Contemporary South African Art 1985 – 1995: from the South African National Gallery Permanent Collection* (1997), both edited by Emma Bedford.[8] I have also referred extensively to William Beinart's *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (2001), in Chapter One, in order to provide political contextualisation for the changes that occurred in the arts.

Probably the closest study to my own that I have referred to is Steven C. Dubin's *Transforming Museums: Mounting Queen Victoria in a Democratic South Africa* (2006) - an enlightening text which outlines the processes of transformation that many South African museums underwent between 1990 and 2006. Dubin's focus is obviously much broader than my own, encompassing all the major South African public museums within a larger time frame, and he also focuses on specific debates such as those around Sarah Bartmann's remains and the District Six area. Because of this wide focus Dubin's text tends to mention, almost anecdotally, a few interesting examples of transformation politics pertinent to each gallery or museum, rather than attempting to create a specific and sustained study of each one.

Many leanings in South African art have been interpreted in the light of the impact of the TRC hearings, which began shortly after my period of study, in 1995, and concluded in 1998. But there seems to have been little consideration of the ways in which history and memory, for example, may perhaps have emerged earlier. Texts like Sarah Nuttall's and Carli Coetzee's *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (1998) and Rob Nixon's *Homelands, Hollywood and Harlem* (1994)

[8] Marion Arnold's essay 'Visual Culture in Context' from *Between Union and Liberation* (2005) and the Iziko Museums' catalogue *Democracy X: Marking the Present/Representing the Past* (2004) are both publications which refer in part to the era I am reviewing. While Brown investigates the Durban Art Gallery, Arnold focuses on women in art, and *Democracy X* is a retrospective collection of essays commemorating a decade of democracy, these texts are informative about the influences on art between 1990 and 1994. Marion Arnold's *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996) and Elizabeth Rankin's *Images of Wood* (1989) and *Images of Metal* (1994) also shed light on some aspects of the 1990 to 1994 period.

address art and politics in general, philosophic or historical terms without specific emphasis on visual art; while Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal's *Art in South Africa: the Future Present* (1996) is helpful but brief and - probably because of an attempt to be as contemporary as possible - includes only a few artworks made between 1990 and 1994. The same applies to many of the publications produced in 2004 to commemorate ten years of democracy, as these often manifestly do not focus on the period prior to 1994. Here and there articles published in international journals like *African Arts* and the *Oxford Art Journal*, and South African art journals *De Arte*, the *South African Journal of Art and Architectural History*, and *Art Design Architecture (ADA)*, have also been useful.

No publication that I am aware of has presented the 1990 to 1994 period as a topic of specific focus. Researching this topic therefore involved collating many disparate sources of information. My primary research and most significant insights have been gleaned during visits to the JAG, SANG, and the DAG libraries and archives. All three libraries have managed over the years to assimilate and maintain remarkably good archives and resources, considering their inadequate funding, staff changes, and the oscillations of their City Councils. The archived catalogues, annual reports, collections records, and press releases of my chief research sites were indispensable in understanding the concerns that affected the galleries during the transitional years, and in tracking changes in reactions to art - to the way it was thought about, written about and understood. The changes in the dominant political ideas are also clearly apparent in the decisions made to buy certain genres of artwork rather than others, and to thematise existing collections in ways that resist prior hierarchies and categorisations. Government releases like the 1996 White Papers on Arts, Culture and Heritage, and other information published by the Department of

Arts and Culture, as well as City Council documents like the *Mayor's Minutes* also proved useful, as these documented arts transformation at a governmental level.

In order to consolidate the information I gleaned from existing records, I conducted interviews with gallery directors and curators working during the early ‘90s, including Marilyn Martin at SANG, Jill Addleson and Carol Brown at DAG, and Christopher Till and Rochelle Keene at JAG. Through this fieldwork I was referred to others involved in the arts in South Africa at the time, such as Steven Sack, Mike van Graan, Colin Smuts, Andries Oliphant, and Maishe Maponya. These interviewees have important insights into arts administration during the period under review, as they have been variously and interchangeably involved in the plethora of political and non-political arts initiatives existent in the ‘80s and ‘90s, which I list later in this introduction.

I also interviewed a number of artists who agreed to speak about their work, in order to ascertain their perceptions about their experiences and artistic concerns during the period I have researched. These included Paul Stopforth, a very influential artist in South Africa in the ‘80s who moved overseas in the early ‘90s; artists who were Johannesburg-based in the transitional years - Wilma Cruise, David Koloane, Steven Cohen, and Colin Richards; those who were Cape Town-based - Zwelethu Mthethwa, Willie Bester, and Gavin Younge; as well as Durban-based artist Andrew Verster. I have spoken to museum professionals such as Jillian Carman, Julia Charlton, and Lesley Spiro-Cohen (all former JAG curators) as well as Fiona Rankin-Smith (Wits Art Gallery [WAG]), Melanie Hillebrand, (Director of the former King George VI Art Gallery, now the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum, in Port Elizabeth), and Jenny Stretton (current acting Director at DAG). The personal accounts of the artists are contextualised using the literature and reviews written on

their work in the early ‘90s, while those of the museum professionals are interesting in terms of the exhibitions and literature they were working on at that time.

Many of my most useful sources have been articles on the Internet written by well-respected figures in the South African arts world, including Sue Williamson’s ‘South African Art in the Nineties’ (Artthrob 2000), and Mike van Graan’s ‘The vanguard of social transformation? Creators during - and after - apartheid in South Africa’, and texts by others like Mario Pissarra, David Koloane and Marilyn Martin. However, these texts are to be found in frustratingly obscure corners of the web and need more concerted, carefully edited collating than I can provide here, as this thesis focuses most specifically on museums rather than general trends in the art world.

By reviewing primary debates that have been created by the architects of the changing views of art in our society - the artists, art activists, curators, directors, art historians, critics, writers, journalists, art dealers and gallerists - and examining the existing resources, it is possible to indicate how political changes in the country informed the production and exhibition of art and cultural expression in museums between 1990 and 1994.

As mentioned in the first part of this introduction, one of the motivations for conducting this research was to explore the suggestion that the fall of the Nationalist government deprived some artists of subject matter, as the iconography and agit-prop of ‘protest’ theatre, music, and artwork had been a well-funded, well-supported, and popular mode of expression in the years leading up to Nelson Mandela’s release. In this thesis, I identify some artists who were especially prolific or well-supported

during this period, often because their work was relevant and encapsulated responses to the new political climate.[9]

In Chapter One I situate the topic in terms of the political situation in South Africa, as well as in relation to major events in, and influences on, the arts at the time. One such influence was the imposition of the Cultural Boycott from as early as the 1940s, to around 1991 (Dubin 2006: 39). Its end was officially marked and celebrated in 1995 by another important event - the first *Johannesburg Biennale*. I also describe the many arts initiatives, committees, and conferences set up in the early 1990s to formulate policy for the arts, and the immense level of responsibility that artists undertook in informing the improvement of the way the arts were run and funded in the country.[10]

I discuss the idea that between 1990 and 1994, real 'redress' for black artists was really little more than a face-value overhaul of existing collecting and policy-making processes, which only began to have tangible benefits after the *1995 Johannesburg Biennale.* I also delve into the influence of corporately-sponsored art competitions on the arts in Chapter Two, which is highly relevant to my discussion of art museums as many of the competitions were shown on a rotational basis in the public art galleries in the country. I believe these major exhibitions and competitions were crucial barometers of the changing concerns in South African art, but not because they were all deemed exceptionally successful: it was their failures that proved more revealing.

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[9] These artists include those I have listed as interviewees, as well as William Kentridge, Norman Catherine, Jane Alexander, Karel Nel, Penny Siopis, Sandra Kriel, Malcolm Payne, Peter Schütz, Robert Hodgins, Andries Botha, Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, Jackson Hlungwani, Joachim Schönveldt, Willem Boshoff, Kendell Geers, Kagiso Pat Mautloa, Sam Nhlengetwa, Kevin Brand, Neil Goedhals, Judith Mason, Kay Hassan, and Moshekwa Langa amongst others.

[10] These include the National Arts Policy Plenary (NAPP), the NAI, the National Arts Coalition (NAC), the ANC's Culture and Development Conference (CDC), the Commission on Museums, Monuments and Heraldry (CMMH), the Commission for the Restructuring and Transformation of the Arts and Culture (CREATE) and ACTAG.

Two exhibitions that were critically acclaimed were *Tributaries* (1985), an independent exhibition curated by Ricky Burnett, and *The Neglected Tradition* (1988), curated by Steven Sack and held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery - as these exhibitions were highly influential in addressing the necessity to revise the ways that the art of black South Africans was considered (or overlooked) in the country. I also discuss *Art from South Africa* (1990), curated by the MOMA, Oxford; the *Standard Bank National Drawing Competition* (1990); the *Cape Town Triennials* (1982, 1985, 1988, 1991); the *Vita Art Awards/Prize* (1986 – 2002); the *Standard Bank Young Artists Award* (1981 to the present)*;* and the 1995 *Johannesburg Biennale*, as it was being organised from 1993 onwards.

Other factors important in understanding the influences on South African art during the 1990s were: debates in international museum discourse about the function, target, methods and responsibilities of museums; the effect of political pressures on museum professionals within South Africa; and the financial constraints involved in art collecting by public galleries, which has had a huge impact on decisions around what has been bought and what it is considered important to buy.

Having given the background essential to an understanding of the situation of South African art and museums at the time, I proceed by discussing my three geographical areas of interest, with their public galleries as the primary focus. IN Chapter Three I relate the events at the JAG to those in local community arts projects and independent institutions, such as the Goodman Gallery, the Fordsburg Artists Studios, the JAF, the Thupelo Project, and the WAG. I also incorporate the views of the artists who were based in Johannesburg during the period under review, including Penny Siopis, William Kentridge, Wilma Cruise, David Koloane, Steven Cohen and Kendell Geers.

In Chapter Four I discuss the SANG, in relation to the *Cape Town Triennials*, as well as to the experiences of artists resident in Cape Town at the time, such as Willie Bester, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Gavin Younge, Jane Alexander and Randy Hartzenberg. In Chapter Five I explore the changes at the DAG and Durban-based community arts projects such as the AAC, and include an overview of work by artists involved with the DAG and the AAC, including Andrew Verster, Dan Rakgoathe, Andries Botha and Azaria Mbatha.

In MOMA's *Art from South Africa* (1990) catalogue, curator David Elliott writes: 'The question which is now being asked from township backyard to art college seminar room is: "what role has culture to play in the new society?"' The crux of my research has been tracing the way this question reverberated - primarily through the hallowed halls of public art museums; secondarily, through the minds of South African artists; and thirdly, the way it echoed back and forth, often in no-man's land, between the two. I posit artists as a secondary focus of my thesis, as it is difficult and unwise to attempt a generalised summation of what 'artists' felt their role to be, or to myself assume what role 'artists' took. It is more sensible and revealing to analyse the traceable developments in the art institutions that are meant to represent, influence, or awaken public consciousness. To ask 'What role do artists have to play as agents or arbiters of culture in the new society?' would be to fly in the face of exactly the kind of freedom of expression that Albie Sachs makes a case for in 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom' (1989).

It is not without irony that the structure of my thesis imitates, to a degree, the hierarchy in the arts world at the time. There was more money and development in Johannesburg and by extension there seems to have been more material there for me to investigate. I have interviewed far more white people involved in the arts than

black people. This is firstly because there were so few black arts or museum professionals who had decision-making powers during the early transitional phase; and secondly because black practitioners largely had only revisionist texts published on them during this era (with the exception of Jackson Hlungwani and Gerard Sekoto) while white artists had good press. Thirdly, due to the abjected societal pigeonholing of black artists in poor living conditions consolidated by the apartheid system, it is tragic that many black artists have in fact died relatively young, rather than enjoying the lengthy lifespan of many of their white counterparts. Mongane Wally Serote (1999: 16) confirms and laments this in *Liberated Voices*, while Steven C. Dubin (2006: 42) relates that:

> At the opening of *The neglected tradition*, Steven Sack mentally went down the roster of names and their respective fates: "dead," "dead," "dead," "jail," "exile in London." Rare were the artists who were able to personally witness or savor their initial moment of triumph.

Finally, much more intensive study is needed into the role of the community centres that were operational at the time, as well as into the vital arts policy meetings held in the 1990 to 1994 period, as I have had to give the briefest overview of these in order to accommodate all the angles of my topic.

CHAPTER ONE:

Political background and advances in art policy creation.

> It has been rare for a country with such deep divisions of race, wealth, and culture to manage a democratic political transition of the kind achieved in South Africa, or for an undemocratic ruling group to give up power without even more intense conflict or outside intervention. Throughout the period of negotiations between 1990 and 1994, the possibility remained that the country would be sucked into a vortex of violence, or fragment politically. That the outcome would be, in Mandela's words (1995), “a small miracle” was by no means predictable (Beinart 2001: 271).

Residents in South Africa between 1990 and 1994 could only hope for a peaceful resolution to the violence that seemed likely to rip the country apart. Those in favour of the transition of power worked in small but firm measures at every level of society to see that, when change was implemented, the decisions made would be well-informed and reached in a democratic manner. This chapter serves to contextualise my study of the prevalent debates about the direction and function of public art museums in terms of the political developments that added impetus to changing theories about South African museum practice, and the impact of the political situation on artists and their work. In the first part of this chapter I discuss the effect that the Cultural Boycott and the resistance struggle had on art, and other intersections of art and politics - including Albie Sach’s 1989 seminar paper advocating the emancipation of the visual arts from struggle objectives. Between 1990 and 1994 debates arose as to the direction and intention of art in South Africa, when its artists began to be exposed to and involved in international art shows. All of these factors fused to fire an intensive period of debate and a renewal of ideas about the South African arts, and the museums which exhibited them.

The second section of the chapter deals specifically with the organisations set up to overhaul arts administration and create new arts policy in the country, with particular emphasis on rectifying racial inequalities ingrained in society and government by the apartheid system. I also touch briefly on the challenges encountered by artists during this era, particularly those experienced by black artists, partially because of the great surge of interest in their work in the late '80s and the '90s.

1.1. The political situation in South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including the effects of the Cultural Boycott on art.

The Cultural Boycott was a key influence on the arts pre-democracy. It was a ban encouraged by anti-apartheid activists since the 1940s on all forms of artistic exchange between South African and international entities, and it was supported by the UN in conjunction with the overseas liberation movements from the 1960s (Dubin 2006: 39). It redoubled in the 1980s, disallowing any international artistic or cultural exchange with South Africa. Despite the Cultural Boycott, and in many ways because of it, the 1980s were a prolific time for the arts in South Africa. Left-wing or liberal artists collaborated with the ANC cultural desk and UDF[11] cultural desk on various conferences like the 'Art Towards Social Development: Culture and Resistance Conference' held in Gaborone in Botswana in 1982, and the 'Culture in Another South Africa' (CASA) Conference in Holland in 1987, where artists, musicians and performers were 'smuggled' into these countries in order to perform and bring

[11] www.mikevangraan.co.za/recent-articles-papers/commonwealth-foundation-paper.doc/download: The non-racial United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed in 1983, in reaction to the set-up of the Tricamerical Parliament, 'imposed by the apartheid government that sought to co-opt "coloureds" and "Indians" into a political arrangement that would continue to marginalise the black majority' (Van Graan).

attention to oppression in South Africa. The Natal Visual Arts Organisation (NAVAO) as well as the VAG were formed after this Conference (Pissarra 2003).

The State of Emergency called in South Africa in 1985 and 1986 signified the apartheid government's most fearsome crackdown on resistance effort and freedom of expression in general. However, 1985 also saw the course of South African art history forever altered by *Tributaries,* a groundbreaking exhibition curated by Ricky Burnett and sponsored by BMW, which was held in a warehouse space that would one day become Museum Africa (Brown 2006:76). *Tributaries* was unique in that more than half of the art on show in was by black artists from different socio-economic areas of South Africa, and it was welcomed with relief and wonder by those who understood the significance of the affirmation of the art of black South Africans as worthy of more than ethnographic interest and display. Also significant is the fact that major galleries applied for budgets specifically to buy works from *Tributaries*, indicating that they were recognised by curators as signifiers of the future representational character of the country (Brown 2005: 77).

The sponsorship of this exhibition by BMW, and the support of the arts by other corporations (such as Standard Bank, with their Young Artist Awards), strengthened the fledgling category coming to be known as 'contemporary South African art' - a tag which I will further unpack in Chapter Two. This kind of sponsorship was evidence that big business and corporations were seeing the death-throes of apartheid. William Beinart (2001: 260) relates that in 1985:

> …a business delegation, led by Gavin Relly, Chairman of Anglo-American, met the ANC in Lusaka - one of the first of a long list of opposition politicians, trade unionists, and intellectuals to make the trip. For powerful sections of the white elite, as well as for the UDF and Comrades, the locus of future political legitimacy was beginning to crystallize. The NP was rapidly losing the support of business, which it had recently courted so assiduously.

Just as big business started to court liberation organisations in the ‘80s, cultural institutions also progressed to working with representatives of the new ‘government-in-waiting’. Artists, arts administrators, and museum professionals saw in advance, as big business had, that building cooperative relationships early on would stand all parties in good stead.

In 1986, despite the draconian control of the State of Emergency, changes of legislation - including the repealing of the pass laws, the Mixed Marriages Act, and Section 16 of the Immorality Act - signalled the state’s slow release of control. Many artists and activists had felt strongly that it was their responsibility to address the social and political inequalities in the country. In the late ‘80s, sensing that the turning of the tide was imminent, they redoubled their opposition of the government’s abuse of basic human rights. They were encouraged in this by local and international anti-apartheid movements, and the health of the arts industry grew in accordance with this upsurge of creative expression. As Ivor Powell asserts in a 1991 *Weekly Mail* article:

> The 1980s were period of unprecedented possibility in the visual arts and indeed in culture as a whole. Massive injections of funding were made available to “progressive” organizations and community projects inside the country. Art competitions mushroomed as large corporations explored the possibilities of the fine arts as a means to image enhancement. Art, it seemed, was a high priority in society as a whole.

In 1988, while political pressure intensified as the government clamped down further on opposition organisations, the art world saw the advent of another exhibition - *The Neglected Tradition* curated by Steven Sack - recognising the work of black South African artists. *The Neglected Tradition's* development and exhibition in an official ‘house of culture’, the Johannesburg Art Gallery, attested to the increased attribution of value to art by black South Africans. Sack was initially reluctant to

curate the exhibition (Sack 2007; Dubin 2006: 40). In eventually doing so, he went against the counsel of many left-wing friends and advisors who advised him against it because the JAG was perceived as an institution which, until that point, had colluded with apartheid policies (Sack 2007; Dubin 2006: 40).

By the black-and-white definitions of freedom-fighting groups, Galleries and Museums were seen to be City Council funded, and therefore, State-controlled. While the funding for these galleries was provided by the government, the apartheid government really had very little interest in the arts in South Africa, and the pre-democracy perception that public galleries were merely a mouthpiece for the State was somewhat unfair. Without doubt they were 'elitist' institutions, but many galleries by the mid 1980s and early 1990s were run by fairly liberal-minded academics, pushing conservative Boards of Trustees into approving sagacious purchases of art works that were politically quite sensitive - as with Paul Stopforth's *The Interrogators* series (1979: Fig. 2), as discussed in Chapter Four.

The political tide finally turned the year after *The Neglected Tradition*, in 1989, when PW Botha resigned as Prime-Minister and was replaced by the more progressive FW de Klerk, and Walter Sisulu and other leaders were released from imprisonment. With the longed-for goal of liberal and left-wing artists and activists met, Albie Sachs delivered his controversial but crucial seminar paper 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom'. In it, Sachs motivated for art to be freed from its obligation to the struggle - a sentiment met with great relief in some quarters and with derision in others, as the Cultural Boycott had played a powerful role in drawing attention to the plight of South Africans. This debate effectively centred around what the roles and responsibilities of visual culture should be (or should not have to be) in post-apartheid South Africa.

Artist Wilma Cruise (2008) remembers that, 'It was an enormous "hot potato" in art, in the late '80s: should you do political art or should you not? Should art be harnessed to a protest situation?' Cruise outlines two results of this kind of thinking: the first was that certain black artists like Durant Sihlali, David Koloane and Pat Mautloa 'were doubly victimised'. Cruise (2008) explained that there were few opportunities for black artists to study art at formal institutions, as this was only possible at Rorke's Drift, the University of Fort Hare, and UNISA. As a result black artists joined the Thupelo and Triangle workshops[12] 'where they learnt a language of Modernism and Abstract Expressionism' and began 'painting in an international Modernist style' (Cruise 2008). These artists were then 'criticised for not harnessing their art to the political cause because… this kind of international Modernism was meant to be apolitical' (Cruise 2008).

The second consequence of the politicisation of art was that it suffered a tendency towards being overly didactic. Cruise (2008) uses as an example an exhibition called the *Detainee Parents Support Committee* exhibition at the Market Theatre Gallery that she took part in:

> The first work I made for it, which fortunately I had the grace not to show (but which just goes to show the kind of thinking that was happening) was a pair of hands twisted up in barbed wire - something so obvious and didactic. So, what happens is that need and that push to make art link to the political cause results in a sort of didacticism. It is not good art, necessarily.

Finally, Cruise (2008) relates that with the political change people started feeling more liberated in their art-making and, as Cruise (2008) quaintly expresses it, 'turning into themselves'. She cites William Kentridge as an example of an artist whose early

[12] One can include in this list the Johannesburg Art Foundation, as its founder Bill Ainslie was a particular proponent of Abstract Expressionist work.

art was centred around social commentary, and then, post-liberation, 'turned more inwards' without divorcing itself from politics. As Cruise points out, Kentridge's work in fact became more politically potent 'because he was talking about himself with Soho Eckstein, the 'Randlord'… he could look at the bigger picture of what it was to be white and Jewish and of that kind of heritage in South Africa' (Cruise 2008). While physical similarities between Soho Eckstein (Fig.3.1) and Kentridge (Fig.3.2) are discernable, it is in the character Felix from *Felix in Exile* (Fig.3.3) that Kentridge's insertion and implication of himself in his work is most obvious. Felix is one of the clearest examples of the way that Kentridge and many other South African artists[13] became freer to interrogate their places in socio-political structures, and to draw attention to the dynamics of their racial and cultural identities and heritages. As Cruise (2008) suggests, it can be argued that South African art improved with the advent of this kind of artistic and personal freedom.

Albie Sachs' 1989 seminar paper 'Preparing ourselves for Freedom' was a key event in the release of the arts from didacticism and political campaigning. It was published in the MOMA's *Art from South Africa* (1990) exhibition catalogue, along with responses to it by key players in arts activism and administration at the time, such as Frank Meintjes of COSAW and Mongane Wally Serote of the ANC Cultural Desk. The major thrust of the paper is an appeal for cultural freedom - specifically in the fields of literature, theatre, and visual art. Sachs (1989: 11) pointed out that, despite the roles that South African musicians Hugh Masekela, Abdullah Ibrahim, Jonas Gwangwa and Miriam Makeba played in the struggle, their music is exempt from the tones and hues of oppression and 'tells us something lovely and vivacious

[13] Other artists who used their own bodies and images to explore the politics and dynamics of their sex, gender, race, and other aspects of personal history and identity in the 1990s include Penny Siopis, Brett Murray, Kendell Geers, Steven Cohen, and Candice Breitz, amongst many others.

about ourselves' rather than 'how to win a strike or blow up a petrol pump'. Sachs (1989:10) asked:

> What we [South Africans, and the ANC] have to ask ourselves now is whether we have an artistic cultural vision that corresponds to this current phase in which a new South African nation is emerging. Can we say that we have begun to grasp the full dimensions of the new country and new people that it is struggling to give birth to itself, or are we still trapped in the multiple ghettoes of the apartheid imagination?

To escape this oppressive fate, Sachs (1989: 10) proposed a number of solutions in the spirit of encouraging debate.

The first, rather humorously, was that ANC 'members should be banned from saying that *culture is a weapon of the struggle*'. While admitting that he was a primary advocate of the arts assisting the struggle, Sachs revoked his former assertions, stating that this 'affirmation seems not only banal and devoid of real content, but actually wrong and potentially harmful'. Sachs (1989: 10) suggested that this slogan 'results in impoverishment of our art', and explained:

> Instead of getting real criticism, we get solidarity criticism. Our artists are not pushed to improve the quality of the work, it is enough that it be politically correct. The more the fists and spears and guns, the better. The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is excluded. Ambiguity and contradiction are completely shut out, and the only conflict permitted is that between the old and the new, as if there were only bad in the past and only good in the future (Sachs 1989: 10).

Sachs (1989: 11) further argued that harnessing culture to the political cause almost empowered the oppressors, 'as though [they] stalk every page and haunt every picture'.

The second proposal Sachs made was less tongue-in-cheek. He suggested that the ANC Constitutional Guidelines 'not be applied to culture', but that culture should

‘make its input into the Guidelines’ and that the ANC should ‘be the harbingers of freedom of conscience, debate and opinion’ in this respect (Sachs 1989: 13). Sachs (1989: 13-15) articulated ‘three aspects of the Guidelines that bear directly on the sphere of culture’. Firstly, he suggested that emphasis be placed ‘on building national unity and encouraging the development of a common patriotism, while fully recognising the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country’ (Sachs 1989: 13-15). Secondly, Sachs (1989: 13-15) mentioned that the proposed ‘Bill of Rights [would guarantee] freedom of expression and… political pluralism’. Thirdly, Sachs (1989: 13-15) articulated the need for societal ‘transformation’ through ‘programmes of affirmative action’, ‘adult education and literacy, and extensive use of the media’, and for ‘the State, local authorities and public and private institutions’ to be constitutionally bound ‘to take active steps to remove massive inequalities created by centuries of colonial and racist domination’.

It is evident that Sachs’ seminar effectively set the tone for the arts in the 1990 to 1994 period; and it is interesting to note that the proposals he made in this seminar were, by and large, gradually implemented in government and museums. This is not to say that Sachs is solely responsible for the changes in new South African policy. The point is rather to elucidate that the goals he outlined did not diverge significantly from those encapsulated in the arts policies which were eventually collated through long consultation with the art world. As discussed in Chapter 1.2, these policies were formulated by politically-aligned and -non-aligned groups, finalised by the ACTAG, and published in the *1996 White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage.*

In 1990 the ANC, PAC, SACP and other organisations were unbanned by the Nationalist government, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and the NP entered negotiations with the ANC to broker a truce between the parties. What

followed between 1990 and 1994 after those key turning points was a complex process and I have relied largely on William Beinart's succinct text on South African history to provide the political context for my discussion of the arts at this time. According to Beinart (2001: 276-7), key events in the early negotiations to broker a power-sharing deal in the country were the 'National Peace Accord signed in September 1991 [which] tried to establish codes of conduct for all political groups and security forces as well as community involvement in peace-making', as well as the government's appointment of 'the Goldstone Commission "Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation"'. Despite these moves, Beinart (2001: 277) gives the distressing statistic that 'Between 1990 and 1994, about 14,000 died in political violence within South Africa', which provides a clear indication of the flaring turmoil and bloodshed in the country at the time. Considering the deep, latent anxiety in South African society during these years, the consequent euphoria of the successful elections and relatively peaceful transition of power is understandable.

Beinart (2001: 278) cites the Witwatersrand and Natal areas as the focal points of the violence from 1990 onwards, relating how 'Masked gunmen killed at random on black commuter trains, previously used as vehicles for political mobilisation by youths during the emergency [and] taxi wars over transport routes escalated'. The violence was primarily between the IFP and the ANC but 'meetings between Mandela and Buthelezi in 1991 failed to douse the flaring grass of people's anger' (Beinart 2001: 278).

Many of my interviewees, when asked to recount their memories of the situation in the country at the time, remember most clearly the horrific reports of this train and taxi violence, rallies and marches, as well as the Shell House and Boipatong massacres which centred largely around ANC and IFP conflict. According to Beinart,

(2001: 278) hope came in late 1991 in the form of 'formal negotiations [between] representatives of a wide range of political groups, including homeland governments and ethnic parties' in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). However, 'CODESA broke down in May 1992 amidst persistent violence and because of the reluctance of the NP and others to accept the logic of a unitary state'. The 'massacre of residents at the ANC stronghold of Boipatong, near Vereeniging, in July 1992, led the ANC to withdraw temporarily from talks', apart from a 'confidential "channel"' between the ANC's Cyril Ramaphosa and the NP's Roelf Meyer (Beinart 2001: 278).

Beinart (2001: 279) describes the knock-on effects of the unstable political situation:

> Violence, vengeance, and the politics of fear sapped the optimism generated by Mandela's release and CODESA. As policing loosened, a crime wave swept white as well as black communities… Violence was becoming an unpredictable and fragmenting force for all parties, raising the spectre of civil disintegration.

However, despite the breakdown of the talks, and the 'public recriminations' between Mandela and De Klerk, the meetings between the two leaders continued and 'survived the popular anger sparked by the assassination of Chris Hani' in April 1993 (Bienart 2001: 279-280). A 'Multi-Party Negotiating Forum advanced on CODESA's progress, and by June 1993 had fixed on April 1994 as the date for the first non-racial democratic elections' (Bienart 2001: 279-280). Finally, although 'deaths dogged the transition to the last… the election took place, starting on 26 April 1994, amidst national euphoria. The vast majority of eligible South Africans of all backgrounds stood together in the polling queues' (Beinart 2001: 285). The ANC won the election

and became the new ruling party and Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as President on the 10th May 1994.

Beinart (2001: 281) explains:

> Institutional change ran in tandem with a political settlement. More churches deracialized; large companies speeded up recruitment of blacks. Hospitals were 'opened' initially by mass action. Universities incorporated more black students; by 1993 they were a majority of the intake. The University of the Western Cape, formerly segregated for coloured people, offered greatly expanded access to higher education for Africans and became one centre of reconstruction thinking.

As mentioned earlier, public galleries and museums had never enforced racial segregation, and they had been actively debating the revision and renewal of the role of the museum since the 1980s. Thus, when political change made mandatory many of the amendments that museum professionals had wanted to implement for some time, public art galleries such as the JAG, SANG, and the DAG transformed with enthusiasm.

The development of museum and gallery policies, while not directly reflecting the needs, aims, and concerns of the new government, show some interesting parallels with the readjusting governmental policies of the 1990s. For example, public museums and galleries broadened their focus from meeting the needs of a small sector of the population, to prioritising the education and representation of South Africans regardless of colour or class. They concentrated increasingly on, and encouraged, attempts to represent a pluralistic national culture, emphasising humanitarian values and human rights as common ground, and constantly revising ideas of what 'heritage' is, can, and should be.

One of the first major changes the ANC implemented in the 'new South Africa' was the division of the regions from four provinces to nine provinces - an alteration

which fundamentally affected the ways that galleries had previously defined themselves by their provincial history, as I will explain in Chapter Two. The location of the galleries under review had a slightly different implication in terms of the political clashes outlined above. While the usual understandings posit a museum as a place that documents events rather than as a place where events occur, the public galleries I am discussing are all still in their original inner-city locations. They have thus been exposed to political altercations, and are situated in places that serve as visible proof of the change in South African society.

The JAG is situated adjacent to all the major hubs of transport in Johannesburg: it is next to a large taxi rank, and is flanked by the vast network of train-tracks that make up the metro and national railroads. The DAG is situated in the Durban City Hall buildings, also in the heart of the City; while the SANG is situated in the grandeur of Cape Town's Company Gardens, a short distance down from the Presidential Tuynhuys residence to which they lent parts of their collection for display during the period under discussion. Suggestions and plans to move these galleries to a safer location are always met with resistance, despite the fact that their locations have a considerable impact on their attendance figures. The feeling is that a city's major public gallery should be centrally placed within that city - not on its outskirts - as it is the most accessible spot for surrounding communities to travel to. There is also a feeling that a city's gallery should not presume to comment on South African life without being prepared to situate itself in that same gritty context.

In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, I will discuss the particularities of the locations of JAG, SANG, and DAG respectively, and, in Chapter Two, I will elaborate on the roles of South African art galleries and museums, as well as the implications of the commercial sponsorship in the arts. In the interim, however, it is

necessary to ground these observations in broader historical parameters in terms of: the effect the Cultural Boycott had on the direction of the arts; the increased level of art administration and policy-making that stemmed from the lack of support for the arts by the previous government; and in the interests of freeing art from the yoke of the struggle activism.

The Cultural Boycott had its primary effect on the academic arts in South Africa. By academic art, I mean the art studied by South African art students, written about by South African art historians educated in South African universities, and collected by South African galleries and museums. Interest in art in this quarter was directed quite firmly towards European and American styles and art movements. Conversely, ‘resistance art’ - mostly made using printmaking techniques, and displayed on posters and t-shirts - flourished during this time, as did black artists who were fostered mainly by independent organisations and community projects that enjoyed the financial support of international anti-apartheid movements (Powell 1991). Since art was not taught to black school children in the ‘Bantu Education System’ the ‘academic’ art community was constituted largely by white people. Some South African students were barred from study at international universities on the basis of their nationality (Thorburn 2008).

Initially, the effect of this on ‘high art’ in South Africa was stultifying. However, the lack of outside influence and interaction gradually pushed South African artists into finding a fairly distinct visual language. As then-JAG Director Christopher Till argued in a 1990 interview with Kendell Geers, the effect of the Cultural Boycott on art museums was 'a double-edged sword' (Geers 1990). According to Till, the ban helped South Africans strengthen the art industry within the country, aided by the tremendous wealth of corporate sponsorship that stepped in where the export market

would have. However, Till also pointed out that, 'on the other hand, we… reached a point where the lack of international comparison, criticism, evaluation or critical analysis from viewpoints other than our own [began] to be felt' (Geers 1990).

In additional to the Boycott, the diminishing value of the rand made it increasingly impossible for South African museums to collect work from outside the country. In 1988 the Government imposed a 60% surcharge on imported luxury items which further affected museums' ability to collect international work, and underscored the isolation of the Boycott (Maggs 1988). While the importation surcharge was decreased to 5% in the same year, thus not proving to be a long-term issue of concern, the hiking exchange rates continued to impede the purchases of international work, and the upshot of this was the motivation to concentrate more specifically on buying and exhibiting South African work (Maggs 1988).

Sue Williamson was the first South African to be included in an international biennale after apartheid. At the end of 1991 her 'piece documenting the pages of one man's pass book, *For Thirty Years Next to His Heart* (1990: Fig. 4), was included on the Fourth Havana Biennial in Cuba' (Williamson 2000). For the 45th Venice Biennale in 1993, selectors from the South African Association of Arts in Pretoria, 'in an attempt to be as representative as possible' sent work by twenty-seven South African artists, including Karel Nel, Jackson Hlungwani, Sandra Kriel, Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Noria Mabasa, and Maggie Mikula (Ross 1994: 10). This was a much larger contingent than the one to three artists usually selected. Most of the white artists funded their own tickets to the event (Williamson 2000). However:

> …too late, the organizers realized there would be not a single black artist at the opening, and sent a hurried message to Jackson Hlungwane[14] that

[14] Hlungwani is often spelt with an 'e', as Williamson writes here. My spelling of Hlungwani with an 'i' is in keeping with the spelling used by Lesley Spiro-Cohen in her resource book on the artist.

> an air ticket would be made available to him. Carving away on his hillside in the far north of the country, Hlungwane declined, sending back this classic reply: "The message is good, but the radio is bad" (Williamson 2000).

In cases such as these it became apparent how far South Africa was in terms of actually levelling the social and economic inequalities that apartheid had driven between people of different races in the country.

The event highlighted not only socio-political inequalities but artistic ones. The effects of the Cultural Boycott were a favourite subject of artist and art critic Kendell Geers. Reporting from this 45th Venice Biennale, Geers (1993) wrote that the isolation of the Cultural Boycott had a negative effect on South African artists, as the lack of 'international competition and contextualization' allowed them 'a comfortable smugness and self congratulatory complacency'. He insisted that this reaction to the art in Venice by South African artists and critics was 'disconcerting' and problematic, as it signalled that:

> Politics [had] replaced art as the standard of quality. Complex feelings of guilt about the atrocities of Apartheid led academics, critics and art historians to argue that the distinctions between art, craft, curio, kitsch, folk and traditional art were the products of Apartheid and as such should be ignored. In the process we also seem to have lost sight of the distinction between good art and bad art.
>
> Discussing our re-entry to the Venice Biennial, Marilyn Martin "encourages us to call into question 'traditional boundaries between high art and low' and to operate without preconceived ideas of excellence or theoretical constraints" (Geers 1993).

What Geers was alluding to here was a particularly controversial issue at this time: the promotion of 'inclusivity' in art meant interrogating how it had previously been defined, and the resistance and uncertainty that accompanied this led to a condundrum as to what deserved 'critical' acclaim. This broadening of ideas was part and parcel of a general rejection of modernist, 'Eurocentric', 'elitist' ideas of what art is: to admit

certain artists and not others to the canon of ‘good art’ on the basis of suspect criteria would have been meaningless and pointless at the time. The opening up of definitions of art granted South Africans access to art and artists that they had previously been unfamiliar with, and encouraged their participation in, and understanding of, the debates about roles and definitions of art. In light of this, anxieties about good art and bad art seemed a somewhat self-conscious construct. The spirit of openness, naiveté and preparedness to learn formed the more endearing and enduring memories of transitional South Africa. This willingness to revise definitions also included the question of whether international formal and conceptual ideas about art were in any way applicable to South African art, given its unique character and circumstances. Debates about whether South African art fitted into existing categories of 'art' often included an interrogation of the mentality behind attempts to categorise.

In reference to Esme Berman's *Painting in South Africa,* Geers (1994) touched on the most pivotal difference between pre-Boycott and post-Boycott critiques of South African art:

> ...many artists, critics and dealers… [tend to reduce] art to a technique and style rather than an intention and conception. The former should be nothing more than the vehicle for the latter, never an end in itself... This attitude has become an epidemic in South Africa as a result of the cultural boycott.

The crucial idea that Geers presents here is that the formal aspects of art should be employed only in terms of their capacity to impart a ‘concept’.

This shift in thinking about the properties and function of art materials was in line with international post-modern trends. Marion Arnold (2005: 13) explains these changes particularly well:

> The colonial mindset of many South African artists saw them deferring to Europe and yearning for international approval. Only with the collapse of modernism, and scepticism about formalism as a critique, was South African art able to assert its multicultural nature, and to theorize its identity in postmodern and postcolonial terms.
> …
> In the decades when modernism dominated the South African art world, 'art' was promoted in opposition to 'craft'. Postmodernism however, embracing inclusiveness, abandoned purist definitions of practice and offered a way of acknowledging cultural creativity and diversity. South African revisionist art historians and exhibition curators, abandoning reliance on western definitions of art, expanded creative concepts of visual culture to accommodate African artefacts and aesthetics as well as objects defined as 'women's work'.

The Cultural Boycott thus slightly delayed the pluralistic effect of the postmodernism in South African art, but when the Boycott lapsed, postmodern ideas proved a useful way of framing art historical discourses in an atmosphere where socio-political necessity called for formal and categorical labels to be problematised or cast aside.

1.2 Art for the Struggle, the struggle for art (1990 – 1994)[15]

> The period between 1989 - 1994 was probably the time of greatest freedom in South Africa – the transition between two governments, with negotiations taking place, and both sides wary of upsetting the other. For artists, there were no more boundaries set on freedom of expression.
> In terms of content, there was a noticeable shift from political themes to personal issues such as sexual identity, religious beliefs, and a general challenge to the dominant, conservative norms and morals of the past (Van Graan c.1997- 2000).

From struggle politics to art politics: national political wrangling had obvious repercussions for artists and public art museums; however, in the arts sector, a different manner of negotiation was taking place, following on from the heated debates sparked by Albie Sachs' 1989 appeal to release the arts as a 'weapon of the

[15] This is paraphrased from Chapter Six of Gwen Ansell's *Soweto Blues*, the title of which is 'Jazz for the Struggle, the Struggle for Jazz'.

struggle'. When Sachs' controversial paper hit the headlines of the arts pages, it marked a turning point for artists and art activists who had previously felt compelled to promote freedom and democracy through their work. The debates centred around artists' and one-time cultural workers' endeavours to take control of the arts and prevent them from falling prey to political or governmental manipulation, abuse, or mismanagement, or from becoming a tool of propaganda. The use of art for propagandistic purposes had not served art well during the Nationalist regime, and had also taken its toll on art in its capacity as a 'cultural weapon'. The early 1990s saw the growth of independent arts coalitions and organisations alongside the politicised ANC and UDF Cultural Desks,[16] with the intent to address the problematic systems of thought and government that were in place.

The following brief rundown as to the nature and aims of these conferences and groups is gathered from newspaper articles at the time, internet resources, and interviews with those who were involved at various levels on these committees. Interviewees include Colin Smuts,[17] Maishe Maponya,[18] Mike van Graan,[19] Andries Oliphant,[20] artists Gavin Younge and Willie Bester, who were members of VAG, and Dominic Thorburn, an artist involved in NAI.

As is shown in the discussion of the Cultural Boycott, much of South African art had been overtly linked to the political agendas of the day - in terms of the Boycott's effects on the content and purpose of art, and due to the involvement, most notably in

[16] The UDF formed a cultural wing which it called the Cultural Workers Congress (CWC), and the visual arts sector of the CWC was the Visual Arts Group (VAG).
[17] Smuts was Secretary of the UDF Cultural Desk, and a key figure in the Open School, COSAW, a former editor of *Staffryder*, and is currently involved in the Community and Business Development Programme (CBDP).
[18] A former *Standard Bank Young Artist* award winner (Drama), Maponya was also involved with the PAC, and the Performing Arts Workers Equity (PAWE), COSAW, ACTAG, and followed Christopher Till as Director of Culture for Johannesburg.
[19] Van Graan was a leading figure in COSAW, NAI, ACTAG, and was the Editor of *The Cultural Weapon* journal.
[20] Oliphant was involved with COSAW, NAI and ACTAG, is a former Editor of *Staffryder*, and chaired the White Paper Committee.

the 1980s, of the ANC and UDF Cultural Desks who worked closely together to promote the aims of the Struggle. Thus, when Sachs made public what had been ANC in-house debate[21] and articulated the need to allow art to take its own course unaffected by political or ideological prescriptions, his recommendation was received with intense relief by many artists and cultural workers. It was also met with fierce criticism by, for one, Mongane Wally Serote of the ANC Cultural Weapons Desk. Sachs' potent questions about the purpose and future of South African art sparked a wave of debate amongst activists and cultural practitioners.

The situation of the arts and artists in the very early '90s is well-conveyed in Powell's 1991 *Weekly Mail* article, an insightful but rather gloomy summary of the prevailing mood. Powell (1991) explained that with government's moves 'towards democracy', international funders were 'increasingly rejecting the control of cultural organization by particular party political interests and demanding instead that arts organizations address themselves in a non-aligned way to the business of reconstruction and development'. However, Powell (1991) pointed out that the past culture of political polarization meant that these organisations had 'little genuine experience of this kind of work' which often 'merely alienated foreign supporters yet further'. Powell (1991) also outlined the dilemma of the state, as it would be unable to help fund arts and culture given the costs of 'turning this country from a land of minority of privilege to… something egalitarian'. Powell (1991) crucially suggests that art had been 'a high propaganda priority' for the state 'despite its protestations over the years'. Eventually, however, the organisations and initiatives set up between 1990 and 1994 helped to see the South African arts through the tremendous task of

[21] Carman, Jillian. Seminar delivered at the SAVAH Conference, Stellenbosch, 2008.

changing policies and affiliations, while conquering obstacles like lack of experience and political alliances.

Artists, arts activists and administrators, and museum professionals, participated vociferously in the conferences, seminars, public hearings and policy meetings on the arts that were held in order to try and rectify the ingrained political, racial, statistical and other inequalities that had been established in every arena of South African life. As Beinart (2001: 306) describes it:

> ….an intense political culture of meetings and discussion, of consulting "stakeholders", to some degree persisted through the first years of the new government. Countless commissions, green and white papers, and consultative processes were set in train on diverse topics from land and environment to education and broadcasting. In every sphere, from politics and culture to commerce and sport, transformation spawned innovative policy strategies often drawing in a wide range of participants, including international advisers. While this porosity and openness in policy making began to pass in the late 1990s, as ministries, bureaucracies, and powerful interests regroup, it was hardly imaginable under the old regime.

At first glance, these groups and meetings seem a veritable alphabet soup of acronyms: apart from the ANC's DAC (Department of Arts and Culture/Cultural Desk), there was the VAG of the UDF's Cultural Workers' Congress (CWC), which was based in Cape Town.

According to Mario Pissarra, 'VAG, NAVAO, Imvaba (Eastern Cape), Artists Alliance (Johannesburg) and Thupelo Workshop' worked together and were:

> …possibly the closest that visual arts organisations in the struggle got in building a national network. At another level most of these organisations were part of the regionally based umbrella bodies of cultural workers that were affiliated to the United Democratic Front… At the national level the UDF established a Cultural Desk based in Johannesburg which ostensibly "consulted" with regional structures and national disciplines. Increasingly the Cultural Desk was perceived of as representing the interests of Johannesburg based arts organisations. Shortly after the un-banning of political organisations in 1990 members of VAG, NAVAO, Imvaba and the Artists' Alliance were part of regional delegations invited to a national

> consultative meeting by the Interim Cultural Desk. This lead to the replacement of the Cultural Desk by a National Interim Cultural Coordinating Committee (later the Federation of South African Cultural Organisations [FOSACO]) (Pissarra 2003).

The Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) was quite a proactive and powerful player at this time, supported by luminaries like Nadine Gordimer and Andries Oliphant. According to Pissarra (2003), FOSACO was doomed from its inception despite support from PAWE, and the Film and Allied Workers Organisation (FAWO), because COSAW withdrew its support, and poured its resources into the Arts for All Campaign instead. This Campaign later resulted in the National Arts Policy Plenary (NAPP) in 1992 and the launch at the NAPP of the National Arts Initiative (NAI), which subsequently created the National Arts Coalition (NAC) in 1993.

In 1994 the incoming ANC government formed the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) headed by Dr Ben Ngubane. One of the first steps taken by the new DACST, in November 1994, was to create the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) under the chairpersonship of Andries Oliphant. ACTAG was created 'with the brief to make recommendations on the formulation of a future arts and culture policy for South Africa, while being guided by the collective wisdom of the arts community'.[22] As Mike van Graan says: 'It was the most empowering period for the arts community – government listening to what artists had to say, and then adopting it as official government policy' (Van Graan c.1997 – 2000).

