In the Shadow of the Rainbow
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johans borman
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Early European explorers and missionaries to Africa described it as the Dark Continent, populated by primitive, unscientific and impoverished people. This concept was further reinforced by the well-analysed novel Heart of Darkness, published by Joseph Conrad in 1899, which is about the life of an ivory transporter on the Congo River in Central Africa at that time. The book explores the relationship of savagery versus civilization – a popular topic in the late 19th Century – and exposes the reality of colonialism and racism that made imperialism possible. The powerful European nations explained their colonizing motivations by the three C’s: Christianity, Civilization, and Commerce. This noble quest to enlighten and free the African people from slavery was, however, largely a disguise for European Imperialist expansion. It was a race to grab the supposed endless riches of the mysterious Dark Continent – to claim the pot of gold at the end of the African rainbow. Although doing great good in Africa by eventually abolishing the slave trade and supplying crucial social services such as education and health care, the colonial powers have left a legacy largely tainted by injustice and exploitation. They generally deserve the distrust and criticism of their former subjects, as their exploitative practices led to widespread corruption, and destabilized large parts of the continent. To this day, Africa is plagued by the perpetual fighting of unnecessary wars and military coups in futile power struggles which are often an attempt to regain some form of order. Even Apartheid was a continuation, in more systematic and brutal form, of the segregationist policies of the colonial power that preceded it.

The wide time frame chosen for this exhibition, spanning approximately 75 years, allows for an overview of the postcolonial era and the redressing of the oppression suffered under colonialism in Africa. The term Social Realism originated in the USA around 1930 when American painters of the Depression era started exploring themes such as joblessness and poverty, political corruption and injustice, labour-management conflict, and the excesses of American materialism. It was introduced into South African art practice from the late 1930s by predominantly black local pioneers such as Gerard Sekoto, George Pemba, Sydney Kumalo, Dumile Feni, Ezrom Legae, Ephraim Ngatane and Peter Clarke who reflected on the social, economic and political realities of their time. These artists were all directly affected and influenced by the segregation of South African society and the impact that Apartheid had on their communities. They drew attention to, and commented critically on the everyday conditions of the working classes and the poor, while questioning the socio-political structures that are responsible for – and perpetuate – these conditions. In the 1960s the phrase Black is beautiful was coined in the USA, and African states started gaining their independence – shedding the grip of their colonial masters. This was a time when a beautiful black woman like Minam Makeba could claim centre stage in New York, and be an activist for the rights of her fellow Africans. E.B Du Bois, an American Civil Rights activist, introduced the term Black Consciousness at this time in an effort to redress the physical and psychological impact of slavery, colonialism and racism on black society. It became a global movement which aimed to restore black consciousness and African consciousness. In South Africa, organizations opposing Apartheid were becoming well organised from the late 1950s, and adopted a more offensive approach after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 when their policy of non-violence was abandoned. Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) or the “Spear of the Nation” was established as the underground armed movement of the ANC under the leadership of Nelson Mandela. However, the MK leadership were arrested in 1963 and sentenced to life imprisonment after the Rivonia trial in 1964. The South African Black Consciousness Movement was led by Steve Biko from the late 1960s. Biko’s ideology reflected the concern for the existential struggle of a black person as a proud and dignified human being, in spite of the oppression of colonialism and Apartheid. Although Biko was “banned” in 1973, the Black Consciousness Movement was instrumental in the mounting resistance and protests against the oppressive regime, leading to the Soweto uprising of 1976. During the 1980s black townships became the focus of serious political violence as anti-Apartheid organizations aimed to make them ungovernable. The Botha government declared several States of Emergency, and political offenders were brutally punished.

The next chapter in South Africa’s history was a positive one – Nelson Mandela was finally released from prison in 1990. Apartheid was dismantled and the Rainbow Nation held its first democratic elections in 1994, leading to the establishment of what is fondly known as the ‘New’ South Africa. The euphoria of having won the ‘Struggle’ created expectations of equality and the redistribution of land and wealth. Almost twenty years later this has turned to disappointment and frustration as large parts of the population have witnessed little or no improvement in their lives. Although reconciliation between black and white, as well as opposing political stakeholders, was relatively successful under the statesmanship of Nelson Mandela, it has been dealt some fatal blows due to a lack of leadership and direction since the sainted Madiba retired from politics.

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It is in the wake of incidents such as the Mankana massacre, when the ‘born-free’ generation lacks tangible evidence of the success of liberation, that cynics may remark that there is neither black nor white in the revered rainbow.

Included in this exhibition are works by leading contemporary artists such as William Kentridge, David Goldblatt, David Brown, Guy Tillim, Brett Murray, Anton Kammeyer, Pieter Hugo, Jaco Sieberhagen, Walter Meyer and Johann Louw. The works of lesser known and younger artists such as Trevor Nkolo, Richard Mardock, Warren Kemp, Khaya Witsco and Kyle Weeks add fresh concepts, often juxtaposing, but also echoing, established views and concerns. These artists are asking critical questions about the way history is presented, the supposed benefits of post-colonial democracy, sustained dictatorships, new colonialism and general injustices; reflecting the reality of their time.