The NAPP was a particularly crucial and ambitious initiative. It was conference held on the 5th and 6th of December 1992 as part of COSAW's 'Arts for all Campaign' (Dodd 1992; Smuts 2008). The NAPP was carefully orchestrated to hear the views of any and all persons or parties interested in the future of the arts in South Africa, by

[22] ANC Information Services daily news briefing: 1 June 1995. Media statement issued by DACST on the National Conference of the ACTAG (31 May – 2 June 1995).

broadcasting the content of the meeting to stadiums and halls far away from its location at the Wits Great Hall. As described in a *Weekly Mail* article:

> The Plenary... aims to bring together the widest possible range of arts practitioners, educators and organizations to pool their aspirations and make concrete their visions of the way the arts should be handled in the proverbial "new" South Africa.
>
> The intention of the organizers is to broadcast the gathering's open sesame to theatres, studios, galleries, halls, fields across provinces, in the cities, throughout the townships of all South Africa's region "Representing" is the word that came up repeatedly at the first public announcement at the JAG on Sunday. "Everybody should be allowed to be there", said Congress of South African Writers national projects officer and steering committee member Mike van Graan... At the preparatory forum in August, it was decided that the steering committee would not approach government for funding. The whole point is to break out of the deadlock whereby the arts are limited by ill-informed state policies or party political emphases. So it's all in the hands, or rather the bank balances, of the private sector (Dodd 1992).

In fact, funding by private sector was not necessarily desirable: according to Van Graan, it was seen as 'Blood money gleaned from the backs of workers'.[23] This left only the option of utilising foreign funding, or the cultural workers' own resources. As Van Graan says, the NAPP heralded:

> …the first time that former "enemies" – those supported by the apartheid government and those allied to progressive anti-apartheid forces – were in the same room to determine their common interests as arts, culture and heritage practitioners, rather than as artists or cultural institutions allied to one or another political tendency or to the state.[24]

Public museums and galleries would have fitted into the category 'cultural institutions supported by the apartheid government', and the JAG and SANG did indeed send official representatives to the NAPP meetings, although DAG did not, as I will discuss in Chapter Five.

[23, 24] www.mikevangraan.co.za/recent-articles-papers/commonwealth-foundation-paper.doc/download

The NAI was launched at the NAPP, and involved 'a year-long process to research international cultural policies and to make recommendations for cultural policy in a post-apartheid, democratic dispensation was launched, together with the aim of building a national, non-racial and democratic lobby for the arts community'.[25] The members of the NAI were reluctant, post-Struggle, to claim any political allegiance or dependence. Many of the founder members, having worked with the UDF and ANC Cultural Desks to achieve liberation, felt it was important not to fetter the organisation to a political agenda (Smuts 2008).

In a *Weekly Mail &Guardian*[26] article Mark Gevisser (1993) described the stance of those involved in this resistance movement:

> Mike van Graan declared that artists were now "a sector of civil society standing up for what they believe in. We're not threatened by booby-traps, by being undermined by people who are scared of the independence of the arts".... The target of Van Graan's fire was the reluctance of the liberation movements – most specifically the African National Congress – to let go of the 1980s cultural-desk style control of the arts.
>
> .....
>
> Many of those applauding the loudest were those who term themselves "cultural workers" - those who found their artistic feet in organizations that were, in Van Graan's own words, "the cultural handmaidens of the mass democratic movements, and accordingly, were rewarded... with foreign funding, prestige and power – not necessarily because of their service to their primary constituencies of writers, filmmakers, actors and musicians, but because of their service to the anti-apartheid political agenda."

The ANC DAC retaliated to this ostensible lack of cooperation by initiating their Culture and Development Conference (CDC) which ran practically parallel to the NAI's conferences. Predictably, it ended up with virtually the same aims and outcomes.

[25] www.mikevangraan.co.za/recent-articles-papers/commonwealth-foundation-paper.doc/download
[26] In the interim between the *Weekly Mail's* merge with the *Mail &Guardian*, the newspaper was, for a short time, known as the *Weekly Mail &Guardian.*

The result of the NAI's findings was the launch, at the end of 1993 of the NAC, 'a formally constituted, representative structure with a democratically elected leadership … [which] adopted 17 resolutions based on intense research and debate that, if implemented, would fundamentally change the face of South African arts and culture'.[27] Funding and support for the NAC and ACTAG was provided in part by the Dutch and Swedish governments, who also 'provided skills and brought in people who had been managing cultural policies for decades in post-war Europe to guide the South Africans in the creation of new policies' (Smuts 2008). In the end, it was the NAI/NAC's policies that formed the larger part of the recommendations made in the ACTAG's report, which were put forward and formalised in the *White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage* in '96.[28]

The major problem that faced the NAC and ACTAG, and therefore the DACST, was how to channel the funds that had served '8 million white people under apartheid, to serve the needs of 40 million South Africans in the new era' without leaving existing institutions destitute (Van Graan c.1997 -2000). An adequate solution has never really been found, with government cutting funding until it is nearly non-existent. However, other initiatives were encouraged later in the 1990s to fill this void: the Arts and Culture Trust was set up expressly to create funding that had been diminished when money primarily devoted to the arts patronised by whites was divided to serve the needs of the entire South African community; and the Business Arts South Africa (BASA) initiative, the National Lottery, and the Human Sciences

[27] www.mikevangraan.co.za/recent-articles-papers/commonwealth-foundation-paper.doc/download)

[28] Some of the resolutions the ACTAG's report suggested were: dedicated audience development and arts education at school level and through marketing; creating more opportunities for artists by organising funding, awards and exhibitions (and achieving this by 'promoting greater tax reform policies to stimulate private sector and individuals to support the arts'); proper education and monitoring of the ethics of art critics; promoting art as a focus of tourism; elevating the status of craft and the art of indigenous communities; and creating legislation to protect artists' rights and freedoms. The report also proposed the monitoring of: 'State institutions and parastatals', 'corporate involvement in visual arts', and the 'National Arts Council and its allocation of funds'

Research Council (HSRC) also generate and provide funding for the arts (Smuts 2008).

All those I interviewed, who had attended and been involved in the above conferences and meetings, emphasised how incredibly exciting the years between 1990 and 1994 were, and how important they felt it was to create a positive plan of action for the arts. They often recalled, however, that these meetings were politically precarious and sometimes exhaustingly difficult to work through, as can be seen with the ANC DAC/NAI rivalry. This was partly because of the tremendous amount of time that democratic decision-making takes, but was also exacerbated by unstable dynamics in personal relationships - sometimes due to differing political ideologies and standpoints and sometimes due to 'personality clashes'.

With the opening of communication and freedom of speech, people had a voice for the first time and an opportunity to state their case: often this fuelled debate but impeded resolution. The debates that occurred in meetings were often long-winded and somewhat abrasive. People of all races, ages, and political ideals were willingly and legitimately working together on these projects for the first time, and sometimes experiencing a lack of mutual understanding and agreement (Maponya 2008). Many of the hiccups and disruptions in the 1990 - 1994 development process in these groups and in museums had little or nothing to do with race but were due rather to unhappy working relationships that obfuscated and broke down progress on the more important issues.

Experiences during this time were distinctly different for participants of different races. Both white and black artists and art administrators, perhaps with the clarity of retrospection, feel that real change in the 1990 to 1994 period was to some extent lacking. Hence the sense that underlying cores of thought and practices were

fashionably ‘redressed’ rather than genuinely abandoned. The art world threw its arms open to black artists, but not initially its pockets. Many black artists at the time, especially rurally-situated ones, were unfamiliar with the workings of the art world, having been largely ignored until the mid ‘80s, and were subsequently exploited by the commercial art market in the early ‘90s.

Marilyn Martin (1996: 4) raises ‘the spectre of internal neo-colonialist practices and appropriation which admits artistic pluralism in order to regain control’. Martin (1996: 4) cites *Third Text* editor Rasheed Araeen’s reflections that the ‘predominantly white art establishment’ in South Africa had an ‘important role…in this transitional period’ and noted the ‘tremendous desire and goodwill among [this] establishment to change the system’. However, Araeen (Martin 1996: 4) argued that this goodwill had to be ‘accompanied by a position which questions and confronts all those ideas and ideologies which were formed and remain today in its institutional structures’.

Current Director of Culture in Johannesburg, Steven Sack, who was Director of the Johannesburg Art Foundation (JAF) between 1990 and 1994, had insights - from the standpoint of a white left-wing art activist - as to the complications involving promoting equality at the time. Sack (2007) suggested that despite the Biennale being a project that had arisen due to ‘the unbanning of the ANC… the release of Mandela, and the demise of the Cultural Boycott’, that ‘it was too early because black people were still fundamentally disempowered’. Sack (2007) explained that ‘no matter how much one thought of one's self, and positioned one's self within the anti-apartheid movement, one was still privileged through circumstances’ and that ‘the power relationships were still, fundamentally, the same’ which made it ‘a very difficult and complex historical moment’. Sack (2007) cited ‘artists and cultural workers’ blocking new initiatives and ‘questioning the activities of the officials who were working under

the existing untransformed structures of government'. Here Sack (2007) cited Christopher Till, as the Director of Arts and Culture in the City, as one of these officials tasked with creating new initiatives, while 'being challenged by the '"new order" - by cultural activists and returning exiles, such as Wally Serote, as they came back into the country'.

Sack (2007) point was that, although racial inequality was superficially being addressed and 'redressed', much of the power and money was still in the hands of white decision makers and there were a number of pitfalls in the desperate attempt to 'reinvent the new South Africa'. As SANG's Marilyn Martin (1996: 4) phrased it: 'social and economic empowerment do not necessarily flow from a shift in political power.' Not only did financial responsibility and power remain in white hands, but the apartheid legacy of inferior education for black South Africans left many without the skills to effectively manage organisations, and thus, frustratingly 'subordinate' to whites in terms of experience.

David Koloane (1996: 54) described this problem with reference to the conference 'Bua!' (Sotho for 'Speak!') which was held in conjunction with the first *Johannesburg Biennale*. Koloane (1996: 54) explained that Pitika Ntuli, the first black lecturer in the Department of Fine Art at the University of the Witwatersrand, 'having recently returned from a lengthy absence in exile, chaired some of the panels, but that 'his participation in "Bua!" was not solace enough to some local participants who were intimidated by the finesse of the other panellists'. Koloane (1996: 54) suggested that South African 'conference and seminar forums' were 'dominated by white scholars by virtue of their privileged position and their command of English' who employed the forums as 'a mechanism for ingratiating themselves with the international world'. Koloane (1996: 54) suggested that white academics' familiarity

with the 'medium of semantics and concepts becomes a passport to acceptance and therefore gives them the prerogative to present academic papers on behalf of black artists in the capital centres of the world'.

Koloane (1996: 54) acknowledged there were few black academics, and that 'the majority of black artists are, unlike their white counterparts, without any scholarly qualifications' and were more concerned with earning a living than with 'the debates surrounding the profession'. Koloane (1996: 54) explained that artists who occasionally participate in these debates found themselves disadvantaged:

> The sophistication of the process, the conceptual finesse, and refined counter-arguments present to the uninitiated an undertaking as awesome and flawless as the latest-model automobile. Issues and topics which currently appear are "identity", whereas the artist is simply concerned with sheer survival; and "marginalization", when the artist's only experience is that of apartheid.

While the situation that Koloane outlines here has changed considerably in the last thirteen years (beginning with the 1995 *Biennale* that Koloane is reviewing), many black artists[29] had gained international recognition prior to their recognition within South Africa, but experienced frustration within the country because of the dynamics of their status as 'black artists'.

Articulating the difficulties of practicing as a black artist under the apartheid system, Koloane (Quoted in Martin 1996: 7) said:

> There are so many absurd things and there is so much still to be done. For me, the fact that there are black artists at all is a straight-out miracle, let alone that we indeed have artists who make work that can completely measure up alongside that of the white artists.

[29] I am referring here to artists such as Koloane, Moshekwa Langa, Gerard Sekoto, Willie Bester, Kagiso Pat Mautloa, Sam Nhlengethwa, Sandile Zulu, Mmakgoba Helen Sebidi, Durant Sihlali, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Kay Hassan, Azaria Mbatha and Santu Mofokeng.

Black artists with and without existing international reputations were promoted to new levels of national and international circulation after the *Biennale*, so rapidly that they had to learn quickly to adapt (Machen & Mthetwa 2004: 91).

Today, younger black artists who have had the benefit of tertiary arts or design training are extremely well-informed about national and international art trends and debates. They create sophisticated and incisive work which is referential of South African history and experience, but fits seamlessly into global art practices. Just fourteen years ago, however, as Koloane explains, acceptance, familiarity, and comfort in art national and international art circles was both a challenge and an achievement for black artists who had had their wings clipped by apartheid policies.

In the early 1990s period that Koloane is reviewing, black artists and white markets were both considerably attuned to the escalating value of art by black artists. The 'scramble for Africa' turned into a 'scramble' for African artists, which led to Robert Hodgins, described in a *New York Times* article as, 'the elder statesman of South African art', noting that 'the inclusive policies of liberals have often been extreme and misguided' (Solomon 1994: 77). Hodgins describes a consequence of this, saying: 'We are now afflicted with a mingling of condescension and panic that has created a terrible Bantuphilia, which is in turn producing enormous publicity and a lot of very bad artists.'

Hodgins' 'Bantuphilia' is a rather offensive way of describing the attention being paid indiscriminately to many black artists during the 1990 to 1994 period. There were not enough black artists, and therefore, not enough black artists whose work, by South Africa's 'Eurocentic' standards, had the formal and conceptual strength to stand in comparison with white artists at the time. This was not due to a shortage of talent, but rather to a lack of awareness, formal training and opportunity in the visual arts for

black communities - the legacy of apartheid education policies. The art world therefore opened up to broader definitions of art, which led to the enrichment of the canon of South Africa art by works that would previously have been termed craft or curio. Examples include the pithy road sign parodies of 'Chickenman' Mkhize or the carved speakers of Phillip Rikhotso. The fact that works by both of these artists appear on the cover of JAG Annual Reports (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2) between 1993 and 1995 shows the extent of this conversion.

According to David Koloane (2008) the Thupelo Project was founded due to the worry that black artists' work 'was being stereotyped by the art market generally, and that it was just identified as township art irrespective of what the individual artists were trying to do'. He also co-founded the Triangle Project held at the Alpha Training Centre in the '80s with the motivation to bring artists from different provinces together, because, as Koloane (2008) said 'during the apartheid time it was difficult for people to travel from one province to the other without having to get permission from the local authorities, so I thought this was an ideal vehicle for inviting artists to gather'. The Triangle was moderately successful but did not address the problem of black artists having no studio space.

According to Artthrob and *Art South Africa* editor Sean O'Toole (2003), 'The early 1990s were quite significant for Koloane, not only because of the wider political context.' In Koloane's (2008) words:

> I think in the '90s we were going through a new experience altogether… We realised we couldn't go on working the way we were doing, where we were working from home - you can imagine working in a township house, a matchbox house with some families where there might be twelve people in the house.

With the deficit of studio space as motivation, Koloane, who had been involved in the International Workshop in Zimbabwe, co-founded the Fordsburg Artists' Studios (the Bag Factory) in 1991 (O'Toole 2003). The area the Fordsburg studios occupied was a viable location primarily because it was zoned as a 'grey area' due to its position near the Market - which proved unclassifiable in terms of the apartheid practice of racially 'colour-coding' and segregating different areas. However, land could not be owned by black people prior to 1994, so the land was bought by Robert Loder, 'a London-based art collector' (O'Toole 2003).

The project was successful, not only in terms of grappling with the space issue but also in allowing black artists to literally and figuratively change their perspectives, in order to avoid making stereotypical work (Koloane 2008). O'Toole (2003) suggests the Bag Factory is 'not always appreciated for what it offers, [despite it being] intimately associated with the careers of Pat Mautloa, Sam Nhlengethwa, Joachim Schönfeldt and Mark Attwood, if not a whole generation of Johannesburg-based artists - black and white'. By 1997 the Bag Factory had begun to host invited artists from other countries, which further helped to combat the isolation of the Cultural Boycott and working alone (Koloane 2008).

Koloane (2008) remembered how the artists in the early years at the Bag Factory,

> ….were working with the change, trying to say: "we have to work and try and express ourselves as artists, not as black artists… and work from a professional level, not from wanting to get sympathy because we are black and oppressed."

However, Koloane (2008) related that 'at the time this was difficult, because there were galleries that would only accept you as an artist if you did a certain type of work.' Koloane (2008) described an occasion, where, having recently begun working with collage, he took some collage works to Gallery 21 in Fox Street, Johannesburg.

According to Koloane (2008) the owner of the gallery refused to believe that the work had been done by Koloane himself, and suggested that someone else must have done them, 'because it wasn't the work he expected from a black artist'. In addition to obstacles of this nature, Koloane (2008) also related that at the time it was frustrating that a black artists' work 'couldn't fetch the same prices as a white artist even if you'd started at the same time.'

While Koloane's difficulty was that his collages and abstract work did not fit into the commercial art market's idea of 'black art' having a high level of literality in content, formal aspects, and/or function, Capetonian artist Willie Bester's experiences related specifically to the content of his work. Bester had similar experiences with the problematic assumptions and attitudes he encountered at galleries. He recounted doing work which he wryly described as 'so-called "amazing"' which 'some gallery-owners were quite crazy about' (Bester 2008). With retrospective amusement, Bester (2008) explained how the gallerists interested in the work would 'quietly sit down with me, to make me feel welcome, and say… "you are a good artist, you don't really need this content" ...because they felt I was a good artist but my content was a bit scary or put them off'.

Bester studied art at the CAP in the Western Cape, and was part of the VAG along with artists like Gavin Younge and art activists like Mario Pissarra. Bester (2008) cited the aims of the movement as being 'to broaden the development of arts locally and internationally'. Bester (2008) said the VAG:

> …worked as a collective… meeting similar groups from elsewhere in the world, but also setting down rules under which we worked - having the Cultural Boycott in place, so that we didn't work with institutions that perpetrated structures like the apartheid system. So we had strict guidelines… I think what a lot of us did was to reinforce ourselves, firstly, by not seeing art as something that could sell, because you would put yourself into a difficult position - a position of weakness.

Rather, Bester (2008) suggested that the VAG artists went the route of using their art 'as a cultural weapon, to embarrass the system'.

Apartheid not only had a direct effect on the motivation behind Bester's art, but also on its scale. Bester (2008) related that 'before 1990 it was a bit scary to do things that would upset the political masters':

> You know it was illegal... the previous government used to call it 'subversive' stuff - things that would show the conditions in the townships, the brutality and that type of stuff. They were very strict on how you portrayed what was happening (Bester 2008).

Bester (2008) would make small paintings so that he 'could hide them away' and would wrap his work up during transportation because of the content. However, post-1990 'the environment was much more favourable to doing bigger sculptures that criticised what was happening in the past, or even what was happening under the new government'.

As Bester's 1990 collage *Challenges Facing the New South Africa* (Fig. 6) shows, he was unconvinced by the quick changing of the political tides:

> I can clearly remember that work because there was a concern on my part, because everybody was carried away. There was this endless partying and I got scared because I was just wondering, because it was the first time that we have this political power: are we capable of handling it? So I then came up with that work about having this euphoria, but at the same time, the concerns. We had had the hit squads in the past, but it seemed they were just transferred - the horrible police were still in their places, and now under the new government they were even protected by labour laws. You cannot just tell a policeman who worked under the apartheid system, you must now *voetsek*.[30] You have to put him under the same labour laws as somebody who does a meaningful contribution to the community. Those were the kind of contradictions if you look at that work (Bester 2008).

[30] Afrikaans slang: a forceful instruction to leave. Similar to 'Bugger off'.

To some extent, *Challenges Facing the New South Africa* cemented Bester's place as a successful South African artist from 1990 onwards.

He continued to maintain a degree of criticality about the change in government, and concentrated more specifically, as many artists did, on general ideas of social freedom, memory, and identity. For Bester (2008):

> …it was not really a specific fight within a time slot, for me it was bigger. Because I never really experienced unconditional humanity in my lifetime… where somebody would accept me for who I am. It's always about race, about where you come from - the little town or city or whatever corner of the city you come from… Given the corner where I come from it was difficult because I was caught up in these race classification things.

Thus Bester took advantage of what he calls 'so-called liberation' by doing larger, more outspoken sculptures, and expressing his desire for uncategorised and 'unconditional humanity', which provided a direction and theme for his work after 1990.

Some artists take umbrage at the suggestion that the change in political power left both black and white artists stumped without resistance-based subject matter to draw on. However, Bester warily concedes that fellow artists, many of whom studied with him at the CAP - such as Billy Mandindi, David Hlongwane, Wabitsi Wangaza and Hamilton Budaza - lost their impetus to some degree and never recovered from the change of focus of the arts. It is unclear, however, whether this was due to a lack of subject matter, or due to the financial support that was withdrawn by resistance movements once the goal of overthrowing apartheid had been achieved.

Three artworks by Billy Mandindi in the collection of the SANG show the change of subject matter in his work. Mandindi's *Fire Games* (1985: Fig 7.1) depicts the power of the South African military during the state of emergency in the country

in the late ‘80s as though it were a boardgame - with ‘jail’, ‘bank’, ‘hell’, ‘pass’, ‘danger’ and ‘death’, as the only potentialities for the players. Two later works by Mandindi are compelling self-portraits in pastel, set in backgrounds of South African wild animals (1995: Fig. 7.2) and with angels wearing timepieces (1996: Fig. 7.3). These portraits intimate that Mandindi was, at this time, searching for a setting that would articulate a sense of South African identity beyond references to apartheid-related issues; however the resulting imagery seems an uncertain fit.

It is clear that artists were affected by the changing aesthetic and commercial dynamics in the arts which accompanied the pre- and post-apartheid socio-political situations in South Africa. As discussed in the next chapter, these and other factors were often influenced by, and played out in, the corporately sponsored art collections and competitions that took place in the nation’s public galleries.

CHAPTER TWO:

Selecting Processes: debates surrounding inclusion and exclusion

EM Forster once wrote, 'Two cheers for democracy. One because it admits variety and two because it admits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough. There is no occasion to give it three' (Quoted in Dubow: 1991). This quote is unfortunately quite apt when looking at the arts in South Africa between 1990 and 1994. Democracy was obviously a desperate necessity in this country, but the way it translated into the selection policies of art museums, galleries, competitions and exhibitions was, perhaps predictably, a somewhat inelegant process. Democratic processes and policies involve significantly more time-consuming consultation than autocratic ones, and can sometimes closely resemble bureaucracy - in terms of additional meetings and paperwork - as every decision taken needs to be agreed upon by a committee of representatives of every party concerned or affected.

With regards to art exhibitions, competitions, acquisitions, and collections in art galleries and museums prior to democracy in South Africa, selections of artwork had been decided upon by a committee or board members, or were directly in the hands of the museum or gallery director. By comparison, democratic selections were socialist in tone: protracted, frustrating, painful, emotional, but ultimately satisfying efforts of labour and organisation. Ironically however, without the problematic choices of authoritarian selections committees to rail against, the democratically-selected exhibitions sometimes amounted to rather bland, well-mannered and well-meaning, selections of artwork, as was the case with the 1991 *Cape Town Triennial* exhibition. A tendency to champion under-acknowledged black artists also developed. This was arguably not unhealthy, unwarranted, or unexpected, yet it seemed to elicit a fair

amount of criticism and anxiety on the part of both conservative and progressive white societies.

The first section of this chapter reviews major competitions and exhibitions in the 1990 to 1994 period, and how they dealt with the debates and the discussions which centred around social and economical equality in the arts. In the final section of this chapter I focus on the core of my study: the role that 'houses of culture' such as galleries and museums played in the 'new South African' society, and the negotiations and evolutions they underwent during the shift of political power in the country.

2.1. Sponsored art competitions, exhibitions, and organisations.

Considerable aesthetic shifts and changes in conceptions of art happened between the 1970s and 1990s. Dean Viljoen (1992: 35 -36) alludes to this in his catalogue essay in *Friends' Choice 1975 -1991: An exhibition of works collected by FOSANG:*

> …by 1987… dissatisfied voices began to be raised about the overpoliticised nature of South African art. A new debate was beginning to take shape. "It is clear that from certain quarters the new South African art and exciting artistic developments we have been experiencing over the last 4-5 years, are criticised for not being true anymore to a pure aesthetic value - a value that is cool and detached and that rises above the nastiness of everyday life."
>
> …By the time the 1985 Cape Town Triennial had opened in the SA National Gallery in Cape Town, the transition from cool detachedness in an ivory tower called Art for Art's sake, to a social commitment, was no longer theory. The Triennial, as well as the highly innovative Tributaries exhibition (also from 1985), clearly marked the start of a new era in the South African visual arts.
>
> It was during these years that the South African visual arts started displaying a significant local content and identity - perhaps that which was so repeatedly emphasised by the contributors to the conference "The State of the Art in South Africa" in 1979 as lacking in the visual art… [in 1984] Neville Dubow had written: "There are signs that a new generation

> of South African artists is beginning to face… the need to produce an art that is at once socially relevant and at the same time artistically valid."[31]

Dubow's observation of 'the need to produce an art that is at once socially relevant and at the same time artistically valid' best encapsulates the debates and parameters for South African art in the early 1990s, especially in view of the anxieties about 'good art/bad art' outlined in Chapter One.

The art on show at exhibitions and competitions such as *Art from South Africa* (1990), curated by the MOMA, Oxford; the *Standard Bank National Drawing Competition*, (1990); the *Cape Town Triennials* (1982, 1985, 1988, 1991); the *Vita Art Awards/Prize* (1986 – 2002); the *Standard Bank Young Artists Awards* (1981 - present), and the 1995 *Johannesburg Biennale* evidenced the South African art world's increasing interest in its own local product (and in the case of *Art from South Africa* and the *Johannesburg Biennale*, the international art world's interest as well).

In this chapter I have included reminders of important exhibitions held from 1985 onwards, not just during 1990 to 1994 period, as these earlier exhibitions influenced those held during the years that are the focus of my study. The planning for the *Johannesburg Biennale* started in 1993, and thus it is also relevant to the 1990 to 1994 period, inasmuch as it was the crucial turning point that ended South Africa's isolation from international discourses on art. Exhibitions compiled by individual galleries, such as Elizabeth Rankin's *Images of Wood* (1989) and *Images of Metal* (1994) held in collaboration with JAG, and SANG's *Ezakwantu: Beadwork from the Eastern Cape* (1993), were also very important, but I will discuss them in the relevant chapters on those galleries.

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[31] Viljoen cites this comment as derived from Dubow's article 'Art and Edict' in *Leadership SA*, vol. 3 no 4, 1984.

These and other exhibitions travelled round the country in a hierarchy that had the SANG at its apex, followed in loose order by the Pretoria Art Museum, the JAG, the DAG, Pietermaritzburg's Tatham Gallery, Port Elizabeth's King George VI Art Gallery (now the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum [NMMAM]), and the William Humphries Gallery in Kimberley. Of secondary importance were Bloemfontein's Oliewenhuis, and various University galleries such as the WAG and the University of the (then-Orange) Free State (Hillebrand 2008). Therefore many of the exhibitions I am looking at would have been seen in all of these museums eventually.

They were the most prominent art exhibitions and competitions at the time and were particularly important as barometers of the changing concerns in South African art. By looking at the selections of artwork exhibited and the public and press reactions to the artwork shown at these art competitions and exhibitions, it is possible to track changing categorisations of, and ideas about, art. They were the only way one could glean any real sense of what South African art 'consisted of' at that time. It was well-nigh impossible for public museums to single-handedly organise exhibitions that showcased works of art from every province in the country - they had limited staff, and could not hope to finance large-scale exhibitions (Till 2008). Publications on art were relatively scarce in the early '90s as there was in a general want of literature on contemporary South African art, and galleries were only just starting to produce the kinds of contemplative, polished exhibition catalogues we are familiar with today.[32]

As Williamson (2000) writes:

[32] In 1991 the *Cape Town Triennial* catalogues were printed in black and white, with colour reserved only for the work of the three winning artists (Williamson 2000). Federico Freschi, the referee for this thesis, suggested that the change in catalogue styles and frequency was a function of changing technology, due to the desktop publishing revolution that took place in the 1990s.

> Documentation of the country's art activities at the beginning of the nineties resided in the quarterly magazine of the SA Association of the Arts [SAAA], distributed free to members, which limited itself to reportage on activities and artists related to its galleries, and ADA magazine, an extremely handsome publication which in spite of winning an award as best magazine in the country, came out at long irregular intervals, never managing to convince advertisers to buy sufficient space to guarantee its survival in the market place. The last issue of ADA was to appear in the mid nineties. In 1993, the county's most highly respected art critic, Ivor Powell of the then *Weekly Mail*, became editor of a new publication would supersede the old SAAA Calendar: *Ventilator*. A promising first issue with great design and well written articles met an enthusiastic reception from the art world. But the same problem – lack of advertising money to finance publication – would force the closure of *Ventilator* after the launch issue.

Considering this lack of documentation, these sponsored exhibitions and competitions - as flawed and controversial as they repeatedly proved to be - provided considerable exposure and support for 'contemporary South African' artists, and were useful for arts administrators and aficionados in getting an idea of the kind of art being made (Till 2008).

The catch-all term 'contemporary South African art' is one that was frequently and uncritically invoked in the interviews I conducted, and it consequently occurs often in my discussion of this period. It was a phrase, and is a phase, of South African art that gained tremendous popularity and support in the late 80s and early 90s. It is a somewhat vague classification that refers to the work of new or young artists, or (particularly in the early '90s) artists who were previously unacknowledged because of their race or the subversive political content of their work.

In Chapter One I touched on the impact of the Cultural Boycott on art: prior to the end of the Boycott the modernist ethos of 'Art for Art's Sake' was popular in South Africa. It decreed that art need not be a reflection of life or society, but could rather elicit a transformative or spiritual response using colour, form, and truth to materials. However, this approach - in light of South Africa's dire apartheid human

rights abuses - was felt in some quarters to be elitist, idealistic, and blind to its context. Art categorised as 'contemporary South African' was what gradually overtook this ethos from the 1980s onwards. It described the art that tended to allude to social or political issues, emphasised a liberation of signification and materials, and underscored the conceptual value of an artwork rather than its formal qualities. As Kendell Geers (1994)[33] suggests, it was the use of formal elements and qualities as 'nothing more than the vehicle for the [intention and conception of art], never an end in itself'.

Also central to the discussion of many of these exhibitions and competitions is the existence of a powerbase of arts administrators dubbed the 'Art Mafia', who were the major selectors in the increasing number of corporate art collections and corporately-sponsored art exhibitions and competitions during the late '80s and early '90s. Both art museums and corporate art collections in these years benefited from the fact that South African art was enjoying a surge in interest, vitality, value, and importance within the country, but was not as yet in great demand outside of it. While it was available, museums and collectors took advantage of the wealth of art on offer to build up their collections (Thorburn 2008). As popular arts critic Barry Ronge wrote in 1989: 'Culture, non-racial and progressive, has become a safe investment for large corporations, for a combination of tax, image, and promotional reasons.' Often these corporations would call in a small handful of known, reliable, usually white, and often male, administrators and academics to be the consultants for, and organisers of, these collections and competitions. The existence of this alleged 'Art Mafia' coincided largely with the *Cape Town Triennial*s, so it is helpful to discuss the two together.

[33] Geers was a young South African artist and critic who particularly stressed the 'concept' in his artwork.

The *Cape Town Triennials* of 1982, 1985, 1988, and 1991 were sponsored by the Rembrandt van Rijn Art Foundation and were staged at the SANG in Cape Town before touring other galleries in the country. As Carol Brown (2005: 68-84) argues, the *Triennials* were large and well-publicised in contrast to *Tributaries* and *The Neglected Tradition*, yet they failed to find a comfortable niche and express the same innovative spirit and relevance as these exhibitions had. While the early *Triennials* were lauded for their 'daring' to exhibit protest-orientated work - as was evident, for example, in the controversial 1985 *Triennial* with its elements of political commentary - the protest voices of the 1988 *Cape Town Triennial*, although not entirely absent, 'lost their shrill and explosive edge as they mutely submit[ted] to overriding political constraints' (Berman 1988: 1). The 1988 *Triennial* was not only criticised for being a bit 'tame' in comparison to its predecessors, but also for having an exclusive and closed selection committee.

An article by Barry Ronge (1989) shows the prevailing criticisms of the *Triennials* at the time, as well as suspicions about the existence of an 'Art Mafia' and the influence of corporate sponsorships on South African art. Ronge (1989) described how the *1985 Cape Town Triennial* 'echoed like a thunderclap through the community of the visual arts'. Initially, according to Ronge (1989), the 'generous prize money' and country wide tour, together with the prestige and innovation of the *Triennials,* invigorated the arts: it ushered in a new aesthetic and challenged the existing canon with the inclusion of 'artists who were previously condescendingly ignored under the label of "tribal craftsmen"'.

However, having given the artwork formerly known as 'craft' an artistic platform, the *Triennials* did not further consolidate this inclusion or make great moves

to strengthen the genre. Ronge (1989) elaborated further on some of these problematic aspects of the *1988 Triennial*:

> Critic Ivor Powell observed succinctly that the ratio of black artists to white at this show reflects with uncanny accuracy the land distribution pattern in this country, and Dr Anitra Nettleton of Wits University's History of Art department … describes how the rural artists, especially those of Venda, make objects and perceive themselves as craftsmen, but now that they have been discovered they are abandoning their traditional, vital creations to make sculptures that will fit a competition panel's requirements

In fact many artists, not just the Venda sculptors Ronge mentioned, seemed to be creating 'competition pieces' - grand one-offs which discouraged the creation of cohesive bodies of work.

Ronge (1989) lamented the 'sameness' of the work and the artists represented at the 1988 *Triennial.* He attributed this sameness to three factors: 'the third consecutive year of the state of emergency'; the effect of sponsored art competitions; and 'a new hegemony… which some call the Art Mafia and others refer to more delicately as "a cartel of academic and sponsorship interests" which is acting exclusively and as limitingly as the economic cartel that runs this country'. Ronge (1989) suggested that: 'across the range of the sponsored art exhibitions… one sees the same group of academics, museum directors and art honchos judging all the shows, and as a result, the same kind of art, indeed, the same artists, are winning over and over again.'[34]

At a seminar in Johannesburg, other criticisms of the 1988 *Triennial* revealed a number of problems with the structure of the competition, one of these again being

[34] Powell (1990) also highlights the 'highly emotive area of criticism… of the "art mafia"' which he describes as:

> …a small cabal of artists, art educators and administrators who, as people saw it, used the field of art competitions, representative exhibitions and public buying as a kind of private play-pit. Every art competition or selection panel reproduced a different permutation of the same group, thus entrenching its own power and its own taste within the official structures of South African art.

‘the perception that the *Triennial* was doing little to address the inequalities of South African history or the socio-racial peculiarities of South African society’. Powell (1990) explains further:

> Artists were required to submit works for judging to what were essentially the nerve centres of the establishment and basically white art world.
>
> Many artists not connected to this art world of the galleries and museums - and especially those in far-flung rural areas - did not know of the existence of the Triennial and would not have been in a position to transport their works if they had. By these indirect means the Triennial was perceived as merely reproducing inherited social relations.

Journalists like Ronge and Powell often attributed these sorts of problems with exhibitions at the time to the stranglehold of the ‘Art Mafia’.

Hazel Friedman later identified its alleged members in a 1993 *Weekly Mail & Guardian* article:

> In the 1980s, competitions were controlled by what is referred to in art corners as the Trinity, Raymond [sic] van Niekerk, then head of the South African National Gallery (SANG), sat at the apex, with Johannesburg Art Gallery's Christopher Till and Professor Alan Crump, head of Fine Arts at Wits, balancing out the sides of the triangle. The triumvirate was finally dissolved after the 1988 Triennial, prior to the 1991 dissolution of the Triennial itself.

Christopher Till was indeed known to be a highly active member of the arts community in the late ‘80s and ‘90s. The JAG Annual Reports list him as presiding over no less than twenty to thirty different arts committees, meetings, Boards and exhibition openings in each year of his JAG career.

I asked Till about ‘standing accused’ as a member of the ‘Art Mafia’ in the interview I conducted with him. He acknowledges that there is validity to the designation, but also claims, as stated in his article in *Viewpoint* (1992):

> This Mafia connotation could be applied to any group within the cultural or commercial sphere.
>
> What it comes down to is that we are a small community of people involved in the buying of works and the holding of exhibitions. We find ourselves co-opted into selection committees and we organise competitions; we are thus very involved. But if one were to remove us, as a group, the next people to come along would also be called the "Art Mafia."

Till (2008) also points out that, after the storm of protest directed at the 1988 *Triennial*, he organised the democratising process that produced the final *Cape Town Triennial* in 1991. Despite the regional and democratic selection of chairpersons and representatives, the same old selectors appeared anyway, because the pool of those prepared to partake was relatively small (Till 2008).[35]

Till (2008) and Williamson (2008) both indicate that there was little literature on contemporary South African art in the early '90s, in comparison with what there was post-1995. Till (2008) explained that it was thus difficult to get a clear picture of artists who were not within the realm of the art network he was 'plugged into' - a predominantly Johannesburg-centred art network which exposed him to a certain circle of art practitioners and administrators, whom he relied upon to give him pointers as to which artists were doing good work.

The 1993 article by Hazel Friedman was reporting on a controversial chapter in the history of the *Vita Art Awards*, rather than the *Triennial*. This indicates that selection committees still retained rather murky and undefined parameters in their decisions to confer awards, and that the control of the arts by the same old invested faces had not diminished to a satisfactory extent between the first *Cape Town Triennial* and the 1993 *Vita Art Award*, despite attempts to democratise the selection

[35] Marilyn Martin was quoted in *South* espousing a similar view; however, in a letter headed 'Arts article gives wrong impression' printed in a later edition of *South*, (4 July 1991: 19) Martin insists she was misquoted as saying, 'In most cases… the meetings elected exactly the panelists (sic) who would have been chosen in any case,' explaining that she merely questioned whether the 1991 *Triennial* would be 'different from its predecessors.'.

of artworks. Friedman (1993) writes in the article: 'Over the years, the same judges have been plucked from the halls of academia and art museums. A few extras have been added here and there as a token gesture to cultural diversity, but ultimately the mix has retained its well-worn whiteness.' What Friedman is most likely referring to here is the inclusion of black judges and consultants on selection committees. This inclusion was, in some cases, a genuine attempt to get black practitioners on board, but in other cases it revealed a disturbing tendency towards a face-value re-dressing of the old committees. David Koloane claims he was several times reported to have been included in published lists of judging panels without his knowledge or consent, supposedly erroneously (Friedman 1993).

The measures Till took to address claims of exclusionary and cabalistic selections of art in the 1991 *Triennial*[36] were to call meetings to which he invited elected representatives from each province of the country; as well as diverse arts and culture groups (Powell 1990).[37] These representatives, during exhaustive judging sessions, had to agree democratically and conclusively on which artworks should be included in the 1991 *Triennial*. The following comment by Till, made prior to the showing of the 1991 *Triennial*, gives a sense of the hesitancy and uncertainty in defining the most appropriate manner of selecting art at the time:

> We are in the process of questioning the way in which the Triennial has in the past identified its constituency, how it has organized the selection of work and how it has judged work for inclusion on the travelling show. If we can't reach a consensus on the problems and if we can't find a practical solution we may have to rethink the Triennial in its present form. I am not discounting the possibility that a high-profile competition show is not the

[36] Till claimed responsibility for instituting these measures in his interview, and his role and actions are confirmed by newspaper articles at the time.

[37] This included, for example, the United Democratic Front's Cultural Desk, the Africanist Afrika Cultural Group, various community arts centres, Wits University, the Johannesburg Art Foundation, the South African Association of Potters, and the Watercolour Society of South Africa, amongst many others (Powell 1990).

> best way of going about things in the present climate (Till in Powell 1990).

Again, one gets the sense that those in arts administration were tentatively having to feel their way over the shaken-up ideological ground of the country, towards potentially viable solutions, which usually started somewhere around the well-favoured 'grassroots level'. For all this negotiation (or perhaps, indeed, because of it) the final 1991 *Triennial* selection was a watered-down, uninspiring affair and the Rembrandt Foundation withdrew its sponsorship. As one journalist commented: '...Rembrandt had moved from outright bad publicity to something even worse - mediocre publicity... With a bit of redirection of resources they could end up being associated with a world-class game of cricket or rugby instead of a not even bad exhibition' (Pryce 1992). Rembrandt's sponsorship of the *Cape Town Triennial*s was in fact withdrawn for more complex reasons than the 1991 *Triennial's* failure to impress. However, as these reasons are specifically bound up with its host museum the SANG, and with Marilyn Martin - for whom it had particular ramifications - I will discuss them further in Chapter Four.

When Rembrandt withdrew its sponsorship arts journalists lamented the loss, but they had really given the *Triennials* very little positive or constructive support and need not have been surprised. During the course of my research I found this to be a frequent trend in the attitudes of South African journalists: to decry initiatives and report only the ways in which they were failing or going to fail dismally, almost so as to avoid looking foolish if seen to be hoping for too much. Daring to hope was a fearful business in South Africa between 1990 and 1994. Negativity or severe criticality in the media appeared in the guise of cynical wisdom and had an unfortunate impact on the psyches of its audiences. Many instances of this kind of

early-‘90s pessimism backfired in sceptics' faces, due to the relative successes of projects like the 1995 *Johannesburg Biennale* and the Newtown Cultural Precinct.

An exhibition, rather than a competition, that warrants brief comparison with the *Triennials* is the 1990 *Art from South Africa* exhibition curated by the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford. *Art from South Africa* presented a wide-ranging selection of art work that, in many senses, showed up the 1991 *Cape Town Triennial's* last ditch attempts to be inclusive and democratic. Demographically, *Art from South Africa* was an extremely ‘representative’ show with over half the artwork on show made by black South Africans. It aimed to create a wider perception of ‘new’ South African art, and included a variety of art by South Africans of all races, with no concern for categorisations of craft or art. Important to note, however, is that this emphasis on inclusion only surfaced after VAG, NAVAO, Imvaba, the Artists Alliance and the Thupelo Workshop, gave their input to the MOMA curators, who had initially a high modernist understanding of art that did not fit in with the changing South African paradigm (Pissarra 2003; Nolte 1997: 99). The resulting MOMA exhibition juxtaposed work by South Africans from every conceivable genre and discipline of art. Also important in reference to this exhibition is its seminal catalogue essays, edited by David Elliott, which included Albie Sachs’ controversial 1989 seminar, as well as the responses to it by other left-wing cultural workers, all debating the direction, value, and responsibility of the arts and artists.

Other noteworthy debates emerged around art works that were submitted under pseudonyms. The two most well-known ‘sabotage’ attempts were by Wayne Barker under the alias ‘Andrew Moletse’, and by Beezy Bailey who has carried his chosen alias, ‘Joyce Ntobe’, through much of his work, to the extent that some of his exhibitions have even been billed ‘Beezy Bailey/Joyce Ntobe’. In July 1990 Wayne

Barker submitted one artwork under his own name, and another called *CV Can't Vote* (1990: Fig.8) under the name Andrew Moletse, to the Standard Bank National Drawing competition. Barker's own submissions were not accepted, but 'Moletse's' work gained entry. Those involved said Barker's point was poorly proven as the work he submitted under the alias Andrew Moletse had evident merit in contrast with the work he submitted as himself. As Barker had intended, however, the incident caused consternation as to the 'Afrocentric' bias of the '90s selection committees, who were somewhat over-anxious to find and include promising black artists as if to try overnight to redress all the racial imbalances of past art collections. The following year artist Beezy Bailey employed a similar strategy when he submitted work to the 1991 *Cape Town Triennial* under the name Joyce Ntobe. Three of 'Ntobe's' linocuts were bought by the SA National Gallery (for R100 each) while Bailey's work was not (Loppert 1993; SANG Annual Report 1992/93: 25; Dubin 2006: 243).

The contradictions in the belated acquisitions of artwork made by black artists is explained by Jane Taylor in SANG's *Contemporary South African Art 1985 – 1995.* In a transcribed discussion with Emma Bedford and Neville Dubow, Taylor asks:

> How does one address or make redress for the kind of racist and culturalist practices of a past policy without perpetuating the same or related racist practices? If one did not buy black artists in the past, should one now buy black artists? There is a dynamic of a kind of compensatory racism that one gets caught in: how do you implement a policy that, on one hand, makes redress for historical inequities, but which is not racist? Also, can one get a sense of this history from the list of how many works so-called black artists have been bought in the past ten years? Should one also consider what these purchases represent financially? If works by black artists represent one percent of the acquisitions expenditure, even though they make up thirty percent of the works acquired … these questions raise issues about how one makes redress (Bedford 1997: 32).

Taylor here articulates two sides to this question: firstly that redress or revisionism could be seen as 'reverse racism'; and, secondly, that although this revision could be

seen to be favouring black artists, those same black artists' works were being bought for a fraction of the cost of the work of their white counterparts.

While Barker's and Bailey's 'protests' have at their core the fear that work by two young white male artists would be passed over and undervalued in the bid to discover, affirm, and collect the art of black South Africans, it is clear that the playing fields were barely levelled at this stage. In addition, other white male artists like William Kentridge, Karel Nel, Willem Boshoff, Andries Botha, Peter Schütz and Gavin Younge were very dominant on the art scene and did not suffer such rejections - as is evidenced by Botha's, Schütz's and Younge's placement as the three finalists in the JAG sculpture competition in 1990.[38] It is therefore possible to put the rejections of Barker's and Bailey's work down to the quality of the work submitted.[39]

Barry Ronge raises a point in his column 'What happened to "Art Now"?' that is worth discussing: the suggestion that sponsored art competitions were fostering an unhealthy tendency in artists to create one-off 'competition pieces'. The 'Art Now' that Ronge refers to is the Johannesburg-based *Vita Art Now Awards*, which were structured so as to curb this trend. The *Vita Awards* began as theatre and dance awards, and were later extended to the visual arts in 1989, with the proposal to be a sort of 'non-competition'. Winners were selected on the basis of already-existing bodies of work that were showing at various galleries, which the panel of judges would visit and assess. A quarterly prize was then awarded to artists who the panel felt had produced excellent exhibitions during that quarter and a yearly prize awarded for best exhibition of the year (Powell 1989). From 1991, all the quarterly and overall winning works were shown at the Johannesburg Art Gallery at the end of the judging

[38] Schütz won the competition (Horowitz 1990).
[39] However, as Federico Freschi suggested, 'when it came down to choosing between mediocre works submitted by white artists or equally mediocre work submitted by (ostensibly) black artists, the panel favoured the black artist. The reasons for this are clear in the context of political correctness and the need for "redress"'.

year (Williamson 2000). However this was a ‘cumbersome system’: the artwork exhibited ‘was often… more than a year old’; and because of the amount of exhibitors, ‘the exhibition was a bit of a mish mash’ that was seen to benefit only the Johannesburg art world (Williamson 2000).[40]

Journalists questioned the claim that the *1989 Vita Art Awards* was supportive of 'Art Now', pointing out that one of its awards went to Gerard Sekoto ‘for works that were completed between 1946 and 1959’ and who had ‘not worked in SA for 40 years’; and that another went to photographer Mike McCann who had died in 1988 (Coulson 1990). Popular art critic Barry Ronge (1990) suggested the awards given were made according to the emotional or commercial decisions of the judges - once again designated ‘art mafiosos’. However these apparent contradictions could be due to the temporal collapse or reverse amnesia that occurred in South African art at this time, where there was a need to acknowledge black artists, regardless of their age and the contemporaneity of their work. That three of the awards went to black artists (Sekoto, Hlungwani and Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi) was given particularly emphasis in the press. Seen from another perspective, addressing the imbalances of the past was felt to be what was important for ‘art now’, rather than the criterion of contemporaneity.

Ronge’s (1990) column once again conjures the idea of ‘Art Mafia’ at work in the selections process, despite the *Vita Art Now* ‘89 catalogue’s description of the competition as an ‘Ongoing attempt to democratise the process of selection’. Christopher Till explained that the *Vita* concept, at the time of its inception three years before was, ‘to try and bring an immediacy to the Johannesburg Art Gallery, by

[40] Overall *Vita* winners included Jackson Hlungwani (1989); Karel Nel (1991), Andries Botha (1992), William Kentridge (1993), Guy du Toit (1994), Sue Williamson (1995) and joint winners Jane Alexander and Kevin Brand (1996) (Williamson 2000).

having contemporary artists participate within the walls of a museum that previously been seen to only collect from a historical distance' (Geers 1990). This bid for currency was part of an increasing interest in the South African arts due to the pre- and post-Boycott stalemate that applied to collecting international art.

Due to this interest in 'contemporary' artwork, curators at this time did not have the luxury of seeing how art works would weather time. The museum tradition of allowing a certain period of 'historical distance' to accrue had resulted in their collections not commenting adequately on recent South African art history, and they had to take some chances in their rapid procurement of artwork that would be more immediately 'relevant'. This was in line with a global change in the way art was being collected.

Resonant with Wilma Cruise's views that contemporary South African art improved considerably post-apartheid, Sophie Perryer reported in a 1991 article on the *Vita Art Awards* that:

> 1990 was a particularly good year for art ... much of the ideologically safe ground that spawned a generation of resistance or protest artists has fallen away since the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the liberation movements. As a result, perhaps a more personal and considered, less formulaic response to the art-making process is demanded - a challenge to which the artists on the Vita show have risen.

The *Vita Art Awards* managed to maintain the good opinion of the art world until the 1993 outcry mentioned above, when they made no award in the first quarter of 1993, and Steven Cohen and Wilma Cruise got the second-quarterly awards. The *Vita Awards* were thereafter called upon to delineate clearer criteria in their assessments of the winning artists. Significantly, the first and only *Vita Craft Now* was held in 1993/94, perhaps falling uncomfortably before the debate about the validity of the categories of 'art' and 'craft' had been entirely thrashed out.

The *Standard Bank Young Artist Award* is another competition worth mentioning in terms of its somewhat unorthodox but perspicacious choices of winners. These annual awards started in 1981, and seemed, by the mid 1980s, to shrug off the mantle of racial conservatism in the South African arts.[41] The award is made on the basis of the merit and promise of the artist and requires and enables the winner to create an exhibition which tours nationally. Artist Wilma Cruise shared in her recent interview that most artists of her generation sensed a lack of opportunities, regardless of race, prior to 1990. As Cruise (2008) explains:

> One of the things that artists of my generation feel is that we really had very limited opportunities in the apartheid years. There were limited opportunities to show, there were limited opportunities to go overseas, there were no commissions, no money was being spent on art, and it really is ironic to say, post-liberation, well "now we're promoting young artists". I've spoken to people like Peter Schütz, and we say we never actually had the opportunities. And it's really quite galling to think now "well, you're the old, established people, and we don't have to bother about you."

Cruise does acknowledge though, that her 'art career is soaring ahead' and notes the benefits, for all artists, of working in the current climate of appreciation for the arts in South Africa.

Many of the new opportunities for artists in the country lay in calls for commissions for artworks to 'articulate' public spaces and governmental and corporate buildings (Cruise 2008). Christopher Till and Wilma Cruise both pointed

[41] From 1981 to 1983, the Awards were sponsored by Five Roses and all the recipients were white. They were: Jules van de Vijver (1981), Neil Rodger 1982, and Malcolm Payne (1983). It was only in 1985 that the first wards were given to black artists (Maishe Maponya - Drama; Sidwell Hartman - Music). The first black recipient of the visual art award was Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, in 1989. Other recipients include Peter Schütz (1984), Marion Arnold (1985), Gavin Younge (1986), William Kentridge (1987), Margaret Vorster (1988), Fée Halsted-Berning and Bonnie Ntshalintshali (1990), Andries Botha (1991), Tommy Motswai (1992), Pippa Skotnes (1993), Sam Nhlengthwa (1994), Jane Alexander (1995), Trevor Makhoba (1996); Lien Botha (1997), Nhlanhla Xaba (1998), Alan Alborough (2000), Walter Oltmann (2001), Brett Murray (2002), Berni Searle (2003), Kathryn Smith (2004), Wim Botha (2005), Churchill Madikida (2006), Pieter Hugo (2007), and Nontsikelelo Veleko (2008). The names of winners have been mostly gleaned from the official National Arts Festival website: http://www.nationalartsfestival.co.za/page/standard-bank-young-artist-award-winners.

out that the commissioning of artwork was somewhat rare prior to 1990, after which the requests for artists to submit proposals grew. One instance of this that I have already mentioned was the JAG sculpture competition in 1990. Another example is the design of Constitutional Court, which is well-known and lauded for its collection of South African artwork. According to Andrew Verster (2008), the young architects who designed 'Con Court' worked with artists and crafts people in creating the aesthetic of the building, 'right from when it was still a drawing'.

Collaborations of this kind are not always successful. Over the years disputes have arisen between corporate or government clients and commissioned artists, and it is not unusual for artworks in public or corporate spaces to cause controversy. Wilma Cruise (2008) related her experience with a commission in 1993 that was directly influenced by the change in provincial government:

> The old provincial government was building a new administrative building in what's now called Ekhuruleni but was Kempton Park. It was a multimillion Rand administrative building and they put out a call for artworks, and it was the first time really that buildings were inviting artists to submit commissions before the building was complete to articulate the building. So a whole mountain of us went there and we submitted our proposals. And I had a proposal accepted for a figure standing outside the library, and it was a clothed figure, which was for me quite a difficult thing. It was a clothed figure, just simply, a black boy, modelled on Themba [a boy that Cruise co-parented] holding a pile of books in his arm, and the only thing I made as a gesture to art is that I made it blue like that couch, you know almost like a Segal, it's a Segal blue, and the proposal was accepted for the next stage.

Next Cruise was asked to do a maquette of the work, but decided to make the finished work instead, which she submitted, and which was accepted. According to Cruise (2008):

> …it stayed at the Ekhuruleni building, standing in the storeroom in the library and just at that time there was a change over in the government. It was municipal election time… and a new municipal body came in and of

> course they inherited this project and weren't interested. So for a year I wrote to them and [asked them to make a decision on this work] and they just brushed me aside.

After repeatedly requesting that a decision be made on the artwork, Cruise eventually staged a protest in January 1995 for the benefit of the local Kempton Park Press. She organised with the Library to fetch the work from the storeroom, and to carry it outside to the piazza of the building; at which point, Cruise produced a four pound hammer and smashed her sculpture to pieces, to the horror of the library employees. After scattering red iron oxide around the shards Cruise produced a cardboard sign displaying the words ART IS DEAD (Fig. 9). The press and public reaction to the protest was varied and considerable (Cruise 2008).

Artist Willie Bester (2008) confirms the increase in commissions after 1990, but points out that it had been part of the VAG's constitution not to work with any company or institution seen to be complicit with the apartheid government. After the apartheid government was overthrown this ban fell away, however Bester (2008) still avoids commissions, particularly 'community' commissions, as he says the funds extended are not enough to cover the material costs, and they are often 'handled in a very sloppy way'. Bester (2008) says he would prefer to 'donate a sculpture to a museum' and cites his donation to the SANG of what he refers to as the 'Ox' - his sculpture entitled *Head North* (1995: Fig. 10).

The final, key, large-scale exhibition that marks the turning point in the character of, and the attitude to, South African art, was the crucial 1995 *Johannesburg Biennale*. It was the brainchild of Lorna Ferguson, who developed the project further with Christopher Till. The *Biennale* was staged to celebrate the end of the Cultural Boycott and had at its core an attempt to 'critically represent African and South African art in a way that would express the accumulating discourses surrounding post-

colonial identity in global and South African art and culture' at the time (Richards 1994). Critic Ivor Powell (1993) reported the first stirrings of the *Johannesburg Biennale* in August 1993, with the bringing in of Belgian critic and art historian Barte de Baere. Initially there was scepticism about the *Biennale*. As Till (2008) remembered it:

> ...the reason for doing the *Biennale* [was] to reengage South African art and artists with the international community, and vice versa, because we were an extraordinarily insular group of artmakers. There was practically no contact on an international level, and the reason for the *Biennale* was to break those barriers down, and it worked. At the time, I was criticised, not only by Ivor Powell and... Hazel Friedman… all that crowd, they gave me an unbelievable hard time in the press: "Why am I spending all this money?" and "Why aren't we investing in community arts centres?" and "It's just one man's ego". And only when the international art world arrived and suddenly everybody was there with the TV cameras and suddenly the curators and museum directors and artists arrived, then they quickly changed their tune.

By 1994, coverage, at least in the *City Press* newspaper, reported positively on *Biennale* developments. The article also reported on the Curators' Forum held at the Africana Museum to launch the *Johannesburg Biennale,* which 'Local artists, academics, museum directors, dealers, critics and representatives from Japan, Mexico, South America, the US, Europe and China [were] expected to attend'. The article cites Forum facilitator Colin Richards (1994) as saying:

> This experience might help us begin to give new shape and substance to our collective visions in a time of truly historic changeover.
>
> It can also contribute to cultural reconstruction by encouraging us to develop relationships and share opportunities and resources on a local, national and international scale.

The 1995 *Biennale* was indeed a major turning point in projecting South African art out of its insular state and into the consciousness of the global art world.

I have already touched on the role of the Thupelo Workshop, the Triangle workshop, the Bag Factory, the JAF and the CAP in terms of the roles they played in the lives of David Koloane and Willie Bester. It is important to briefly mention other institutions doing similar work in the upliftment and art education of disadvantaged communities and individuals. These included the AAC, the FUBA Academy, the Mofolo Arts Centre, the Funda Art Centre in Soweto, Rorkes Drift, and the Alex and Kathlehong Art Centres, amongst many others. Christopher Till's memory of the criticism he received was that it centred around the amount of money that was spent on the *Biennale,* and unhappiness that the funds in question were not being invested in community arts centres. This was a valid concern as independent art programmes and community arts centres played a vital role in the South African art world prior to 1990. Had these institutions not existed it is not excessive to say that there would have been almost *no* black artists resident in South Africa for museums and galleries to draw on when change came and their work was in demand.

Ivor Powell's (1991) description of the 'massive injections of funding… made available to "progressive" organisations and community projects inside the country' was followed by this gloomy observation:

> Those days are no longer with us and the scenario being faced at the present moment by those involved in the visual arts is pretty bleak.
>
> Overseas funding is drying up just as magically as it appeared in the first place. The huge waves of interest in this country on the part of the outside world, it becomes increasingly clear, were in apartheid and not in South Africa as a whole.
>
> ....Nearly all of the community arts centres and cultural projects functioning in South Africa are having to reconsider their future. For some there is simply no more money coming in.

In my interview with him, Steven Sack, the Director of the JAF between 1990 and 1994, confirmed that all the foreign funding was reviewed, and resources withdrawn

from numerous art centres that had emerged ‘partly due to fragmentation and partly due to… over-ambition’. Sack (2007) outlined the dismal scenario with the JAF, Funda, FUBA and the Alex Art Centre: ‘Whereas before you had one unviable art school, now you had four unviable art schools.’ Sack (2007) acknowledges that the programmes were ‘created for good reasons but proved to be completely unsustainable’. The Alex Arts Centre collapsed, the JAF closed, and in Sack’s words ‘FUBA sort of limps along today’ while ‘Funda is on its knees’. Governmental funds were provided for these centres, but these were as inadequate as they had been for museums; thus it is understandable that pouring money into new arts initiatives rather than supporting older, more established ones, must have seemed an unreasonable step.

2.2. Changes in Public Museums in South Africa during the transition of governmental power.

> It is important to note that it's somewhat artificial to draw a distinct boundary between pre- and post- 1994: museum conferences were the scene of spirited and defiant debate during the years in the run-up to the establishment of democracy. Museum professionals had a head start on imagining what South African might become, although in general they lacked the wherewithal to implement these thoughts (Dubin 2004: 24).

Art museums were already changing their processes of selecting and exhibiting artwork, not only pre-1994, as Dubin asserts, but even pre-1990 - prior to the National Party’s release of the governmental reins. The primary transformation in the way art was selected was that it changed from being chiefly a directorial choice to a consultative process that involved a larger contingent of the museums’ curatorial staff, as well as the input of a progressive Board of Trustees (Bedford 1997: 14). Additionally, these selections aimed to procure more contemporary art and more art by black South Africans than had been previously collected. South African museums

also worked to involve surrounding communities in museum activities to a greater degree - a necessity locally, but one very much in line with international initiatives. The implementation of these ideals was hampered primarily by the deficiency of funding, and inadequate numbers of staff. Public museums and galleries struggled with rapidly diminishing budgets, which were largely inadequate to make the necessary acquisitions of work that would be more 'representative' of all South African citizens.

South African arts administrators and gallery and museum professionals recall the years between 1990 and 1994 as times of both euphoria and uncertainty. It was precarious to be in the business of producing or procuring art that would be meaningful and pertinent to a country whose future was so unclear, and whose cultural character was still emerging. The bias fell, rightly, towards including more work by black artists, but there was also an anxiety, as I have mentioned, that existing museum collections may be seen as redundant given that they were collected in a colonial or separationist era. Popular journalist Denis Beckett gave vent to such sentiments in a newspaper article, writing: 'they could give those smarmy Randlord portraits to the park hoboes in lieu of blankets' (Beckett 1994). Museum professionals were anxious to emphasise the historical importance of these collections, for fear that entire collections would lose validity and currency, or perhaps even be sold off, even though this was illegal.

Up to this point I have used the terms 'gallery' and 'museum' interchangeably. The differences accompanying the different terms are subtle but present. The SANG and the JAG have always maintained the word 'gallery' in identifying themselves. The Pretoria Art Museum, in contrast, has always retained its designation as a 'museum'. The DAG, however, changed from being the Durban Art Gallery to the

Durban Art Museum, and back again. Although both terms are applicable to a public art collection, it seems there is a psychological difference associated with the word ‘gallery’ as opposed to ‘museum’.

The word ‘gallery’ connotes a place where art work is exhibited in a fluid, ostensibly neutral space that should be able to accommodate changing visual displays. A museum, ideally, should also be able to change its visual displays to keep up energy and interest, but the mental picture we get when museums are mentioned is often of pitifully-funded natural history museums - like the one situated below the DAG - which are comprised of dusty, claustrophobic, deteriorating displays which freeze time rather than move with it. Thus the term ‘museum’, as a place that displays art, suggests a place that showcases the art of the past, not of the present. This psychological association of museums with dust and antiquity was one of the motivations behind the international push for a revision of their ethos, which I will shortly discuss further.

The museum/gallery ‘identity crisis’ is also quite apt in the case of the DAG because of the controversy I will refer to in Chapter Five, which centred on the prioritising of the British collection over the South African one. Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa attests that the DAG generally had a good relationship with, and was seen to be accessible to, black artists; however its decision to hang its Victorian collection in pride of place in the early ‘90s seemed reactionary and proved contentious. I will continue to use the terms ‘museum’ and ‘gallery’ interchangeably, but would suggest that it is perhaps the thin line between the connotations of the two words that these institutions were negotiating and trying to reconcile during this era.

The shift in emphasis which saw galleries or museums as institutions responsible for representing the present, rather than the past, is particularly interesting to study in

South African museums at this time. This is because the debate about their role in the late '80s and '90s, and the social-political impetus in the country to be more inclusive and interactive with the broader community, was aided and enhanced by the need to shift perceptions of the museum from 'mausoleum' to 'forum'.

Museologists began 'to challenge dominant views of the museum as a site of power relations… to invoke and encourage new relations between museum and communities. As a movement, this phenomenon can be broadly defined as the "New Museology"' (Witcomb 2003:79). It is not surprising that this 'New Museology' dovetailed with the advent of the 'New South Africa' in ways that would benefit South African museum professionals as they strove to render their establishments more accessible to the 'general public'. As Christopher Till stated in the early '90s, in his former capacity as Director of the JAG: 'We're looking to the next decade... We need to decide where the gallery is going, how best it can serve its community' (in Powell 1990).

Also relevant to the South African context is Andrea Witcomb's (2003: 79) assertion that 'New Museologists question a museology that focuses on museum processes and ask instead for a focus on the political dimensions of museum work'.[42] Witcomb (2003: 79) is insistent, however, that this 'political dimension' - which urges museums to concentrate on their relationship to 'communities' - does not posit the 'community' being imagined or framed as a cohesive group with common interests, goals and needs. It would also be unsatisfactory for museums to be situating themselves as one body, with the community as an other (Witcomb 2003:79). In this scenario, regardless of whether museums have good intentions with regard to serving these 'communities', the relationship is still framed in terms of an 'us and them'

[42] Here Witcomb cites 'Karp *et al* 1992, Vergo, 1989, Weil 1990' in support of this argument.

dialectic which does not effectively challenge the traditional hegemony of the museum (Witcomb 2003:79).[43]

Art historian and museum expert Annie Coombes (2003: 4) also warns that these developments may sometimes have ulterior motives:

> For some time now, in international museum forums, there has been an expectation and an ethical injunction to establish wider consultation and active participation from members of the public not professionally engaged in museums and other publicly funded cultural institutions. In the most opportunistic scenarios the idea of "community" invoked here may simply be a bureaucratic fiction strategically employed to legitimate and institution and its projects.

This was undoubtedly a realistic concern in South African museums, and many parties who had seen museums as colluding with apartheid were suspicious of museums' efforts to remake themselves under the 'new South African' banner. Given public museums' dubious history, it seemed that to sanction their sudden change of heart would amount to them 'getting off lightly'. Certainly, shifts in museums had practical, strategic, and economic motivations but it nevertheless seems to me that they were often driven by the earnest enthusiasm of museum employees who were born along by the euphoria that accompanied South Africa's well-publicised 'rebirth'.

As one advertorial trilled in a 1990 *Femme* magazine article entitled 'Restored and Reformed':

> Museums are shaking off the dust, hanging out the 'Welcome Home' banners and calling in the ordinary man. The day of the silent, hallowed gallery is gone. Elitist art and artefacts are shifting over to make space for exhibitions and objects of contemporary relevance. For the modern museum looking forward has become just as important as looking back.

[43] Witcomb cites Tony Bennett's 1998 book *Culture: A Reformer's Science* as her primary source in this discussion of museums' relationships with communities.

From the South African perspective, museums gave great attention to reconstructing notions of what constitutes South African 'identity'. Revising the function of museums was a hotly debated topic during this time of transition, as museums were potentially important places where active revisions of South African culture could take place. The international change in views of the museum ethos ran parallel with the shift in South African art criticism and reviews. It heralded a move away from - simplistically stated - an international, modernist, 'elitist' bias towards an 'Afrocentric', more Post-modern, revisionist attitude which had been triggered by the end of the Cultural Boycott and the budgetary constraints of public galleries.

As Marilyn Martin (1997: 18) argued:

> Taking new directions and bringing about profound shifts in thinking and working mean that definitions, distinctions and standards must constantly be assessed and debated among ourselves and in public forums, many of which are initiated by the SANG. We are, in turn, challenged about what is suitable and appropriate for the collection of a national art museum – issues about "art" and "craft" and "high" and "low" are often raised, as we continue to erode traditional boundaries and eliminate categories which have invariably been imposed from outside our own borders and experience. These only serve to hinder the potential for interchange and the creation of our own theories and terminologies.

Change in the collecting policies and functions of public art museums and galleries were therefore affected by national socio-political discourses and economic factors as well as global shifts in museum theorisation.

A key incidence of heated debate surrounding museum practice occurred at the *51st South African Museums Association Conference* in 1987, at which South African galleries were urged to take a more active role in changing the status quo in the country (Brown 2005: 82-3). Guest speaker Dr John Kinnard, Director of the Anacostia Museum in Washington DC, sparked controversy at the conference with his rousing attack on South African museums, which he labelled as being 'too

Eurocentric' (Brown 2005: 83). According to Brown (2005: 83), Kinnard stated that these museums,

> …were in need of "intensive care" and suggested: "Museum people must stand up and be counted as agents of social change". The main emphasis of his speech was that museums in the past had avoided controversy and seen themselves as chroniclers of events rather than "looking at the future through the eyes of the past". He continued that "South African museums have not recorded the history of the people. They have recorded European history alone. Black South Africans have seen themselves through white culture, so they cannot identify with museums" (Daily News, 11 May 1987). This paper caused a great deal of controversy at the conference. The Administrator of the Cape, Eugene Louw, retorted that similar attacks would force him, together with other administrators, to review their policy of sending representatives to other SAMA conferences in future. Many white museum professionals walked out in protest against Louw at this point indicating that within museum circles there was support for an inclusive approach and a break from previous representations of history. However museums have a strong sense of continuity with the past and, due to their state links, these changes were gradual and only started to become evident in the 1990s when most museums began changing their policies, displays and exhibitions.

Kinnard's rousing call and the heartening response by some museum professionals, was only one example of an attempt by the museums sector to tackle the ideological problems inherent in existing museological theories.

As Dubin (2006: 4) suggests:

> One simply needs to scan the titles of some of the articles appearing in the Southern African Museums Association Bulletin [SAMAB] during this time to appreciate the sense of the debate: "Ringing the changes: A call to South African museums"; "Bastions of ideology: The depiction of precolonial history in the museums of Natal and Kwazulu"; "Stating the case: A synoptic view of the position of museums and the problems they face, in the changing and divided society of contemporary South Africa"; and "Cultural history museums in developing countries: Expensive luxury or vital institutions?"

There were many other conferences and commissions in the early 1990s centring on the influence and responsibilities of museums. A 'national consultative meeting' was

organised by the ANC's DAC's Commission on Museums, Monuments and Heraldry (CMMH) in March 1992 (Odendaal 1995: 19). The CMMH had been created in 1991 'to engage the state, develop future policy and push for the democratisation of the country's cultural institutions' and the meeting in March '92 was 'attended by a cross-section of people, including the leadership of the museum establishment and government representatives' (Odendaal 1995: 19). CMMH later became the Commission for the Restructuring and Transformation of the Arts and Culture (CREATE).

May 1992 saw the creation of the Museums for South Africa (MUSA) Intersectorial Investigation for National Policy, at the urging of the South African Museums Association (SAMA):

> …because leading figures from museums (rather than just bureaucrats) would be involved in policy formulation for the first time. The ANC, however, saw MUSA as part of a unilateral restructuring exercise by the apartheid government and the museum establishment prior to the advent of a new constitutional dispensation (Odendaal 1995: 19).

The MUSA report, upon its completion in 1994, was deemed by CREATE to be consultatively flawed, 'unrepresentative', and 'an attempt to maintain the status quo… at national cultural institutions whose directors had dominated MUSA' (Odendaal 1995: 19). Eventually, SAMA and the ANC agreed that the MUSA report's findings were inadequate, and gave the information over to ACTAG to be further investigated (Odendaal 1995: 19 – 20).

Public museums also participated in, and were reviewed, at the ANC's international Culture and Development Conference in 1993, which ran parallel with the non-politically-aligned NAI's efforts to formulate policy (Odendaal 1995: 19). The SANG's Annual Reports show ample evidence of its collaboration with the ANC,

and most museums had representatives at many of the arts policy meetings mentioned. Rochelle Keene, the Director of the JAG between 1992 and 2003, remembered participating in the above meetings as a member of SAMA. The meetings, according to Keene (2007) comprised:

> …a whole conglomeration of people - ANC, PAC, people of all political persuasions. They were really the first forums where people with different political persuasions came together and debated what the way forward was, and there was also a big inter-sectorial report done on the way forward for museums in South Africa. I was part of that process and did a lot of the criticisms of that report... People who were not aware had no excuse, because they were public forae and they could've engaged with everything that was being said and everything that was being done. And things were happening within the SAMA, particularly at conferences, where issues like audiences, collection policies, display issues, were vented and debated from the '80s, and hectically debated, you know it wasn't tame little tentative steps, it was absolute outright criticism of what the status quo was.

Clearly, the idea of what constituted an 'outright criticism of the status quo' was not necessarily the same for museum professionals' as it was for the ANC's CREATE team.

Keene (2007) also mentioned that museums at this stage, were not understood as having great value as tourist attractions. This idea has changed radically in the years since then, with museums like Robben Island, the Apartheid Museum and Constitution Hill having become places of tremendous interest to local and international tourists. When ACTAG was formed in 1994, one of its twelve sub-groupings was the Heritage sub-committee, which focused on museums, monuments and other heritage sites; and 'because of the particular debates and processes which have taken place in this sphere over the past few years' museums were one of the most well-prepared sectors under review in ACTAG's process (Odendaal 1995: 18).

A considerable amount of research went into establishing what museums' public constituencies wanted to see represented. According to Dubin (2006:4): 'Audience surveys were conducted to accurately assess who museums were attracting and the specific ways in which different racial groups were satisfied or dissatisfied with what they saw.' Annie Coombes (2003: 175) recalls one instance in which a postal survey was sent out by Museum Africa in 1990 to no less than 106 groups:

> …including women's, youth, and educational organizations; organizations for the disabled; cultural associations (Afrikaans, Indian, and Chinese, among others); and the educational and tourist sectors. From the responses a list of ten historical topics emerged that it was felt the museum should prioritize. The first five in order of priority were: "black protest and township unrest, including Sharpeville and Soweto riots of 1976"; "the origin and history of black tribes"; "the release of Nelson Mandela"; "the great trek"; and "the Anglo-Boer war." …The postal survey also established the visibility of the museum: "In addition to the many who refused to visit the museum because it did not fit into their framework of reference, there were those who were simply oblivious to the museum's very existence. It was also evident from the findings that the majority of the community felt that while education was the most important task to be fulfilled this function was being neglected."

In his capacity as President of SAMA between 1989 and 1990, Christopher Till, wrote in a 1990 *SAMAntix* President's Column: 'The decade of the 1990s in Southern Africa will be, to my mind, one in which the museum will prove to be an active generator of new ideas and will provide a realignment of energies and thinking in formulating a total vision of ourselves in this region.' One can see from statements like these that public museums endeavoured to become effective players in instituting change.

A comprehensive article written in *The Star* in October of 1990 under the heading 'Who is South African art for? Museums take a look at their future role...' reports on an open panel discussion held at the Pretoria Art Museum, entitled 'The Role of the Art Museum in a New South Africa'. The report outlines museum professionals' attempts to root out the problems in their systems and the vestigial

elements of racism and elitism that so many South Africans despised their institutions for (James 1990). Art critic and writer Samantha James (1990) reported that the 'major points hotly debated, emerged during a meeting which numbered 6 black and 64 white people'. James (1990) listed some of the questions raised:

- Is it true that art education was withheld from black people because it encourages free thinking and liberates the mind?
- How will the present infrastructure of art museums - dominated by white ownership and ensuing manipulation of culture - relinquish its power to benefit the new age?
- As city council budgets shrink and art museums are used by the few - will the duty of the museum director focus in future, as it does overseas, on outside funding?
- Can the role and functions of museums be redefined in a way that has developed nowhere else in the world to inform people of black, white, Indian and coloured groups?
- How practical is such a goal, with on one side an elitist white group all knowing what a museum is, and on the other a black education crisis with millions who cannot read properly, and who are unversed in the visual arts?
- Will the attainment of this entail the scrapping of all that has hitherto been enshrined in art - and in the present explosive climate how can anybody rearrange a museum without talking to the ANC?

Despite these candid questions aimed at debating solutions to racial imbalances in museums, James noted that there were two incidences of black speakers being treated condescendingly or with a lack of understanding during the course of these conferences, giving a sense of the shaky beginning of racial equality and integration.

The possibility of scrapping museums entirely - at least as they were known or understood to exist at the time - was also raised and debated, as is evident in these points of view by Dr Albert Werth, Dr Marion Arnold, and Bongi Dlomo-Mautloa:

> Said Dr Werth, "During the last decade the mausoleum image of museums has changed to an open forum for discussion and interaction. Some museums have been very actively engaged in organizing exhibitions of work by black artists..."
>
> Dr Arnold said holdings of black art should be increased, but "many museums have a very elitist board determining what should be

> purchased.... The majority of white museum visitors... want exhibitions to endorse their tastes and confirm their prejudices... Apathy to art... in the SA population at large can be traced back to the defective SA education system."
>
> For years museums had been collecting art and ethnic crafts, said Dhlomo. The collectors were "educated, know-all and white". Yet they didn't accord due respect to the work and the maker by noting traditional name and accurate use of the article. Instead it was assumed that an article was, for example, "possibly Tsonga-Shangana".
>
> In the minds of black people, she said, a museum is "a government building that does not allow blacks in... or associated with white women who have no work to do... There are practicing black artists who have never once visited an art museum... So how will the millions of people who know nothing about art have an interest at all?"
>
> Durban Art Museum was an exception, [Dhlomo] said. It always looked busy and was not intimidating. But most (black) art centres had been suppressed and funds threatened by the State. Lack of exposure to art and a total lack of career guidance had removed it from all but a few. (James 1990).

This would seem to reinforce Steven Sack's assertion 'that since the late 1980s, initiatives to expand the reach of museums in any respect were "all done by white management, white curators, white intelligentsia. There had not been a culture of black South Africans going to these institutions. And there certainly wasn't a sense of ownership"' (Sack in Dubin 2006: 32).

Claims such as art critic John Dewar's damaging assertion, in a 1988 article, that black artists are 'hard to contact and unreliable in producing work', shows an unpardonable lack of understanding, on the part of many whites, regarding the difficulties encountered by black South Africans as a direct result of apartheid projects of repression and abasement. Issues surrounding racial entitlement and ownership were particularly thorny and complex, and were bluntly aired in the 1990 to 1994 period. It remains a contentious subject today, but much of the discomfort obvious in discussions about it in the early years of democracy resulted in the formulation of politically correct terminology and policy creation which provided a framework within which to address racial inequalities.

In the ensuing three chapters I will outline the individual ways that the Johannesburg Art Gallery, South African National Gallery, and Durban Art Gallery acclimatised to the political changes and rewrote their policies. There were, however, common factors and similarities which these galleries shared, which are worth summarising here. One piece of common ground was the somewhat conservative Boards of museums and galleries that all three had to contend with, largely in the 1980s but continuing, to some degree, throughout the early 1990s. Another was the amount of influence that the museums' or galleries' directors had in changing the institutions' paths. With JAG, SANG, and DAG, the length of their director's tenures and the time at which they started links very clearly to the speed with which galleries adopted new ideas.

The directors who had lasting effects on their galleries were: at JAG - Christopher Till (1983 to 1991) and Rochelle Keene (1991 to 2003); at SANG - Raymund van Niekerk who left in 1989, with Marilyn Martin incoming in 1990 (to 2008); and at DAG - Jill Addleson (1960 to 1995), and former DAG education officer Carol Brown (1995 to 2006). Van Niekerk's and Addleson's long tenures at the SANG and the DAG meant that their particular visions had held sway at these galleries for some time, and van Niekerk was influential in the art world on a national level as well. Incoming '90s Directors Marilyn Martin and Carol Brown brought different, fresh perspectives into their respective posts, many of which dovetailed with 'new museological' theories advocating, for example, giving more responsibility and agency to interested participants, and in the form of community workshops and guest curatorships. Martin placed particular emphasis on breaking down the boundaries between art and craft and buying and displaying contemporary South African art, while Brown introduced extremely effective programmes to draw public attention to

the museum and to inspire a flow of creative energy between the museum and the city and streets.

Christopher Till had had a constructive effect at the JAG from 1983, instigating similar changes to those at the SANG and DAG already in the late '80s - for example, by facilitating the creation of revisionist exhibitions. Till also tended to delegate, passing a lot of the responsibility and creative direction for these exhibitions onto his staff at the time, a good team of researchers and curators including Jillian Carman, Brendan Bell, Lesley Spiro-Cohen and Julia Charlton.[44] Lesley Spiro-Cohen (2008) remembers her time at JAG under Till as being particularly exciting in terms of having freedom to innovate, test new strategies, and create new systems.

Post-1994, the arts were provided, in part, with their own Ministry, the Department of Art, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), which was initially headed by Dr Ben Ngubane. While it was a positive step to have a ministry dedicated to the arts, and the DACST supported their aims to restructure their policies to meet the needs of the larger South African community, financial resources from government for public galleries were still scarce. The JAG, SANG, and DAG struggled increasingly with rapidly diminishing budgets, as funds were split further and siphoned off to ailing community upliftment programmes and new arts initiatives.

The JAG had the unique benefit of the Anglo-American endowment fund which enabled it to buy international work (albeit only affordable prints, which continued to

[44] In an informal conversation with Elizabeth Rankin on 4 September 2008, Rankin credited Till with being an effective 'facilitator' of projects, able to network and draw the right people on board to oversee projects - for instance with Steven Sack's guest-curatorship of *The Neglected Tradition* and Rankin's guest-curatorship of *Images of Wood.* Sack's fundamental and successful role in curating the exhibition was in fact - while not 'last-minute' - initially unplanned. Sack was only invited to curate the project when Sherrie Lisoos, who was originally tasked with it, suddenly had to pull out. In my interview with him, Sack describes his initial catalogue essay as very 'angry', and credits the JAG staff with toning it down and making it appear more academically acceptable. Dubin (2006: 41) echoes this, writing that the ""struggle" character' of the text, 'was a reflection of the super-charged tenor of the times. But without claiming censorship, [Sack] acknowledges that subsequent input from his wife as well as JAG personnel made it more "subdued," "cleaned up," "objective."'

augment JAG's fantastic print collection). The endowment also made it possible for JAG to 'repatriate' large collections of South African art from 'ethnographic' collectors overseas, like the Brenthurst and Horstmann Collections, and to incorporate them into the gallery's permanent collection, thereby filling its gaps. However the budgets of the SANG and the DAG were grossly insufficient to acquire international artworks, or the large collections that JAG could procure, and both tended to concentrate on buying more affordable art.

Apart from financial challenges, the JAG, SANG, and DAG had other factors in common. These included their location in the CBDs of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban respectively, as they were initially designed to infuse the growing colonial capitals with 'culture'. All three buildings are visibly steeped in colonial history - most clearly apparent in the elaborate monumental magnificence of their architecture. Because of their colonial origins, they also have in common large collections of British and Dutch paintings and, specifically, strong collections of Victorian paintings. All three spaces were continually used as venues for classical music concerts. The colonial cultural origins of the gallery were still very much in evidence towards the end of the 20th century, and had to be consciously addressed and redressed during the transitional era.

Another factor shared by the SANG and DAG was the problem of a chronic space shortage, and a coincidental period of intense renovation in the late '80s and early '90s. Finally - and perhaps most significantly - a point of commonality resides in the frequent refrains of needing to 'redress' and 'fill the gaps' in their collections, which liberally pepper all the publications produced by the galleries during the early 1990s. British anthropologist Sharon Macdonald (1996: 1), writing on the rapid

increase in the numbers of museums across the globe the in the last thirty years, explains that 'this does not indicate security':

> On the contrary, museums face an unremitting questioning about whom they are for and what there role should be. Falling visitor numbers, failure to attract minorities, massive expenditure on art works, storage and conservation problems of ever-expanding collections) many of which are never displayed), and the competition from the electronic media and other leisure pursuits, all threaten the future of the museum.

Thus it is clear that the problems I have outlined were not unique to South African museums, although they were arguably accentuated by the transition of government and the particular challenges that arose from it.

It is necessary to mention that the 1994 restructuring of South Africa's provincial borders from four provinces to nine provinces (1995: Fig. 11) did affect provincial museums, but that it had more of an affect on museums in cities which had previously not been provincial capitals.[45] It did not have a significant impact on the JAG, SANG, and DAG, as they remained galleries within provincial capital cities. The DAG was spared from great upheaval as the Kwazulu-Natal area's provincial borders were largely unchanged. The SANG had previously had much of the Eastern Cape under its provincial jurisdiction and had amassed a large amount of customary Xhosa items from this area, although this was not very problematic as it is the country's National gallery and thus not restricted by its provincial borders. The JAG, which had originally collected art from Mpumalanga, Gauteng, and the Northern Province (the home of the treasure-trove of Shangaan and Venda sculpture), had a greatly diminished locality to draw from, but had healthy existing collections and a thriving

[45] For example, the King George VI Art Museum, now the NMMAM in PE, which was previously in the Western Cape is now in the Eastern Cape.

community of contemporary artists from reputable academic institutions to compensate for this.

Before beginning my individual examinations of the JAG, SANG, and DAG, I conclude these explanatory chapters with an excerpt from South African curator Emma Bedford:

> Not only are museums places of education and experience, but museums are also instruments of power able to portray people and their cultures in affective ways, thereby shaping the visitors' perceptions of their world and its people. How people are represented is therefore crucial because what is at stake is the articulation of identity. As Ivan Karp has pointed out, the struggle is not over what is to be represented, but over who will control the means of representation (Karp and Lavine [1991: 15] in Bedford 1993: 10).

South African museums staff assumed a massive responsibility in trying to reshape and represent the changing cultural history of the country, and it was a task they undertook at a time of great flux and dynamism - economically, socio-politically, and in terms of museology. The most incendiary questions centred, as Karp suggests, around what is represented and who controls the means of representation. Another sensitive subject, however, was the manner and means of representation, which is a focal issue in the ensuing chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

The Johannesburg Art Gallery

> We need to become more relevant to more people, not only because we are bound, by the terms of the 1913 *Deed of Donatio Inter Vivos*, to be an Art Gallery in Johannesburg
>
> > "for the behoof and public benefit of the inhabitants of the said town and the neighbourhood thereof and of others resorting thereto",
>
> but also because we wish to survive in this country. At a recent South African Museums Association conference in Pietermartizburg… the whole question in a post-independence South Africa, of "Museums in a changing and divided society", formed the theme. As one of the invited speakers said during a panel discussion: We museums are lucky, we have to date had too low a profile to be politicized. We still have time to get our houses in order. We still have time to give a new perspective to our policies with regard to acquisition, display, education, to ensure that we survive and continue to be relevant (Carman 1988: 208).

This excerpt comes from an article that appeared in the *SAJCAH* and was written by Jillian Carman, then Senior Curator of Historical Collections at the JAG. The article sets out how the acquisition policies of the JAG had changed over the years, with specific reference to the South African collection, and how it was adapting once again in the late 1980s to a foreseeable evolution of government. The *Deed of Donatio Inter Vivos* cited was one of the 'earliest policy statements relating to the collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery'; and the reference to serving the neighbourhood surrounding the gallery would have been made with a white, primarily English-speaking community in mind (Carman 1988: 204). In this context, however, Carman invoked the 1913 *Deed* in support of the need for JAG to review its responsibilities in 1988, so as to serve a broader 'public' than previously conceived of. The statement shows that museum professionals were emerging from a sense of their institutions as

conservative, depoliticised entities that viewed socio-political trends only at a safe historical distance.

The JAG was in a favourable position to make these changes. With a young, energetic and dedicated staff, it was in some respects quicker to instigate the changes that needed to be made than SANG and DAG were. Jongi Ndakana (1993: 30) struck a sober note in his *Mayibuye* article on the JAG with the reminder that, 'The art gallery is not independent. It is a Municipal Council's department and its continued existence depends on council financing. The council may exert its influence over the gallery's collection and curatorial policies by not agreeing to expenditure.' This had been a concern with JAG in the late '80s, as Christopher Till (2008) related, but by the '90s instances of board resistance or interference were infrequent.

The JAG was largely at liberty to redefine itself against the historical baggage of apartheid and conservatism; its challenges were to evolve its collections, public image, and educational function in line with the socio-political changes in Johannesburg and in the country in the 1990 to 1994 period. It also had to negotiate internal shifts in the management of the gallery, as all institutions do from time to time. The JAG responded to challenges as follows: by increasing its concentration on education as a primary function of the gallery; by identifying the gaps in its collection and purchasing work to fill them; and by producing more carefully considered publications and catalogues which lent weight to the importance of the exhibitions they were creating during this period.

As Carman's article notes, the South African collection at JAG had come to 'constitute the largest of all the collections' (Carman 1988: 203), and the gallery worked with South African artists like Gerard Sekoto, as well art historians and teachers, to ensure that it would be a place where creativity and knowledge would be

engendered and not merely represented. The JAG was fairly adventurous, giving exposure to South African artists who were exploring new directions in their art at this time. One of the most interesting collaborations was with performance artist Steven Cohen, who explored different and unconventional ways of engaging with the gallery space at the JAG, as will be explained later in the chapter. As Christopher Till (1992) said of JAG in a *Habitat* journal: 'South African art is a major component of our purchasing policy and we consistently buy South African artists, not necessarily representative works but those we feel are making and sustaining a contribution to art in this country.'

While my chief area of focus is the JAG, other Johannesburg-based institutions such as the JAF, FUBA, Funda, the Mofolo Art Centre, the Thupelo Workshop, the Fordsburg Artist Studios, the WAG, COSAW, the AEA and the Goodman Gallery, all played a part and sometimes collaborated with JAG on various projects.

Many of these groups were interconnected and it is somewhat difficult to refer to them, and the artists connected to them, in isolation. I have consulted people who were involved both with JAG and with some of these organisations. These include, at JAG: former Directors Christopher Till (1983 -1991) and Rochelle Keene (1991 – 2003); former Curator of Prints, Drawings and Watercolours, and later of Contemporary Collections, Julia Charlton (1991 to 1996); former Senior Curator of Historical Collections, Jillian Carman (1977 - 1998); Print Curator, and later Curator of Modern Paintings and Sculpture, Lesley Spiro-Cohen (1988 - 1995); former JAG and SANG Committee Member, artist and Thupelo Project coordinator Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa; and Voluntary Docent Lorraine Deift (1976 - present).

I have also interviewed Fiona Rankin-Smith, who has worked at the WAG since 1980; Wits lecturer and artist Colin Richards; Steven Sack, current Director of Arts

and Culture in Johannesburg, who was the head of the JAF during the '90 to '94 period; artist, art writer, Thupelo Project and Bag Factory founder, and former JAG committee member David Koloane; and artists Wilma Cruise and Steven Cohen. While the JAG exhibition catalogues and writings on the gallery by Carman have played a part, the remainder of my information on the museum comes from consulting the invaluable archive books put together by the librarians at the JAG. These archival compilations include every press release, report, advert and article on those galleries and on arts policy in general. I also looked at the Annual Reports of the gallery, which include its acquisitions records.

JAG was under the directorship of Christopher Till from 1983 until 1991 when he was appointed to the newly-created post of the Director of Culture in Johannesburg. During his time at JAG, Till saw the gallery through an enormous spate of renovations and extensions (Fig. 12.1-4). Once finished, the Gallery was re-opened in October 1986 with an exhibition showing the size and importance of its South African collection for the first time, after years of the privileging of international, specifically European, collections (Ndakana 1993: 30).[46]

[46] Till is an ubiquitous figure in my research. The JAG Library Archive books are replete with press clippings referencing his involvement in the Johannesburg and national art scene in the 1980s and early 1990s. His term at JAG coincided with his presidency of the SAMA in 1989 and 1990. He seems lauded and decried in equal measures by many of the arts workers familiar with him. For instance, the 'Mamba Awards' were a short-lived spoof award ceremony organised by artist Braam Kruger, that claimed to reflect 'what the art world thought'. Till was nominated for a 1991 Mamba in 'The Most Destructive Entity of the Year' category, along with the ANC Cultural Desk, and prankster artist Beezy Bailey. The ANC Cultural Desk won the 'award' but the nomination gives a sense of Till's ignominy in certain art circles. It's unquestionable, however, that he was an incredibly energetic facilitator of new initiatives in the arts during the period under review.

Till is often accused of unduly taking the credit for the work done in the initiatives and organisations he was involved in. However, in their respective interviews, Till, Keene, and Sack all indicated that the real strength of the JAG in the '80s and '90s lay in the high calibre of its staff. This is in terms of their being well-qualified and dedicated, and because of the innovation of the projects they undertook at the time. As mentioned in Chapter One, many of the challenges in museums during the 1990 to 1994 period involved not national politics, but internal politics and personal in-fighting, so this rosy view may be endowed with the grace of retrospection, but JAG's high-quality exhibitions and catalogues serve as testaments to the dynamism of the JAG staff during the late '80s and early '90s.

In reference to his involvement in facilitating groundbreaking exhibitions at JAG, in particular the 1988 exhibition, *The Neglected Tradition*, Till (2008) explained that there was a 'conscious decision to start with exhibitions like the *Neglected Tradition* and *Images in Wood*'. This stemmed from the need for JAG 'to take the lead in presenting art in South Africa and documenting it', as the gallery had until that point 'abrogated its responsibility' in the sense that it was loaning exhibitions from other sources, including commercial galleries, such as the Goodman Gallery (Till 2008). These exhibitions were the manifestation of the trend towards revising existing South African art history, and they 'focussed attention on the art gallery more effectively than any famous foreign art work purchased in the past [had] succeeded in doing' (Femme 1990).

According to Till (2008), when he started at JAG in 1983 there were no publications being produced by the gallery at all, which was in keeping with the general paucity of arts publications in South Africa as a whole. Till (2008) explained how the JAG attempted to address the need for literature on the South African arts:

> There was firstly an attempt to address the fact that there was an element of South African art which had not been recorded, and was not represented, and we started to try and produce publications. It was difficult because we had to find money for those publications. It wasn't part of a normal operating budget - you had to go and find somebody to help you justify your doing it. And then we were starting little catalogues with the money that came out of *Vita Art Now*, where there was a contemporary collection. There were also the *Triennial* exhibitions which gave us some money to try and do a catalogue, which we did collaboratively with the National Gallery and so on, so there was a move towards those kinds of things.