The objective with this exhibition is to draw attention to, and stimulate debate on issues such as cultural differences, economic inequality, racial prejudice and the everyday realities of our Rainbow Nation and Africa. Artists reflect on their society by expressing its feelings and ideas through the symbols derived from the values and culture of such a society. Although the works presented in this exhibition are by artists from Southern Africa, and these artists are expressing their realities in reference to this region, the issues they highlight are mostlly universal.

Johans Borman
August 2013
Cape Town
Gerard Sekoto

(1913 – 1993)

Sekoto often commented on how he enjoyed, and also was intrigued by, studying and observing people – often making quick sketches to use as references in his paintings which would then be composed from memory. He seems to have had an instinctive ability to simplify and compose works that have a strong compositional quality, while at the same time managing to express the mood with his unique use of a harmonious blend of near primary colours – as illustrated in this watercolour of commuters boarding a bus.

Sekoto’s subject matter was essentially the surrounding milieu in which he found himself. However, one of the outstanding features of Sekoto’s early work was the endless variety within this subject matter. The artist tackled subjects ranging from women gossiping and washday, to African beer halls and workers commuting. He appreciated the colourful, the anecdotal, the interesting, in what to more jaded eyes might have appeared commonplace and not worthy of an artist’s attention. Sekoto consistently imbued the figures in his compositions with great dignity and reveals his deep empathy with the human condition.

Lesley Spiro, Gerard Sekoto: Unsevered Ties, Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1989, p 42

The racial residential segregation policies applied in South African cities during the 1940s meant that black workers had to rely on public transport to get to work from their segregated ‘black locations’. With high unemployment and poverty levels, people lived under very poor socio-economic conditions, which was exacerbated by the poor transport provision in which bus companies had a monopoly and no cheaper alternatives to get to work were available. The first bus boycott took place in Alexandra township in Johannesburg in 1940, when commuters protested to a proposed rise in fares from 4 to 5 pence. More such transport boycotts followed, and spread to other parts of the country – an indication of the conflict created by the segregation policies over the control, management and affordability of the racially divided urban space.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

At the bus stop
Watercolour
27 x 37,5 cm
Signed bottom right
Gerard Sekoto
(1913 – 1993)

The series of highly atmospheric candle-lit paintings produced by Sekoto in the 1940 to 1942 period are proof of his extraordinary natural talent and intuitive ability to capture the dignity of his subjects and convey it with great empathy. Barbara Lindop comments on the humanity of his pre-exile paintings in terms of his lack of sentimentality, his commitment to truth, a poignant realism and an acute awareness of the heroism revealed in ordinary human life.

Although Ernest Mancoba showed Sekoto copies of Van Gogh’s paintings and also used Van Gogh’s troubled life as an example of the struggle artists most often have to endure, Sekoto was always adamant about the fact that he had not allowed any other artist’s work to influence him in any aspect of his painting. The resemblance to Van Gogh’s ‘Potato Eaters’ is uncanny in Sekoto’s series of paintings dealing with the intimate night time gathering of friends or family members around a lone candle; usually the singular light source in a back-lit composition. What is remarkable about these seminal works is Sekoto’s ability to recognise, and successfully communicate, the emotional and atmospheric qualities of these ordinary, everyday scenes at such an early stage of his career.

Newspaper reviews of his 1940s exhibitions referred to the aspects of African primitivism evident in his work, in an effort to explain his lack of formal training and the resultant distortions of human form and perspective in his paintings. This view excludes the possibility that Sekoto had purposely chosen to portray these scenes in this manner in an attempt to capture the poignantly earthy and unsophisticated humanity of his subjects, affording them the dignity and respect they were most often denied as members of the workings class in a discriminatory society.

Evening at home
Oil on canvas
45.5 x 54 cm
Signed bottom right

PROVENANCE
The Campbell Smith Collection

ILLUSTRATED
Hayden Proud (ed.), Revisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art, Cape Town, 2006, p 104

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Gerard Sekoto
(1913 – 1993)

In Barbara Lindop’s biography of Sekoto, he recalls the subject of this painting: During my stay in Cape Town it happened that somehow out of that notorious District Six, there arose a most fascinating and spectacular street musician. He was a tall, slender, limping young man of about twenty years of age, slightly hunchbacked, wearing a flat old hat. He groaned out loud in a husky voice on a one-note tone, accompanied by his empty tins which he handled easily under his arm to hit it with the other hand to a rhythm of a guitar.

His tin had a hole meant for two purposes: to enhance the sound and also to allow in a drop of a coin from an appreciative listener. Like all the spectators I enjoyed the sight of his artistic performance, yet felt a certain tragic chord striking deep within me, although I would express in my painting only what the eye could see, while leaving the rest to the judgement of human conscience.