Jillian Carman was in charge of curating the 1989 *Vita Art Now* exhibition, which she described as the 'bane of her life': 'we were all terribly under-resourced and overworked... Mandela had been released, it was the beginning of the year and life

should've been wonderful, but we sat at a meeting with Christopher Till, saying "Who is going to curate this exhibition?"'[47] Carman admitted in our interview that nobody wanted the responsibility of it, despite it being an opportunity (seldom-available at that time) to curate a show of contemporary art. It is perhaps only with hindsight that one can see the historical potential of an excitingly curated show of the art of that time. Carman took it on herself, but committed only to recording the work, putting it up, and doing a catalogue, which in her estimation was not very attractive given the fact that she was working with a bare minimum of resources (Carman 2007).[48]

It is significant that it took JAG three years to follow up the lead of the privately-sponsored, independently-curated 1985 *Tributaries* exhibition, in terms of revising views of black art production. JAG, with its City Council funding and relatively conservative Board of Trustees, evinced the relative slowness of the public galleries to manifest visible signs of changing societal attitudes. As Till (2008) points out, it took effort initially to persuade museum Boards to stop seeing African art as more suitably placed in an ethnographic museum than an art gallery. The three-year gap between the exhibitions is also indicative of the time it took to properly research the subject in order to produce an in-depth study of African art, as there was dearth of accurate knowledge about it, and its careful conservation had not been widely seen as

[47] Carman's memory of this may seem flawed, as the 1989 awards seem to predate the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990. However, the structure of the *Vita Art Awards* was such that the work was exhibited the year after the winning works had been selected (Williamson 2000).

[48] The poor quality of the *Vita* catalogue may have been underscored by the award in 1989 and 1990 of the Volkskas Prizes for Art Historical Publications to Steven Sack for the catalogue of *The Neglected Tradition.* In 1990 Professor Elizabeth Rankin was awarded 1st prize in the Volkskas Prize for Art Historical Publications for the catalogue accompanying the acclaimed exhibition *Images of wood: aspects of the history of sculpture in 20th-century South Africa* (1989) (JAG Annual Report 1990/91). It is not coincidental that Volkskas were making art history awards, which in their reincarnation as ABSA they no longer do, and that they chose to award exhibitions featuring black artists' works. Supporting awards which applauded the work of black artists was often a strategic decision by large corporations. Volkskas was a South African company, but other large international corporations with continued investments in apartheid South Africa felt pressure to appear unsympathetic to apartheid oppression, while trying to serve their commercial interests. A similar motivation was behind German car manufacturer BMW's sponsorship of the 1985 *Tributaries* exhibition (Brown 2005:75 cites [Du Plessis 1992: 23] here).

imperative to South African art history until that point. Progress was further impeded by the view, still in evidence in Carman's 1988 article, that a 'certain distance in time' was necessary in the collecting process, in order for an artefact or artwork to 'pass the test of worth' (Carman 1988: 203).

Till vacated his seat as Director of the JAG in 1991 and Rochelle Keene, who had been at JAG since 1978 as assistant to the Director, stepped in as 'Manager'. The post of Director was not advertised as was usual, as a decision was taken by the City Council as part of the re-structuring programme they had started in 1991. According to the 1991/92 Annual Report, 'the structure of the City Council was changed and the Art Gallery now forms a separate division under a Director, Libraries and Museums, which in turn is part of the Culture and Recreation Directorate' (JAG Annual Report 1991/92). At the time of Keene's promotion the detailed restructuring of posts had not yet been completed. Employee's posts were given different names but their jobs were essentially the same. Additionally, there was some initial uncertainty as to what exactly Keene's position should be called since all existing structures in governmental departments were under review - perhaps because of heightened sensitivity to the associations that posts like 'Director' had held with autocratic power in the past. For a while Keene operated under the title of 'Manager'. The Director of Museums and Libraries, Dawn Evenden, admitted that this was unsuitable and likely to change, and by 1992 Keene had come to be known as the Director (Ozynski Feb-Mar. 1992).

Many of my interviewees maintain that Keene was not very successful in her new role - hence the reluctance to designate her as 'Director' may also have stemmed from doubts as to her ability to fulfil the requirements of the position adequately. Keene did not display great foresight, for example, when artists were invited to participate in the creation of dinner sets that would be auctioned at the 1992 Mayor's

Ball, to held at JAG. Steven Cohen was one of the artists invited to create a dinner service: predictably, considering his oeuvre, he created plates incorporating genitalia in their design which he dubbed ‘cockery’ (Fig.13.1-2). This caused a significant amount of badly-handled controversy, which I will expand upon later in the chapter.

While Christopher Till vacated his directorial seat at the gallery, he retained a modicum of control by sitting in on some JAG Board meetings, although he had no direct jurisdiction over what was collected. The creation of a Director of Culture for Johannesburg was viewed askance by many, yet, in this capacity, Till was key in overseeing the recreation of the Johannesburg CBD as a cultural centre. This included the revitalisation of the Civic Theatre, the Market Theatre and Museum Afrika in the Newtown Cultural precinct, and the JAG, as well as the initiation of various festivals like the Arts Alive festival and the 1995 *Johannesburg Biennale.* Newspaper reports at this time suggest wide-spread scepticism about these projects, and lament the lack of visible ‘culture’. This was understandable, as the cultural aspect of the city literally had to be overhauled and redressed in order for it to be a workable entity for the ‘new South Africa’.

A 1991 jibe in *The Star* reports on Till's appointment as director of cultural affairs in the following sarcastic tone:

> …whether he will offer a reward to those who actually hunt down some culture in the city remains to be seen, but oldies will note that there are three focuses of culture: the Art Gallery, which, being on the wrong side of the tracks, attracts too few visitors; the Civic Theatre, closed for many years; and Newtown's future Market Museum complex, which is empty and out of bounds until 1992.

Despite such scepticism, the opening of the Newtown galleries in 1991 and the launch of the Arts Alive festival launched in 1992, were evidence of the enlivening of the City (Bristowe 1991). A 1993 headline, ‘R250 000 thrown out for having too few

black faces' gives an idea of the scale and impetus behind the remodelling that went into the Johannesburg CBD's facelift (Loppert 1993). A mural for the new Civic Theatre was rejected because it did not feature enough black South Africans and was therefore deemed unrepresentative (Loppert 1993). The theatre was eventually reopened on 15 September 1992, with a performance by the 'world-renowned Dance Theatre of Harlem' - an international group whose presence at the opening also attested to the loosening hold of the Cultural Boycott (*N.-E.Tribune* 1992). Later, when governmental structures changed, Till had to reapply for his job as the Director of Culture in Johannesburg, but Maishe Maponya was appointed to the position.

At the time of Till's and Keene's directorship, the JAG was in good financial shape, with a R500 000 purchasing budget from the City Council, and the interest on R6 million Anglo American Johannesburg Centenary Trust which had been procured by Till in 1986 (Carman 2003: 243). This was used to purchase international prints and to repatriate what was termed 'traditional African art'. In comparison with the SANG and DAG, the JAG was fortunate to have this buying power in the '80s and '90s (Keene 2007; Till 2008). From 1987 a considerable amount of focus in the gallery was on building up a good collection of 'traditional' African art,[49] and JAG worked in conjunction with Wits University, who had been collecting African art since 1976, and with the Africana Museum (Rankin Smith and Charlton 2007). Additionally, 'in September 1991 a Curator of African art was appointed, reflecting the gallery's increasingly intense focus on building up its holdings of art that had been

[49] The description of African art as 'traditional' implied that it was fixed in time and unchanged by its passing. However, the word 'traditional' was seldom used critically in relation to African art during the early nineties. The quotation marks I have inserted in using the term are therefore my own intervention, and are intended to highlight the problematic nature of the term.

completely neglected under previous directors whose vision was Eurocentric' (JAG Annual Report 1990/91).[50]

The 'watershed' exhibition *Art and Ambiguity: Perspectives on the Brenthurst Collection of Southern African Art* (1991) celebrated the repatriation - made possible by the JAG's AngloAmerican endowment fund - of 'a significant collection of cultural objects to their place of origin'. According to the JAG Annual Report 1991/92:

> The Brenthurst Collection, owned by Mr H F Oppenheimer, comprising 862 objects largely from southern Africa, was built up from auctions and private purchases by Jonathan Lowen between 1971 and 1983 in London. Much of the material originally left South Africa via missionaries, explorers and scientists who wished to return to Europe with "curiosities" from Africa. The oldest pieces date to the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Artefacts on loan from other institutions and private collections were also included in the exhibition.
>
> The catalogue produced to accompany the exhibition included essays by specialists in the field who presented varied perspectives on the collection, contributing to the re-evaluation of the manner in which southern African art is viewed worldwide.

The Weekly Mail journalist Joyce Ozynski (1992) wrote an article covering the opening of *Art and Ambiguity*, indicatively titled: 'Time to graft a culture of crafts in SA.' 'Grafting a culture' suggests a surgical or horticultural process by which a piece of skin from another part of the body, or a branch from a different plant, is joined onto an area in order to heal a wound or create a hybrid species. It is unfortunate that South

[50] Till's immediate predecessor was Pat Senior (1977 - 1983), but before Senior had been the long reign of Anton Hendriks (1937 – 1964) (Carman 1988: 212 and 206). Hendriks was the director responsible for buying, in 1940, the one and only work by a black artist that JAG acquired until 1972. It was Gerard Sekoto's *Yellow Houses: a Street in Sophiatown* (1940: Fig 14) (Carman 1988: 207). Hendriks also addressed the exclusion of art by Afrikaans speakers during his term as director of the gallery (Ndakana 1993: 30). As Jongi Ndakana (1993: 30) of the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity reported:

> There were two groups of the community that were excluded at the inception of the JAG... First, the South African of Dutch origin has now been fully reinstated in the collections of the JAG... Second, that of the black South African still has to be accommodated and this dictates the principal shift in the acquisition policy. The primary goal today is perceived as the establishment of a historic collection of black art.

African art needed to use such a strong word to suggest the reintroduction of its culture of craft. As Ozynksi wrote in the article:

> The approach to the exhibition and the accompanying essays in the catalogue reveal a singular care and delicacy which has much to do with the need to set right the wrongs of the past.
>
> .... The amount of effort put into this show might seem excessive were it not for the fact that what it is doing, symbolically, is shutting the door on a history of racism which has affected South African art works up until very recently (Ozynski Oct. 1992).

The success of *Art and Ambiguity* was partly due to the input of Elza Miles, who had built up the FUBA archives and worked at JAG at the time that *Art and Ambiguity* was being researched.[51]

Following the successful repatriation of the Brenthurst Collection in 1991, the JAG acquired the Horstmann Collection of Southern African traditional art. According to the JAG Annual Report 1992/93:

> This collection, assembled over many years by the Swiss collector and dealer, Udo Horstmann, from sources in South Africa, Britain and the United States of America, provided the Gallery with the opportunity to extend its own collection with objects of exceptional quality and rarity and to repatriate them to their region of origin. The Gallery also received a significant donation from Udo Horstmann at the time of the acquisition.

Also reported in the press was the imminent purchase of 'traditional clothing of the Tsonga and Batlokwe women' which was priced at R22 300. According to the article:

> There is one married woman's skirt and a very rare Batlokwe married woman's outfit. There is also a Tsonga doll which is used in initiation ceremonies and a rare Batlokwe collar, an important item to complement the woman's full outfit.
>
> These outfits will enhance the gallery's sets of Ndebele beadwork and will establish an excellent collection of comparative complete outfits. The

[51] The FUBA had taught a number of black artists and was situated next door to the Market Theatre. The FUBA archives were eventually transferred to JAG, and they became a source of valuable information in the research for the *Art and Ambiguity* text.

> Batlokwe outfit is probably one of the last sets which will become available for purchase.

The money and research JAG put into these purchases and acquisitions clearly shows how serious it was about building up an exceptional collection of African art, which today is one of the most impressive aspects of its collection.

As with these repatriations, the JAG's staff went about addressing the gaps in the rest of its collection, and its changes in policy, in a fairly systematic way. While the political changes and unrest in Johannesburg and the rest of the country permeated gallery workers' lives with a mixture of exhilaration and fear, there were practical issues to consider. As Jillian Carman (2007) said, it was 'business' as usual in many respects: 'at the art gallery you also had to clock in and out so the practicalities continued… you were still employed by an incredibly conservative city council and things didn't really change [all that fast or visibly]'.

Julia Charlton (2007) described the kind of practical changes the gallery had to undergo in order to process the transformation in the country:

> JAG went through a process of re-evaluating policies quite fundamentally at that kind of time... everything, from the exhibitions policy and the acquisitions policy, right through, was substantially rewritten. *Neglected Tradition* exhibition had been held there in '89, although the research leading up to it was obviously quite a few years before that, had really opened a lot of people's eyes to this immense wealth of material that had been excluded from public institutions, from most institutions, and there were dramatic imbalances which needed to be addressed, so the policies were shifted accordingly, all of which felt absolutely appropriate and right, but also highly charged… the white, green papers, and the white papers and the brown papers, and the red papers and the all of those documents that we had to wade through - it was a very bureaucratic process.

Print Curator Lesley Spiro-Cohen, who later become Assistant Director under Rochelle Keene, did a 'number-crunching exercise'. Keene (2007) explained that

Spiro-Cohen looked at the collection from every angle, judging statistically how representative the collection was in terms of the sex, gender, race, and culture of the artists in the collection; whether they had informal training, academic training, or whether the purchases were based on 'prodigious CVs'; as well as ascertaining the comparative number of prints, paintings, works on paper and sculptures.

Keene (2007) explained that this allowed JAG staff to recognise the gaps in the collection, and after that 'it was fairly straightforward to source things that were going to fill those gaps'. While the research was underway the staff were already looking to address the more obvious discrepancies so that, by the time the research was published, 'a lot of those discrepancies had been addressed and we found ourselves really in 1994 with a collection that we were not ashamed of because we'd done a lot of catching up in that time' (Keene 2007).

As Keene (2007) describes it:

> I think when 1994 came because so many of us at JAG had been involved in this, we were kind of ready for the change. You know it wasn't boom, here's the new government let's do an about-face. We had already done a lot of the changing that needed to happen to make museums more representative, to make collections more representative, to change our education focus.

The change in the educational focus of the JAG was one of the most crucial aspects of the gallery's revised objectives. The increased focus on education began in the late '80s with:

> …the establishment of the education department and the opening of the gallery's library to the public. Although the gallery for many years had been engaged in educational activities in the way of lectures and tours, assisted by voluntary guides, the formalizing of the role has been particularly significant. Educational outreach has been a principal tool in facilitating access to an institution that was imperialist in origin and intent and that, despite transforming radically, is still viewed by many as elitist and representing an alien culture (Carman 2003: 244).

The global impetus to transform museums and galleries into places of public discussion rather than antiquated silence merged with the need for South African museums to appear as viable generators of public knowledge and understanding, and many gallery directors seized this opportunity to open galleries to a wider public.

More and more black visitors came to the gallery, especially schoolchildren. As Keene (2007) said, the location of the gallery at the transport hub actually became an advantage as 'kids could come to us from all over - from the townships and the Northern suburbs - because the gallery was on the taxi route, the bus route, all the transport routes led to the gallery, so it was very easy for us to access different audiences'.

JAG voluntary docent Lorraine Deift, who has been a guide at the gallery for thirty-two years, remembers well how JAG's visitorship gradually transformed. In Deift's (2008) words, '…suddenly the schools of colour began to book tours at the JAG. Before this, very few small people of colour ever came to JAG'. Deift (2008) relates that these school children were initially reticent, intimidated and scared to ask questions, but that the JAG was eventually 'inundated with bookings from outlying schools [whose learners] were bright, lively, interested and totally absorbed'.

It was not only outlying schools that were targeted. Education Officer Themba Mabaso included those in the immediate residential vicinity of the gallery:

> To introduce the gallery to local residents, education officer Themba Mabaso is working on a comic which will feature a taxi driver, a student, a hawker and a gallery worker in discussion about the gallery. This will be distributed on a monthly basis to people working and living nearby.
>
> Mabaso has been working hard on ideas to make the gallery more accessible (Ozynski 1994).

Other plans included ‘guided tours of the exhibitions in Zulu and Sotho’; contacting the schools in the area ‘as a preliminary step to bringing young people into the gallery’; and offering ‘classes to hawkers to improve their writing skills so they can manage their work more efficiently’ (Ozynski 1994).

There was also a shift from the academic tone of the catalogues that JAG had initially been producing, towards more accessibly-written catalogues which would be useful to primary and secondary school learners. The first example of these resources was Lesley Spiro-Cohen’s *Looking at contemporary South African sculpture – Jackson Hlungwani: a resource book* (1993). Spiro-Cohen relates that the Jackson Hlungwani educational resource was the first of its kind ever to be done in South Africa. The publication gave schools, particularly high school students, access to Hlungwani’s work, and supplied teachers with questions they could ask their students. As Spiro-Cohen (2008) said, it was ‘all about being more relevant’. According to the 1992/93 JAG Annual Report:

> …this resource was produced in response to the present education crisis in this country and is the first in a series planned by the Gallery to serve a variety of needs. It is intended to open new avenues for students to explore, to encourage new ways of looking at works of art and to introduce students to how an art gallery works.

As Doran Ross (1994: 10) described it, 'This forty-page workbook may be the most substantial grade-school resource ever developed to focus on a single African artist. It explores such topics as “Hlungwani’s Life,” “The Artist’s Interpretation,” and “Are Hlungwani’s Sculptures Very Valuable?”’[52]

[52] Ross (1994: 10) continues here to say, ‘The last is a rare example on planet earth of a museum actually answering one of the questions most frequently asked by museum visitors. “How much is it worth?”’

Other research projects at the JAG, however, were both helped and hindered by the political climate at the time, as with Jillian Carman's immense amount of research on the gallery's collection of Dutch 17th-century painting. Her project was assisted, initially, by the lifting of the Cultural Boycott in the early 1990s which opened up exchange channels with the Netherlands, but the project gradually came to be regarded with diffidence within the gallery because it did not dovetail with the aim of affirming the importance of black or South African artists. Other projects, such as monographs on Rodin's *Miss Fairfax* (1903: Fig 15) and the Lace Collection, received similar criticisms as to their 'relevance' given the historical events of the time (Carman 2007).

There were challenges that JAG had to face as the times and the character of the city changed, but there were also various avenues that opened up with those changes - as is evidenced by Themba Mabaso's workshops for schoolchildren, hawkers, students and taxi drivers. In the early 1990s the Johannesburg CBD was seen as having 'died'. This is misleading as it implies that the CBD became deserted, which it patently did not. It 'died' in the sense that many of the businesses that once formed the Johannesburg CBD decentralised to suburban areas and in the sense that it had been known as a centre for white commerce. However it re-incarnated as a thriving hub of primarily black small business and residences. It was seen to be a dangerous place and the area that JAG was in was even alliteratively dubbed, 'Murder Mile' (Lauth 1991).

This was not altogether surprising as the Johannesburg city centre had been the site of clashes between different political parties for some time - for instance, the Shell House massacre had occurred a few blocks from JAG. Shootings left bullets holes in the walls of the gallery, and the JAG Archive books contain snippets from newspapers that hint at the frequent civic unrest experienced as part of the urban

situation of the gallery. One finds, for instance, small archived articles notifying the public of the gallery's early closure in view of scheduled marches.[53] In one instance the *New Nation* newspaper reported in August 1988 that ANC member Kenneth Themba Mahlaba was blown up in the Joubert Park, adjacent to the gallery. According to Christopher Till (2008) he had accidentally detonated a bomb that was intended to be planted somewhere close by. The bomb went off so close to the gallery that, as the security guard said at the time: '*Sy skande hang op die Villa!'*[54]

Both Julia Charlton and Fiona Rankin-Smith (2007) shared their memories of their experiences of working in these city galleries (JAG and Wits respectively) during the turbulent early '90s. They remembered the euphoric marches in the streets, the vigilante mob violence, and the regular news reports of massacres, bombings, train and taxi violence, and clashes between the ANC and IFP in central Johannesburg.[55]

The JAG's, SANG's and DAG's locations in contested city spaces have often operated in a way that makes them seem all the more relevant in the development of the country. As one journalist stated in 1995:

> ...the Johannesburg Art Gallery in the middle of the taxi park and hawkers' paradise of Joubert Park... gives tourists a true reflection of life in the city and South Africa. The gallery is surrounded by markets, street barbers, hawkers and residents of the inner city in an area that has been part of the new South Africa for a long time (Lamberti 1995).

[53]Article dated April 1993 reads 'Gallery reported closed for the protest March by ANC/SACP/Cosatu alliance protesting Chris Hani's assassination. March started at head of SACP in Rissik St to John Voster Square Police Headquarters.'

[54] 'His 'shame' (Afrikaans slang for genitals) are hanging on the Villa!' (the Edoardo Villa sculpture outside the JAG).

[55] An anecdote Charlton remembers indicates the tremendous political and economic impact of the turbulent transitional period. On the day of the Shell House massacre Charlton and her husband submitted an offer for a house that they desperately wanted but could in no way afford to buy. The offer they put in was thus much lower than the asking price, but - by the time the estate agent had negotiated her way round the blockaded roads - the news of the massacre had broken, and the owner was so convinced of the country's imminent collapse that he accepted the Charltons' incredibly low offer (Charlton and Rankin-Smith 2007).

While this cheerful description of JAG's location is not unwarranted, the gallery's location at the heart of Johannesburg transport nexus is also somewhat problematic. The entrance is difficult to get into and out of because of the extremely busy taxi thoroughfare. Its grand architecture is sooty with pollution, it is bordered by littered train tracks, and it is fronted by Joubert Park - which is a haunt for the doped, dissipated and dispossessed. Rank as the early 1990s were with ferment and uncertainty, the increased security risk posed by the gallery's location in the midst of town threatened its existence as its former (mainly white) patrons were less inclined to venture into the dangerous inner city.

By 1994, the perceived danger of JAG's location saw the 'Friends of the JAG' membership dwindling, and it experienced a 'cash crunch', due to mismanagement.[56] In the article that reported the Friends' dilemma, dwindling membership was ascribed to the '"old school" body' (the predominantly older white membership base of the Friends) not having 'adapted rapidly enough to the changes relevant to the new South Africa'.[57] They had lost interest in being proactive for an art that no longer seemed directly 'relevant' to them, and the gallery's concentration on disadvantaged groups - who had not the money to, nor the experience of, being involved in these kinds of organisations - meant that no one was stepping into the shoes of the older disgruntled members.

Denis Beckett's 1994 column 'They should let people into clangingly empty gallery' was an ambivalent article, both damning and praising the JAG. Beckett describes his difficulty in finding the entrance to the gallery, as the first set of grand, imposing doors were not open for public access and the correct entrance was not well

[56] Reported in *Rosebank Killarney Gazette*. 25 February 1994.
[57] Reported in *Rosebank Killarney Gazette*. 25 February 1994.

sign-posted. The less-than-obvious location of JAG's main entrance is a problem which persists today, and would have been even more problematic in the early ‘90s, considering the gallery’s efforts to dispel its previous aura of inaccessibility.

However, as Beckett (1994) writes:

> I begin to suspect there are more reasons for this place to be clanging in eerie emptiness than the obstacle course at the entrance. Maybe there are art students keen to study the brushstroke technique of Lady Phillip's portrait painters, but is this what a public gallery needs in 1994?
>
> Maybe not. A little further on the gallery has got relevant. Unfortunately, much of the effect is to incline one warmly towards Lady Phillips. At least she isn’t smacking you on the head with the ills and evils of the modern world.
>
> That’s *much* of the effect, not all. Some of the headsmacking is startlingly potent.

Beckett (1994) goes on to describe ‘head-smackingly potent’ artworks as having ‘maximum impact’: for example he mentions work centring on the worst aspects of township living - shackfires and murders of children - as well as a work done in 1920 titled *The Captive*, representing ‘a black man's body shrieking distress’. Beckett's account shows that both older works (the ‘smarmy Randlords portraits’) and more contemporary works were on display during his visit, which suggests that the JAG was attempting to represent both of these histories, and to reconcile its present with its past. His concern with the gallery being ‘relevant’ is a refrain that echoes at the forefront of many discussions about gallery collections throughout the transitional period.

The JAG’s closure due to renovations severely dented its attendance figures and articles like Beckett’s suggest that the gallery had a rather shaky public image for a while. A 1994 article in the *Sunday Nation* entitled ‘Save the Gallery’ outlined two possible ‘doom scenarios’ for the JAG's continued existence: the first - ‘the gallery is left to moulder away, unvisited, unloved, and under-funded’; the second - ‘someone

suggests that a museum of contemporary art be built. Funds are quickly raised from big business, and it is built - in Sandton' (Ozynski 1994).

Neither of these two scenarios came to pass, as the *1995 Johannesburg Biennale* rejuvenated the JAG and the South African art scene. While suggestions had formerly been made to move the JAG to a less chaotic area, gallery employees throughout the '90s were content rather to draw from the character and energy of the CBD in their efforts to enliven the image of the gallery. One of the ways they did this was by using the Joubert Park as a site for its projects and collaborating with groups such as COSAW, 'with which it jointly planned the performances and programmes held at lunch-time in the surrounding park and gallery', and the AEA, with whom it worked 'on programmes and educational material for teachers and children' (Ozynski Oct. 1992).

The *Vrye Weekblad* (1992) described this gathering in Joubert Park, as 'a public entertainment project initiated by local artists that's starting to attract a lot of attention. Organised performances, readings, plays, songs… later give way to open busking. This integration of performance into the community is held every Saturday from 12pm'. COSAW also held, at the JAG, a public reading by 'Nadine Gordimer and some other distinguished members… of works by French and Afri-French writers. The reading was entitled "Language as Home" and was devised as an illustration of language's unifying force in culturally diverse societies' (Ndebele 1992).

Another initiative that was aimed at children, parents, and teachers was the Gerard Sekoto Open Day for Children. Sekoto donated his prize money from the 1989 *Vita Art Awards* to the Johannesburg Art Gallery for this purpose. According to a 1991 article:

> The aim of the Open Day was to expose children and their parents and teachers to the world of art and to inform the public of the wide range of art-related and cultural and educational activities that take place at the Gallery. The project was also planned to attract people who may not have visited the Gallery before, or had not had previously the opportunity to be involved with, and exposed to, the exciting world of art and culture.

Further programmes that were run at JAG included educational initiatives by the 'Transvaal regional branch of what was then the South African Association of Art and Architectural Historians (now SAVAH)' which were focused on 'creating new discourses about South African art for school teachers'.[58]

According to Jillian Carman (2003: 244):

> There have also been more formal links with the Imbali Teacher Training Project (initiated in 1989 to improve art education for teachers), the AEA (their Art Resource Centre moved from Joubert Park to the gallery's premises in 1996), and cooperation with the Curriculum Development Project for the Creative Arts. The latter resulted in a series of resource books for use by learners and teachers, the first of which was Lesley Spiro Cohen's *Jackson Hlungwani* of 1993.

Training of a slightly different nature is detailed in the '91/'92 JAG Annual Report. A workshop held in 1992 by artist and former University of South Africa Fine Art lecturer (1979 - 1987) Nina Romm, was 'organised for the Joint Management Development Programme on "Multiculturalism - the 'art' of change management in the new South Africa"... The workshop was part of a training block on multiculturalism organised by JMDP or middle managers from various organisations', and gives an idea of the breadth of the kind of adjustments that JAG was instigating at the time.

Similar programmes were attended by JAG employees, in the interests of being aware of the kinds of debates and projects that could help the gallery to formulate its

[58] Ascertained in correspondence with Brenda Schmahmann, 2008.

own plans. One such programme was the CBDP's Education Group seminar on 'Future policy options for the following forms of marginalised education: pre-school education; art; literacy; adult education', which was held in 1991 at Wits and attended by JAG education officer Michelle Jersky.

The level of educational activity and community engagement outlined above, as well as the advertorial tone of the 1990 *Femme* magazine article previously quoted, indicates how widely promoted the JAG's aim to become more accessible, proactive and 'representative' was. These aims continued throughout the early 1990s, as is shown by the JAG 1994/95 Annual Report which states under General Progress: 'The staff of the gallery continued to encourage local community participation in gallery activities in an attempt to meet the needs of the neighbourhood,' as well as concentrating on assisting schools with art education. [59]

Exhibitions like *Jo'burg City – Whose City,* put together by JAG in 1990 show the increased engagement of the gallery with its environment. The show was a combination of a photographic exhibition and a series of lectures explaining the results of an oral history research project, which explored the central question posed by the show, and offered:

> …a pictorial essay on the composition of its inhabitants plus an examination of the historical currents producing its mix of citizenry... The sheer statistics show that, since Jo'burg's inception a little over 100 years ago, people of different races have, to varying degrees, lived together in the centre of the city. In spite of the Group Areas Act of 1950, since 1978 over 75 000 black people have moved back to the inner-city suburbs of Hillbrow, Berea, Joubert Park and Mayfair.

The show was opened by Achmat Dangor of the Kagiso Trust and, rather than the standard fare of classical musical accompaniment, the vibey *Mbaqanga* band the

[59] Listed under the heading 'General Progress' in the *1994/95 JAG Annual Report.*

African Jazz Pioneers performed - all signs that the gallery was becoming, in many ways, a more 'colourful' place (Baneshik 1990).

The JAG Annual Report 1990/91 featured on its cover a photograph by Alf Khumalo, entitled *Love* (Fig. 16). The photograph depicts an elderly woman, eyes deep with disbelieving sorrow. Her hand, clamped over her mouth to stifle her tears, is wrapped in a scarf printed with the word 'Love'. The photograph is tremendously evocative of the grief of black South Africans at the frequent funerals they attended at that time because of ongoing violence. That the photograph is featured on the cover of the JAG Annual Report, shows the gallery's awareness of and sensitivity towards the triumphs and troubles of previously-disadvantaged South Africans.

A more profound adaptation was signalled by JAG's rearrangement of the permanent collection of late 18th- to 20th-century works 'with the emphasis on themes rather than chronology and nationality... as part of an ongoing policy of interpretative reassessment' (JAG Annual Report 1990/91). In addition, 'a new accessioning system was introduced ... replacing the old and ...obsolete system where works were accessioned according to medium'. Works then became accessioned by numbers, rather than according to medium or national schools.

Another particularly crucial change of this nature occurred in 1994/95, with the 'long-term programme of redisplaying the gallery's permanent collection'. The intention of this rearrangement, according to the 1994/95 JAG Annual Report was:

> …to make the collection as accessible and interesting to as wide an audience as possible. The first new installations are *The Foundation Collection* (including decorative arts and the early history of the Gallery), *Dutch Paintings of the 17th Century* and *Public Worlds/Private Worlds* ("traditional" southern African art).
>
> The *Public Worlds/Private Worlds* display includes objects of exquisite quality from various South African Cultures. Many of these objects are rare and no longer seen or used. The display provides access to a heritage which is rapidly disappearing.

The 1994/95 JAG Annual Report further states:

> Integral to the programme of re-displaying the Gallery's collection is the production of accompanying literature in the four principal Gauteng languages [Zulu, Sotho, English Afrikaans]. This includes extended labelling, wall texts, information sheets and a collection guide called the *jagpack.* The *jagpack* will consist of a folder into which leaflets relating to the collection, area by area, are inserted.

The creation of the 'jagpack' showed the desire to attract members of the public by rendering the museum experience 'friendlier', more accessible, less intimidating, and more enlightening. The 1992/93 JAG Annual Report also lists the appointment, for the first time, of a Curator of Publications and Publicity; thus 'a new information pamphlet and publicity posters were produced, banners announcing the Gallery were hung outside both entrances and a project to improve signage within the Gallery began'. Between 1990 and 1994, the JAG was therefore making conscious efforts to draw in the public, redress their collection, and represent and reconcile the different aspects of South African history in a way that would be sensitive to and permissive of contrasting interpretations.

Furthermore, it was important that the structures of the museum be representative of, and accessible to, people of all races as well. The JAG Annual Report of 1991/92 announced Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa's election to serve on the Art Gallery Committee from July 1991 onwards. Dhlomo-Mautloa was the first black person to be elected to the Committee and, according to Till (2008), was the first black person in South Africa who was involved in any kind of decision-making process in fine art collections. As Till (2008) suggests, this meant that 'there was a voice there', a black voice rather than a white voice, which even at a very basic level was significant in South Africa at the time. Placements like these were often touted as tokenism, but Till

(2008) adds, ‘Bongi wasn’t some token coward person... she's forceful... she said what she wanted to say’. In October 1992 black artists David Koloane and Ezrom Legae were also invited to be alternate members of the Art Gallery Committee.

Jane Alexander's *Integration Programme* (1992) (Fig. 17) is featured on the second page of the 1992/93 Annual Report. The work expresses considerable irony in its title, as the man in the work is standing on a wheeled board and literally has to be pulled forward with a rope - led forcibly towards integration. The inclusion of this work in this Annual Report is ironic, as it expresses the processes that JAG was itself going through in the systematic pursuit of ‘integration’. Alexander made a lot of work at this time centring on the ambivalences and invisible, seemingly inexpressible barriers to integration.

A final important development in the early ‘90s is that collaboration with overseas arts institutions was becoming more frequent. According to the ‘92/’93 Annual Report, ‘With the restoration of cultural ties between South Africa and other countries’, the Gallery… received three exhibitions from the United States of America: the *Bloomsbury Artists at Charleston: Paintings from the Reader's Digest Corporate Collection*; photographs by *Alfred Eisenstaedt* and *Knots and Nets: Spiritual Connections:*

> All the exhibitions generated considerable media interest. *Alfred Eisenstaedt*, in particular, received unprecedented publicity including an 8-page supplement in *The Weekly Mail*, interviews in several newspapers and on radio, and inserts on every major television arts programme.

South African art was in a particularly exciting and healthy phase during the early 1990s, but the press interest in international exhibitions also suggests the extent to which South Africans welcomed the slackening of the Cultural Boycott. These

international art exhibitions positively contributed to the vibrancy of the post-apartheid South African art scene.

In contrast to the ambivalent tone of the Dennis Beckett's 1994 article on the JAG, Maureen Isaacson penned, in the same year, what seems to be an advertorial for the JAG entitled 'Arts Afire', which shouts:

> If you've steered clear of galleries all your life because the art soars way above your head, the Johannesburg Art Gallery will change your mind.
>
> The Gallery has long since kissed Eurocentrism goodbye and brought in a range of exciting concepts and images.
>
> .....
>
> Certainly those who have until now believed the Johannesburg Art Gallery to be an ivory tower, housing only the lace collections of mining magnates wives, (exquisite though the Lady Phillips lace collection may be) and paintings depicting defunct scenes with no "relevance", will be relieved to discover that images of our daily existence abound. Here you will find a visual feast of frozen moments in the troubled times of our country. You will see bullets, barbed wire, instruments of torture and gross symbols of apartheid.

The sensationalism of the 'troubled times of our country' in Isaacson's article is somewhat distasteful, and it seems clear in her discussions of some of the artworks on exhibition at JAG that much of the art 'soars way above' Isaacson's own head as well:

> In its own way, each local artwork reflects our immediate world: Steven Cohen's *Bitter Suite* takes a high-camp look at local fascism. Alan Alborough's shattered bullet-proof window says all there is to say about shattered bullet proof windows in this time and place (Isaacson 1994).

I have included Isaacson's article despite these flaws as she includes a comprehensive list of works on exhibition at JAG by 1994, and also show a populist attempt to come to grips with South African art and raise the profile of the gallery.[60]

[60]Isaacson (1994) lists works on exhibition by Jann Cheifitz, Dominic Thorburn, David Roussouw, Gideon Mendel, Penny Siopis, Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Bonita Alice, Michelle Raubenheimer, Nina Romm, Josephine Ghesa, Lola Frost, the Brenthurst and Horstmann collections; and under the banner of 'redressing balances', it mentions the work of Gerard Sekoto, Pat Mautloa, Jackson Hlungwani, Noria Mabasa, Ndou Brothers and Paul Tavhana. It also reports on future plans to exhibit historical and

The JAG's catalogue and resource book on Jackson Hlungwani was put together to coincide with his retrospective in 1993. Hlungwani is particularly important to consider here as he first came to notice in the early 1980s, specifically because of his involvement with Ricky Burnett, the curator of *Tributaries*. Their relationship turned sour after a misunderstanding, but Hlungwani's fluid, mystical woodcarvings - for example *Christ Playing Football* (1989: Fig. 18) - received a lot of admiration and attention in the early 1990s. For many of my interviewees his works are amongst the most memorable art from that period.

There were, of course, many artists making interesting and powerful work at this time - including, for example, William Kentridge, Judith Mason, Karel Nel, Malcolm Payne, Joachim Schönveldt, Norman Catherine, Clive van Berg, Deborah Bell, Sam Nhlengethwa, Robert Hodgins, Diane Victor, Peter Schütz, and Kagiso Pat Mautloa to name just a few. I would be failing if I did not mention the importance of William Kentridge and of Penny Siopis, in particular, in the South African art scene between 1990 to 1994.

Siopis moved to Johannesburg in 1984 and has lectured in Fine Arts at Wits ever since (Smith 1999). Some of Siopis' best-known early work was her 'Embellishments' series, in which she thickly encrusted her canvases with oil paint, producing disconcerting confections resembling human skin (Schmahmann 2005: 198). Equally acclaimed was Siopis' 'History Paintings' series including works such as *Patience on a Monument* (1988: Fig. 19.1), *Exhibit Ex-Africa* (1990: Fig. 19.2), and *Reconnaissance* (1990-1997: Fig.19.3). In these potent explorations of the politics of gender and power, 'skin figures not only as the perimeter of the body - the site

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contemporary 'Bushman' art (Isaacson uses this term uncritically). The article is commercial in tone, and superficial, but interesting in the points it raises and the artists that it conjures as particularly representative of a 1994 South Africa.

marking the juncture between “self” and “other” or between the individual and society - but also as a potent sign for classifying people in terms of their (ostensible) race’ (Schmahmann 2005: 197).

Siopis was one of the artists who became more self-referential in her work in the ‘90s, concentrating on personal rather than public paradigms. At Siopis’ 1994 solo exhibition called ‘Private Views’ at the Standard Bank Gallery, works such as *Tula Tula I* (1994: Fig 19.4) and *Comrade (Brain)* (1994: Fig 19.5) from the ‘Comrade Mother Series’ were a sign of ‘Siopis’ growing interest in psychoanalytic theories, especially ideas around “the maternal”, [which] developed out of her concern with self/other and subject/object relations that she began exploring in the 1980s’ (Schmahmann 2005: 216). These 1990s works are an example of how Siopis ‘extended her already eclectic range of media’, to include not only impasto oil paint and found objects, but ‘monumental installations, film and video’, often using ‘the intersection of biography and autobiography in narrating aspects of South African history’ (Smith 1999).

As Sue Williamson (2000) notes, the utilisation of installation art by South African artists, ‘following world trends… began quite early in the [‘90s]’, paralleling the ‘radical societal change’ in the country. ‘Video’, Williamson wrote in this nearly decade-old article, ‘that favoured form of the international art world… is slowly taking hold’, becoming a major feature of the South African art scene only with the dawning of the new millennium (Williamson 2000).

One artist particularly well-known for his film and video art is William Kentridge, who has lived and work in Johannesburg all his life. Although he is now South Africa’s most internationally recognised and acclaimed artist, he has never, as he himself observes, ‘been able to escape Johannesburg’. He continues: ‘…in the end,

all my work is rooted in this rather desperate provincial city. I have never tried to make illustrations of apartheid, but the drawings and the films are certainly spawned by, and feed off, the brutalised society left in its wake'.[61] Kentridge's oeuvre includes groundbreaking video, computer animation and theatrical collaborations with the Handstring Puppet Company on *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992); with Deborah Bell and Robert Hodgins on *Easing the Passing (Of the Hours)* (1992) and *Memo* (1994); as well as films from the 'Drawings for Projection' series - *Monument* (1990), *Mine* (1991), *Sobriety, Obesity and Growing Old* (1991: Fig.20) and *Felix in Exile* (1994: Fig. 3.3). His works are indicative of an engagement with the politics of identity and relationships with land, and they sparked Kentridge's stellar national and international success.

Siopis' and Kentridge's nuanced, affecting and powerful artworks are arguably some of the best to come out of South Africa, and many of them were made in this crucial transitional period.[62] Other artists who were also visible during the 1990 to 1994 period include Steven Cohen, Wilma Cruise, David Koloane, and Kendell Geers.

Steven Cohen, in his own words, is a Johannesburg artist 'through and through, in every sense from aesthetic to vocabulary' (Cohen 2008). The catalyst for Cohen's career as an artist was his experiences in the army, which reinforced his sense of his marginal status and otherness, as he was a conscientious objector and gay man in a militaristic and heteronormative setting (De Waal and Sassen 2003: 6; Cohen 2008). Cohen identifies with marginalised societies not only because of his homosexuality, but also because he is Jewish (De Waal and Sassen 2003: 6). In our interview Cohen

[61] Excerpt from (Christov-Bakargiev 1998) quoted on Artthrob.
[62] A tremendous amount has been written on Siopis and Kentridge and while I in no way undervalue them, for the sake of brevity I can only devote attention to a few artists, and have therefore concentrated more on those who have not been written about as assiduously, but who were also particularly visible during the 1990 to 1994 period.

explained that his ‘early work was about the political and social realities of living in South Africa’, and his performances in the late ‘90s, which he is best-known for, showed him to be an artist particularly willing to engage with different communities and public spaces (Cohen 2008).

In these performances Cohen deliberately took himself into spaces and rendered his own appearance in ways which very clearly ‘othered’ him. Cohen uses his own body in his performances, accentuating his buttocks and genitals,[63] which in post-1990 South Africa must have seemed shocking to conservative elements of society. Cohen reveals, however, that these performances were often traumatic experiences for him, rather than being instances of exhibitionist revelry. The sense of physical discomfort is palpable in the impediments that form part of his costumes - such as kudu horns and weights attached to impossibly high stilettos which make walking appear painful and inelegant - and in other elements that disrupt the glitter and draggish glamour often evident in the rest of his attire.

Cohen is best known for his performances, and is particularly identified with the Red Eye @rt initiative started by the DAG in 1996. However his collaboration with the JAG in the early ‘90s is interesting: Cohen installed his studio at the JAG and printed there for some time. Cohen describes the installation as having a ‘the feel of recent silk-screening, dirtied papers on the floor, half-made works on the table. It smelled of ink and tea and the sound of the plastic-toy-coated radio playing 702’ (Cohen 2008). Cohen (2008) also remembers when:

> … the huge pantechnicon - this mammoth truck - containing my studio, the four printing tables, the silk-screens, the buckets of ink, the collection of bizarre objects… arrived at the JAG, some of the guards told me “we don't want this stuff in here, this isn't art, it's all rubbish”. That installation

[63] For instance Cohen has previously places dildos or sparklers in his anus, and often binds his penis in performances - sometimes so tightly that it appears to be cutting off the blood circulation.

> was based on a work made with Mandela's head in a Marie-Antoinette wig and it was called "Let them eat cock".

Cohen's installation, with its image of Nelson Mandela in a wig, attempted to draw attention to the plight of those historically 'othered' on the grounds of their sexuality, alongside campaigning for abolition of racial discrimination.

The installation also evoked and critiqued the convention and construction of the artist's studio as a private place of creative genius where artworks are made according to some divine formula. Rather, the studio was presented as worthy of display in and of itself, but with the critical difference of its placement in a museum - usually a place for completed art, rather than a space for its creation. Cohen working in the space would have appeared almost as a 'living diorama' - an inversion of the traditional museum diorama which, in the late '80s and early '90s, was being re-evaluated for its problematic evocations of scenes as timeless and finite.

I have already mentioned Cohen's set of 'cockery' (Fig 13.1-2) which created some controversy for JAG at the Mayor's Ball.[64] The controversy centred around the 'pornographic' content of one of Cohen's side plates, which he described as 'rather small, and beautifully made with a colour transfer of a 1950s doll collaged to look like it was holding an erect prick taken from a porn magazine' (Fig. 21). As Cohen (2008) puts it: 'a small dick, a small doll, a big scandal.' There were eight of these side plates, which Cohen called 'a-bit-on-the-side plates', and Stephen Weltz (acting for Sothebys) refused to auction the work. It was debated whether they should actually go

[64] 'Vita Art Now exhibition soon' *The Star Tonight* 13 April 1994, entirely coincidentally, mentions Cohen, Cruise and Geers in the same article:

> Steven Cohen, the controversial artist who depicted penises on a dinner service a few years ago, and Wilma Cruise, whose 1993 exhibition was an emotive response to the murder, by rightwing terrorists, of her nephew, Nicholas Cruise, are among the artists being exhibited at the eight Vita Art Now exhibition, opening at the Johannesburg Art Gallery on Sunday May 8… Other artists in the exhibition this year are Kendell Geers, who joined all the major political parties earlier this year as a work of art, and who has been named as one of the ten most intriguing South Africans…

on the show, and although they were not featured in the auction catalogue, they fetched the third-highest price. Cohen (2008) remembers Kendell Geers and William Kentridge as the two artists who came to his defence: Kentridge ‘admired the side-plates and said they were “like petits-fours”’.

The scandal was compounded when Cohen appeared on the night of the auction, ‘relatively demure in a Victorian hoop skirt’ but accompanied by a female friend ‘who had on a gorgeous clinging black beaded Victorian sheath dress which [he] had cut the arse out of’. The following Sunday morning the papers all featured images related to the Mayor’s Ball arts installation, more of which showed Cohen’s friend’s revealing dress than the contentious ‘cockery’. Cohen (2008) remembers overhearing a neighbour in Troyeville saying: 'First erect cock I've seen in the *Weekly Mail’*. This change, Cohen says, was important to him as, ‘the sub-text’ of his work ‘was always about art and the limits of liberty’ (Cohen 2008).

When asked how the political and social changes in the country affected his work, Cohen (2008) said: ‘I think my struggle became more internalised and my work less military and more sexy.’ In the ‘90 to ‘94 period the memories that stand for Cohen are:

> Lots of public sex and fucking on premises at gay venues; Nelson Mandela's release; having a work bought by a major South African gallery which made me feel more recognised as an artist; being hungry (for food, not success); but mostly lots and lots and lots and lots of silk-screening and hand-painting - I did it ceaselessly until I ended up in hospital, allergic to the silkscreen ink and with a variety of diseases - I recognise now, looking back, that making art was my alternative to suicide (Cohen 2008).

The work bought by a ‘major South African gallery’ was Cohen’s *Bitter Suite* (1993: Fig. 22.1), acquired by the JAG. It was frequently featured in press releases on the

gallery in the early ‘90s, seemingly being a work that captured public or journalistic imagination or perhaps just made for an eye-catching visual insert (Isaacson 1994).

Bitter Suite is a trio of works from Cohen’s 1993 show *Uneasy chairs and bitter suites.* Cohen furbished a flamboyant rococo-style lounge suite with screenprinted fabric that he designed and hand-coloured (Lamberti 1995; De Waal and Sassen 2003: 10). The high colour and joyful campness of the work at first seem as though they could be innocuous, *chic* décor, but the images printed on the furniture are of icons of the colonial presence in South Africa - Queen Elizabeth, and wagon wheels, juxtaposed with colonial architecture and leopard skins. As pieces of furniture, with function and design, and as works of art, they complicate the oppositions of ‘art’ and ‘craft’, crossing the boundaries of these definitions and rendering them inconsequential.

Cohen identifies the 1990s as an ‘amazing era’ of unbridled artistic freedom. There were distinct moves to release people from restrictions on freedom of speech, for example the *Mail & Guardian's* anti-censorship festival, which included the public display of graphic pornography. This was the perfect era for an artist such as Cohen who was determinedly challenging conservative viewpoints and tastes. Cohen (2008) did ‘astonishing[ly] frank installations’ such as *The Toilet of Adventure* subtitled, *Shortcut to the Moon* (1994: Fig.22.2 -3), in incongruent public venues like ‘the foyer of the Civic Theatre in Braamfontein’. *The Toilet of Adventure* ‘recreated, in the most ironic and playful manner possible, a “glory hole”: the circular aperture often made in the walls of public toilets or sex clubs through which cruising gay men make contact and stick their cocks to be fondled and sucked’ (De Waal and Sassen 2003: 11).

Cohen (2008) also pointed out that, ‘by ‘94, there had not yet been a national gay/lesbian exhibition’. This is surprising in terms of the encouragement of freedom

of expression and campaigns for gay rights; but it also illustrates how much focus was still on the lifting of oppression imposed along racial lines rather than on sex and gender politics. The first national show on gay rights was the 1996-7 *Gay rights rites rewrites*. Cohen's 1993 work *I'm a Crime* (Fig. 22.4) was included in this show and 'takes a police docket, the form that would ordinarily be used to fingerprint people charged with a crime, and inserts into the spaces a host of gay porn images' (De Waal & Sassen 2003: 11). Cohen went overseas shortly before the *1995 Johannesburg Biennale* opened, leaving the studio installation behind for audiences. Of this he says: 'I remember one ironic thing about that show was that Kendell chose a huge room and emptied it, and I chose a small room and filled it' (Cohen 2008).

The work by Kendell Geers that Cohen refers to here was called *Outside Inside* or *(Title Withheld (Boycott)* (1995). Geers displayed, as his exhibition, the empty red gallery of the JAG, 'the epitome of colonial style and space' (Bristowe 1995). According to Anthea Bristowe (1995):

> Outside the viewer is confronted by a very different space, Joubert Park. Here one experiences not the refinements of colonial décor but the world of vagrants and the homeless. The squatters camping out in the park are manifestations the colonial world strove to keep at bay.

Geers was a young artist pushing the boundaries of the acceptable in the early '90s. First introduced by the Everard Read Contemporary Gallery, Geers was proverbially known in some South African art circles as the *enfant terrible* of South African art. His work may not be very well thought of in South African art circles, but his probing and interrogation of South African art during the '90s stimulated valuable debate.

I have already quoted some of Geers' writing, which was generally passionate, acute, and terribly malcontent with the stifled post-Boycott condition of South African art. He was a fierce proponent of the post-modern and favoured the prevalence of the

concept above formal techniques and materials traditionally associated with art. He often used unusual materials to signify visual metaphors, as well as invoking wordplay to denote the instability of language - a favourite preoccupation in postmodern art - but one which he attuned to a specifically South African context.

Geers' early work, in particular, is often accused of being over-reliant on shock tactics. In one of his earliest works, *Bloody Hell (Version 2)* (1990: Fig. 23) Geers returned to South Africa, after a period of study spent overseas, to perform a ritual washing of his 'white Afrikaaner Boer body' with his 'own fresh blood'.[65] In the '90s Geers worked continually on a series of works called *Title Withheld* or *(T.W.*). A few of the more well-known 'T.W.s' feature a semen-stained Hustler centrefold, called *Title Withheld (Hustler)* (1993/94: Fig 24.1), and R8, 69 in South African coins called *Title Withheld (R8,69*).

Title withheld (Hustler) was first exhibited at the short-lived Everard Read Contemporary gallery in 1994, and later at the JAG and was described innocuously by Geers as 'a work on paper'. Both the Everard Read Contemporary and the JAG ended up censoring the image by placing it in restricted viewing areas (Powell 1995). *Title Withheld (R8,69*) was entered into the Volkskas Atelier exhibition in 1993. R8,69 was placed randomly on the floor of the exhibition space and insured with a R3000 policy: 'When artists CJ Morkel and Gordon Froud replaced the money after borrowing it to buy beer, [Geers] accused the management of fraud' (Powell 1995).

Another work in the same line, *Title withheld (small change),* consisted of fourteen coins scattered on the floor of the JAG as an entry to the 1995 *FNB Vita Art Now exhibition*, unlit and totally unremarkably presented as a 'work of chance' (Powell 1995). Once again the work was insured with a policy for R6000, and if the

[65] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kendell_Geers

coins were taken, the JAG was liable to pay the insurance. Then-Senior Curator of Communications at JAG, Steven Sack, and the JAG staff, tried various ways to safeguard the coins as they cold not afford to appoint a security guard to guard the work at all times. Proposals included putting them in a glass box or gluing them to the floor, but Geers rejected all of these moves, pointing out: 'The potential to pick up the coins… and the resulting museological and ethical conflicts and debates this potential elicits is precisely the work of art' (Powell 1995).

In another work, *Untitled (ANC, AVF, AWB, CP, DP, IFP, NP, PAC, SACP)* (1993-94) begun in July 1993, Geers went about joining every South African political party. According to Christian Rattemeyer:

> The work officially ended on February 7, 1994, when the ultra-right Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) issued him a membership card. Documented in the comprehensive collection of different membership cards, the work refers to Geers' personal involvement in politics, which was not without personal risk since the parties considered each other "enemies." It also illustrates the fundamental double bind of Geers' own conflicted cultural ancestry as a descendent of colonial rulers, which, despite his anti-apartheid activism, re-inscribes the role of the oppressor in his biography.[66]

In the well known *Title Withheld (Brick)* (1993: Fig. 24.2), Geers threw a brick through the window of an art gallery; and in *Vitrine* (1993: Fig. 24.3) the brick was thrown through the glass of a vitrine. In *Title Withheld (Deported)* (1993/97) he 'erected an electric fence charged with 6000 volts across the showroom, which prevented visitors from entering part of the exhibit' (Rattemeyer). In *Blow* (1993 – 1999: Fig. 24.4) Geers blew a number of holes in gallery walls with explosives, and in *T.W. (I.N.R.I)* (1994: Fig. 25.5) the figure of Christ with an amputated leg was wrapped in red and white chevron tape.

[66] culturebase@hkw.de) http://culturebase.net/artist.php?1449

These were all works that resonate with the violence and uncomfortable social boundaries of the early 1990s in South Africa. The literal installation of violence and territorial protection devices into a gallery space challenged the construction and conventions of museums and galleries as neutral spaces and, by extension questioning the neutrality of the viewers and the works of art within them. In 1993 Geers also infamously urinated into Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (Fig. 25.) at the Palazzo Grazzi in Venice.[67]

Besides his incisive criticism and his inflammatory art works, Geers was important in the '90s in one other respect. Sue Williamson (2000) credits Geers with initiating a change in corporate attitudes to art investment. Corporate art collection increased as a practice in the 1990s, but Williamson (2000) quotes an 1992 *ADA* article claiming that 'a number of corporations prefer to remain silent about their activity, believing that public knowledge of their expenditure on fine art assets will anger the trade unions'. The article cites the Rembrandt Foundation, the Standard Bank, and Sasol as companies that were visibly investing in the arts. Williamson (2000) notes:

> In 1994, the Johannesburg mining house Gencor appointed Geers as art consultant, with a brief to build up a corporate collection, giving him a restricted budget but what amounted to free artistic rein…. [the article mentions the acquisition of work by Boshoff, Bester, Sihlali, Siopis, and Makhoba] In recent years, Gencor's example has led to the foundation of other progressive art collections by such companies as MNET and Vodacom.

Eventually Geers moved abroad where he continued his career as an artist.

David Koloane was an artist who I have shown was proactive in the early 1990s, and is described as a veteran as often as Geers is described as an *enfant terrible*. In the

[67] http://www.onepeople.com/intArtists/artists/geers2.html

early 1990s Koloane's work seemed to combine aspects of figuration and abstraction, and between 1992 and 1994 he worked on a series of works depicting a township vista in various moods and atmospheric conditions. *Made in South Africa (Sun*) (1993: Fig.26.1), *Made in South Africa (Moonshine)* (1993: Fig.26.2) and *Made in South Africa (Twilight)* (1994: Fig.26.3) are vigorously drawn pastel works which, although depicting fairly innocuous times of day, seem to blaze apocalyptically with colour. The title 'Made in South Africa' is a sardonic label that one would normally associate with a product 'proudly' manufactured in South Africa. The use of it in Koloane's series title is ironic as the scenes depicted are of hardship and poverty.

As Artthrob and *Art South Africa* editor Sean O'Toole (2003) writes of Koloane's work:

> An early proponent of township realism, Koloane's post-liberation (1990) works have tended towards what critic Ivor Powell defines as a "primal stylistic chaos". Willingly naïve, and yet gloriously unconscious of this paradox, Koloane's work shares something of the abstract intentionality of Jean Michel Basquiat. His work is also characterised by its recurring subject matter (particularly townships scenes, dogs, cityscapes, jazz music), and tends to offer a curious blend of sombre epiphanies and mesmerised celebrations of our collectivity as human beings.

At this time Koloane also began to develop his series of works depicting township dogs (Fig. 27.1-2). Koloane (2008) explained that stray dogs were a ubiquitous feature of townships and squatter settlements, since there was no effort to control breeding. Koloane (2008) was born and grew up in Alexandria township and remembered that these dogs can be particularly vicious, especially at night, and have been known to attack and kill people. Koloane (2008) related that he found the stray dogs an apt metaphor 'for black communities during the apartheid era… [as they were] neglected by the apartheid system and left to fend on their own'. Koloane (2008) suggests that this metaphor was his way of avoiding doing what he called

‘AK47 type of work’ - work that referred didactically to violence in townships - and wanted rather ‘to employ something that was in essence universal, a symbol that could appeal to everybody and anybody could identify and recognise what I was trying to say’.

Koloane (2008) explains that the ‘primary objective in setting up studio space was to improve our creative expression’ and also to dispel the impression that tourists could ‘order’ artwork that corresponded with their stereotypical views of township life, for example: ‘six drawings or paintings of happy people, or musicians in the townships, or people in a shebeen.’ It was perhaps in light of this that Koloane was not altogether satisfied with the depiction of the township landscapes in the ‘Made in South Africa’ series, and thus developed the stray dog metaphor to create a more nuanced reference to the effects of long-term trauma and neglect.

Koloane’s abstract expressionist work had been rejected to an extent by black and white societies. Many whites simplistically associated black artists with a figurative style, and with the subject matter of, as Koloane worded it - AK47s, township and shebeen scenes, happy people, and musicians. In black political circles, art had been strongly pushed as a weapon of the struggle, and thus Koloane’s reluctance to figuratively depict injustice, violence, or poor living conditions did not tally with the political needs of these parties. According to Marilyn Martin (1996: 5): ‘white academics were outraged that black artists should paint in an abstract expressionist manner, and the work produced was negated and criticized amidst accusations of American imperialism.’

Martin (1996: 5) cites Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa’s cutting summation of this in the *Weekly Mail*:

> It would seem that white South African artists aren't necessarily expected to carry the burden of apartheid guilt in their works, or even dig into their Dutch or English colonial roots for inspiration. But black artists, as the political situation gets fiercer, are expected to carry the banner for the liberation struggle in one hand while holding onto the goat-hide skin of their ancestral roots in the other.

Thus the transitional period of South African history brought with it the need and freedom for black artists like Koloane to diversify their work, and to complicate the simplistic label of 'township' art. They were able to speak rather of 'universal' issues surrounding oppression, rather than appearing to garner sympathy for being 'black and oppressed'.

One of Koloane's contemporaries and fellow Bag Factory artist Kagiso Pat Mautloa produced a work that seems to express all of these divergent pressures. *Reconstruction* (1994: Fig.28) is printed on three old South African mail bags, bolted to which are three seemingly removable images. Affixed to the bags are three panels: the first is an image of bullet holes in metal; the second is a small abstract work; and on the third is the new South African flag (Nolte 1997: 96). According to Jacqueline Nolte (1997: 97) the triptych is a 'querying of legislated culture' that is 'framed by the official byways of the past [and raises] important questions in this climate of rapturous national construction.' I find the work an insightful and concise summary of the influences affecting black artists in Mautloa's and Koloane's era, as these artists had been framed, like the detachable panels on the post bags, by old South African official parameters. The bullet holes on the first panel suggest violence and danger and contrast markedly with the abstract panel, which seems evocative of the spiritually transformative power of art. There are formal similarities between the South African flag and the abstract panel, but more striking is the way the flag's bold,

colourful statement seems dwarfed and called into doubt by its contextualisation on the old mail bag.

The ‘90s as a whole was a period in which Koloane felt he could finally exceed some of the boundaries that accompanied the label of ‘black artist’, relating that it was the *Biennale* ‘that really launched the new expression that artists were developing over that period' (Koloane 2008). Koloane (2008) remembers that:

> …Some of the artists started being noticed and they were invited into international exhibitions and other Biennales around the world, China and other places, so that was for us a great kind of revival if you like - that people no longer saw us as township artists but started realising that we could do things that we thought we weren't free to do... So for me that period was one of great change within black African artists' expressions.

It was really only after the *1995 Johannesburg Biennale* that black artists’ works began to garner the same prices as the work of their white counterparts, but investment in South African art rose considerably from that time and all artists benefited.

Pre-1990, Koloane had been an active facilitator of the arts for black artists in Johannesburg and throughout the country; and early on in the ‘90s he became a favourite inclusion in art committees and judging panels, providing a much needed black perspective in and on the arts world. In 1995 Koloane also curated the South African section of ‘Seven Stories About Modern Art In Africa’. This show, according to Sean O’Toole (2003) was, ‘Unlike the hit and miss Johannesburg Biennale of the same year… tightly honed’. O’Toole (2003) quotes Koloane's assertion in the ‘accompanying catalogue’ that: ‘The pervasive role played by politics in the existence of the South African populace affects both victims and perpetrators alike, and therefore every sphere of life.’

Koloane has work in the JAG and SANG collections, but in the '80s and early '90s, his work was often shown at the Goodman Gallery, which, under the Directorship of Linda Givon, was one of the first galleries to exhibit the work of black artists. While some black artists feel they were badly treated and taken advantage of by the Goodman, this gallery also gave them the exposure and support they needed, exhibiting the work of black artists before it was 'fashionable' (Verster 2008). Also, the many artists who have had disagreements with Givon have not all been black, and thus it is debatable whether their perceived mistreatment was due to their race.

According to Sue Williamson (2000): 'the commercial gallery scene [in Johannesburg] in the early nineties was dominated by the Goodman Gallery.' Givon was the controversial and uncompromising head of the gallery for forty-two years, in that time building an impressive market for South African art. Other commercial galleries in Johannesburg during the '90s included Everard Read Contemporary, which opened in 1992 with Wayne Barker's debut solo exhibition and closed its doors again in 1996; F.I.G (Famous International Gallery) which opened in 1990 'founded by Wayne Barker and Morris la Mancha', and the Newtown Galleries at the Market Theatre precinct which were opened by Ricky Burnett in 1991 (Williamson 2000). The nearby FUBA and Bag Factory made the inner city a vibrant space for the arts.

Givon herself seems either to have bitter enemies or sincere supporters. Sue Williamson, seemingly one of the latter, writes in a 1999 Artthrob 'artbio' on Givon:

> Apart from a blip five years ago when the art world seemed intolerable [1994] and Givon announced she was closing the gallery, only to reconsider and move to a much bigger, more commanding space, the Goodman Gallery has been in the forefront of the art world ever since. Passionate about art, and strongly supportive of her artists, Givon has never felt herself restricted to the gallery, and has sat on committees, banged on government doors to loosen up cultural funds, curated, trod on a number of authoritarian toes, and been immensely enabling in helping art and artists participate in international exhibitions. But in the end a

> gallery is judged by the quality of the work it shows, and although of course no gallery can get it right 100% of the time, the Goodman has been by far the most consistent over the years, its professionally run shows launching the careers of such artists as William Kentridge, Willie Bester, Kendell Geers and Penny Siopis.

One possible reason for the 1994 'blip' Williamson mentions could be the imminence, at that time, of the *Johannesburg Biennale*, as Christopher Till (2008) remembers Givon accusing him of 'destroying South African art' because the artists and their works would disappear overseas and leave a void. While this did happen to some extent, it was only to the detriment of public gallery collections, as the Goodman went from strength to strength with the influx of international clients.

One of the noteworthy exhibitions that was held at the Goodman Gallery in 1993 was Wilma Cruise's *Nicholas, October 1990* - a prime example of an art exhibition that coincided and melded with political events. In this case it was one of the most politically and emotionally heightened events in South Africa's transitional phase: the murder of Chris Hani. In an interview Cruise (2008) explained that *Nicholas, October 1990*, '…was a project that more or less spanned three years, and it was a cycle of works that revolved around Nicholas Cruise who was murdered by the right wing in October 1990'. Cruise's exhibition, *Nicholas, October 1990* was held on the day of Chris Hani's funeral in Johannesburg, which Cruise (2008) described as: 'the most incredible event because… the whole of Johannesburg was barricaded: if there was going to be civil war it was going to be on that day - and I opened at the Goodman Gallery.' Cruise (2008) further explained that, 'That Friday in the press… the information came out that the people who'd murdered Nicholas were the same group that was implicated in Chris Hani's murder'. Thus *Nicholas, October 1990* was 'directly linked to the events of that moment', and as Cruise (2008) recounted,

'people walked into the gallery and started crying. The whole period of three weeks that that exhibition was up, people cried. Linda had a box of tissues out.'

Cruise (2008) explained that the 'incredible hype' over the exhibition was in part due the assumption by the press that Nicholas her son or husband, whereas he was in fact her nephew by marriage. Newspapers carried 'headlines like "Mother's Grief"…"A mother's shout against the silence"… "*Die vergete slagoffer*" (the forgotten victims)… and "*Weduwee*" (Widow)' (Cruise 2008). With wry humour, Cruise related that the exhibition, her second one-person show with Goodman, was very successful as she sold all of the work, including the now well-known *Bully Boys* (1993: Fig. 29) which was purchased by the DAG.

However, the coincidental public attention that the exhibition received made sensational a much more subtle and general theme that Cruise was working with. She explains that the 'whole cycle of works… was trying to deal more with the kind of philosophical approach to the notions of good and evil - with Nicholas representing good and the bad men representing evil - and how those kind of ideas were dealt with in the 20th century where the murderers got celebrity status'. Cruise (2008) relates that:

> The *Nicholas* exhibition is underpinned by a series of writing and poetry where I explore, as I said, the nature of the existence of God. Nicholas was a Christian - so were the "bad guys". So it was a question of "Where is God?" and "Does God exist?" (I'm an Atheist.) And if He does exist - why? … It's captured in a phrase which I say: "Christ has a cock, why then is He impotent?" In all the exhibitions, the purists got me to rub it out, but you see it's got nothing to do with [politics]… it's the impotence of religion, the impotence of religion in the face of such a dastardly kind of deed.

Cruise (2008) felt it was unjust that Nicholas's name was negated, while the names of his murderers 'were mentioned on a daily basis in the press'.

According to Cruise (2008), the murderers got celebrity status because they were arrested for their involvement in the Pretoria bombings:

> ….they were going to be charged for treason… and as awaiting trial prisoners they went on a hunger strike and they landed up in hospital. Nelson Mandela had been released, and as an act of reconciliation he decided to visit them in hospital, so there were these headlines and photographs, "Nelson Mandela visiting the hunger strikers". Their hunger strike was monitored over the days, and then it went on… for beyond 80 days… Finally they were caught cheating on their hunger strike - their wives were smuggling chocolate bars into the hospital for them (laughs).

Thus, Cruise's *Nicholas, October 1990* is as example of how work made with a philosophic intention was inescapably interpreted in light of political events.

While the art works by Cohen, Geers, Koloane and Cruise are thematically quite different, it can be argued that in this early 1990s period, all work, regardless of the artist's intention, could be, and usually was, interpreted in light of the legacies of apartheid. As Sander Gilman (in Martin 1996: 12) writes:

> South African art has become one of the spaces in which memory of collective experiences come together for all of the citizens of the nation… How can you work through the agonies of the past - by turning them into representations that articulate both private myths and memories and public expressions and acknowledgments of trauma - they can and must speak from the vision of the old South Africa for the new South Africa.

Johannesburg, having been a central location for the arts in the country from 1990 to 1994, was at the forefront of the push in the arts towards grittier contemporary work. The JAG, it seems, tried its best to keep up with and foster some of these dialogues and advances, and it was doubtless quickest off the mark in its redressing of its collections and its exhibition of contemporary art. The SANG, as I will show in the next chapter, made a considerable and successful push to do the same, especially with

respect to the exhibition of African art, despite being constantly dogged by financial limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR

The South African National Gallery

Racially-motivated political violence had occurred in the surroundings of public galleries and museums, and was increasingly represented from the 1980s onwards in the art that was exhibited in them. The boundaries between political concerns and art were entirely breached in January 1992, when four uniformed members of the AWB[68] entered the South African National Gallery and smashed a ceramic sculpture by Gael Neke entitled *Eugene Terre'blanche and his Two Sidekicks* (Fig. 30) (Karon 1992). As Susan Loppert (1993) reported:

> …any discussion of art in South Africa is inevitably a discussion of the relation between art and politics... The culprits warned that they would not tolerate "monstrous images" of Terre'blanche, and that next time they would use explosives to "Blow the place up". Robert Hughes once suggested that no artwork ever changed society; this act demonstrates how powerfully it can move, challenge, provoke. In this society, art *is* a weapon [or a victim] of the struggle, not just an adjunct.

The AWB, although a brutal and dangerously ignorant band of militant reactionaries, had by this time the reputation of buffoons rather than effective rightwing terrorists, and this sort of public, symbolic, but politically weak vengeance was just the kind of sport they enjoyed. Despite this, the incident was still a shocking encapsulation of racial and political tensions in South Africa, and was also a revealing indicator of how much public galleries in South Africa had changed in a single decade. No longer did the works collected have the historical distance from their society that rendered them politically benign and inspired no reactionary objections. The SANG and other museums around the country were exhibiting work with contemporary political relevance, and in this case, paying the price.

[68] Afrikaner Weerstandbeweging - Afrikaans Resistence Movement.

This evolution in the SANG's vision and mission had been enabled by a change in the processes by which work had previously been acquired - from the relatively unilateral decision-making of past museum structures, to the latter-day importance of equality and consensus. Much of my information about these shifts has been gleaned from the SANG's 1997 publication *Contemporary South African Art 1985 – 1995: from the South African National Gallery Permanent Collection,* a catalogue edited by the SANG's then Head of Curatorial Departments, Emma Bedford. The catalogue accompanied the SANG's exhibition of the contemporary South African art it had added to its permanent collection between 1985 and 1995, which grew rapidly in that decade.

Although the DAG produced similar, largely retrospective texts in 2001 and 2004, the SANG's text is unique in its clear, open, transparent[69] publication of the kind of questioning and revisionist process that it was going through in the transitional period. It also outlines the primary debates and challenges at the SANG, and has thus been very useful to me. As Jacqueline Nolte (1997: 95) framed it, the SANG 'underwent a voluntary exposure in the spirit of national reconciliation' in this text.

The SANG, as earlier mentioned, is centrally situated in Cape Town on Government Avenue in the historic Company Gardens of Cape Town. It is nearby other Iziko Museums, including the Natural History Museum, the Planetarium, the Holocaust Museum, and the Slave Lodge. It is also within easy walking distance of other places of historical importance such as the Presidential Tuynhuys residence, the houses of Parliament, and St. Georges Cathedral and Mall. Its situation is thus visibly steeped in South African history and is in a slightly more 'tourist-attractive' situation

[69] This popular byword of South Africa's new democracy is particularly apt in the case of this publication, as it made public all the previously rather stale and problematic policies that SANG had held to in earlier years.

than the JAG and DAG, owing partly to the continued vibrancy and relative safety of the Cape Town CBD, and partly to its scenic environment.

Until 1990, when Marilyn Martin took over, the Director of the SANG was the indomitable Raymund van Niekerk. Van Niekerk was the alleged 'head' of the triumvirate of the 'art mafia', as discussed in earlier chapters, and had the attitude, according to fellow 'art mafioso' Christopher Till, of caring little for what others in the art world thought.[70] Till (2008) claimed that, during Van Niekerk's era, 'it was still very much a rarified environment of the museums commanding what was out there' with directors high-handedly selecting the artwork they favoured. Till (2008) added: 'The whole idea of bringing in material which was… "ethnographic" wasn't even considered.' Emma Bedford (1997:14) described the consequent shift in selection processes in her curator's preface in SANG's *Contemporary South African Art 1985 – 1995*. Bedford (1997:14) suggested that it was 'interesting to consider how the terrain has shifted from the late 1970s where the Acquisitions Committee described by Neville Dubow was pervaded by an ethos of "gentlemans' [sic] agreement" to the present day where discussion, contestation, and negotiation are valued'.

Former JAG curator Julia Charlton was of the opinion that 'the National Gallery... until the '80s was still being run by very conservative decision makers who would block any changes that curators tried to make' (Charlton and Rankin-Smith 2007). This is evidenced by the difficulties experienced in moves to buy work with

[70] Till (2008) put it in memorable terms in my interview with him, saying, '…you know old Raymund used to have an expression, he used to say, "Oh well, *fok hulle*"'. Till asserted that when the move came towards more consultative selection processes, this attitude did not bode very well, and that when Marilyn Martin came to the SANG, Till urged her to take the opportunity of being more inclusive and representative of the broader community, an opportunity which he describes Martin as taking to heart 'almost to the opposite extreme' (Till 2008). Martin explains in Dubin (2006: 244): 'You know, when you want to change things you have to sometimes go to extremes to put [them] right. So one can go overboard a little bit, but it was the decision we took and we stand by it.'

clear political intent. Such work proved difficult to pass by the SANG Board without subterfuge. A widely-known example of this is Paul Stopforth's *The Interrogators,* (Fig. 2) acquired by SANG in 1979. The Acquisitions Committee could not reach a unanimous decision to acquire the work and it was therefore brought before the full board for consideration - but under the innocuous title *Triptych* (Bedford 1997: 30).

The work was acquired after Board member Neville Dubow motivated for its acquisition on the basis of its formal strengths, however it was only later exhibited under its original title (Bedford 1997: 31). Bedford, the Educations Officer at the museum at the time, remembers:

> …conducting tours for large school groups around this work. The three faces are portraits of the security policemen who interrogated Steve Biko and the chair that appears in the work is the one to which he was bound. And so this piece became a springboard for us talking about very important people and events in our history, things that weren't being talked about in their school history texts or in other ways; and so it enabled education staff at the Gallery to engage in people's education at the very time in which the cultural boycott was also building up and being directed against the National Gallery as a State institution (Bedford 1997: 31)

Bedford (1997: 31) recounts that Raymund Van Niekerk, despite being a key figure behind the acquisition of *The Interrogators* was 'very much aware of [its] power…from time to time when we had visits from key people in the Education Ministry, the work had to be taken down and replaced with a less controversial work'.

According to the SANG's Draft Policy Manual (1991: 10), in April 1988 galleries across the country became officially free to acquire whatever work they chose to, with the Department of National Education's implementation of 'a system of Framework Autonomy for non-profit institutions'. The Draft Policy Manual (1991: 10) states:

> Under this system, provision is made for the institution to function under an autonomous Board of Trustees, and not simply as an extension of the Public Service. Within this system the SANG enjoys a large measure of autonomy. It enables the Board of Trustees to formulate policy and to take final decisions in all aspects of running the SANG.

The acquisition of Stopforth's work indicates that the SANG, like the DAG and JAG, acquired art prior to 1990 that challenged the dominant nationalist rhetoric of the then-ruling party - even though it was funded in part by the government.

Marilyn Martin stepped in as Director in 1990 - a crucial time of opportunity for galleries in South Africa - and remained in that position for 18 years.[71] I asked Martin if she had experienced bureaucracy in the period under review, and she replied that she encountered very little in earlier years, saying that:

> …the institution was autonomous. It's always been a kind of a parastatal. The word parastatal really didn't exist in the old South Africa, but it's always been a very long arm of funding and we've kept it that way. My predecessor ensured that it was that.
>
> In terms of bureaucracy, I managed the institution obviously with financial people and so on, and subject to the state auditor, but we managed our budget and we kept the bureaucracy down. With the amalgamation in 2001 when Iziko came into being and the centralisation of functions - centralisation brings bureaucracy - and it has just grown to a point where most of us find it untenable, so *now* we're battling bureaucracy.

Martin also rejects the idea that there was a stranglehold by the board at the time. As she asserts:

> …our previous government - any government in South Africa from the time this institution came into being - hasn't really been interested in the visual arts and in museums. That counts against us, and it also counts for us, because we've had no interference. The curators would make the selection [of artworks]. We then started involving Board members who knew about the visual arts in the selection... We had a very good built-in system at the time, in that there was representation - and that still held [between 1990 to 1994] - from the University of Cape Town, the

[71] Marilyn Martin retired at the end of 2008.

> University of Stellenbosch, and the University of the Western Cape. So we had progressive academics on the council, and we were involved in suggesting people, so we had someone like Karin Skawran on the board - and Neville Dubow was on the board for a very long time. There was continuity, and people who really knew and who understood art, to advise, and they became members of the acquisition committee, so that there never was a proposal turned down (Martin 2008).[72]

Skawran is white, as was Dubow (who died in 2008), so when Martin is speaking of representativeness, she means that the board members were from different institutions rather than racial groups.

Emma Bedford (1997:14) does, however, refer to this aspect of the SANG's 'representativeness':

> The question of how representative the Acquisitions Committee is and whose interests it serves is a vexing one which has been addressed more effectively with the appointment of staff and Board members who more accurately reflect the demography of the country (see list of Members of Acquisitions Committees 1985 -1995, Addendum D).

Addendum D indicates that Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa, who had been on the JAG Committee since 1991, became 'Government Appointee' to the SANG's Board of Trustees in 1994. Dhlomo-Mautloa has been with them ever since, and in a telephonic interview, she lamented having to watch South Africa's art disperse to international private and public collections, as the SANG cannot afford to buy it.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, it was important that museums such as the JAG, SANG, and DAG underwent transformation, not only in terms of the exhibitions they held being more 'representative', but also in the demography of the decision-making bodies and creative teams of the galleries. South African contributors to Richard Sandell's (2002) *Museums, Society and Inequality* argue as follows:

[72] Martin acknowledges that the exception to this was the proposal turned down by the Rembrandt Foundation.

> Transformation is not only about changing *what* is represented in new and old museums, but crucially concerns *who* is empowered to make the representations. Therefore, it is argued that these transformation processes cannot be initiated, sustained, or succeed, unless serious attention is given to the democratisation of the museum profession in demographic terms, particularly in the middle-and top-management decision-making levels.
>
> Historically, the decision-making levels of the South African museum profession in the government-supported museums have been almost exclusively the domains of whites, with blacks being employed only in the lower ranks. Still today, there is no black director of a national state-sponsored museum. This being said, it should be noted that there was some repositioning that took place during the 1980s and 1990s, with certain black museum workers being raised to the position of education officer or outreach officer. This move was primarily done for the sake of the institutions, as museums, fighting for survival, attempted to attract new users from the groups who had for so long seen museums as alien western constructs (Ka Mpumlwana, Corsane, Pastor-Makhurane and Rassool 2002: 246).

Despite museums aiming for racial representativeness, the number of black employees in top positions in museums since the nineties has remained relatively low. The field of art history has not been one which has attracted many black academics, and institutions like the SAVAH today still have very few black members. This is an issue that will most likely only start to resolve itself once a new generation of post-apartheid equal-opportunity learners have come of age.

What is clear is that the era of Board members 'humming and hawing'[73] over politically sensitive work was largely over by the start of Martin's tenure. An exception, acknowledged by Martin in her interview concerned the 'personal and institutional hiccup' of the SANG's 1991 conflict with the Rembrandt Corporation, which resulted in a council action against Martin and showed that the political content of artwork was still a bone of contention.

If anything impeded progress in the '80s, it was the 'stranglehold', in Martin's words, 'not from government so much, but from this new breed of cultural

[73] Dubow's phrase (in Bedford 1997: 29).

commissars that took upon themselves - so-called 'progressive people' in South African society who thought that they now wanted to tell everybody what to do' (Martin 2008). Martin clarified that these 'commissars' were not those from organisations such as the NAI, FOSACO or ACTAG, but 'were active prior to 1990 in monitoring the Cultural Boycott. Before you could do anything, you had to consult, not necessarily with the broader community, which was absolutely - and continues to be - necessary, but with individuals and groupings' (Martin 2008).

Journalist Tony Karon wrote in 1991, with reference to the opening of the *1991 Cape Town Triennial* at SANG: 'Whereas "struggle" artists boycotted in 1988, the Federation of South African Cultural Organisations (FOSACO – né [sic] Cultural Workers' Congress) now jointly runs the gallery.' Marilyn Martin categorically refutes this, and another article in *ADA* the relationship of SANG to FOSACO was more accurately described as 'a joint working group' (Sorrell 1993: 86). Despite the error, the article shows the relationships the SANG entered into and nurtured in its commitment to transformation.

According to the SANG Annual Reports 1989/90 and 1990/91, the renovations that the Gallery underwent saw its closure from April 1989 until October 1991. It was meant to reopen in June 1991, but the rehanging of all the rooms was only complete by January 1992.[74] This meant that all exhibitions during this period took place at the SANG's satellite galleries: the Annexe adjacent the Gallery in the Company Gardens, and the Natale Labia in Muizenberg.[75] The SANG also co-operated with other museums during this time, for instance the Irma Stern Museum, with whom they staged the retrospective exhibition *Gerard Sekoto - Unsevered Ties* (11 July - 12

[74] This is according to the SANG Annual Report 1989/90 and the SANG's *Bonani* newsletter Jan/Feb 1992.

[75] An interesting aside: this gallery has recently gone back into the possession of Count Labia after an extended legal wrangle. The Count was upset about the gallery not using the space adequately or frequently enough (*Art Times* October 2008).

August 1990). Various parts of the SANG's collection were also shown by the Michaelis Collection and the South African Association of Arts in Bellville during this period of closure (SANG Annual Report 1990/91: 3).

In light of the overhaul that the Johannesburg city centre was undergoing to renew it as a centre of culture, it must have seemed that cultural institutions had 'gone to ground' in the early '90s. With public galleries and cultural centres scaffolded, and artists just beginning to find new directions in their work, 'culture' must have seemed a quiet and tentative business for a time. There were a number of commercial galleries operating in Cape Town during the early 1990s, but the only one that could match the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg was 'the Gallery International under the… formidable Esther Rousso… who vied with Linda Givon to show the leading artists, with the galleries of the South African Association of the Arts in Cape Town and Pretoria, and in Durban, the NSA, taking up the slack' (Williamson 2000). It was from these commercial galleries that public galleries bought many of their works; and during the periods of public gallery closures, commercial galleries seemed to hold the fort for contemporary art.

Due to the closure of the SANG's Main Gallery, there were only seven exhibitions at the SANG during the '89/'90 period. They included two well-received shows exhibiting toys. The first was *Miniature and Doll's Houses and Interiors* (December 1989 to February 1990), and the second, *Japanese Traditional Toys* exhibited at the Natale Labia (May - July 1990) and at the Annexe (December 1989 to early 1990). As JAG had done, the SANG focused increasingly on bringing children and ordinary citizens into the gallery, and in some ways, the venues of the Annexe and Labia were ideal in this respect. They were less grandly intimidating than the Main Gallery: this is especially true of the Annexe, which was frequently used as a

creative workshop space. According to the Annual Report 1989/90: 'Children's workshops were held in conjunction with both the latter exhibitions, and those involving Xhosa-speaking children were televised for two programmes on SATV.' Because of the positive media coverage it received, the exhibition of Japanese traditional toys was requested by the DAG for between August and September 1990.

Another initiative in aid of making the SANG and the arts more accessible to the public was the SANG's Visiting Artist Programme, launched in May 1989 (SANG Annual Report 1989/90). The invited artists set up a studio in the Annexe Gallery and the public was allowed access to the space to interact with them and see the works in progress. The first artists featured included Francine Scialom-Greenblatt (May to June 1989) who concentrated on 'architectural features within a radius of 100m of SANG' producing a series of oil on canvas works. Beezy Bailey, who featured from the 16th to the 30th of August 1989, reworked photos of paintings in the 'Sir Abe Bailey Collection of Sporting Paintings', which belonged the SANG's permanent collection.[76] Hayden Proud, Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SANG from 1992, featured at the SANG as an invited artist from the 18th to the 30th of September 1989 (SANG Annual Report 1989/90: 13). Proud had previously taught art history at UCT, but has become a seemingly indispensable member of the SANG staff. Visiting artists in 1990 included Nicolaas Maritz (April - May), Kevin Brand (June - July) and Sue Williamson (October) who worked with women in workshops (SANG Annual Report 1990/91). Andries Botha (May) and Angela Ferreira (July) featured in 1992, as well as Peter Schütz (April) and Penny Siopis (August - September), during which time Siopis worked on her mammoth piece, *The Baby and the Bathwater* (1992: Fig.31).

[76] An historical link here is that Beezy Bailey is the Grandson of Sir Abe Bailey.

SANG's changing acquisitional emphasis is clearly visible in the Annual Report '89/'90, as it states: 'With the exception of a few works on paper, our acquisitions consisted entirely of South African art works. We are in the process of reviewing the nature of our collections and our acquisitions policy.'

A relatively small number of acquisitions were made during this period.[77] However, the inclusion of prints by Denis, Rodin and Beckmann showed an interest in maintaining an international collection of prominent artists, and these prints would have been fairly expensive. The increase in acquisitions from 1989/90 to 1990/91 is very noticeable, with 37 works being purchased in 1989/90 as opposed to 173 works in 1990/91. This is possibly due to the increase in acquisitions of South African art, which was generally more affordable than international art.

The SANG's Annual Report (1990/91: 3), in stating that its 'acquisitions consisted almost entirely of South African art and more particularly contemporary art', showed a further shift in line with the change in trends in art acquisition across the country. This is the first time in the SANG's reports that the catch-all 'contemporary art' was mentioned as a term for the type of art being acquired at the time. At the same time, the SANG also reports starting at this time, 'a collection of traditional art from Southern Africa, an area which is being actively investigated and pursued' and 'acknowledge with gratitude the fine collection of Ndebele beadwork which was bought for the SANG by the Department of National Education' (SANG Annual Report 1990/91: 3). Although the SANG was still under the province of the

[77] Paintings and sculpture bought in 1989 included a sculpture called *Devil* by Johanness Segogela; a 'Shangaan pin cloth' (ie. an *nceka*); Penny Siopis' *Piling Wreckage Upon Wreckage*, (1989: Fig. 32); Jackson Hlungwani's *Sculptured Throne*; four sculptures for the niches on the SANG's façade by Barend De Wet; 'Fingo'/Mfengu beadwork loveletters, aprons, and scarves; a *mpondomise* (chastity apron); works by Anton Momberg, Maud Sumner, Gwelo Goodman, Maggie Laubser, Cecil Higgs, Neels Coetzee, Ruth Everard-Haden, Kim Siebert, Douglas Portway; a photograph by Geoffrey Grundlingh; and prints by Rosenkrantz, Rodin, Menpes, Power, Max Beckmann, Clive van den Berg, Roy Ndinisa, William Kentridge, Maurice Denis, and Elizabeth Vels.

former government's Ministry, the purchase of Ndebele beadwork by the Department of National Education' suggests that the need to have different cultures of South African art-making represented in art museums was rippling through the country at higher levels as well.

The 1990/91 acquisitions were of a wide range of artworks, including those by 'contemporary' artists like Sam Nhlengetwa, and canonical/ established/ traditional artists like Maggie Laubser. They also include a number of purchases of items like a Fingo 'Courting Belt', an '*Igquira* outfit' - whose makers are listed as 'Unknown' - for what would later come to be known as the 'African Heritage Collection'. It is interesting to note that these items are listed in two different ways over the early 1990s: firstly they are noted as 'Fingo' and later as 'Mfengu'. The Mfengu are 'descendants of refugees from the *Mfecane*' (the 'massive migrations of Nguni peoples' from Natal to other parts of the country) who settled in the Eastern Cape.[78]

The presence of a large number of items made by the Mfengu group of the Xhosa people is an interesting historical by-product of their collaboration with early British colonists in the Eastern Cape, to whom they were known as the 'Fingo'. After fighting for the British in the mid 1800s,

> They were granted lands in the frontier districts of the Transkei and Ciskei, at Xhosa expense and in order to act as a buffer against further Xhosa invasions of the colony. With their social organisation shattered during the *Mfecane*, the Mfengu were receptive from an early date to Christianity and Western education.[79]

The small detail of how the denotation of this group changed from 'Fingo' to 'Mfengu' in the acquisition records shows how the mainly white gallery staff at this

[78] Text from http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/379579/Mfengu. Thanks to Sanelisiwe Sobahle for alerting me to the history of the Mfengu people.
[79] Text from http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/379579/Mfengu.

time were growing more educated and more 'politically correct' about black South African history.[80]

There was also a great number of Ndebele works collected by SANG. Ndebele speakers had historically been subject to continual relocations from the Southern Nguni group (during the *Mfecane*) to the Transvaal Highveld, and thenceforth to the KwaNdebele homelands under the Group Areas Act, having all the while adapted and expanded their distinctive styles of geometric design (Martin 1996: 7-8). As a national gallery, SANG had the advantage of not being bound to place emphasis on provincial socio-linguistic groups, and could therefore take their pick of the most striking art from across the country.

The surge in purchases in 1989/90 was mainly due to the retirement of Raymund Van Niekerk and the commencement of Marilyn Martin's Directorship at SANG. Staff also may have had additional time to concentrate on purchases while the SANG underwent renovations. At this time the SANG, according to Martin, 'still had a budget of R250 000, which started diminishing thereafter, until we had nothing'.[81] Key purchases in this list are Gael Neke's *Eugene Terre'blanche and his sidekicks*, as well as paintings and sculptures such as Kevin Brand's *19 Boys Running* (1988: Fig.33); Willie Bester's *Challenges Facing the New South Africa* (1990: Fig.6); Jane Alexander's *The Butcher Boys* (Fig. 34);[82] Gerard Sekoto's *Basking;* prints and drawings by Dan Rakgoathe, Norman Catherine, and Lallitha Jawahirilal; Helen Sibidi's *The Child's Mother holds the Sharp Side of the Knife* (1988: Fig. 35); and Sue Williamson's *A Few South Africans* (1983/87: Fig. 36.1-3). Many of these works

[80] Initially, in the early '90s, the collection of African art and beadwork was handled by the curator of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture. Eventually a post of Curator of African Art was created and Carol Kaufmann was appointed. She is still working at the SANG in this position (Ascertained through correspondence with Hayden Proud).
[81] Ascertained during email correspondence with Martin (2008).
[82] Marilyn Martin described *The Butcher Boys* as a 'priority' for her, having seen them in Johannesburg prior to her beginning at SANG.

have became extremely well-known examples of South African art and it was a coup for SANG to have collected them at this time.

The SANG's photography department also grew significantly at this time. According to the 90/91 report:

> …this is reflected in the acquisition and exhibition of photographs as well as in the photographic commission which was launched in 1990 and which has resulted in six photographers working on projects. The financial support of the Foundation for the Creative Arts made this project largely possible (SANG Annual Report 1990/91: 3).

The predominance of photography is clear in today's art production and collection but it had, for the major part of the 20th century, been seen as the 'poor cousin' of high art modes such as oil and watercolour painting. The SANG's photographic acquisitions at this time include a large number of works by Neville Dubow, Rashid Lombard, Billy Monk (in 1990), Jürgen Schadeberg, (in 1991), Bob Gosani, and a few by Jeremy Wafer, Lionel Oostendorp, Peter Magubane, Gopal Naransamy, Ranjith Kally, and Victor Xashimba (SANG Annual Report 1990/91: 29). Many of the Schadeberg photographs were shown in *Drum – Photographs from Drum Magazine* in the Main Gallery in 1992, while the photographs by Billy Monk and David Wise were exhibited in shows such as *From the Bridge to the Catacombs Club* between January and February 1993.

Another photographic exhibition held at the SANG was *People's Parks* (Annexe, 8 November to 2 December 1990). The exhibition was curated by Steven Sack, then-Director of the Johannesburg Art Foundation (SANG Annual Report 1990/91:18; Sack 2008). It consisted of photographic documentation by 'prominent South African photographers… of the building of parks by people themselves in 1985 and '86, mainly in the Transvaal' and was opened by Mike van Graan (SANG Annual Report

1990/91: 18). It is clear from the people involved here - Sack and Van Graan - that the Gallery was showing support and providing a platform for 'liberal' or 'left-wing' projects early in the '90s. At a photographic exhibition at the SANG in 1993, David Goldblatt acknowledged and explained the difficulty of finding suitable subject-matter post-1990:

> When apartheid stopped as the official policy of the state and the machinery was thrown creakingly into reverse, photographers - and others - were suddenly deprived of the central focus of their work. Whereas before there was an enemy and no one was in any doubt about the nature and identity of the enemy, there was now a confusion of forces, previously the protagonists were clearly divisible into the bad guys and the good guys, now they were no longer unequivocally so (SANG archives).

Apartheid was never more potent than in black-and-white photography. The medium produced many of the starkest and most heartbreaking records of apartheid's deprivations, and in the case of Schadeberg's photographs, its celebrations as well. Without apartheid to focus on, photography is still a favoured, simple and effective medium - especially in the use of forgiving and atmospheric black-and-white portraiture and urban landscapes. It has thus been put to good use in post-apartheid explorations of identity and contested spaces.

Before the opening of the *1991 Cape Town Triennial*, and besides the *Peoples Parks* exhibition, the exhibitions put together by the SANG in the 1989 to 1990 appeared to be rather timid. Japanese woodblocks, toys and miniatures, calligraphy, and ceramic plates by school-goers were interesting but benign exhibitions, centred around involving children and the public in creative exercises.[83] The SANG's 1990

[83] The venues and dates for these exhibitions were as follows: *The Decorative Arts of the West 1900 – 1940* (Natale Labia: March - May 1990); *Ukiyo-E The Japanese Colour Woodblock Print* - an exhibition which would later travel to DAG (Michaelis: July –September 1990); *Art on Plate* which included 'ceramic plates made by young people of school-going age [from] schools, art centres and community arts projects' (Annexe: August – October 1990); *Treen*, another exhibition of miniatures

'Invited Artists Programme', featuring Kevin Brand and Sue Williamson, would possibly have been possibly the most subversive exhibition in their line-up, as both artists were working with socio-political themes.

Entertainment-wise, the gallery was used as a venue for fashion shoots by magazines *Cosmopolitan* and *Sarie* and clothing store Truworths. As JAG had done at the opening of *Jo'burg City – Whose City?* the SANG distanced itself from its historic link to classical music, hosting an outdoor concert by the African Jazz band Tananas (SANG Annual Report 1990/91: 23). It also continued its annual programme of lectures on art and architecture, which are quite interesting to track in light of way the subject matter they focused on changed between the years 1990 and 1994.

Up until 1994 lectures were mostly delivered by white speakers, on art historical topics with a fair amount of academic, temporal and geographical distance from South Africa as they were almost entirely on international art movements. For example, in 1990 lectures were given on Art Nouveau, Art Deco, ceramics, architecture, restoration, Georgian silver, Chinese porcelain, and the 'decorative art of the West'. The one and only lecture on anything remotely current was Nina Romm's 'Educating for Creative Change'. Romm did a number of workshops during this transitional phase which centred on ways to facilitate political and social change within art establishments (SANG Annual Report 1990/91: 21 -22). Lectures given at the gallery in 1992 remained predominantly on colonial subject matter, such as naturalist and botanical illustrators, (obviously sparked by *Art Meets Science*); the 1857-60 settler immigration to South Africa; 'the Queen's pictures'; the Old Wynberg Dutch reformed cemetery; antique clocks; surgeons at the time of the French Huguenots; and Lady Anne Barnard's journals.

(Natale Labia: December 1990 – January 1991); *To Put to Paper* - an exhibition of Western Cape calligraphers (Annexe: December 1990 – February 1991); *Graffiti on the Berlin Wall* - photographic documentation by Ralph Gründer (Annexe March – April '91) (SANG Annual Report 1990/91: 18).

It was only towards the end of 1992 that this concentration on aspects of colonial history lessened and made way for lectures on contemporary Cape Town, and current art movements and architecture. By 1994 lectures were addressing more material of local interest. The programme included lectures by Tim Maggs on the Lydenburg Heads and Russell Kaschula and Abner Nyamende on '*limbongi*: Changing Oral Traditions in the Eastern Cape'. In 1994 an exciting art history workshop was held with the participation of well-known South African and international art historians Evelyn Cohen, Linda Hutcheon, Lela Acheson-Wallace, Tamar Garb, Marion Arnold, Sander Gillman, and Elizabeth Rankin, which shows that the post-Boycott melting-pot of South African culture was of sufficient interest to attract international academics and experts.

In other aspects of its running, the gallery was undergoing more conscious evolutions. In the *Contemporary South African Art 1985 -1995* catalogue, Marilyn Martin outlines the shifts between the Acquisitions Policy of 1980 and the 1996 Acquisitions policy, the first draft of which appeared in 1991. All the Acquisition Policies in question are included in their original form as Addendums to her catalogue essay. She points out:

> In the last 15 years important shifts have taken place in the Acquisitions Policy, which stated that art from the European founder countries, Africa and South Africa be purchased... But already by 1980 it was becoming difficult to make significant additions to the modern Western or the older European collections (Martin 1997: 18).

The 1980 Acquisitions Policy that Martin refers to here states further:

> This means that Netherlandish, British, French and German art of all periods should be acquired as well as traditional art from Africa […] The Gallery does not possess any important contemporary works by the leading modern British, French, German or American artists. This means that art students, artists and interested members of the public are deprived

> of first-hand experience of the art of our own day. This is a profound educational disadvantage for our people […] Due to many factors, including the political, fewer important exhibitions come to this country from overseas…. If our art museums, and especially the National Gallery, cannot show good international art to their public, the Fine Arts will be doomed to an ever-increasing provincialism and poverty of achievement (Van Niekerk 1980 in Bedford 1997: 38).

This 1980 Acquisitions Policy is only a page in length and entirely devoid of any reference to the need to collect 'modern' or 'contemporary' South African art, which, especially in comparison to the document created only ten years later, is a startling absence.

The 1980 Policy bears distasteful witness to the grim state of oppression in the country: one cannot but infer that the 'art students, artists and interested members of the public' and the ostensibly disadvantaged 'our people' that it refers to, were white, since black children received no art education at schools and few universities trained black artists. These inferences create a curious ambiguity when one considers that this same museum had, the year before in 1979, approved the purchase of Stopforth's *The Interrogators*. As with the Stopforth work, the overarching preoccupation in South African art before the 1980s was with the formal qualities of art work, and this was a creditable basis on which to accept these works, enabling curators to dodge questions about political content (Dubow, Taylor, Bedford 1997: 30).

There are not that many differences between the SANG's 1991 Draft Policy Manual that was submitted to the Board of Trustees for consideration, and the final *Acquisitions Policy 1996* published in the SANG's *Contemporary South African Art 1985 -1995*. The Mission Statement, in particular, remains completely unchanged. It is as follows:

- The mission of the SANG is governed by its function as a museum concerned with the visual arts. Activities include collecting,

curatorship (documentation and conservation) and communication through exhibition, education, research and publication

- The goal of the SANG is to develop and maintain the highest standard of excellence in all its activities, and to be an art museum of the first rank.
- The SANG acknowledges the multi-cultural nature of South African society; we strive to accommodate its diversity while recognising and supporting the building of a national culture.
- We pursue a goal of non-discrimination with regard to race, class, creed, gender and sexual orientation. We are committed to equality of treatment and opportunity.

The 1991 Draft Policy Manual is slightly longer and almost endearing in its earnest talk of change, whereas the 1996 document is more streamlined and businesslike. Admissions concerning the inadequacy of the gallery's former policies and collections are absent, possible because those compiling the new Policy felt that these insufficiencies had been suitably 'redressed' by 1996.

With regard to Christopher Till's (2008) point about art museums not focusing on so-called 'ethnographic' material, the SANG's Draft Policy Manual (1991: 7) does in fact mention that 'a policy to buy traditional African sculpture had been formulated in the late 1960s, but somehow it was neglected in the succeeding decades, to the extent that the SANG [was then] far behind the other institutions' in this area of its collection - a backlog which the SANG vowed to 'seriously and actively redress'.[84]

The Draft Policy Manual (1991: 7) also admits that the exhibitions staged by the SANG, although 'excellent… reflected a distinct Eurocentric bias', with the result that:

> Africa, with the exception of the Standard Bank Collection of African Art in 1981 - was relegated to minor exhibitions. Through our exhibition programme we must participate in the rewriting of art history in South

[84] The first lectures on African art at UCT were delivered only in 1984 by Brenda Schmahmann, so it is therefore unsurprising that an interest in the works of black Africans would have flagged under the SANG's heavy leanings towards Europe.

> Africa, and curate exhibitions which will give a balanced and representative view of art activities in this country - past and present.
>
> An acquisition and exhibition policy of inclusivity rather than exclusivity should be pursued. This does not affect standards and ideas of excellence and quality, rather than their revitalisation.

These passages are replete with transitional bywords like 'redress', 'rewriting', 'Eurocentric', 'representative', and 'inclusivity'. However they also allude to an underlying anxiety that the unpredictable admission of the 'African' and the 'community' would 'affect standards'. In Chapter Five on the DAG I delve into the implications inherent this quasi-euphemistic talk of 'lowered standards'. For the most part, it stemmed from unhappiness - largely on the part of the white conservative minority - about a shift from colonial emphases, histories, and understandings of what was fit to be held in high regard.

The Draft Policy also moves towards the globally changing idea that a museum, rather than being 'a repository of objects', should 'be in tune with and reflect the changing environment in which it functions' (Martin 1997: 7; SANG Draft Policy Manual 1991: 7). It also expresses, as one of its objectives, a desire for the SANG to be a 'trilingual institution (English, Afrikaans, Xhosa) wherever possible'. This is evidenced by the SANG's newsletter *Bonani*, which features articles in all three languages from 1990 onwards. By 1996, however, the final published *Acquisitions Policy* omits this particular ideal, and there are less and less Trilingual articles in *Bonani* in the 1996 and 1997 copies.

The SANG reopened after its renovations with the 1991 *Cape Town Triennial*, which received mixed reviews and somewhat dismal press. The headlines of articles at the time reported drearily: 'Uneventful opening to an event in transition', and 'One and a half cheers for Triennial' (Karon 1991; Dubow 1991). Amusingly, the core complaint of these articles is the lack of 'malevolence' that the *Triennial* exhibited,

with Neville Dubow's subheading reading 'Much of the art chosen for this year's Triennial wouldn't cause so much as a cluck at a church bazaar'. It is almost as though the atmosphere of conflict and high tension that characterised the late '80s, and the daring art it evinced, left art lovers a little hungry for the scintillation of the fresh 'blood, sweat and tears' of the struggle years.

Karon's (1991) article emphasises the extent to which the event is 'in transition', citing Marilyn Martin's speech describing it thus. It also mentions the different genres of music accompanying the opening (from an 'ethno-percussion band' to an 'average D-I-Y-karaoke pub band'), the broad spectrum of people present, and the 'cacophony of styles' of their attire (Karon 1991). Dubow's review attributes mediocrity to most of the work on show, excluding: the work of winners William Kentridge, Willie Bester, and Sandra Kriel; insightful work by Gavin Younge and Kevin Brand; 'tough works' by Deborah Bell, Keith Dietrich, Diane Victor; and a 'maverick piece' by Neville Hoad (Dubow 1991).

The 1991 *Triennial* had particular ramifications for the SANG and for Marilyn Martin. Squabbles over money and the all-round bad press ended with Rembrandt withdrawing it sponsorship of the *Triennial* altogether. According to a 1992 article in the *Vrye Weekblad:*

> The decision to withdraw apparently followed a squabble over the role played by host institution, the National Gallery in Cape Town, over administrative issues. Gallery director Marilyn Martin had - first in an interview in *Vrye Weekblad* - indicated her dissatisfaction with the fact that she and her staff were expected to bear the burden of organising the competition, of liaising with artists, and of seeing that everything happened on schedule, but were given little or no reward for doing all this. ...
>
> At the same time a squabble arose over a special Triennial supplement which ran in *Die Burger* at the time of the current exhibition's opening last year. Martin presented Rembrandt with a bill running to tens of thousands for the supplement, a bill which the corporation refused to pay on the

> grounds that such expenditures were already provided for in the generous lump sum allocated to the event (Pryce 1992).

Martin (2008) called this 'the major personal and institutional hiccup' of her term as Director.

In my interview with her, Martin gave a slightly different explanation of the reasons for the conflict:

> There was a disagreement about the [design of the] cover… Kentridge was the winner of the main award in '91… and there was a marvellous video with people with red flags marching down the street, and I thought it would be - we all thought it would be - appropriate for the cover, and the Rembrandt Foundation didn't want that. So we had to go with the sponsor, but as I said earlier on, I think an institution like this is not here to be dictated to by anybody.
>
> …That one [proposal that was turned down] was, I think, because Rupert is such a very powerful person and was perhaps not accustomed [to being disagreed with]... but it wasn't a major opposition… In the end we gave in, because you know one also has to be realistic about what the situation is.

According to Martin, it was the political content of the image that the Rembrandt Foundation found unpalatable. The disciplinary action that was brought against Martin from the council, which Martin (2008) described as 'very much still an old council appointed by the previous government', was in relation to Rembrandt's withdrawal of sponsorship.

Martin (2008) explained that the council wanted her to be fired. Meanwhile, *Die Burger* newspaper ran 'a campaign' with sexist references to Martin's 'petticoat sticking out' and showing its colours to be green, yellow and black, implying that she was a supporter of the ANC (Martin 2008). What the comments made in *Die Burger* show is that the changes in the gallery sparked suspicion amongst conservative communities, who surmised that its increased support of contemporary South African

art, and black artists, and its encouragement of its patronage by a non-racial public, were the product of left-wing ideals.

Martin (2008) links this council resistance not only to the *Triennial* but to another exhibition called *Affinities* which followed the 1991 *Triennial*, and which 'combined all types of work to show the kind of affinities between them'. Martin (2008) explained that one of the focuses of the *Affinities* exhibition was on South African artists who had worked with or depicted beadwork, and described one of the works on display: 'a beautiful Preller painting of a Christhead' with a 'paspartou of perfect Ndebele beadwork before the frame'. According to Martin *Affinities* was one of the exhibitions which sparked the fear that the older paintings would be 'thrown out', sold, or neglected.'[85] This underlying fear in the 1990s had surfaced at the JAG, and, as I will show in the next chapter, played out quite dramatically at the DAG.

The decision to unite artworks of eclectic genres and from different eras, in order to display the 'affinities' between them, became a favourite solution for curators wishing to utilise and display parts of all their collections. The theme of *Affinities* was expressly focused on artworks that featured or incorporated Ndebele beadwork. According to an information sheet on the exhibition found in the SANG archives:

> Traditions of still life and interior painting flow together in a beaded Ndebele blanket, Stanley Pinker's painting of a black nude on such a blanket and Kim Siebert's intimate European Residue [1986: Fig.37]. Karel Nel's drawing, Accelerating Field, [1986: Fig.38] is inspired both

[85] Martin insists with slight irritation, just as the former Directors of JAG and DAG did, that there was never any question of the deaccessioning of any works for any reason, regardless of whether they were seen as relics of colonial domination. As she put it:

> …our first responsibility is to safeguard, maintain this collection because we are temporary custodians of the National Art Collection. There is no question of ever throwing things out... [SANG] had a horrible history for different reasons in the late '40s when Roworth was the honorary director and he sold off parts of the collection. So… when the new legislation came, I worked with Mike Cluver who was director for the South African Museum at the time. We worked on the legislation with government [and now] it's virtually impossible to deaccession something [unless it gets broken, deteriorates beyond repair, or it gets stolen], and it is *impossible* to sell it (Martin 2008).

> by beadwork and by his interest in contemporary scientific concepts and icons.
>
> The selection challenges the spectator to consider the boundaries between art and craft and reveals a whole range of visual expression.

In the early '90s the SANG actively took on the challenge of levelling the art/craft hierarchy - in Till's (2008) estimation, 'almost to the opposite extreme' of what the Gallery's policies had previously been. It is unsurprising that conservatives interpreted this as the death-knell of the existent 'canon' of South African art. SANG's acquisitions and exhibitions show a definitive swing towards art connected with African heritage, and some of the catalogue essays written to tally with exhibitions seem almost strange and desperate in their bid to 'reclaim Cape Town's place in Africa'.[86]

As Martin (1997:18) wrote in the *Contemporary South African Art 1985 – 1995* catalogue:

> We believe that we are doing more than passively holding a mirror to society, that we inform, construct, change and direct the narrative – aesthetically, culturally, historically, politically - through our acquisitions and exhibitions, that we invigorate art practice and that the national art museum is integral to refiguring and reinventing South African art and identity. This offers a partial explanation for the unease, disapproval and controversy with which the first manifestations of the new directions were greeted.

The 'disapproval' that Martin refers to here was aired at a public debate organised at the SANG at the time of the exhibition 'Recent Acquisitions 1990 -1991', which 'was characterised by a great deal of criticism by the traditional stakeholders of the SANG and some artists' (Martin 1997: 25). According to Martin, the criticism was directed

[86] For example, Martin (1992: 7) writes in the *Made in Wood* catalogue: 'At the back of the decision to concentrate on the Western Cape were two nagging preconceptions: that the area was not really part of Africa and that it had no history of wood carving,' and, 'The perception, or the deception arose - and persists - that the Western Cape does not belong to the continent of which it occupies the southernmost tip. But the Cape could not escape Africa.'

at the 'changes in acquisition policy and the acquisition of beadwork and politically powerful works', and was fuelled by the misconception, yet again, that the historical collections would be neglected'.[87] The *Affinities* exhibition (1991 – 1993) was one of the manifestations of the new direction that the SANG was taking that sparked 'unease' amongst conservative sectors. *Affinities* aimed to 'point to the similarities rather than the differences, to the confluences of approaches rather than the divergences, to the cross-pollination between the traditions and transitions of past and present, Western and African sources' (SANG *Affinities* information sheet: 1).

The exhibition compared South African artists like David Koloane and Jenny Stadler, who had both done work in an Abstract Expressionist manner, but showed that they had different objectives in using this style: 'Stadler… is deconstructing modernism, while at the same time bringing about a reconciliation between a modernist concern with materials and process and postmodern strategies of reference and texuality,' while 'Koloane says of his work [in general]: "I reflect a spectrum of concerns in the urban communities."' The exhibition and catalogue also encouraged comparisons between the coloured woodblocks of Cecil Skotnes and Lucky Sibaya, the multi-layered reliefs of Norman Catherine and Willie Bester; Billy Mandindi's township scene *Fire Games* (1985: Fig 7.1) depicting state-of-emergency living conditions, in contrast with the more idyllic township scenes like *Street Scene* (c.1939-47: Fig. 39) and *Basking* painted by Gerard Sekoto; and artists like Andre van Zyl's and Roger van Wyk's engagement with 'the landscape tradition epitomised by the work of J.H. Pierneef' (1932: Fig. 40) as opposed to Randy Hartzenberg's *After Driekopseiland*, (1989: Fig. 41) which 'refers to a site in the Northern Cape where

[87] Martin clarified this in my email conversations with her.

rock-artists engraved images of their time into a glacial pavement alongside the marks gouged by the process of glaciation' (SANG *Affinities* information sheet:1).

A 1993 article in *The Independent,* titled 'A real change of art', gives passionate fanfare to the SANG's efforts (Loppert 1993). The subheading declares, 'After years of apartheid, South Africa's galleries are adjusting their collections. Susan Loppert (1993) reports on the complicated attempt to create a new national culture':

> It's an exhilarating experience going to the National Gallery in Cape Town these days. Where once separate development and the emphasis on separateness were paramount, there's now an exhibition called "Affinities" deftly illustrating the relationship and cross-pollination between Western European and African art. Where once all the signs were in Afrikaans and English only, now Xhosa has been added.
>
> There's a Mission Statement from "the museum for the nation" which states that the gallery "acknowledges the multi-cultural nature of South African society; we strive to accommodate this diversity while recognising and supporting the building of a national culture". Marilyn Martin, although conscious of "the pitfalls and sensitivities in a sporting, sunshine and rugby country", feels privileged to be in South Africa and part of the transformation of South African society now that art that was classified as ethnology has moved into art galleries.

Other important exhibitions such as *Recent Acquisitions 1990-1991* would have clearly shown the progressive direction SANG was moving in.

Recent Acquisitions exhibitions were in fact held for two consecutive years and were put together to show the vast amount of South African contemporary art that was bought during this period. Martin's essay on the exhibition encapsulates the new focus and character of the museum:

> Traditionally an art museum is a place where unfading, immortal works are kept, a place of permanence which values proven rather than experimental works of art. The SANG is such an art museum, but it is also much more. Here tradition merges with or is juxtaposed to experimentation; young art, untested and untried art, and the art of protest

> and anger and concern about a place and a society confront the spectator alongside great art works from the past (Martin 1997: 18).[88]

Some of these then-recent acquisitions, including *Challenges facing the new South Africa* by Willie Bester (1990: Fig. 6); *The Ostrich Farm*[89] by Gladys Mgudlandlu (1962: Fig. 42); *Basking* by Gerard Sekoto; *European Residue* by Kim Siebert (1986: Fig. 37); *Dorslandboom* by Willem Strydom (1989: Fig. 43) and *The South African Landscape Tradition* by Roger van Wyk (1991: Fig. 1), formed part of the *Affinities* exhibition.[90]

It was the purchase of this huge range of art work, specifically for the African Heritage and Contemporary South African collections, that enabled SANG to stay abreast of the change and show work that was pertinent to, and engaged strongly with, the political transition in the country at the time. It is also an excellent example of the proverbial 'gap filling' which was so prevalent in galleries at this time.

January 1992 brought with it not only the destruction of Gail Neke's sculpture but also the announcement of free admission to the Gallery in the Jan/Feb *Bonani* newsletter, with the motivation 'that access to collections of publicly-funded museums is an important and integral component of the nation's academic, educational and cultural life'. The exhibitions that were to be enjoyed *gratis* included

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[88] This is repeated in Martin's 'Introduction' to the *Recent Acquisitions 1990 – 1991* exhibition.

[89] The correct title for this work is not exactly clear. The SANG lists the work as *The Ostrich Farm*, however Elza Miles (2002: 19 – 21) attributes that title to an etching in the possession of a private collector, and calls the work in the SANG's collection *Untitled (Ostriches).*

[90] Other acquisitions included a few 'foreign works' by Keith Barnes, Frederick Porter and Kathleen Bruce; and an etching by Frederick Landseer Maur Griggs to add to the gallery's collection of early 20th-century British art, which was seen as its strongest collection besides the South African. Other proudly-mentioned acquisitions were:

> The groups of paintings by Gassner, the prints by Rakgoathe dating to the 1970s, the portfolios created by Atkinson, Starcke and Webber in 1970, the works by Ainslie, Baldinelli, Langdown and Mgudlandlu fill gaps in the permanent collection. Others, which were remembered from previous encounters, were sought and found: Alexander's *The Butcher Boys*, Brand's *Nineteen boys running*, Kram's *Girl at her dressing table*, Hylton Nel's *Tortoise Man*, Stroebel's *Port of Plenty* and Williamson's *A Few South Africans.*

the *Friends' Choice 1975 -1991: An exhibition of works collected by FOSANG* held in the Main Gallery from 9 April - 2 May 1992. According to Martin (1997: 18) this exhibition stemmed from the SANG's increasingly:

> …open-ended and pluralistic approach which means, for example, that work originating in rural and other "peripheral" contexts began to be acquired alongside art which is influenced by the Western "mainstream". Increasingly diversified cultural production stimulated the evolution of a policy of inclusivity rather than exclusivity. This resulted in the termination, in 1991, of the Friend's Choice Collection, which was initiated in 1975 with a view to acquiring work by young, lesser-known or unknown artists. Many works were taken into the SANG Permanent Collection, a major show was held in 1992, and those created after 1985 can be seen on this exhibition...

The exhibition was accompanied by an insightful and thorough catalogue, which was markedly different to the 'catalogue essays' - in fact, little more than 'information sheets' - for the SANG exhibitions I have mentioned thus far.

In his catalogue chapter 'Directions and Trends' Dean Viljoen (1992: 39) writes that,

> …with the advent of the nineties, there was evidence of a near oversupply of narrative and figurative work. Kentridge… commented … in 1990: "I think that there has been a tendency in South Africa of recent to pay particular attention to certain forms of image-making over others and that there has been a predilection for work that is allegorical… there is a sort of tyranny of allegories which exist at the moment or which has existed recently in South Africa which certainly needs to be reconsidered." Whether the figurative and narrative quality of so many linocut prints available today is also the target of Kentridge's criticism is not clear.

Viljoen's comment could point to the mass of prints, particularly linocuts that were being produced during this era. Linocuts were the medium of choice for many black artists in Western Cape - as well as for art students and community arts projects, because the tools and presses needed were simple, but resulted in bold, eye-catching

prints (Viljoen 1992: 39). Lino was also a convenient means for artists with limited space or time as it was easily transportable (Viljoen 1992: 39).

Another noteworthy exhibition in 1992 was *Made in Wood: work from the Western Cape*. The exhibition seemed to emulate the practice of other galleries in the country who had staged large and well-received exhibitions of South African wood carving, such as JAG's *Neglected Tradition* and *Images of Wood*. However, the Western Cape did not actually have much of a tradition of woodcarving, so the SANG invited a number of artists to create work for the exhibition. The accompanying catalogue essay written by Marilyn Martin (1992: 7) is a rather strange one, picking up on rhetoric at the time that Cape Town was not seen as a 'part of Africa'. Martin seems to be trying to correct this perception but her constant referral to Cape Town's 'lack of African-ness' seems problematic as it is presented as fact rather than perception.[91]

From 1992 onwards, the SANG concentrated more and more on showing its 'African Heritage Collection' after the Main Gallery's completed restorations saw the reopening of all of its rooms. The number of exhibitions mounted went up considerably to twenty-three in 1992/93, with the continuing trend of showing more African and South African art, and attendance figures went up in accordance with the reopening and local and international interest in the country's art.[92] The SANG Annual Report (1992/93: 3) suggests that these 'visitors numbers reflect the interest in our activities and exhibitions', and signify:

> The enthusiasm for South African art in general and the programmes of the SA National Gallery in particular is revealed in articles published

[91] See footnote 86.
[92] The number of visitors rose from 36 049 at the Main Gallery in the 1991/92 period, to 61 337 in 1992/93 and reached a peak for my period of review in 1993/94 with 72 493, dropping slightly again to 68 626 in 1994/95 (SANG Annual Report 1992/93 & 1994/95: 3).

> nationally and internationally and the comments made (many of them in the visitors' book) by museologists, lay persons and people professionally involved in the visual arts.

Exhibitions at the SANG's Main Gallery in 1992 focused on displaying the gallery's contemporary collections. *Bequests and Presentation 1992* (also held in 1993), *Friends' Choice* and *Artists' Choice*, and *Images and Contexts* in 1993 continued the trend of curating eclectic exhibitions, with a 'diverse selection of South African and Western European works from the Permanent Collection' thematically arranged by Hayden Proud (SANG Annual Report 1992/93: 21). Also shown at the Main Gallery were major exhibitions that were examples of SANG's efforts to 'redress' their past omissions and reflect the lives of different communities, including *Vumani 'All our Children'*; *Where we Live: Panels by the People of Cape Town;* which I will discuss shortly, as well as an exhibition of *Sephardi Art.*[93]

The SANG also held exhibitions of Neville Dubow's photographic work in *Sequences, Series, Sites 1971 – 1992* and *Gabriël (*Gawie*) Fagan* (1992), as well as the *Artist's Choice* exhibitions of work by *Andries Botha* (May 1992) and *Angela Ferreira* (July 1992), which coincided with these artists' participation in the Invited Artists Programme. These were all South African artists who were getting considerable support and exposure through having solo exhibitions in the SANG. In the case of Neville Dubow it must have seemed fitting to have had his exhibition shown at the SANG, given his involvement with the museum through the years.

[93] Exhibitions held in 1992 at the Natale Labia Gallery included *German Romanticism*; *The Hand is the Tool of the Soul: Works by Peter Clarke*; *Japanese Prints;* and *Looking at Portraits*. Travelling exhibitions that made their way to SANG included MOMA's *Art from South Africa* (Main Gallery June - August 1992; the Standard Bank's *Art Meets Science: Flowers as Images* - an acclaimed exhibition curated by Marion Arnold that aimed to question and dissolve the boundaries between art and botanical illustrations (October - November 1992). The Standard Bank's collection of *Textiles from Africa* was shown in January 1993 and *The Bloomsbury Artists at Charleston: Reader's Digest Collection* travelled from JAG to be shown at SANG between March and May '93. These Standard Bank exhibitions made up a significant part of public museum's annual exhibitions, and thus are another example of the significant impact of corporate sponsorships in the arts.

The SANG showed an inclination towards supporting Capetonian artists and initiatives with their 1993 exhibition *Where we Live: Panels by the People of Cape Town* (Fig. 44.1-3):

> …the culmination of a project designed to encourage community involvement and participation in the activities of the SA National Gallery as well as to generate and express ideas and feelings about living in Cape Town. Participants, including crafters' guilds, a literacy group, hospital patients, self-help co-operatives and women's groups created a number of fabric panels on the theme of *Cape Town, where we live.* The making of panels involved techniques such as beading, felting, embroidery, appliqué, quilting, weaving, sewing, crocheting, pasting, printing and knitting (SANG Annual Report 1992/93).

For this programme and exhibition, the SANG organisers 'sourced interested participants at community centres and organizations, crafters, guilders, hospitals, and Pollsmoor Prison' (SANG Annual Report 1992/93).

Considerable emphasis was placed on involving and highlighting the agency of *people* in creative endeavours. This was particularly applicable to African and South African groups who had been neglected by the SANG in the past. *Made to Move: An exhibition of puppets, masks, dancing maces and toys* was held in the Annexe Gallery and exhibited 'cultural products which, in the content of their traditional use, depended on people to animate them':

> The exhibition included puppets made by the Bambara people from Mali, masks from Central and West Africa and articulated toys and dancing maces from Southern Africa. The exhibition was intended as a contribution towards affirming South Africa's position as an African nation and the SA National Gallery's commitment to fostering an understanding of our diverse, but shared cultural heritage (SANG Annual Report 1992/93).

Another exhibition, *Picturing Our World: Contemporary Images of the Western Cape,* also placed emphasis on SANG's engagement with the community and shared cultural heritage.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, 'community' or 'communities' are somewhat ubiquitous terms for groups of people who may or may not see themselves as united on common ground, thus SANG defined their use of the term in the *Picturing Our World* catalogue:

> As far as the term 'community' is concerned, our perception of community flows from a broad policy of calling into question hierarchies and boundaries which in many cases are part of a system of marginalisation and control, and which are no longer applicable to the South African experience. So-called 'community art' is not perceived as a different category, separate and separated from other categories of art. This is the approach which informed previous exhibitions held at the SANG, such as *Where we live – Panels by the people of Cape Town* and *Made in Wood – Work from the Western Cape,* and which guided the curators of *Picturing our world – Contemporary Images of the Western Cape* (Martin 1993 [*Picturing Our World*] : 5).

The work on this exhibition was drawn from the Permanent and Education collections of SANG, the Community Arts Project, the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa (University of Western Cape), and from artists working in the Western Cape. This greater consciousness of the need to confer with marginalised communities or organisations in shown by the 1992/93 Annual Report, which lists all of the organisations and institutions SANG's education division consulted with - something previous Annual Reports had not done.[94]

[94] These included those mentioned in connection with the above exhibition, as well as Sakhile; the Children's Art Project, Athlone; the Ulwazi Centre in Langa; FOSACO; the Art Educators Forum; the Montebello Centre; the Dal Josafat Arts Foundation; the Thupelo Art Project; the South African Association of Art Historians (SAAAH); Learn to Live; the Manenberg People's Centre, with whom SANG co-organised art classes; and UCT's Students' Health & Welfare Centres Organisation (SHAWCO) (SANG Annual Report 1992/93: 31).

In Chapter Two I quoted SANG's former curator Emma Bedford's suggestion that the onus is on museums to represent society in the most responsible way possible, considering the power they have to shape narratives of history and culture. That responsibility is particularly important with reference to two major exhibitions at the SANG: *Ezakwantu,* an exhibition of *Beadwork from the Eastern Cape* (1993) and *IGugu LamaNdebele: Pride of the Ndebele* (1994), an exhibition of Ndebele mural paintings.

It was only in August 1990 that the SANG began to arrange an 'African Art Heritage' collection which would 'acknowledge and celebrate the material culture of our continent, and particularly that of southern Africa'. This began a process whereby:

> …the national art museum was to become actively involved in preservation and presentation of a multiplicity of cultural manifestations, and that it would be instrumental in altering the status of objects which initially had been regarded by the West as curiosities, and later as ethnographic specimens... (Martin 1993: 6).

Ezakwantu was the first exhibition that displayed the artwork that had been collected for the 'African Art Heritage' collection. It was opened on the 30th of October 1993, and was extended nearly a year over its original scheduled closure date in 1994, to the 29th of March 1995.

Ezakwantu means 'Things from the House of the People' and focused specifically on beadwork (Leibhammer 1995: 81). In the foreword of the catalogue Marilyn Martin (1993: 7) explains the position taken by the SANG, with regards to mounting the exhibition:

> …[*Ezakwantu: Beadwork from the Eastern Cape*]... welcomes beadwork, which fits uncomfortably into existing definitions of art and hierarchies appropriate to an art museum, into the SANG... In order to achieve this, traditional boundaries and terminologies had to be abandoned, assumptions had to be deconstructed and the very nature of representation

> had to be questioned. The whole process of consulting with individuals who are an integral part of the culture, as well as the act of welcoming - rather than resisting - the overlap with discourses and disciplines other than our own, have contributed enormously to the revitalisation of the SANG.

According to the curator Emma Bedford (1993: 7) the display of the work presented a problem as '[beadwork] is made to be worn, not placed on walls and in cabinets'. The challenge was to exhibit the work to its best advantage in an exhibition space, but in a way that avoided the usual associations with ethnographic display, like 'simulated bodies'[95] such as mannequins, or in the cabinets Bedford mentions. One wonders if all these good intentions were not undone when, logged in the SANG Annual Report (1992/93: 21) is the following dubious suggestion: 'Ezakw [sic]: a proposal has been formulated to build a Southern Nguni dwelling at the Gallery, and the matter is being carefully investigated with relevant authorities.' A construction of this sort automatically invokes the idea of museum dioramas - scenes with life size figures which were created in order to give visitors an idea of what it must have looked like/been like to live in certain eras or settings, for example, 'the stone age', 'the 1820s', or 'a Xhosa village'. Such scenes were, by necessity, both essentialised and generalised, and came to be viewed as contentious in their framing of race or culture depicted in a timeless, unshifting ideal.

I have already introduced some of the discourses around reconstructed displays in the previous chapter on the JAG, with respect to the construction of Steven Cohen's studio in the JAG's Print Gallery, and will discuss this again in Chapter Five on the DAG. This issue of the decontextualisation of black South African art was a problem that curators repeatedly seemed tempted to solve by creating simulacrous contextual environments within the gallery. In the *Ezakwantu* catalogue Bedford's

[95] This phrase borrowed from (Leibhammer 1995: 81).

(1993: 9) explanation of the exhibition tallies entirely with trends in 'new museology':

> More than merely an exhibition, *Ezakwantu* is a project, located within an art museum which is in the process of redefining itself both as an active centre of engagement with wider audiences and as an investigator of new ideas, rather than a passive repository of objects. Instead of being a temple of art, where the public gathers to worship the objects on display, the South African National Gallery is becoming more of a forum, a place for confrontation, experimentation and debate. Exhibitions at the SANG increasingly have been the product of consultation with the broader public, many of whom have participated in shaping both the process and the final outcome of exhibitions.

Bedford (1993: 9) also emphasises that:

> The parameters of collecting policies are shifting and in the process beadwork is being redefined… The primary objective of this exhibition is to relocate beadwork from the context of ethnography to that of art, in order to explore its aesthetic significance and to do so in a way that does not entirely decontextualise it.

According to Nessa Leibhammer's (1995: 81-82) review, the glass cabinets that were used to display much of the work (Fig. 45.1), were uncomfortably reminiscent of typical ethnographical displays, and the almost over-conscientious register of the exhibition worked, in some cases, against it rather than for it.

For example, the attempt to keep exhibition walkabouts multilingual required a translator, who was only present for the first few weeks. His consequent absence:

> …resonated at a number of levels. One of these concerned the two Xhosa-speaking bead-artists [Fig. 45.3]. This essentially sound attempt at showing the public how this artwork is made and to introduce the artist as an individual (to counter the largely anonymous nature of beadwork in collections) was rendered problematic. When, as at the time of my visit, no translator was present and the audience consisted of mostly English or Afrikaans speakers, the bead artist, Nosayisi Nzilana, remained silent. Unable to set up any kind of dialogue, the audience was left with the uncomfortable sense that she had been cast in the role of the objectified "Other." This feeling of objectification was intensified by the knowledge

> that exhibitions of art objects made in Eurocentric aesthetic tradition, parallel demonstrations are absent. Where are the painters, watercolourists, and printmakers in other exhibits at the South African National Gallery? (Leibhammer 1995: 81-82).

In this last point Leibhammer is only half-justified, as the Invited Artist Programme at SANG had entailed many white South African artists displaying their creative process to visitors, although they were situated at the Annexe rather than the Main Gallery, which was possibly the crucial difference.

Another reviewer (Garner [1994] in Dubin 2006: 250) saw *Ezakwantu*, as a 'promising step forward in the SANG's ongoing attempts to move beyond this moribund jail-house of virtual-culture…' and as 'proof that South African Cultural Institutions are capable of moving with the times and away from the position which presented black people as exotic specimens and curio-mannequins'. Leibhammer was less convinced by the exhibition, however.

Her conclusion was that:

> … the curators of "Ezakwantu" repressed their own voices in an attempt to allow those from the originating culture, those of the creators, of the wearers, of the objects, to speak. The difficulty is to decide which voice, or voices, are the most compelling – the ones that attempt to recreate "authenticity" as a social, political, and cultural obligation; those that claim priority as the makers and users, or the one that has as its only restraint the aesthetic and conceptual potential of the curator. "Ezakwantu" clearly chose the first two options.
>
> "Ezakwantu" was weighed down by the obligation not only to locate the objects in "authentic" contexts but also to correct and rewrite the history of the objects, their makers, their users, and their scholars, viewers, and consumers. In a final assessment, while sensitive to the myriad voices that wished to speak, to the complexities to be presented, and to the over-whelming need to rectify so much past inequality, the exhibition, although rich in information, lacked visual and conceptual coherence (Leibhammer 1995: 82).

The main thrust of Leibhammer's review is that the SANG staff and curators tried too hard to 'redress' previous exclusionary practices at the gallery. However, one needs to

bear in mind that these kinds of exhibitions were without precedent, and the curators had to be fairly experimental in trying to find the right level at which to pitch their revisions.

IGugu LamaNdebele Pride of the Ndebele (December 1994 to April 1995) was the SANG's next offering from their 'African Art Heritage' collection (Fig. 46.1). Six Ndebele muralists, including Esther Mahlangu (Fig. 46.2) and Isa Kabini (1994: Fig. 46.3), came to participate in the exhibition as the SANG's Invited Artists. According to the SANG Annual Report (1994/95: 20) they were treated with meticulous care, as if to troubleshoot any accusations of their exploitation:

> Ndebele muralists and sculptors worked with Gallery staff and guest Curator, Peter Rich on exhibition display. [The] women were accommodated, entertained and transported during their stay as well as all other personal requests were addressed. Ms Kaufmann secured a visit to Parliament where the women were introduced to President Mandela.

It is these muralists who painted the Ndebele designs on the niches of the museum (Fig.43.4-5) at the end of 1994. According to Martin the women were invited to work on an exhibition of Ndebele art and architecture:

> Peter Rich, who was a colleague of mine at the Wits architecture department, designed the architecture and built it, and the women came and they painted, and they worked so fast we didn't know what to do with them. They were going to be here at the opening, so they painted panels, and then the niches outside had been a problem, because we'd had little sculptures in them… and I suddenly thought "why don't we get Isa Kabini to paint them?"

The inclusion of these Ndebele paintings on the SANG's walls was a step towards engaging with, and subverting, the intimidating colonial architecture of the gallery. The DAG went a large step further with this some years later in 2000, by wrapping

the entire Durban City Hall in a panel of red cloth to highlight the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Sharon Macdonald (1996: 14) suggests in the introduction to *Theorizing Museums*, that museums themselves can present only:

> …a theory: a suggested way of seeing the world. And, like any theory, it may offer insight and illumination. At the same time it concerns certain assumptions, speaks to some matters and ignores others, and is intimately bound up with - and capable of affecting - broader social and cultural relations. For this reason, museums and exhibitions, like social and cultural theorizing, deserve careful and critical scrutiny.

Ezakwantu and *IGugu LamaNdebele* displayed work that was particularly loaded because of the historical context the exhibitions were curated in, and because of the relatively recent international revisions of ethnography as art. Debates about arts and crafts were still in their infancy, or perhaps their adolescence - and were thus unsatisfactorily concluded - and the political dynamic in South Africa meant revisionist attitudes were slow to adjust. It can therefore be argued that these exhibitions could not hope to find conclusive answers to the question of representing customary African art in a museum environment, but that their value lay rather in their 'statement of position' (Macdonald 1996:14).

Exhibitions such *Ezakwantu* and *IGugu LamaNdebele* showed SANG's sincere efforts to be more representative of the South African population. The exhibitions were displayed for long periods and beadworkers Thembeka Lucy Ntamo and Nosayisi Virginia Nzilana (Fig. 45.3) featuring as the SANG's Invited Artists.[96] If the

[96] Interestingly, the Invited Artists were referred to as Lucy Ntamo and and Virginia Nsilana in the SANG Annual Report that records their time at the gallery, whereas the *Bonani* newsletter refers to the women by their full names, and Nessa Leibhammer (1995: 82) by their Xhosa names rather than their English names. Referring to black artists by their full names, (For example Kagiso Pat Mautloa, rather than Pat Mautloa, and Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi, rather than Helen Sebidi) became more common in the late '80s, as a form of respect, as - historically - English names had sometimes been randomly given to black people by white administrators who found their African names

Annual Reports are to be believed, the SANG was growing substantially in energy and popularity in the mid-'90s, but continued to suffer from serious financial and space problems. Instead of expanding, it was freezing posts because of lack of funds, resulting in a shortage of staff, and it was a little harder to procure work of quality. Only eighteen items were acquired in the 1992/93 period - all, significantly, by 'unnamed' South African (Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa, Mpondo, Mfengu, Thembu) 'traditional' artists - but for one work by Diana Kenton. Acquisitions from this time on showed a general bias towards work by black artists, showing that the SANG, like the JAG, was paying particular attention to building its 'African Art Heritage' collection.[97]

The significant political and governmental changes in 1994 had ramifications, both good and bad, for the SANG. Firstly, after already going through years of considerable financial struggles, the SANG's subsidy fell away entirely (Martin 2008). After the inauguration of President Nelson Mandela and the transition to ANC government, the SANG, which had been under the jurisdiction of the Department of National Education, was transferred to the care of the newly formed Department of Arts Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), under the Ministry of Dr Ben Ngubane. As Martin (2008) related: 'It was a new department, but some of the people stayed, so it was not such a traumatic transition, because there was some continuity'. The DACST's efforts to revise arts policy are mentioned briefly in the SANG's Annual Report (1994/95: 2), in which the SANG lauds the DACST's 'commitment to art and culture and [its] efforts through ACTAG to create policies are much appreciated and admired'.

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unpronounceable. During the late '80s and the '90s era of greater 'political correctness', this formed part of the general sensitivity to, and a more responsible use of written and spoken language.

[97] Gifts and bequests to the gallery included work by Wolf Kibel, Pablo Picasso, Azaria Mbatha, Gladys Mgudlandlu and Gillian Solomon.

This Annual Report (1994/95: 2-3) presents the SANG as a museum 'rapidly becoming known - nationally and internationally - as an important factor in the promotion and development of South African art and culture in all its manifestations'. Despite the slight drop in attendance, the gallery was enjoying a good response from the public and this Annual Report (1994/95: 3) notes again that 'the enthusiasm for South African art in general and the programmes of the SANG in particular' is 'revealed in articles published nationally and abroad' and that 'foreign visitors are astounded by the richness and diversity of the exhibitions, while South Africans feel increasingly at home in their national art museum'. While this excerpt is glossy with PR, it shows the balance that SANG was attempting to strike in 1994 between attracting international visitors, and becoming a more representative and inviting institution for South Africans.[98]

Of particular historical interest is the loan, in 1994, of a number of art works to 'the State President's Office and selected venues in Tuynhuys' (SANG Annual Report 1994/95: 13). Also loaned, were 'paintings from the Permanent Collection of South African art to decorate the offices of Deputy State President De Klerk' and '54 paintings from the Permanent Collection to Anglo-American Farms for the interior decoration of the Vergelegen manor house… in anticipation of the visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II' (SANG Annual Report 1994/95: 13). These loans show

[98] There was particular emphasis on African and South African works, tempered with samples of the British Collection. The Main Gallery showed *Muslim art from the Western Cape,* and *Asafo! Fante flags from Ghana 1850 – 1957* (both in April/May '94). *South Africa in Black and White – 45 Years On* was an exhibition originally held in September 1993 at the British Council with its full content of 112 prints. It was later held at SANG on the 16 April 1994 in a shorter version of 85 prints (*South Africa in Black and White* leaflet 1993-94). *Ladies and women – a British view* ran through April 1993. Exhibitions in 1994 included The *Durant Sihlali: Mural Retrospective* (May - June 1994); *Images of the Hunt* from the Sir Abe Bailey Collection of British Sporting Pictures (April 1994). The *1993 Standard Bank Young Artist Award* winner Pippa Skotnes' work was shown from June to August 1994, as was a retrospective of *Patricia Peirce-Atkinson (1942 – 1994). Rencontres Africaines: African Encounters, Contemporary Art from Africa* was shown in September/October '94 and *Intaglio Marks* from August '94 to January '95.

that the SANG had, by this time, amassed enough works 'relevant' to the 'new South Africa' that they could grace the walls of the Presidential offices.

The SANG focussed its attention and energy on its contemporary South African art collection and its African art collection, as well as being open to representing and collaborating with different communities and sectors of the public. There was an effort to deliberately frame the gallery in terms of the ideals of the new South Africa, including the inclusivity of different socio-linguistic groups and different sex, gender, and belief systems, as well as an emphasis on transparency in their decision-making processes. Artworks that were purchased to articulate the SANG's new identity included those by Cape Town-based artists whose work spoke potently during the 1990 to 1994 period: Willie Bester, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Jane Alexander, Randolph Hartzenberg and Sue Williamson.

After his *Challenges facing the New South Africa* (1990: Fig.6), Bester continued to make mixed media paintings that incorporated metal scraps and detritus from garbage heaps in paintings such as *Sukungena e Bisho (Keep Out of Bisho)* (1992: Fig.47.1), *Transition* (1993), *Homage to Chris Hani (Hamba Kahle*) (1993: Fig. 47.2) and *X Roads* (1994: Fig.47.3.) which dealt with 'incidents of violence which occurred in the dying days of National Party rule' (Martin 1996: 10). He also began to highlight difficulties and uncertainties in post-apartheid society by developing militant-looking metal sculptures made largely of scrap materials. For example, *The Soldier* (1990: Fig.47.4), incorporates themes surrounding apartheid and the events of its aftermath.

Jane Alexander, like Willie Bester, was also working with the after-effects of apartheid, but more so with the inexpressible psychological aspects of trauma and the anxieties surrounding the transition of power. In Chapter Three I mentioned

Alexander's *Integration Programme* (1992: Fig.17) as well as her iconic sculpture *The Butcher Boys*, (1989: Fig. 34) which was SANG Director Marilyn Martin's prize purchase at the start of her term at the gallery and a star piece in their *Recent Acquisitions* show of 1990 - 91. *The Butcher Boys* are three ashen creatures with the bodies of men, but they appear alien-looking, mutant, or mutilated, with their liquid black eyes, absent mouths, animal horns, and their genitals contained in steel. They are both monsters and victims, and illicit equal measures of horror and empathy.

Alexander's *Self Defence and Stability Unit* (1994: Fig.48.1) and *Serviceman* (1994: Fig. 48.2) seem to be a continuation of the masculine trauma and anxiety evoked in the *Butcher Boys.* The face coverings of the men relate to various guises donned by men in militant causes in South Africa, for example the 'generic balaclava of the township revolutionary in the 1980s' worn by the black figure in *Self Defence and Stability Unit* (Powell 1995: 17). Similarly the white hood worn by the adjacent white figure and the *Serviceman* 'derives in general from a mask sometimes used by members of the Security Forces... [and] …from a particular image of a demolition by thus disguised municipal workers of a squatter camp in Grabouw' (Powell 1995: 17-18). The agonising 'culpability of the footsoldier' is suggested by the body language of these figures - in their covered, and thus dehumanised, faces, and their wide terrified eyes - rather than in the obvious mutation and mutilation of the earlier *Butcher Boys* (Powell 1995: 31). In all three works, however, the figures, 'both masked and exposed [are] aggressors and victims at the same time' (Powell 1995: 18).

Marilyn Martin quotes Ivor Powell writing about Alexander's work in the *Weekly Mail* of the 17th to the 23rd October 1986:

> It doesn't respond in any adequate way to the overdeterminations of history, it doesn't register or interpret any political realities. It doesn't work in any identifiable way towards the creation of a new society. What

> it does do is reflect and explore a sense of being. It presents, through the sustaining metaphor of the human figure and its transmutation, a relation of the individual to the society – construed as a whole, not in terms of its internal dynamics – that surrounds him or her.

Alexander was one of the few artists in the early '90s who captured the sense of uncertainty and the strangeness of the era of South Africa's 'integration'. This is clear in subtle and enigmatic works such as *Pastoral Scene* (1995: Fig.48.4), *Integration Programme: Man with TV* (1995: Fig.48.5), *Stripped (Oh Yes) Girl* (1995: Fig.48.6) and *Hit (poor Walter)* (1995: Fig.48.7). All are works from a larger body which resulted from Alexander's winning the *Standard Bank Young Artist Award* in 1995, and which co-won the *Vita Art Award* in 1996.

Although these works were made in 1995 and are thus outside my study period, I believe they are worthy of being looked at as summations of the anxieties prevalent in the preceding 1990 to 1994 period of transformation. In the 1995 catalogue that accompanied Alexander's Standard Bank Young Artist Award, Ivor Powell (1995: 2) states:

> Alexander's current works are particularly pertinent to our society as it tries to initiate a dialogue between entrenched beliefs and the many voices of democratic debate. Her images are broadly located within a framework of socio-political commentary but they are neither authoritarian nor didactic. Alexander is not a prescriptive artist with an ego-based message or a sense of moral imperative. She aims to jolt visual sensibilities and, having gained viewer attention, her forms require us to re-think our understanding of the human condition. Avoiding the traps of predictable narrative and manipulated emotionalism, Alexander's sculptures and photomontages examine situations of disempowerment, suffering and acceptance.

Powell gives an insightful analysis of Alexander's work in this catalogue essay, and draws comparisons between the 1995 works and earlier works, for instance between

Integration Programme (1992: Fig.17), *Integration Programme: man with wrapped feet* (1994: Fig.48.3) and *Integration Programme: Man with TV* (1995: Fig.48.5).

According to Powell (1995: 26) the title 'Integration Series' derives from the:

> …so-called "Reintegration Programme" that New York State authorities engaged in during the early 1980s, clearing psychiatric hospitals of all but the most immediately dangerous patients… The nett result was that thousands of people, many homeless, others drugged, catatonic, paranoid, whatever, were left wandering about in a hostile urban wilderness, rootless, rudderless, inexorably disintegrating.

Powell thus outlines the link that Alexander makes between the homeless and unstable former-patients and the young rural man in *Integration Programme: Man with TV* (1995: Fig.48.5). In his neat but outmoded suit he communicates a similar sense of being lost and misfitted in an urban landscape with little guidance but for the TV screen. The screen in front of him in fact shows a looped tape of one of the 'New York misfits trying to get himself right for integration in the outside world (Powell 1995: 28). A white man, dressed somewhat like the rural black youth in a dark suit, is standing in front of a mirrored column on the deserted street in the pre-dawn' continually adjusting his tie (Powell 1995: 28). The sense of pathos and fruitlessness is strongly palpable in this and Alexander's other works, and the sense of 'dislocation' is a constant theme that she shows through a skilful and sensitive understanding and rendering of the body language and composition of her figures.

Powell also explicates the link between the figure of the black domestic worker in *Pastoral Scene* (1995: Fig. 48.4) and the versions of this figure in two works both titled *Beauty in a landscape: born Aliwal North 19-, died Boksburg 1992*, one mixed media (1993: Fig. 48.8) and one photomontage (1995: Fig.48.9). The figure of 'Beauty' is modelled on a woman known to Alexander, but it is also a reference to the South African stereotype of the domestic worker (Powell 1995: 7). In both these

works Alexander uses the art historical conventions of the association of women, beauty, and the landscape, but irrevocably rescinds the idealisation inherent in this convention. As Powell (1995: 11) suggests: 'the guiding irony of the title, [evokes] a rural idyll inside what is clearly an urban context. The pastoral is precisely what has been forever lost.'

Yet Alexander's work is simultaneously subtle and ambivalent enough not to lose the tone of redemptive promise - perhaps more realistic than idealistic - that is inherent in the simple attitude of figures themselves. Alexander's sculptures impart a sense of human presence to the viewer that is disconcertingly at odds with the fact that they are not flesh-and-blood, and despite the lostness and dislocation of these figures there is a hint of strength, life and hope in the fact that they continue to be 'embodied' and existent.

Artist Zwelethu Mthethwa is another artist who engages empathetically with the human subject. The major inspirations of Mthethwa's art have been the folk stories his mother told him, as well as social gatherings with friends (Mthethwa 2008). His work is centred in the shared spaces of the working and middle classes, and he is fascinated with rural and urban movements (Mthethwa 2008). Colour is a vitally important aspect of both Mthethwa's paintings and his photographs. He renders the skin of the people in his paintings in non-realistic colours such as blue and purple - a subtle elision of the attribution of identity based on actual skin colour. A pastel work titled *The People's Messenger* (1991: Fig. 49.1) is in the collection of the SANG. Jacqueline Nolte (1997: 101) suggests that, in this painting:

> …Mthethwa places his concerns with prophecy in a more overt political framework... Produced on the eve of the unbanning of political opposition, the work projects a sense of persons waiting to be delivered out of a saturated red "foetal" cave into an element yet defined by fears of bewitching and persecution.

Nolte's reading is valid, and yet very few of Mthethwa's '80s or '90s works yield an overt political interpretation. In the transitional period Mthethwa had just returned from America, but remembers that 'In the images that were produced and the spirit of the people there was uncertainty' (Mthethwa 2008). The suspense and sense of loss is palpable in Mthethwa's *The Spirit of the Father* (1994: Fig: 49.2).

The use of colour in his photography is a way of restoring and maintaining the dignity and personality of his subjects (Dhlomo 1999: 75). Mthethwa feels that black and white photography lends to depictions of people and places an 'acute political angle of desertion and emptiness' (Dhlomo 1999: 75). As he puts it:

> I cannot start to imagine how drab the photographs I am currently taking would look in black and white; and how desolate their state would be to the viewer's eye. I think these photographs preserve and show a humanness of the occupants in their private spaces. They restore their pride and affirm their ownership (Mthethwa in Dhlomo 1999: 75).

Mthethwa still works with pastels and photography, but his major breakthrough in the national and international art scenes was with his photographic depictions of mainly black subjects in their township homes. His decision to depict his subjects in a deliberately affirming manner was largely at odds with depictions of black township dwellers up to that time, who often seemed to be portrayed as victims - whether of apartheid, AIDS, or poverty. Mthethwa did not shy away from these influences on his subjects' lives but refused to let them dominate.

This particular way of seeing may have had something to do with the formative experiences in Mthethwa's artistic career. Mthethwa came from a relatively well-off family in Umlazi, and started out on his art career in the early '80s after having dropped out of medical school. Rorke's Drift alumni Charles Nkosi and Joe Ndlovu

encouraged Mthethwa to attend UCT's Michaelis School of Art, as they felt that it was the best school at the time (Dhlomo 1999: 69; Mthethwa 2008). Mthethwa's experience was far from seamless: he 'had to obtain ministerial consent to study at a white university. This consent could be given or refused without any explanation' and as a black student he could not stay on campus because of the Group Areas Act (Dhlomo 1999: 69).

Mthethwa went through two months waiting for this consent and remembers:

> Those two months were the most traumatic. First, there was the ministerial consent situation and the uncertain waiting. Second, I was suffering from an inferiority complex that was compounded by my poor command of the English language. Third, I had never attended class with whites before, I was one of two black students at UCT, and I was new in Cape Town (Dhlomo 1999: 69).

Mthethwa adjusted quickly after this initial rocky period, and after winning 'a Fulbright scholarship to study for a masters degree at the Rochester Institute of Technology, majoring in photography' in 1987, 'he became one of the first black African lecturers in the history of the fine arts faculty [of the Michaelis School of Art in Cape Town]' (Koloane 1999: 29; Dhlomo 1999: 76). His success was cemented when his international career took off after the *1997 Johannesburg Biennale*.

Although all of his subject matter is deeply tied up with South Africa, Mthethwa is distinctly jaded about the country and expresses serious misgivings about South African galleries and the South African art world. He says he feels very little patriotism or duty to the country and that he has been 'raped' of any sentimental emotions connected with his home towns of Durban and Cape Town. Mthethwa (2008) describes his relationship with the South African art world as one based purely on business, and says he 'just tries not to be used'. He places serious emphasis on not being taken advantage of, asserting that black artists like Gerard Sekoto and George

Pemba did not have business acumen and consequently got robbed. Much of his cynicism stems from anger and hurt about a lack of respect and recognition for him and other artists in the country.

He believes South Africa's public collections suffer from a lack of vision and funding, and cites the racial divide as having interfered with art collecting in South Africa. He also believes that South African collections do not have adequately formulated and defined collecting philosophies, that they 'only collect "names"' - meaning works by artists deemed successful. With specific reference to the national and regional public galleries, Mthethwa suggests that their collecting in the early '90s was not well thought-out, and that they did not truly know their mandate, and were liable to 'make mistakes trying to patch holes'. Whether his insights are just or not, I have included them because Mthethwa's perspective is a relatively unique one, as the beginning of his academic and arts career had straddled, and was directly affected by, the period of political transition.

Sue Williamson has been an intensely active artist and writer on the South African art scene since the 1980s. She is the author of two books on South African art - *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1989) and *Art in South Africa: the Future Present* (1996) with Ashraf Jamal. She is also the founding editor of the Artthrob online art journal. As mentioned, Williamson was the first South African artist to have work shown on an international Biennale in 1991: *For Thirty Years Next to His Heart*, (1990: Fig.4) which was based on the passbook or 'dompas' that a black South African man had carried for thirty years.

One of Williamson's most well-known series of artworks from the 1980s, is *A Few South Africans*, in which she depicted South African women - many of them activists - who had been largely uncredited in the liberation struggle. These women

included Helen Suzman, Miriam Makeba (Fig. 36. 3), Virgina Mngoma (Fig. 36.1), Mamphela Ramphele (Fig. 36.2) and Albertina Sisulu. Williamson consequently did a series of works engaging with South African history, including *Colouring In* (1992: Fig.50.1) the source for which, according to Williamson (in *Panoramas of Passage* 1995: 99):

> …is a children's colouring-in book sold at the Boer War Museum in Bloemfontein. It contains photographs dating from the Boer War, lists on the frames of each picture of all the Boers who died in the British concentration camps, press pictures from the 1870s and religious messages in Xhosa. In each case the losers declared their full faith in a God who would see them through.

Williamson also deals with other mementos of battle in her *Museum Case Series: Hanover Street, District Six No. 7* (1993: Fig. 50.2). This work is a continuation of Williamson's *The Last Supper,* in which she collected and installed in a gallery space the remnants of the last stages of the demolition of District Six. In 1993 Williamson revisited the razed site of District Six and retrieved 'linoleum, glass, tiles, bits of toys [cast these fragments] in resin and placed them in "museum cases" like Roman glass or pre-Columbian artefacts. The leftovers from a community which had passed into history' (Williamson in *Panoramas of Passage* 1995: 100).

Jacqueline Nolte (1997: 100) notes that Williamson's installations 'have provoked much debate regarding her "rightful" authorship in narrating the experience of others less empowered than herself… Williamson wilfully aestheticises these gross symbols of black experience, presenting them as hand-coloured prints and signed artist's editions, acts of objectification which remain questionable'. Nolte (1997: 100) goes on to suggest that:

> Judging the informing circumstances of cultural production in a country divided by cultural privilege is an unhappy task which leads on to passing

> judgement on political and moral commitment. Surviving as a privileged citizen in South Africa seems to produce a sort of cultural schizophrenia, benefiting from the system while also struggling for its demise.

The issue of white artists appropriating black history and culture is a controversial one, but Williamson's contributions in interrogating, revising and researching aspects of untold South African histories have proven to be valuable work regardless of the implications of her own race.

Capetonian artist Randolph Hartzenberg is less well-known outside of Cape Town than Bester, Alexander, Mthethwa and Williamson, but he did some fascinating and sensitive works in the transitional period. Like Williamson's, his work engages with ravaged landscapes and the fragments and symbols of upheaval that they carry. One the first works by Hartzenberg collected by the SANG was his *After Driekopseiland* (1989: Fig.41). Nolte (1997: 96) describes Hartzenberg's work as: 'Merging abstraction with both landscape and performative traditions,' and *After Driekopseiland,* as visiting 'upon his canvas the relentless devastation that has been visited upon this land and its people. Applied to the canvas… is a split iron pail, clotted paint and rusted nails as remnants of an individual catharsis in the face of collective pain.'

Hartzenberg's 'Domestic Baggage' series (1991 – 1994: Fig. 51.1-2) 'evolved as a response to a perceived site of crisis' (Martin 1996: 13). Marilyn Martin (1996: 13) also quotes Hartzenberg as saying that for him: 'the greatest challenges in "post-apartheid" South Africa… are those arising from the coping with memory and the psychological scars inherent in individual and collective experiences (multiple perceptions notwithstanding) of the conflicted [South] African past.' Hartzenberg has an intense preoccupation with the land and memory and often uses traumatised landscapes as an expression of traumatic memories or events. He uses the basic

mineral elements of the landscape - earth, rock, water, metal, salt, and their weathering processes - as metaphors for the processes of memory and the traces of emotional and spiritual trauma experienced during South Africa's history, specifically those dealing with slavery and apartheid.

Much of Hartzenberg's work is set in contested spaces in Cape Town, for example in the Castle and on the deserted District Six land. On the site of the latter, according to Martin (1996:13), Hartzenberg 'relives the destruction and dislocation caused by bulldozing people from their homes and emphasises his refusal "of the desire for historical amnesia": "In negotiating the terrain of the present, the past provides necessary landmarks, Memory asserts its presence in our retrospective dialogues."' The 'Domestic Baggage' series depicts suitcases that have been altered in various ways to articulate trauma and the disintegrating process of memory (Fig 51.1-2). One work from the series, *Painting with a Blanket* (1993: Fig. 51.2), is in the collection of the SANG. Nolte (1997: 101) writes evocatively of this work:

> Hartzenberg presses a mix of media plus blanket onto the canvas as signifiers of spaces in which the body and soul seeks to be both contained and nourished. In his vista… the satiation of life's basic needs leaves evidence in its wake of all that is denied plus the unfathomable challenge of having to retrieve, in the dust of burned coal, something of its glitter.

Hartzenberg's paintings give the impression that land, memory, and his canvases, have been eviscerated and poorly bandaged. His works from this period, like those by Willie Bester, Jane Alexander, Zwelethu Mthethwa, and Sue Williamson, explore the physical and emotional after-effects of apartheid without the air of didactic damnation of the protest era, and without necessarily promising redemption or a glorious future. Works by Durban artists, as I will show in the next chapter, tend to have a more celebratory, reconciliatory and redemptive tone.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Durban Art Gallery

At the DAG, internal debates based ideological differences amongst the staff were a significant factor in determining the gallery's response to the political transition. As former DAG Director (1995 – 2006) Carol Brown (2001: 4) articulates in DAG's *Umbukiso* Catalogue:

> Since the 1990s the Gallery's byword has been diversity. Durban's rich cultural mix is increasingly reflected in the growing collection, the gallery has begun to play a vital role in the public discourse around the complex social and political concerns which have emerged in our new democracy since the demise of apartheid in 1994.

Umbukiso was published in 2001 and is, as a DAG publication, intended to show the gallery in its best light. It also has the rosy glow of PR and retrospection. However, despite DAG's fascinating history of early racial integration, I will show in this chapter that progress at the DAG, in terms of change and diversity, was not as seamless between 1990 and 1994 as the positive framing of this excerpt might suggest.

DAG has always been situated in the centre of Durban city, in Durban's imposing City Hall. Brown (2001: 3) writes that it has 'thus… been closely allied to local government structures, but has maintained an artistic independence, which is possibly why it has survived this long'. Despite maintaining 'artistic independence' DAG is and was always dependent on the Durban City Council and reliant on the Council for its financial assistance - which means that the Gallery has had to remain in its good graces. As newspaper reports show, the DAG was often aligned in public perception with the Council's interests and failures.

While the Gallery enjoyed a cordial relationship with the Nationalist Party City Counsellors, it also had an unusually good relationship with black artists who felt the gallery was more accessible than most public galleries (Dhlomo-Mautloa in James 1990). This was due to the *Art South Africa Today* (*ASAT*) competition which began in 1963 and continued until 1975 - 'the first major art competition in the country which was fully multi-racial' (Brown 2005: 42-3 and 49). The *ASAT* exhibitions were started, in collaboration with the DAG and the Natal Society of Art (NSA), by the Institute of Race Relations (IRR). Thus began the DAG's long history with this independent organisation which supported non-racial initiatives.

The IRR had a shop, which later developed into the African Arts Centre, which sold the work of black South African artists who emerged from the bi-annual *ASAT* exhibitions. It is from the AAC that the DAG has acquired much of its 'African' art ever since (Thorpe 1990: 6). Over the years the AAC and the DAG have collaborated to produce exhibitions such as *Vulamehlo - Open Eye* (1990). According to Brown (2005: 50):

> The establishment of the AAC meant that works by rural artists, which were not being shown or marketed actively by the existing galleries, now had an outlet in the city centre, and Jo Thorpe became extremely influential in promoting black artists. The venture had started with the aim of fund raising for the Institute and benefiting rural people. It also changed the pattern of purchasing for the DAG.

The AAC enjoyed a lot of support and a definite increase in interest during the 1990 to 1994 period, although its sales were later affected by the reduced support from the DAG and other galleries that had to curb their expenditure following subsidy cuts by the Durban City Council. Reduced budgets were further affected by the general recession that the country was undergoing at the time (African Art Centre Annual Reports 1990 – 1996).

In my interview with her, former DAG Director Jill Addleson (1970 – 1995) claims that she never acknowledged a dividing line between art and craft, reasoning that if Japanese, Chinese, or other examples of international ceramics and design were considered fit for art gallery exhibition, then South African ceramics and design should be as well (Addleson 2008). Through the AAC, Addleson and the DAG supported crucial initiatives in the development of black South African artists, such as the Rorke's Drift group, from which the DAG has a fine collection of work. The DAG was quite unusual in this regard, as neither JAG nor SANG had an early history of supporting art made by black South Africans.

The DAG, it seems, had a head start over the JAG and the SANG in making their collections more demographically representative, due to their early non-racial projects and their resulting atmosphere of accessibility. However they seemed to fail to turn this to their advantage in the early '90s and were slightly slower than JAG and SANG to make proactive changes in line with the new political ideals, exhibiting some vestigial 'colonial' attitudes. University of the Witwatersrand lecturer Alan Crump supplied the opinion that, in 1991, Durban lagged behind Kimberley, Johannesburg and Cape Town in the amount of attention paid by the public and the Council to its major public gallery (Crump 1991). The DAG, in its defence, lacked the financial benefit and boosted acquisitional power that the JAG had from its AngloAmerican endowment fund, and the elegant tourist-attracting setting of the SANG, to bolster its viability.

Durban was historically a British colony, and had a large white English-speaking population who valorised British culture and 'civilisation'. It is not unusual to find some older white Kwazulu-Natal citizens who purportedly have an almost cultish affection for the British Royal family. This is one of the main reasons for DAG's

large collection of Victorian paintings, as well as ‘French and Chinese ceramics, glassware by Lalique and bronzes by Rodin’, as many of these were donated from the personal collections of white Durbanites and philanthropists over the years (Brown 1994: 21).

The black population of Durban is mainly Zulu-speaking and the 'Zulu nation' is famed for its warring conquests over other South African socio-linguistic groups, as well as over the British armies at famous battles like Rorke’s Drift. The South African War of 1899 to 1902 was primarily brought on by British colonial armies fighting to overcome the resistant power of the Zulu and Boer armies (Beinart 2001: 2). The Kwazulu-Natal area is a well-known IFP stronghold, and it comprised one of the most cohesive 'homeland' communities during the apartheid enforcement of the Group Areas Act. According to William Beinart (2001: 223), in the 1970s, ‘Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi in Kwazulu used the homeland system to its full potential in establishing a powerful hold on his region… Buthelezi, deeply conscious of the historic might of the Zulu’, stuck to a successful campaign of group-definition by invoking Zulu cultural symbols derived from its roots in the traditional structure of chiefdoms (Beinart 2001: 224). The leopard hide, shield, and short-handled spear of Zulu ceremonial costume are the most recognisable and almost stereotypical markers of Zulu identity, and are images frequently associated with Kwazulu-Natal. Additionally, Durban is also well-known for its large Indian community.

In Durban this sense of strong, unique cultural identities seems to have been further entrenched by the emphasis placed on these different cultural influences in the tourism and marketing strategies of the region. Durban has always been a well-loved and famed holiday destination, even in the early days of the Natal colony - a fact

which sparked the evolution of Durban's iconic, exotically-costumed rickshaw drivers.[99]

Since its colonial beginnings the city has remained a thriving hub of business and transport; however, as at the JAG, white patronage of the leisure and cultural attractions of Durban's CBD has been curtailed by the perception that the city has become dangerous. In November 1990, a Municipal Reporter noted the Culture and Recreation committee's agreement 'to urgently investigate insuring the contents of Durban's museums against political rioting and malicious damage' (Municipal Reporter 1990). A member of the committee stated that: 'all other major cities had such insurance and it was "imperative" that Durban protect its valuables. "In the times we are living in this is a matter of urgency."' This gives some idea of the anxiety that political unrest would manifest in the Durban CBD as it had in Johannesburg.

The gallery itself, situated in the midst of this central district, maintains an atmosphere of activity that is enhanced by its situation on the third floor of the City Hall above the City Library on the ground floor, and the Natural Science Museum on the second floor. DAG, suffering from a crippling lack of space, has been motivating for over twenty years to take over all three floors of this section, a change which involves new space being made for the Library and the Museum, and which current Acting Director of DAG, Jenny Stretton (2008) says is imminent.

Despite the DAG's chronic shortage of space - a problem clearly shared with the Natural History Museum - I believe it is, ironically, this charming, cramped, colourful, busy location which is partly responsible for DAG's air of accessibility,

[99] Early rickshaw pullers were plainly dressed in so-called 'kitchen boy' outfits, and performed the function of transporting goods. Later, as the tourist industry began to develop, these outfits were embellished and the rickshaw drivers began giving lifts to holiday makers whom they attracted with increasingly elaborate costumes. The rickshaws thus evolved into more of a subject for holiday photographs than a serious means of transport, becoming an image strongly associated with the city Durban.

which was not shared by JAG and SANG in the years before 1990. The Library is a vital resource for schoolchildren, and during my research there people from many different income brackets and ages were stopping in to take out books to read, while high school students sat and studied in the Library. The Natural Science Museum has always provided educational support for teachers and schoolchildren, and is often filled with uniformed schoolchildren on daytrips. When the focus of public galleries post-1990 swung so heavily towards education, it would have been a short step to entice the schoolchildren up one more level, to engage with South African art. Workshops educating the general public were also set up at the DAG, along similar lines to those at the SANG.

As with the JAG there were suggestions made that DAG should move away from its location at City Hall to a ‘separate cultural centre' (Crump 1991). The City council, in coalition with the ANC, formed a proposal to take the arts away from city centre to residential areas. Crump (*Daily News* 1991) opposed the idea, offering the opinion that: ‘a cultural centre must be the core of the visual arts and people will have to commute to it.’ As mentioned in previous chapters, the fact that major public galleries have stayed in the centre of town has lent them a degree of 'authenticity' in representing social issues and problems in South Africa today. City centres, with their high population densities and transport systems, are places where all societal issues seem to intensify. These issues are less obvious in the suburbs, which in South Africa are still often largely racially segregated - if no longer on the grounds of race, then on the grounds of wealth or community ties. Had public galleries decentralised to quasi-suburban areas it may not have been as valid for them to display exhibitions commenting on poverty and social ills: these would, in all likelihood, not greatly

interested residents of the suburbs, who generally avoid city centres and seem to prefer to spend time and money on ‘escapist’ pursuits.

Questions were not only posed as to a suitable location for the Gallery, but also as to a suitable name. Since its inception, the gallery had been ‘administered jointly with the Natural Science Museum’, and known as the Durban Museum and Art Gallery (Brown 2005: 38). A director presided over both the museum and the gallery, while a curator was appointed to manage the art gallery from 1959 onwards (Brown 2005: 38). The Durban Art Gallery was thus interchangeably known as the Durban Art Museum, but on 2 April 1990 the Durban city council passed a resolution that the Durban Art Museum revert once again to the name the Durban Art Gallery, as it has been known ever since (DAG Annual Report July 1989- June 1990).

While the DAG had had a fairly egalitarian approach to the importance of black art and involving multi-racial communities, it was slower to assimilate new art historical discourses in comparison with the JAG and the SANG. Thus, whereas the JAG's permanent collection was rehung in 1990, emphasising thematic connections between works rather than dividing the collections into national ‘Schools’ of art, the ‘Schools’ at the DAG were only dismantled in 1996 (Brown 2001: 8). Brown (2001: 8) explains further:

> For most of its existence the Gallery's displays reflected those of similar overseas galleries where the spaces were divided into the National “Schools” - for example, the French, Dutch, Victorian and South African schools. The majority of the Gallery's space was dedicated to the permanent collections, and a smaller percentage to travelling exhibitions.

It was only ‘in 1995 after the election of Mandela's ANC government’ - when Jill Addleson stepped down as Director and became Curator of Collections and Carol Brown assumed the role of Director - that the ‘gallery was rehung to reflect the

multicultural nature of the collection' (Brown 2001: 6). Consequently, according to Brown (2001: 6): 'The collection was recognized in The British Museums Journal for its display, which place[d] art and craft in a non-hierarchical manner.'

Paradoxically, despite its racially open atmosphere, the DAG was seen to be slower to change its prioritising of 'Western Art' over 'African Art'. I say 'seen to be', as this view, though held by many, is not necessarily true. Despite its apparent leaning towards a valorisation of the art of the colonial past, the DAG had for years been supportive and respectful of the art production of black South Africans, outside of 'ethnographic' categories. The prioritisation of some kinds of art over others could thus be argued to be indicative of sluggish council reactions to certain moves, as well as the gallery being over-stretched - resource and staff-wise - rather than of there being exclusionary aims in the DAG's policies.

One point of contention, which the DAG laid at the door of the Durban City Council, was that there had been consistent calls as far back as the early 1980s, from Durban's considerable Indian community, for an 'Indian and Oriental Art' section at the gallery, or for an Indian art museum.[100] The project was only prioritised between 1993 and 1994, and by the end of 1994 a consultant was employed to advise DAG in compiling the Collection (Geldenhuys 1993; Ismail 1994). In Addleson's words, 'It was a serious lack of foresight on the part of the city council to ignore Indian art. Art galleries must not be seen to be propagating cultural purity and superiority. We must correct the imbalances of the past' (Ismail 1994).

The publication *ISHUMI/10* coincided with the DAG's retrospective art exhibition of the years 1994 to 2004, called *Ten Out of Ten for Democracy*. Despite being a text that focuses mainly on the years from 1994 onwards (when Carol Brown was Director

[100] See Letters published in the *Daily News* by Varma, Gurudutt, 'Where is the Indian art section?' 10 March 1987; Jayraj, B 'Call for Indian arts section' 26 March 1987; and Unknown. 'Oriental art: City is making an effort' 19 March 1987.

of JAG) the text is useful as an indicator of what was happening in earlier years, when former Director Brown and current Acting Director Jennifer Stretton were both working at DAG in different posts. In her essay, 'Changing Space: Keeping Pace', Brown (2004: 9 -10) writes:

> It became clear during the 1990s that the role of any public institution was to embrace the population rather then exclude it, and various strategies were put into place to make spaces more inclusive.
> ...
> The challenge for the Durban Art Gallery was to revise the displays within an existing framework which had remained physically unchanged for over a century while the sociopolitical environment had changed enormously.

The strange mixture of racial accessibility and colonial conservatism that was unique to the DAG was partly due to its long time Director, Jill Addleson, who had managed the gallery from 1970 until 1995 (Lauth 1992). Brown's period of directorship coincided with the start of multiparty democratic government after the four years of uncertainty. Brown made the most of the atmosphere of regeneration and enthusiasm in the country in the infancy of her directorship, initiating many interesting projects at the DAG after her appointment as director. These included the *Red Eye @rt* extravaganzas, which were hugely successful in bridging the divide between the inner sanctum of the museum and the outer vibrancy of the streets. However it is Addleson who was at the helm during the unpredictable '90 to '94 transitional period, when the way forward was by no means clear or assured.

Addleson is respected for her dedicated acquisition of African art - especially of beadwork (Carman 2007). Most of these items were bought with the finances reserved for educational acquisitions, rather than the permanent collection's funds, as the acquisitions books show. Recorded in the DAG Study Collections Acquisitions book between 1990 and 1994, are purchases of cloth, bead and fibre work; wood carving;

linocuts; pencil, charcoal, and pastel drawings on paper; telephone wire work; ilala palm weaves; leatherwork; stoneware; earthenware, and other clay works. Some of the work was by well-known artists, and included linocuts and oils by Trevor Makhoba, linocuts by Tito Zungu, and a large collection of watercolours by Gwelo Goodman. I was not permitted to record the specific prices of the works for insurance reasons, but the purchase prices ranged mainly from R10 to R800.

Regarding the educative intentions of the gallery's collection, a 1992 article by Brenda Lauth records Addleson as saying:

> We have a big responsibility towards children. We must not sway them one way or another. We are here to tap their emotions, their ways of expressing themselves.
>
> We encourage this primarily in what we collect. The major part of our collection is art from our own region, the KwaZulu-Natal area. We don't make a distinction between high art or between fine art or crafts. We collect anything that people make, provided, of course, that they have something unique to say. If an object is beautifully made – technique really does count – it doesn't matter to us if the maker had a formal art education or any training at all.

Jillian Carman (2008) attests that, because equality between art and craft was not widely promoted in the '80s, this strategy of buying 'craft' on the educational collections budget was a means of avoiding restrictions by a conservative board who would not sanction the spending of the permanent collection funds on supposedly 'inferior' art.

However by 1992, as the beadwork heraldry on the cover of the *1991 – 1992 Mayor's Minutes for the City of Durban* show, this heritage was increasingly appreciated and promoted by the City Council as something with a 'typically Durban' flavour, while also showing its support of community initiatives.[101] Addleson's

[101] The *1991-1992 Mayor's Minutes for the City of Durban* explains the use of beadwork in the heraldic sign on its cover: 'About the Cover: An artistic expression of the Coat of Arms of the City, undertaken in traditional beadwork – to symbolise the diversity of the population that comprises this great region.'

collection of beadwork, though an un-calculated move, therefore proved fortuitous for the gallery. The DAG was also actively involved in educational schemes to preserve disappearing craft skills, including holding monthly beadwork classes since 1987, as well as ilala palm and Zulu mat weaving, basketry classes and other craft workshops for the community (Berea Mail reporter 1991).

The Permanent Acquisitions record between 1990 and 1994 shows that the DAG was equally representative of primarily black and white artists, while still not paying particular attention to Indian art or other 'minority' groups. The distinctions between the two acquisitions categories - the Permanent Collection and the Study Collection - are characterised by the former favouring artists working in 'high art' mediums. Even though the Permanent Acquisitions Record lists a fair amount of silkscreen, ceramic, earthenware and stoneware, ilala, and linocut work, it lists far more purchases of watercolours, oil on canvas, lithographs, pastel, etching, bronze, porcelain and bone china, photography and video, than does the Study Acquisitions record during those years.

The demographics of artists whose work was purchased for the Study Collection is around eighty percent black and twenty percent white, while those on the Permanent Collections books are sixty to sixty five percent white and around thirty-five percent black. While these combined figures mean that the DAG was supporting roughly two black art makers for every white art maker, they also suggest that white art makers were better represented in the more esteemed collection, and better paid. One should remember, however, that Addleson treated these different categories quite malleably, manipulating the funds to meet the needs of the Collection, with little concern for what 'the books' reflected.

While trawling through DAG's archive books, something caught my attention every time an article included a picture of Addleson in the context of the Gallery. It occurred to me that every photograph of Addleson showed her in the gallery space with artworks in a way that suggested her personal ownership of, or responsibility for, the pieces. When photographed in the Gallery she appears both familiar with and dominant in the space, conveying an attitude best described as looking 'at home' (which was possibly only befitting a director of such long tenure) (Fig. 52.1-7). Although an inconclusive matter of body-language or the need for quirky press photography, these articles collectively convey the level to which Addleson's personality was equated with the gallery. This can not be entirely disregarded, as it was a considerable factor in shaping the path the gallery took in the years of transition.

Both the JAG and the SANG had relatively new directors in Christopher Till and Marilyn Martin, and their tenures at these galleries coincided largely with the new imperative in museum discourse to open up management, selection processes, and curatorship in galleries to employees, as well as making museums places of community investment. Addleson had headed the DAG[102] for a long time, and seemed reluctant to change the gallery's 'formula' too greatly. The DAG only made dramatic changes in the same way as JAG and SANG had when Carol Brown took over in 1995, and the dismantling of the schools is one example of how Brown's vision for the gallery differed to Addleson's.

In Chapter One I mentioned that the course of policy change in the years between 1990 and 1994 was, at times, affected by clashes in working relationships, due to differing views about the correct paths institutions should take to best serve the

[102] The post of Curator was known as such until 1970, and was changed to Director in 1985 (Brown 2005: 38).

needs of the arts. DAG was, to some extent, a victim of this kind of tug-of-war. Some employees at the gallery and Durban artists felt that the DAG was prioritising other collections - primarily the Victorian collection - over the South African collection, and not paying close enough attention to developments in South African and local art, particularly during the transitional era.

This resulted in a dispute which played out in the then-Natal press, when the DAG's British collection was once again hung in the prime gallery space of the DAG's elegant Circular Gallery after its 1991 refurbishment. As Marilyn Martin (1997: 20) writes in the SANG's *Contemporary South African Art 1985 – 1995:*

> ...for centuries many white South Africans associated themselves with Britain and Europe, emulating in every possible way the "civilised values", the "standards", the "way of life" and the art and culture of distant places, while ignoring, neglecting and destroying not only existing cultural manifestations, but also those emerging from the struggle for political freedom.

Many Durban artists and art critics felt that the prioritisation of the British collection was a negation of the importance and value of South African art.

Despite his role on the DAG's acquisition committee, Durban-based artist Andrew Verster (2008) was responsible for much of the open criticism of the DAG that appeared in the local newspapers at the time - usually in the form of letters to the editor. In Verster's view it was not a productive decision to put the Victorian collection in pride of place. This was not only because of the political situation in the country, but also because - in Verster's estimation - the gallery's collection of Victorian art was not an outstanding one, and could not be added to as the collection budget had fallen away in 1992. Moreover, the generation of gallery patrons who had Victorian paintings to donate was dying away. The DAG could primarily afford to

buy only South African art at this time, and so the continuing prioritisation of the stagnating Victorian collection seemed regressive.

It is somewhat difficult to make sense of the often conflicting accounts as to how successful DAG was in its choices of collections and exhibitions in the early '90s. In many instances, it was merely a matter of old projects being derailed by changing socio-political concerns, as was the case with the JAG's Jillian Carman who struggled to complete her research on the JAG's Dutch 17th-century paintings. Although Carman's study was significant, it was conducted at a time where its relevance was questioned and overtaken by the need to prioritise previously untold histories, rather than colonial ones. Similarly, the DAG's Victorian collection may have been a 'worthy' project but - in the context of transition - it appeared to be a questionable bid to maintain, for as long as possible, a link to British colonial culture.

Jenny Stretton (2008) and Andrew Verster (2008) both suggested that the DAG did not pay enough attention to the South African art collection in the '90s. However, this is confusing in light of the clear support that the DAG had given, particularly to black South African artists. I asked Carol Brown to explain this in my interview with her and she answered: 'This is complicated and coloured by the prevailing attitudes of the time' (Brown 2005). According to Brown, Addleson made considerable efforts to:

> …increase the collection of black artists however it was mainly through a special fund created for this purpose and they were accessioned separately as the "Study Collection". Most of these works were in the craft arena and were displayed separately. They were in a sense seen as "different" or "inferior" to the European art... A black education officer, Pat Khoza was appointed in 1990 but she tended to favour crafts and giving of workshops such as beading. The matter was still treated in a paternalistic way.

It seems there is a contrast here between the two Directors' viewpoints on the subject of art and craft.

Addleson (2008) says she never saw any difference between art and craft in her time as Director. Outsider Jillian Carman (2008) praised Addleson for having the foresight to collect beadwork in the years that she did, and viewed the decision to buy it with funds from the Study Collection as a way to skirt the DAG's Board. However, Brown suggests that the way the work was presented and displayed separately emphasised its difference and supposed 'inferiority'. It is difficult (and pointless) to try and ascertain which party was more correct. Whatever view was held at the time, the collection exists as evidence and was thus a positive step for the DAG that has put them in good stead.

As with the SANG's 1993 *Ezakwantu* exhibition, the display of beadwork and other craft items is a contentious matter because of the historic display of objects from 'Other' communities, either in over-exoticised contexts, or decontextualised ones. In this early era of revisionist exhibition-making it was almost inevitable that these kinds of displays were likely to fall short in either respect because of their lack of precedent. Precedents still had to be set, and they were only going to be worked out through criticism, evaluation and contestation of existing efforts. Much of the DAG's bad press in the 1990 to 1994 period relates to its lack of constant re-evaluation of the contextualisation of its artworks and collections.

Newspaper articles from 1990 assist in showing how the DAG grappled with the changing social and identity politics of the Durban community, and with the re-allocation of resources by Durban's Municipality. These debates manifested particularly clearly around the renovations that were conducted at the DAG in the early 1990s. According to Brown (2001: 07):

> The Gallery falls under the Durban Metro Unicity/Municipality and is administered by a Director and a Board of Trustees. While funding is obtained from the City, the importance of the Arts is always a matter for

> debate in a city such as ours where a great percentage of the population do not enjoy access to the most basic amenities. Accordingly, the funding focus has shifted, and corporate and private donors have begun to play a vital role in the continued health of the collection, as have the Gallery's own efforts.

A 1991 article titled ‘Housing, sewerage, education: they all go together’ by arts columnist Brenda Lauth shows how the DAG negotiated questions about its future value and importance in view of the vast need for funds for disadvantaged communities.

The article gives an idea of the arguments being made by both the council and the DAG. In the article Addleson promoted the Gallery’s importance as a collector of local art and the international recognition of its Victorian Collection:

> The collection has grown enormously over the years, particularly the South African collection and more particularly the art of Natal and KwaZulu...despite the difficulties [lack of space] being experienced in the present premises, the gallery attracts the highest attendance figure in the country.
>
> Last year we opened the Paper Gallery, and renovations are presently being carried out in the Circular Gallery which we regard as the flagship of galleries in South Africa...it is unique... We will house our own Victorian Collection in the renovated gallery which is strongest and most internationally known of our collections (Lauth 1991).

Addleson also advertised the gallery’s role as an educational institution at this time, in order to motivate for its importance amid more pressing concerns of poverty, unemployment and lack of adequate housing.

In her article Lauth (1991) quoted Addleson as saying that ‘museums stand for the most important part of informal education.’ Addleson (Lauth 1991) stated that museums were key in the upliftment of the nation and in ‘provid[ing] a sense of identity’, as people’s identities, and their origins and movements during their lifetimes, ‘are pointers to the future’ which can only be decoded through the study of

'art, through natural history and local history artefacts'. Addleson (Lauth 1991) stated that it was a 'fatuous argument that sewerage and housing are more important than education', arguing that both education and basic services are vital to the wellbeing of the country.

Addleson (Lauth 1991) also proposed that the 'Durban Art Gallery was the only one in SA where one could pop in at lunchtime', arguing that this was not the case with public art galleries, such as SANG and JAG, which Addleson suggested were dangerous and not 'well-situated'. Addleson (Lauth 1991) then pointed out that DAG was 'the only gallery in SA which has not recently undergone either expansion nor [sic] extensive redecoration', and her final appeal was that 'with the emergence of the new SA, tourism will surely grow and expand enormously and will have to cater for all ethnic cultures'. She argued that the lifting of sanctions meant that South Africa could be 'invited to host international exhibitions', and that should the DAG be neglected, the city would be 'left out in the artistic cold' (Addleson in Lauth 1991). This article suggests a fair amount of desperation, with its libelling of the JAG's and the SANG's locations. It can be argued that the SANG, all things considered, is far better situated than the DAG. Addleson also plays on the stereotype of Durban as an artistic 'backwater' in order to raise support for its hoped-for upgrades (Brown 2005: 63).[103]

The difficulties that the DAG had in trying to raise financial support for the changes it wanted to make are evident. However it can be argued that the DAG was not completely without support from the Durban City Council in the early 1990s. The amount of refurbishment done in the JAG, SANG and DAG at this time was

[103] Brown (2005: 63) notes that in the '80s 'this was a term that had somehow gained currency to describe Durban's cultural activities.'

somewhat surprising, given the constant reports of financial strain. In relation to the DAG, Carol Brown (2008) ascribed this to:

> …a desperate attempt to cling on to the old style and make sure standards did not drop. I remember this being a constant refrain - We will never compromise our standards - we are a museum of highest standards... in a strange way this colonial type attitude did help keep the ship afloat as there has been almost no money for maintenance given by the council since 1994.

As Addleson mentioned in the Lauth article, in 1990 the council funded the renovation of the DAG's Paper Gallery which was reopened in March 1990 (DAG Annual Report July 1989- June 1990). The space was opened with an exhibition entitled *Unseen Masters*, a showing of 19th-century prints from Gallery's permanent Collection, including works by French Impressionists Monet, Manet, Toulouse Lautrec, Degas, and Renoir (Meijer May 1990). However, as Dan Cook noted in October 1991, after its grand opening and all DAG's gripes about lack of space, the Paper gallery was scheduled to stand empty over the Christmas period until February 1992. It can only be assumed that it was not only the space issue that curbed DAG's frequent mounting of exhibitions but also its lack of staff.

In 1991 the DAG was generally 'spruced up'. It was repainted and its floors were sanded, with particular attention being given to the refurbishment of the DAG's Circular Gallery. This gallery was refitted in Edwardian style, as one magazine put it, with a 'timeless colour scheme' of peach-coloured walls (Fig. 53). As mentioned, the British Collection was hung here, in pride of place for the opening (*Communiqué* 1991).[104] In an article covering the opening of the new Circular Gallery Durban's deputy mayor Mrs Margaret Winter was reported as saying, that 'although the main priority of the council was the upliftment of the poorer sections in the region, the

[104] The article continues, 'Then, as now, Victorian paintings and sculpture take pride of place.'

city's assets also had to be maintained so that they could be of real value to the city for future generations' (*North Glen News* 1991).

Winter is also quoted as saying:

> The art museum was the permanent home of man's finest achievements and as such the custodian of the history of a nation's art. It played a singularly important political role through its permanent collections which should be a reflection of the art created by an entire community.
>
> We do need to redress the past, but if we don't look after this kind of institution the cost to the future will be great (*North Glen News* 1991).

Winter's evocation of mankind's achievements rather than humankind's achievements will most likely jar with a reader in today's politically correct South African society. That aside, a few grammatical elements in this excerpt of Winter's speech are curious: firstly, her use of the past tense in outlining the function of a museum; and, secondly, her vision as to what it *should* be, seems to elide the question of its function and situation at the time. Winter also speaks of 'a community' and 'a nation' implying a single, unified South African community and nation. As mentioned in Chapter One, references to 'the' or 'a community' should not be taken at face-value. Although Winter was known for being one of the more progressive councillors of the era,[105] one wonders how inclusive her conception of Durban's 'community' was - considering the context she is speaking in, as a member of a pre-1994 council surrounded by the glowingly lit Victorian collection. No doubt Winter and the other councillors saw the need for 'redress', but the way these sentiments are framed at this particular occasion casts doubt on the level of effective change being implemented at this time.

One 1991 article reporting on the resurgence of interest in Victorian painting after it was derided in the 1950s and '60s is titled, 'Durban holds onto Victorian heritage'. It includes a photograph of Addleson in front of a Victorian painting entitled, *Pursuit*

[105] According to *ADA* 1994 'Durban and Surrounds'.

of Pleasure (Fig.52.7) which the article describes as having ‘inestimable artistic value’ (Segar 1991). The article reports that: ‘Thanks to the gallery's determination to hold onto its heritage, Durban's collection of Victorian art compared favourably with international galleries’’ (Segar 1991). This attempt to match up to the perceived standard of international galleries, especially European ones, is a frequent refrain throughout articles on DAG at this time. The DAG went as far as to research the production of ‘special slippers ... being made for those who arrive in stilettos - to protect the floor... in line with art galleries all over the world’, and culminated finally in the report in a 1992 *Saturday News* article, of the production of plugs of rubberised material. This innovation was demonstrated in a low-angle photograph of a leggy model in the Circular Gallery, (Fig. 54) wearing stilettos and a short skirt (Sandy Cook 1991).

Despite its comical tone, this incident was symptomatic of a more serious bid to keep the Circular Gallery as pristine as possible, in a state befitting the elegance of the works featured in it, comparable with the ‘best international standards’. As mentioned in earlier chapters, there was a real anxiety that collections like the DAG’s Victorian Collection would be deaccessioned and sold off to acquire art works with more ‘relevance’ to the new dispensation. There was never any real danger of this; but the DAG’s hallowed treatment of the international collections inadvertently brought to the fore the manner in which South African art was displayed in the gallery.

In a 1991 review on of the opening of the Circular Gallery, art critic Dan Cook took exception to the differing treatment of the two collections. As Cook (Sept. 1991) saw it:

> With the circular gallery's unveiling, the Durban Art Gallery has become an unintentional metaphor for South Africa. Victorian (that is British Imperialist) art is enshrined with care – each work has plenty of

> beautifully appointed space in which to "breathe", while enjoying the best of modern lighting.
>
> By way of stark contrast, in a small adjacent gallery, South African black art is crammed into display cases designed to look like rustic squatter shacks. This misguided attempt to "contextualise" the display fails, because it ignores the varied contexts within which works were created. Sophisticated Western-influenced art is presented next to rural craft – the only common denominator being that all the work is by blacks. The display is crowded and artworks can't be viewed unhindered – the beautiful and spacious Circular Gallery, next door, making the inadequacies of this room all the more embarrassing.
>
> Given these blatant inequalities, one can only speculate as to how kindly future Durban City councillors will view requests to fund further renovations in the gallery... Durban...stands at the threshold of a "new South Africa" and speculation is that the present city council may be the last white one - 1995, at the latest, will see blacks in the majority. That council may well vote to keep the Durban Art Gallery in its present state, not for its curatorial excellence, but as a museum of apartheid.

This damning review is also mentioned by Carol Brown in her Master's thesis on the DAG.

Brown (2005: 79) explains that the exhibition of black South African art that Cook refers to was an exhibition of Zulu art curated in 1986. The darkness of the room was enhanced by the shuttering of its two windows in 'order to give a sense of "atmosphere" to the area' and the rest of the room constructed thus:

> The gallery was transformed into a reconstruction of a rural African trading store with rough wooden poles, a corrugated iron roof with pumpkins placed on it (a customary method of simultaneously securing the flimsily placed material and ripening the staple product of the area), an ubiquitous Coca Cola advertising sign and a stuffed monkey (an animal associated with rural Zululand). A pawpaw tree made from fabric, and commissioned from artists John Roome, completed this picture of a rural environment. The layout contained shelves similar to a shop display with such items as grass baskets, pottery, candlesticks by Bonnie Ntshalintshali, a wooden aeroplane and a sculpture by Wiseman Mbambo – most of which were purchased in the three years since the inception of the study collection. Placed among these three-dimensional objects were prints by Azaria Mbatha, John Muafangejo and other South African artists. African music was played almost constantly in the gallery to give a 'lively atmosphere, creating a very different mood from that of quiet contemplation intended in the foreign galleries.

> At this time this display drew little critical comment. There was no newspaper or journal comment on it and it seems to have passed unnoticed. Evidently it was accepted as the norm, and it remained as a permanent display in the DAG until the early 1990s (Brown 2005: 79).

As previously mentioned, issues surrounding the contextualisation and/or decontextualisation of African art were not easily resolved: if curators contextualised the art work in displays such as the one described above, there was a danger of creating a false sense of timelessness or of lumping all the art makers together under labels such as 'rural' or 'black', without taking into account the work on its own.

There was also the danger of locating the work so firmly within its geographical or societal context that it would be eternally read as 'Other' to, and outside of, 'mainstream'/'Western' or European art, which had up to this era been framed in a carefully constructed context of 'neutrality' and 'universality'. If curators chose not contextualise the work in a setting associated with its origin, it seemed that the only choice left to them was to utilise the traditional presentational tools of museum display - plinths, display cases, shelves, cabinets, and walls - which all served to channel the work through Western eyes and understandings of art. If anything, these issues merely served to highlight that museums were generally an uncomfortable home for black Africans, as spaces in which black African culture was either staged by or swallowed by Western paradigms and discourses.

With reference to these debates in the DAG, Cook's criticisms of the DAG's displays were supported by many Durban artists, and a number of artists wrote letters expressing their concerns that DAG was not taking enough interest in the changing ethos of the nation:

> It is our opinion that the Durban Art Gallery not only privileges Victorian painting at the expense of South African painting, but similarly disadvantages sculpture in favour of painting. We believe this

> to be the antithesis of the Durban Art Gallery's mandated function, since it is reinforcing the notion that art is an elitist preoccupation. In the light of the above, we wish to pose the following questions:
> - Why are the only rooms with ideal exhibition space and good lighting both dedicated to Victorian art?
> - Why is South African art (which is also contemporary art) exhibited in a cramped and dark room (in the foyer of the Durban Art Gallery) where it is juxtaposed with artificial flower arrangements, a refreshment stall, and poster stands?
> - Why have the same works been exhibited for more than a year without change?
>
> SIEMON ALLEN, CLIVE KELLNER,
> LEDELLE MOE, GREG STREAK
> Durban (*Sunday Tribune* 1991).

Another letter by an anonymous writer undersigned 'Durban the Underdog' (1991), accused Durban's city council of not providing more space for the gallery, the Natural Science Museum and the Library, arguing that, 'the reason why the Durban Art Gallery is unable to display all its collections (South African art as well as foreign art) and in an appropriate manner is because it lacks the space to do so' - not as Cook put it in a later article, because the Durban Art Gallery was unaware of discourses in art historical theory at the time (Dan Cook Oct. 1991).

Brown's description of the exhibition of black South African art would suggest that the exhibition was merely unconsidered, rather than problematic due to space. When asked to clarify the debates at the time, Brown (2008) imparts that, 'The staff had suggested removing the foreign collection from public display but this was met with great resistance in the cause of "Not dropping our standards and making sure we do not lose our heritage"' and thus was due more to vestigial Eurocentric attitudes or a stagnation of displays than to an issue about space.

Additional refurbishing at the DAG included the Main Hall of the gallery which was re-hung towards the end of 1991 in order to show 'more of the gallery's collection in chronological sequence' (*Daily News* 13 December 1991). This

rehanging possibly followed on the heels of the above debate and in some way served to address it, as it focused specifically on South African work from the 1970s because it was a significant 'era for South African art in that political protest became very important' (*Daily News* 13 December 1991). The article mentioned works by Malcolm Christian, Cliff Bestall, Patrick O'Connor, Paul Stopforth, Penny Siopis, Marianne Meijer and Bronwen Findlay. However, works like Stopforth's, which had been bought by public galleries without reference to their political content, were still discussed in this article in a formalist sense rather than for their political content.[106] Dan Cook's January 1992 review in the *Sunday Tribune* comments favourably on the exhibition's South African content and context.

As was suggested in the letter from the anonymous defender of the DAG, much was made in the papers of the chronic shortage of space at DAG during the 1990 to 1994 period. Articles feature photographs of artworks being kept in toilets, and this problem was brought forcibly home when DAG was unable to accommodate all the work on the 1991 *Cape Town Triennial* (Municipal Reporter 1991). The *Triennial* was eventually held at three different locations in Durban: DAG, Elizabeth Gordon Gallery, and the Technikon Natal Art Gallery (Meijer Oct.1992). It is possible that these *Triennial* problems provided additional motivation for the DAG's renovations through as well as the provision of extra accommodation for art work. Works were at first kept in external accommodation in Burlington House, and Addleson consequently opened a conservation facility in an abandoned beer hall in 1992, which helped lessen the problem of artworks deteriorating in Durban's subtropical heat (Lauth 1992). The plan was to move the Library and the Natural Science Museum out of the building, and let the gallery take over all three floors. This has still not

[106] Brown is quoted as saying: 'This decade produced works of a more reflective, optimistic note and the use of thick impasto and bright colour characterised many of the paintings, particularly those of Natal artists' (*Daily News* 13 December 1991).

happened although Acting Director Jenny Stretton (2008) says the change is imminent.

The DAG had council support - and funding – in the early 90s which made possible the gallery's renovation, however, as Brown writes in *Umbukiso*, all council support in the form of subsidies and acquisitions budgets, eventually fell away in 1996 and 1997. The DAG then had to find corporate support, which both Addleson and Andrew Verster regarded as having positive aspects. In Addleson's opinion it made the Gallery work harder to continue, and in Verster's, it liberated the Gallery from the control of the Council (Addleson 2008; Verster 2008).

The DAG was targeted in arts columns again in 1992 for not attending the NAPP meeting held in December of that year at the University of the Witwatersrand. The principal criticism came once again from the *Sunday Tribune*'s incisive art critic, Dan Cook. After writing glowingly of the NAPP's aims and successes, Cook (Dec. 1992) laments:

> Conspicuous by its absence was the Durban Art Gallery. Lame excuses such as a lack of funding hold no water since the Department of Education and Culture provided a R140 000 sponsorship to provide for such cases.
>
> This episode is merely the latest in a long, sad history which has increasingly marginalised the Durban Art Gallery and is fast rendering it irrelevant. The time has come, therefore, for the people of Durban to demand a public explanation from public officials, employed by the city council, paid by public money, who work in the Durban Art Gallery.

Cook then directly requests that these 'officials' account for not attending this 'Vital Meeting for South African arts', as his article is titled.

Cook's indictment was once again supported by artists Camilla Battiss, Bronwen Findlay, Virginia McKenny, Andrew Verster, and Jeremy Wafer, amongst others, who signed their names to a letter published in the Sunday Tribune, which read:

> [Cook's] recent statement regarding the absence of the Durban Art Gallery at the National Arts Policy Plenary should be seen for what it is – a concerned plea to the Durban Art Gallery to be engaged and aware, to help decide along with others involved in the arts what their future role will be before the politicians do.[107]

It was Jill Addleson, in turn, who eventually responded to Cook's indictment in *Newsdart* (February 1993).

When asked by the interviewer about the lack of DAG representation at the NAPP, Addleson offered: 'It is incorrect to say that we were unrepresented… We… asked a member of our Board of Trustees to report back to us. He was wearing many hats, one of which was that of our Board.' When asked who the representative was, Addleson named Andries Botha, and then somewhat undermined her retort by saying that Botha would be coming in 'that afternoon' to report back to them, (some three months after the event). Addleson attempted further justification by saying: 'He may not have been an official delegate, sent on behalf of the City, but nevertheless he has played a very crucial role in formulating national and regional policy. We therefore feel absolutely confident that we will receive a full and unbiased report of the Plenary' (*Newsdart* 1993).

This thinly disguised lack of interest in the Plenary was confirmed, finally, by Addleson herself in my recent interview with her, in which she admitted that she thought the Plenary was 'a whole lot of hot air'. In Carol Brown's (2008) view:

> The gallery did not make an effort to participate in most of these endeavours. If the Director did not go staff were not encouraged to attend. In fact it would have been frowned upon. I think that it was felt that these endeavours presented a threat to the status quo (which they did) and the feeling was that it was best to ignore them and just stand one's ground.

[107] Letter signed by Battiss, C; Findlay, B; Frost, L; Howard, J; Kotze, G; Lurie, H; Mackenny, V; Saunders, F; Smart D; Stroebel, H; Van Melsen, F; Verster, A; Wafer, J; Walsh, A; Wassermen, M. 'Under fire: What the artists say.' *Sunday Tribune*. 14 February 1993.

Also controversial - following the uneasiness over the display of the DAGs' Victorian collection - was the suggestion in 1993 that older art work be sold off in order to collect newer work. The suggestion to sell of work 'in order to fund new acquisitions' was proposed by the local Durban metro, and the consequence was pictures of Director Jill Addleson chained in the gallery in protest (Fig. 52.2). This argument flared again in 1996 with support from Andrew Verster (Dubin 2006: 230-1; Verster 2008). Verster has subsequently admitted that he was agitating in order to get his point across about the gallery's shortcomings. He backed down when he found out that it was actually illegal to deaccession and sell works from the permanent collection (Dubin 2006: 230 01; Verster 2008).

The motivation behind his campaigning was that, in his opinion, the DAG had 'Inherited a collection of Victorian narrative works, which it prided itself on as being a great collection, but it could not hope to match the collection of even the small provincial museums in Britain' (Verster 2008). Rather, Verster wanted the DAG not to 'hide behind its colonial identity', but to 'buy local, and preserve the local or contemporary *now*, as if you don't buy it you've lost it', as well as to build a South African spirit of criticality, independent of international mores and standards (Verster 2008).

According to Dubin (2006: 231): 'The council then decided to set up a review committee consisting of two of its own members and eight "experts" to examine the DAG, the Natural Science Museum, and the local History Museum.' This review committee was never formed, however:

> The chairperson of the Durban Metro executive committee made it clear that the powers-that-be did not approve of the gallery's past policies, and it was not prepared to channel more money its way: "People do not come to Durban to see our Victoria [sic] collection!" she declared. "Is it still

> relevant in today's South African society? Should it take the prime position in the Durban Art Gallery?" (Dubin 2006: 231).

Two factors eventually brought this debate to a close. Firstly, Carol Brown's 1996 rehanging of the collection definitively prioritised the DAG's South African works. Secondly, the withdrawal of council support in 1996/1997 turned out to be an inevitable and unavoidable eventuality regardless of DAG's sluggish efforts at redress.

I shift now from a discussion of the debates within DAG, and those on a national arts level that also affected it, to a more specific focus of the kinds of exhibitions the DAG was staging between the years 1990 and 1994, and the initiatives it took in order to draw people into the gallery. I gathered most of this information from newspaper articles about the DAG's events and from its Annual Reports.

Education officers Carol Brown and Pat Khoza worked hard at DAG to include the community in projects at the gallery, providing for people in different income and race brackets. Their initiatives included educational trips to China and Egypt for the well-to-do, as well as taking art workshops into schools and places in townships in order to reach those who could not reach the gallery. The Volunteer Guides at DAG started a project in 1990 which sought to stimulate public awareness of the collection by selecting an 'Art work of the Month'[108] which would be published monthly in newspapers. I found some of those selections in the course of my research. They were: in March 1990, *Drum* by Maggie Mikula; in September 1991, Penny Siopis' *Unrequited;* in September 1992, Norman Catherine's *Serenade;* in February 1993 *L'Escargot* by Henri Matisse. The choices of work seem to reflect an even promotion of both South African and international art.

[108] Examples from DAG's clippings file include those from the *Daily News.* Art Beat section. 16 March 1990 and the *Natal Mercury.* 27 March 1990.

1990 exhibitions included the travelling exhibition of the work of Frederick I'Ons, curated by Melanie Hillebrand of George VI Art Museum, now the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum (NMMAM). The exhibition seems to have been created rather more for its historical value than for its importance in reviewing debates of colonialist stereotyping of race, which have been discussed in relation to I'Ons' work (Fig. 55) in recent years. Carol Brown's review at the time draws attention to I'Ons paintings as 'commissioned to show the people "back home" how savage and exotic their opponents were', as well as pointing out that 'Racist stereotyping and attitudes however surface every now again (sic). Particularly in the caricatures and one or two paintings but the works as a whole do not exhibit this attitude which was so prevalent at the time' (Brown Nov. 1990).

Another travelling exhibition was the *Gerard Sekoto Retrospective*, which did to an extent, have a revisionist intention. As Carol Brown (June 1990) suggested in her review: 'The exhibition is one of several recently held by the Johannesburg Art Gallery in an attempt to reassess South African art history which has, until recently, been concentrated on well known white Western orientated artists.'

As mentioned, a particularly important exhibition for the DAG was *Vulamehlo - Open Eye*, which was co-ordinated by the AAC, sponsored by Alliance Francaise. It was held in the 'prestigious' Circular Gallery in August, prior to its renovation. This is a key point as the Victorian Collection would have had to have been removed to accommodate *Vulamehlo* in the space. The exhibition showed the work of a number of KZN artists who had been affiliated with the AAC over the years including Andrew Verster, who was a trustee; sculptors Zamakwakhe Gumede, Vuminkosi Zulu, and Andries Botha; painters Charles Nkosi and Joseph Manana; ballpoint artist Tito Zungu and graphic artist Azaria Mbatha. It also included works by carvers,

master weavers, telephone wire craftsmen, and bead work by rural women (Meijer Aug. 1990). Towards the end of the year the DAG staged a show of work by contemporary South African artists, called *Behind the Scenes,* which was on display between December 12 1990 and Feb 24 1991.

The year 1991 saw a coup for KZN in that the Standard Bank Young Artists award went jointly to Bonnie Ntshalintshali and Fee Halstead Berning, and the exhibition of their work showed from February to March 1991. As Carol Brown (Feb. 1991) wrote, 'Fee Halstead Berning and Bonnie Ntshalintshali are artists who express a contemporary African spirit and whose work is rooted in their life experiences.' The award was a fitting choice at the time where harmonious collaboration between whites and blacks was a political and social necessity.

A particularly interesting sponsored event was the Standard Bank National Drawing Competition exhibition, which came to DAG from 13 March to April 7 1991. There were three prize-winners: Matong Simon Nkwadiso, Margaret Vorster, and Walter Oltmann. In the catalogue introduction, Alan Crump (*De Arte* 1991), then Chairman of the National Arts Festival Committee, writes: 'To single out specific works in this competition would be unwise... What for me, though, possibly prevails is an abundance of technical excellence, diversity and dexterity but also an uncertainty of where to "break through" into - and what to explore - in the course of the 90's.'

Crump also commented that the exhibition featured frequent iconography of 'snakes, caves, floods, chickens, columns' (Meijer 1991). The comment was flippantly made but what Crump is alluding to is the mixture of mystic symbolism from black South African artists, which seemed to convey the heightened atmosphere surrounding the falling bastions of white South African culture and power. This can

also be seen in the light of William Kentridge's reference, in the previous chapter, to the profusion of allegorical work that abounded in the 1990s. The images of floods that Crump refers to could be those by sculptor Noria Mabasa, who seemed to imbue works such as *Carnage* (Fig. 56) with a slightly apocalyptic edge that could be seen to comment on the pervading anxiety in the country at the time.

In 1991, the DAG also featured an exhibition of *Art from Zaire,* as well as a showing of Linnware Ceramics of which the gallery had a good collection (Woodhouse 1991). The Pierneef Station Panels came to the Durban Art Gallery in October 1991, with Dan Cook doing a revisionist write-up on the ideological links of Pierneef's depictions of land with the Nationalist agenda of land domination. According to Jillian Carman (2008), however, the catalogue for the exhibition was already slightly revisionist in tone, framing Pierneef as a bit of a renegade and a somewhat unscrupulous or opportunistic man rather than devout 'Broederbonder'.

In 1992, another Natal-born, educated, and employed artist, Andries Botha, was named the Standard Bank Young Artist for 1991, and his exhibition came to DAG in 1992. Botha was deeply involved with the arts on a regional level with the NSA and the DAG and various community projects, including helping to found Durban's first community arts workshops in 1981.[109] He was also known in the South African arts nationally, and was often involved with the JAG, as well as with the arts policy processes that I outlined in Chapter One. He was a popular figure in Durban amongst many black artists, with and for whom he organised workshops and classes based on the kind of knowledge-sharing that is implicit in Botha's use of his mediums and materials.

[109] This closed again in 1988.

Botha modelled his award-winning works from galvanised wire, grass, wattle, wax, tin cans, flyscreen, and tyre rubber in a way that seemed ‘an attempt at reconciling the country's material traditions’ (Nolte 1997: 99; *Bonani* May/June 1992). It can be argued that Botha’s works also perform a reconciliation in terms of gender, as he incorporates the listed materials using processes traditionally associated with craft - such as weaving, plaiting and sewing, seen in the past as ‘women’s work’. These are brought into proximity with as well as basic aspects of engineering in bolting, welding, and carving the work, which have been conventionally ‘male’ tasks (SANG *Bonani* May/June 1992).

The body of work that resulted from Botha being awarded the *Standard Bank Young Artist Award* included larger-than-life tableaux of humanoid figures and animals, which seem to enact mythological narratives and have the air of visual rhapsodies. As with Jane Alexander’s art, the titles of Botha’s works are often ambiguous and have personal significance for the artist, which allows readings of the work to be fairly open-ended. Botha’s works do, however, tend to be slightly lighter in tone than Alexander’s. Titles such as *Dromedaris Donder en ander Dom Dinge* (1986) make allusions to South African symbols and history (the Dromedaris was one of the ships that brought Van Riebeeck to the Cape) and are often in Botha’s first language, Afrikaans. Perhaps one of Botha’s most well-known works is *Alleenspraak in Paradys* (1991: (Fig. 57.1-2), in which a ‘voluptuous black figure rises phoenix-like in her tyre-bound form, “sniffed” out by a carved buffalo/dog at one end and fanned/served by a well-mannered wire mannequin with neon heart’ (Nolte 1997: 99).

Marilyn Martin (1996: 9) describes Botha’s *What is a Home Without a Father?* (1993 – 1995) as follows:

> Comprising seven self-contained elements, it is an epic response to the new South Africa. The artist uses cultural clichés and icons, such as the flying ducks on the lounge wall, a dancing couple, crucified figures and monumental rolling waves in order to establish or allude to degrees of complexity or unpredictability as determinants of historical discourse. The underlying theme is the idea of home land as a desired or neglected place which involves tensions, contradictions and resolutions, e.g.: home/exile, conflict/resolution, leaving/returning, finding/losing etc., in the complex evolution of personal or cultural identity.

The success and favourable reception of Botha's work in the early 1990s seemed very much bound up with the feeling that his work managed to perform and articulate balances and reconciliation between all sorts of opposites, without being trite, over-determined, or idealistic.

When not receiving the benefit of travelling exhibitions like those sponsored - as with Botha's exhibition - by the Standard Bank, the DAG had to cast their nets wide to find sources of new interest to exhibit. In February 1992, DAG collaborated with Durban's Don Africana Library to stage an exhibition of *Maps of Africa* from the Don Africana's collection; and in May 1993 DAG and the Don Africana Library collaborated again with the Local History Museum to create *Maps, views and Nature: the 19th-century impressions of the Bay of Natal.*[110] As Addleson said of this latter collaboration 'I foresee that more such exhibitions will be organised. As finances are getting scarcer, we will have to use our own resources' (Meijer 1993).

DAG's centenary was celebrated in 1992 with the exhibition *100 years of Pictorial Art in Durban,* which featured works by artists in KZN and Natal, divided into three eras: 1892 -1920; 1930 -1970; and 1980 – 1992. As artist and art critic Marianne Meijer (Sept.1992) described the exhibition in the following cursory fashion:

[110] See Tonight reporter. 'Maps of Africa on show at Art Gallery.' *Daily News.* 22 January 1992; and 'Maps of Africa.' *Natal Mercury*. February 1992

> The third period dates from the 1980s to the present. It is characterised by a wide variety of styles, including Post-Modernism and Symbolism, in which the Natal landscape is used to express artists' feelings about contemporary issues in South Africa.
>
> Other major trends in Natal are photorealism, abstraction, and especially the use of cross-cultural elements and references.

This exhibition was one of the few that won critic Dan Cook's praise as it gave considered attention to local art. In Cook's (Jan. 1992) estimation: '*100 years of Pictorial Art in Durban 1892 – 1992*… not only records the history of the Durban Art Gallery, but also documents the development of art in Natal. More importantly however, it traces the polyglot social and political evolution which makes Durban the dynamic city it is today' (Cook Jan.1992).

Following this in 1993 was the Standard Bank's *Art meets Science – Flowers as Images* exhibition curated by Marion Arnold, which also received a lot of press interest and acclaim in Durban. It had travelled from its launch at the 1992 Standard Bank National Arts Festival, to Pietermaritzburg's Tatham Art Gallery, to the SANG, and then on to DAG. The exhibition was a blend of 'fine art' and botanical drawings that ignored the boundaries that had been in place between the arts and illustration. As Cook (Jan. 1993) points out, before berating the DAG staff for their sloppy hanging of the exhibition:

> What makes this exhibition so important is that it points to ways in which the elitism associated with traditional shows can be overcome. This is obviously very attractive to South African galleries since thematic exhibitions provide a democratic forum of art, irrespective of cultural origin or purpose.

While this signalled one change in art historical conceptions and approaches to the curating of exhibitions, Brown (Feb.1993) also notes, in her review of *Art meets Science*, that 'Catalogues are becoming more and more important as permanent

records of exhibitions and the thought-provoking and well-illustrated catalogue accompanying this exhibition sets a standard which will hopefully continue'.[111]

As with 1990 winners Bonnie Ntshalintshali and Halstead Berning, Tommy Motswai (Fig. 58.1-2) was an apt recipient of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award. Being both deaf and black, he was doubly worthy of recognition by a new South African arts world anxious not to neglect minority or previously disadvantaged groups. Carol Brown (18 Feb.1993) wrote in a review of his exhibition:

> Tommy Motswai's show has aroused controversy throughout the country. Some of the critics have revelled in its joyous, optimistic, colourful approach while others have slated its stereotyped, repetitive images.
>
> But have we missed the point? At the Durban exhibition opening, Ann Curry, principal of the Fulton School for the Deaf, spoke about how we were viewing works by a deaf artist rather than a black artist. We have all become so sensitive about the deprivations of the black artist, that we forget that there are other disadvantaged groups as well. Admittedly, Motswai is a black artist, educated and brought up under the apartheid system, but Mrs Curry's talk clearly indicated that his view of the world is one which is shared by most deaf people.

Other key 1993 exhibitions were the *Readers' Digest*-sponsored *Bloomsbury Group of Artists*, the 'first exhibition from overseas since the lifting of the cultural boycott'; a long-awaited exhibition focusing on Indian art; an exhibition on the subject and practice of the conservation of paintings and paperworks, involving the gallery's restorers; and the curation, by Durban artist Jannie van Heerden, of a Kwa-Zulu grass-weaving exhibition titled *Ukusimana Kwamasiko* (Cultural Survival) in October and November (Meijer 1993). In December, over the Christmas period, the Victorian collection was open for viewing. The breadth of focus of these exhibitions

[111] *Art Meets Science* was one of four nationally-travelling Standard Bank-sponsored exhibitions that visited the Gallery in 1993. The others included the February exhibition of Standard Bank Young Artist of 1992, Tommy Motswai; as well as *Sequence Series Sites: photographs by Neville Dubow from 1970 to 1991* in March; and in April, an Azaria Mbatha Retrospective: *Mbatha in Africa* (Meijer 1993).

shows that, by this time, the DAG had responded to censures about its lack of equal racial representativeness and support of provincial and national artists.

Another development in the gallery in 1993 was also clearly motivated by these aims. Perhaps sparked by the 1991 controversy over the display of South African art, the 'small Zulu craft gallery' was dismantled and the room consequently used to house 17th-century Netherlands and Flemish art and the ceramics collection. Addleson said of the move: 'It's our policy to give art and craft equal stature. Often art and craft are related and complement each other' (Quoted in Meijer 1993).[112]

Between the 2nd and 27th March 1994, the gallery launched an exhibition called *No Man's Land.* It consisted of recent works by South African women artists from the collection of the DAG that shed light on the role of women in South African art history. An exhibition which strove to redress gender discrimination was a welcome theme and one which tallied with egalitarian 'new South African' ideals. As Brown (2001: 18) says in *Umbukiso*, 'Since the demise of Apartheid, the focus of social action in South Africa has shifted to Human Rights', rather than vivid depictions of apartheid brutality, and DAG has been especially aware of the infamously high HIV infection rate of the KZN region, and has done much in highlighting awareness of the virus, and addressing the stigma attached to it.

Of the three galleries I have covered, DAG seemed still to be the most accessible and representative of black artists in the 1990 to 1994 period, for all the accusations of colonialism levelled at it. Natal Artists Bonnie Ntshalintshali and Fee Halstead Berning worked together in the Ardmore Ceramics project, and Andries Botha, a former Board member at DAG and an artist, kept in touch with the gallery and

[112] Apart from these exhibitions, DAG had two other large projects planned for 1993 (Meijer 1993). The first was to complete the renovations started in 1990, by re-decorating the top floor of the gallery. The second project was the movement of the education and restoration departments of the gallery to the Old Beer Hall premises in Prince Alfred Street (Meijer 1993).

worked closely with black art makers and crafters in Durban. The DAG also staged a number of significant exhibitions of works by black artists, some of which were retrospectives of artists who had died, such as Cyprian Shilakoe (1991 – presented by the Standard Bank) and Nelson Mukhuba. Other exhibitions showed the work of John Muafangejo (January 1989); the *Artists of Rorke's Drift* (1992); *A Collection Rediscovered* (1992), on Dan Rakgoathe's work from 1968 to 1975; and an Azaria Mbatha retrospective: *The Standard Bank Exhibition, Mbatha in Africa* (1993).

Mbatha was born at Mhlabatini in Zululand, and studied at Rorke's Drift in the early '60s, thereafter going back and forth between Sweden and South Africa studying and teaching. He was the first black South African artist to have work acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[113] *The Revelation of St. John* (c.1965: Fig. 59.1) was one of the two linocuts by Mbatha that were purchased by MOMA - the first graphic prints by an African artist to be included in the museum's collection.[114] He continued with other works such as *The Return* (1980: Fig.59.2), which may have been a response to his return to South Africa. Mbatha again returned to South Africa between 1992 and 1995 doing fieldwork for his DPhil in African historical symbolism. An exhibition called *Home Coming* was held at the AAC in July 1992, and he collaborated with the Standard Bank on his retrospective (Thorpe 1990: 24). In 1998 the DAG held another Azaria Mbatha Retrospective Exhibition.[115]

A number of works by black artists were bought for the DAG's permanent collection in the early 90s: by Muafangejo, Shilakoe, and Rakgoathe in 1991, and by and Johannes Segogela and Azaria Mbatha in 1992. Twenty-seven works by Nesta Nala were also purchased in 1993 on the study collection budget. Other then-Natal-based artists who frequently appear on the acquisition books are Andrew Verster, Tito

[113] http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/artsmediaculture/arts/visual/never-too-early/azaria-mbatha.htm
[114] http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/artsmediaculture/arts/visual/never-too-early/azaria-mbatha.htm
[115] www://www.lifewithart.com/artists/azariambatha.html

Zungu, Jeremy Wafer, Ian Calder, and Bronwyn Findley. Wafer and Calder were artists and lecturers in the art department of the University of Natal (UN, now UKZN) in Pietermaritzburg, and their works and those of other UN lecturers like Ginny Heath were bought by the DAG through the years to bulk up their collection of local Natal artists. Findley was a student of Verster's who became an artist in her own right, although her works are similar to Verster's in their decorative appearances.

Tito Zungu, having been born in the rural Mapumulo district of Kwazulu-Natal, started his art career as an artist with the AAC in 1970 (Thorpe 1990: 35). Known as 'the master of the decorated envelope', his incredibly precise geometrical pen-ink drawings on envelopes (Fig. 60.1-2) are very distinctive, not only in style and materials but in subject matter (Thorpe 1990: 38). Zungu's beginnings in the country inspired his fascination for the fast-paced technology of city-living, hence his concentration on architecture, particularly skyscrapers, and mechanically engineered forms such as ships and aeroplanes (Thorpe 1990: 35). These are rendered with a hand-drawn exactitude, colour and geometry reminiscent of Zulu 'textiles, basket work, beadwork and… earplugs' (McKenny 2000).

Virginia McKenny quotes Colin Richards' suggestion, in his catalogue essay for Zungu's retrospective, that his work:

> …seems to be "founded in the impulse to communicate". Not only is it done on the very container/carrier of communication between people (envelopes and letters) it also depicts modes of transport (ships and aeroplanes) and means of broadcast (radios) which signal transmission of news and ideas and which promise interchange between people (McKenny 2000).

Unfortunately, despite his fascination with modern technology and his eloquent expressions of its precision, the way Zungu's work was written about was pervaded by references to its 'innocence' and 'naivity' - even up to the 1990s. Such

descriptions implied a condescending perception of Zungu as 'childlike' and 'unsophisticated'.

Even in the opening address of his retrospective in 1982, Prof Pancho Guedes described Zungu's creative vision in very problematic terms, with a quote by Andre Breton: 'His eyes exist in their savage state' (Thorpe 1990: 38). Later, he had a '…major exhibition of his work in September 1987 at the *Primitive* Art[116] and Antiquities Gallery in Rosebank, Johannesburg' (Thorpe 1990: 36). Conceptions of the 'childlike', 'uncivilised', 'authentic', 'primitive' and the 'noble savage' were a form of bigotry often applied to work by black artists, and these references show the spirit in which Zungu and his work were often received and shown: as a 'cook boy'[117] with a good eye for line whose work was safe to support because it displayed no revolutionary sentiments.

Another Natal artist worth mentioning here is Derrick Nxumalo, whose colourful and elaborate designs and renderings of 'cityscapes and tourist attractions' also have uniquely South-Coast exuberance and African design aesthetic similar to Zungu's, as is evident, for example, in his *The Drakensberg Mountain Ranges* (1987: Fig. 61). In 1993 Nxumalo, at the urging of Andrew Verster, had an exhibition at the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, which was enormously successful, with all the work sold (Thorpe 1990: 62).

Dan Rakgoathe, in contrast to Zungu, was considerably more ambitious and better informed about art, although it may have been his upbringing in the Transvaal and his formal training and teaching at the Ndaleni Art School that helped in this (Thorpe 1990: 40). After his time at Ndaleni, Jo Thorpe of the AAC arranged for Rakgoathe to attend the Rorke's Drift art centre and he began his Fine Arts Degree

[116] My italics.
[117] Zungu was described as 'Mr Tito Zungu cook boy' in the caption accompanying a photograph of him taken at the ASAT exhibition in 1971 (Thorpe 1990: 35).

through UNISA, later completing it through the University of Fort Hare (Thorpe 1990: 40). From as far back as the ‘70s Rakgoathe wished to produce a record of his work in book form, although this did not materialise for many years (Thorpe 1990: 40). Rakgoathe taught at the Jubilee and the Mofolo art centres in the 1970s, during which time he produced works like *Dream Vision* (1973: Fig. 62.1). He enrolled at Fort Hare, completing ‘his BA Fine Arts in 1978 followed by an Honours degree in 1979 - a unique achievement for a black artist at the time’. This resulted in his being awarded a Fulbright Scholarship in 1983 and later obtaining his ‘MA in African studies at the University of California’ (Thorpe 1990: 40).

The great tragedy of Rakgoathe’s career was the diabetes-related blindness that overtook him in the 1980s. *Solar Rapture* (1982: Fig. 62.2) would have been amongst the last work that Rakgoathe produced. By the time Jill Addleson and the DAG staff organised the 1992 retrospective of Rakgoathe’s work, he was completely blind, but attended the very well-received exhibition. While Rakgoathe is really a Johannesburg born and based-artist, it seems there was not nearly as much recognition and assistance forthcoming from that area. It was his participation and involvement with the African Arts Centre and Rorke’s Drift which helped him gain a substantial foothold in the arts.

Two key purchases worth mentioning here are the DAG’s acquisition of William Kentridge’s *Sobriety, Obesity, and Growing Old* (1991: Fig. 20) in 1992, and of Wilma Cruise’s *Three Shades (The Bully Boys I, II, III),* (Fig. 29) from the show *Nicholas, 1990*, in 1993. *The Bully Boys* sculptures are some of Cruise’s most recognisable and powerful works, redolent with a brutish dark presence. As Brown puts it: ‘the figures depict a kind of masculine brutality - they are depersonalised, large, dark, armless figures with no facial features and protected genitals emphasising

the image of the body as a weapon, with limbs, which although powerful, are immobile.'[118] Cruise's own notebook (1993) describe the *Three Shades* as representing:

> …the collective shadow that hangs over nations when inexplicable murders and disappearances are committed. In both the metaphysical sense and in actuality the bully boys are seldom seen. They are the malevolent shades that hover just off the edge of consciousness…The erasure of their primary means of expression, face, arms, and hands, renders them mute. They are helpless, caught up by the web of their own violence. Only their darkness, their massiveness, and their sheathed organs reveal their power.

The acquisition of these works is an indication of how the JAG balanced its acquisitions of works by local artists, with those by artists creating fine work on a national scale as well.

Finally, it is fitting to end off my discussion of the DAG by reviewing the work of Andrew Verster, a life-long Durbanite who has appeared many times in conversations about, and press research on, the Gallery - often as one of its fiercest constructive critics. Verster, like Andries Botha, has had a long and successful career in the KZN region, as well as nationally and internationally, and has remained a proactive campaigner for the arts in Durban. As a card-carrying member of the ANC and a gay man, Verster had a vested interest in seeing gender-discrimination eliminated in the country, along with racism and sexism. In our interview, Verster (2008) recounted his memories of the early '90s, one of these being of his joining the ANC in 1990 when it became legalised, and campaigning for votes. Verster (2008) described how shoppers walked past the ANC tables set up at Musgrave Centre with averted eyes, but remarks that, 'The day after [the election results came out] everybody said they voted for Mandela. Everyone wanted to be on the winning side'.

[118] www://artthrob.co.za/02jul/news/male.html

Verster was also one of the ACTAG team, is a member of the Film and Publication Review Board, the Arts Works Trust, Very Special Arts, Artists for Human Rights Trust, the AAC, the committee of the Grahamstown Festival, and has long been a DAG Trustee (Brown May 2007). He is first and foremost a visual artist, specifically a painter, but also has acquired acclaim through his short-story and play-writing, and has designed clothes, both for the opera and for various design collections (Brown May 2007), as well as designing the doors and carpets for the new Constitutional Court building. Verster's visual art is somewhat unusual in the contemporary South African art scene, as it is conceptually straightforward, highly coloured, decorative and celebratory, as is evident, for example, in *Holy Fire* (1999: Fig.63.1). His designs often incorporate human figures, usually men, in stylised manners, as in *Untitled* (1996: Fig. 63.2). Verster (2008) says he tends to 'Go round in circles' continually revisiting his more worthwhile concepts.

Recently Verster had a second retrospective to celebrate his 70th birthday. The show was curated by Carol Brown, and shown at the 2008 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, where Verster's works were exhibited at the Albany History Museum. Cloistered off in a separate room to his highly coloured paintings and wax works were works that the curators may have felt would offend viewers with delicate sensibilities. This series, entitled *Rude Boys* (1994: Fig: 63.3), comprised figure drawings of men that are sharper and more eroticised than the rest of his oeuvre, often focussing on the genitals.

When I asked Verster about these works, he explained that: 'The date [1994] is significant. With democracy, I, as a gay person, was legal in my own country in which I was born. I celebrated it with a series of etchings of boys as sexual creatures' (Verster 2008). Verster (2008) said: '…we had to fight for recognition as gay people,

but I've never felt a victim, although I was on the wrong side of the law, I've always been a person on the wrong side of everything' which he claims makes him more empathic 'with people… we're all victims of a bigger system and we're all outsiders'. Verster (2008) says, however, that he always just did the work that interested him, without experiencing significant differences pre- and post-1990.

When asked how, in his memory, galleries and exhibition spaces accommodated political change, and if there was anything they may have struggled with, Verster (2008) chuckled sagely and said: 'Oh yes… All of a sudden, people discovered that there were black artists. It was so humiliating.' Verster (2008) suggests that initially, before apartheid was overturned, 'people' bought black art 'as a way of appeasing their consciences… then, they suddenly started buying black art because it was important to have black art and to be on the right side'. Verster (2008) admitted that the DAG's acquisition committee 'started collecting black art rather later than we should have done, but committees are funny things'. In explanation, Verster (2008) described the committee as 'conservative', and (resonating with an earlier statement by Zwelethu Mthethwa), refers to a South African 'inferiority complex' which is at the root of the South African art world's unwilling to invest in art that has not first been ratified in international art circles.

Both Mthethwa (2008) and Verster (2008) cite Berni Searle, Willie Bester and Pieter Hugo as artists who were appreciated outside of the country before they were lauded within it. This is clearly the case with artists such as Azaria Mbatha and Dan Rakgoathe as well. The DAG did, however, take steps towards showcasing the works of these artists in the early '90s. Artwork by Kwazulu-Natal-based artists such as Andries Botha, Tito Zungu, Derrick Nxumalo and Andrew Verster suggest a

celebration of cultural integration, as early as the ‘80s, rather than addressing the ambivalence and traumatic aftermath of apartheid.

In discussing South African artists in terms of their geographical situations at certain times, I acknowledge that the nature of the South African art scene is more complex. Artists are often involved further afield than their own home regions; they have lived and worked in more than one South African region during their lifetimes; their works have been collected by public art galleries in many regions of the country; and have worked on themes with national significance rather than regional significance. In view of this, my discussion of artists in Chapter Three, Four and Five is more for organisational reasons than in order to draw superficial boundaries between artists in different regions.

CONCLUSION

This thesis grew from my desire to bring clarity to a period of South African art history that warranted more careful study. Between the unbanning of left-wing political parties and the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, and South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, the country went through a number of very rapid changes in social and political hierarchies and priorities. This involved a complete restructuring of the policies in every field of endeavour in South Africa, from government, to business, to the arts. The study I have undertaken is a wide-ranging one, encompassing the public galleries of three cities in three regions - the JAG in Johannesburg, (then the Transvaal, now Gauteng); the SANG in Cape Town (then the Cape, now the Western Cape) and the DAG in Durban (then the Natal Province, now Kwazulu-Natal). Despite their differences, I have shown the common pressures that public galleries underwent due to the national transformation taking place.

In the years between 1990 and 1994, these pressures included the need for public museums and galleries to become receptive to, and representative of, current events, and involve themselves with the present rather than showing history from the safe distance of the past. They also needed to become more accessible and welcoming to the broader public, regardless of race and class; and the emphasis on museums and galleries as places of education increased dramatically during this era. For public museums and galleries, with their increasingly limited staff and budgets, these rapid changes were not easy to accommodate. Public museums and galleries revised, and earnestly 'redressed', their systems and policies, which involved shifts on political, ideological, academic, professional, social and personal levels. Often these revisions

were impeded by practical considerations - like limited space and/or staff - and transformation often took place without the benefit of financial freedom.

These changes were motivated by two different factors. Firstly, in the late 1980s, national and international pressure compelled South African academics and museum professionals to take more of a vested interest in the dire political situation in the country. This was in line with a global move away from the perception of museums as 'temples' and towards the idea of museums as 'forums' - as places of debate, vibrancy, porosity, freedom of expression; and as environments open to constant revision of perceptions, definitions, and categories. Secondly, public museums and galleries in South Africa had been seen as elitist bastions of white culture - financially dependant on - and thus aligned with, the Nationalist government. With the turning of the political tides in the early 1990s, the survival of these museums depended upon a serious overhaul of their images. They had to transform themselves into non-racial, productive, constructive, culturally and educationally indispensable institutions.

One of my secondary aims in getting a clearer idea of the arts during this specific era, was to investigate the perception - in view of the thriving culture of protest art in South Africa in the 1980s - that artists were left without 'struggle' subject matter once apartheid had been overthrown. Although I could not devote in depth analysis to this question, given my primary concentration on museum policy, I have shown that some artists did fall by the wayside. Others formed what may be referred to as a 'lost generation' - those who missed out on the period of increased interest in and appreciation of South African arts.

However, most contemporary South African artists felt liberated by the shift of focus away from struggle propaganda, and started to make subtle, thought-provoking work that often showed considerable socio-political content and comment, but centred

more on the human and individual aspect of identity and rights. As Philippa Hobbs (2004: 2) suggests: 'Artists have outlived apartheid-era labels, such as "art-as-a-weapon-in-struggle." Today the "politics of representation," as it were, has overtaken the "representation of politics"' (Quoted in Dubin 2006: 257). I have also shown how museums adjusted to this changing socio-political climate, as well as how the artists they exhibited engaged with these evolutions.

Whatever hesitation there may have been on the part of artists was largely symptomatic of a national condition of uncertainty. As I related in Chapter One, the years between 1990 and 1994 in South Africa were euphoric but intensely volatile and violent, shot through with the anxiety that the country could have erupted at any number of key stages into civil war. As many of my interviewees related it was an exciting but difficult and unpredictable period: the uncertainty that permeated the country filtered down into an underlying current of tension in everyday existence.

A culture of democracy and inclusivity - which often meant meetings and vociferous debate - characterised the relationships between South African political parties and the relationships between different sectors of the art community. Part and parcel of the atmosphere of contestation was the lifting of censorship and a subsequent move towards the freedom of expression. Artists were liberated from the fear of retribution should their works express sentiments that did not tally with Nationalist rhetoric. The atmosphere of profuse communication during 1990 to 1994 is, I believe, one reason for the lack of substantive literature on the period - there were simply so many groups formed and meetings held that it would be a mammoth task to plot each of the roles and proposals made by individual groups. South Africa has many times been likened to a mythical Phoenix reborn from its own ashes; and writing a thesis on this highly-charged transformative era has, at times, been like

trying to identify the individual flames in the fire. Out of this atmosphere of negotiation, collaboration, and contestation, emerged numerous wise and well-considered policy amendments, which were put forward and finally cohered in the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage of 1996. Unfortunately not all of these amendments have necessarily been implemented.

In Chapter Two, I narrowed my focus on the arts world and museums further, discussing the escalation of the collection of contemporary South African art by big corporate companies, and describing the key art exhibitions of the time, many of which were sponsored by corporate entities like the Standard Bank, the Rembrandt van Rijn Foundation, BMW and Gencor. I discussed the perception that these competitions were 'unhealthy' for the arts climate, due to the ostensible reign of an 'art mafia' - a small groups of academics and art administrators who seemed to control all of the selection panels of these competitions and propagated a sense of 'cronyism'. For some, the emphasis on large, corporately-sponsored competitions initiated a detrimental trend of artists creating 'competition pieces', which negated the production and development of cohesive bodies of work.

This led to a discussion of the role that public art galleries like the JAG, SANG and DAG played in this - as they were often the venues for these corporately sponsored competitions. I also looked at the implications that changing arts policies had for pubic art galleries, and how museum staff set about interrogating and revitalising the role of the public museum in post-apartheid South Africa. I then set about showing how these debates unfolded in the specific, individual cases of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (in Chapter Three), the South African National Gallery (in Chapter Four), and the Durban Art Gallery (in Chapter Five).

In the course of my discussion I have considered the work of both black and white artists. Some have trained at tertiary educations such as the University of the Witwatersrand, and the University of Cape Town, and some have studied at community arts projects like CAP, Thupelo, FUBA, Funda, JAF and Rorke's Drift. I have also put forward the views of the (mainly white) museum professionals, academics, art administrators and historians operational in the 1990 to 1994 period or just prior to it.

In relation to one of the dominant watchwords of my thesis, 'redress', I have presented a number of the problems that museums encountered in their early attempts to bring black South African arts into the 'Western' paradigm of the museum. Further to this, I have detailed instances where the JAG, SANG, and DAG, literally 'dressed' their interiors in order to contextualise African arts and crafts more 'comfortably'. Despite the curators' intentions, these exhibitions have often served to highlight the incompatibility evident in different cultural models of display. This has led me to question, on a broader level, how useful these public galleries have been as 'houses of South African culture'.

Museums were seen as bastions of apartheid but actually received little financial support from that government. Despite great efforts to revise policy and transform themselves in line with the ideals of democracy during the '90s, it would appear that increased financial support from government is still not forthcoming. I have detailed how public museums and galleries' abilities to acquire art has been severely curtailed by diminishing finances as governmental funding of public museums fell away entirely in 1997. Directors and Board Members of public galleries bemoan the amount of South African art exiting the country to those who can better afford it. In the 1990 to 1994 period the arts world - both public galleries and independent community art

programmes - struggled with the withdrawal and division of national government aid and international financial support. Resources have been eagerly allocated to new initiatives, while the old projects flicker on.

The increase in commissions and sponsorships post-1990 have also seen some of the greatest neglects and misunderstandings of art, especially in terms of public commissions, which have, in many cases, been dissatisfying from the points of view of the sponsors, patrons, and artists alike. Having researched this period from numerous angles, my greatest insights have been just how difficult transformation was, but how adeptly the South African arts world handled the necessary changes during the transitional period. It is unfortunate that public galleries seem, after all the fire and energy of the 1990s, to have fallen into a slump. Perhaps because they are haunted by the colonial legacies that have shaped their very architecture, they seem to remain an uncomfortable fit for the new cultural dispensation of the country. In conclusion, I would suggest that, as a nation, South Africa has largely forgotten the value of the discussion, contestation and negotiation that so enlivened and liberated the arts between 1990 and 1994; however, the visual arts continue to be a searching and incisive reflection of the social and political atmosphere in the country.

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