Barbara Lindop, Gerard Sekoto, Johannesburg, 1988, p 24

His recollection cited in N Chabani Manganyi’s biography is slightly different: There was a chap who was limping. He would hit an empty tin while yelling and howling. But he was very amusing in the face. The face was harmonising with his movements. He was tall, with thin legs. He would move for a while beating the tin while howling and yelling. All of a sudden he would stop, make a surprising movement, an expected dance, a strange movement. He was making his living that way. People put money in his tin. What pleased me was that he was having a good time. He was an artist. He was true and real.


PROVENANCE
Ashbey’s Galleries, 1969
Private collection, Johannesburg, 2004
Private collection, Cape Town

ILLUSTRATED
Song for Sekoto: Gerard Sekoto 1913-2013, Exhibition catalogue, Johannesburg, 2013, p 137

Street musician in District Six
c1943-4
Oil on canvas
61 x 50.5 cm
Signed bottom left
The 12-year-old George Pemba loved watching films at the ‘bioscope’ and, abandoning his afternoon duty of herding his father’s few cattle, would walk the ten miles back to Korsten to see these films. At this time he also started his first business venture drawing likenesses of the film stars of the day, (such as the famous star of silent western films in the twenties, Tom Mix), charging his friends a tickey a picture. [...]

When his father came to hear that he was avoiding his herding duties, he was furious. Pemba was soundly thrashed despite the protestations of his mother. He was so humiliated by this experience that he ran away from home [...]. After a while, his father found him and begged him to return. They were joyfully reunited.

During his long painting career this theme of the prodigal son returning to his family was close to Pemba’s heart, and was to be painted time and time again. The theme of these works comments on the importance of instilling a traditional value system in each new generation. This helps the survival of traditions and family values in a society which continually changes and offers new ideas which can easily corrupt the true and tested principles on which its identity is based.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Sarah Hudleston, George Pemba – Against All Odds, Parow, 1996, pp 20 to 21

The prodigal son
1952
Oil on board
30.5 x 40 cm
Signed and dated top left
Traditional healers of South Africa are practitioners of traditional African medicine [...] and fulfill different social and political roles in the community, including divination, healing physical, emotional and spiritual illnesses, directing birth or death rituals, [...] and narrating the history, cosmology, and myths of their tradition. [...] It is estimated that there are as many as 200,000 indigenous traditional healers in South Africa compared to 25,000 Western-trained doctors. Traditional healers are consulted by approximately 60% of the South African population, usually in conjunction with modern biomedical services.

Despite the fact that Pemba [had] always been a committed Christian who [had] aligned himself with various churches, traditional Xhosa custom [was always] important to him. He felt that these traditions should be kept alive and was proud of his Xhosa heritage. The trips he had made to rural Xhosa areas, and his many paintings of his people in traditional dress helped to keep this feeling alive.

This duality of Christianity and traditional belief systems is a reality for a very large proportion of Africa’s population. The complexity of living one’s life according to both sets of principles brings a very different challenge to a society which has to fit in with the demands of the ‘global village’ in the 21st century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Sarah Hudleston, George Pemba – Against All Odds, Parow, 1996, p 75
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_healers_of_South_Africa

Sangoma
1980
Oil on board
35 x 45 cm
Signed and dated bottom left, inscribed with the title verso
In 1950 the Berlin-born photographer Jurgen Schadeberg, then 19 traveled to Johannesburg, looking for a job. He found one on a new magazine called Drum, which during the year(s) of apartheid was South Africa’s leading lifestyle monthly with editions throughout the continent as well as in North America and the Caribbean.

The magazine recorded South Africa’s vibrant urban life and its growing political repression. As picture editor and chief photographer, Mr. Schadeberg was in charge of training a young, mostly African staff, which included Bob Gosani (1934 – 1972), Peter Magubane and Gopal Naransamy, all of whom became renowned photojournalists.

[...] At the time, South African popular culture was much influenced by the United States. In a 1954 picture, a jubilant Hugh Masekela at the beginning of his career cradles a trumpet sent to him as a gift from Louis Armstrong. In a photo from 1955, Miriam Makeba is seen onstage around the time she made her first recordings with a local band called the Manhattan Brothers.

http://www.jurgenschadeberg.com/press07.htm

Jurgen Schadeberg writes about this time in his career:

When I arrived in South Africa in 1950 from Germany I found two societies running parallel with each other without any communication whatsoever. There was an invisible wall between the two worlds. The Black World, or “Non European World” as described by white society, was culturally and economically rejected by the White World.

Only servants and menial workers could enter the White World. In the fifties The Black World was becoming culturally and politically very dynamic, whereas the White World seemed to me to be isolated, cocooned, colonial and ignorant of the Black World. As a newcomer and outsider I managed to quite easily hop from one world to another... for example in the evening I might photograph a white masked ball in The City Hall, the next morning an ANC Defiance Campaign meeting, or shebeen in Sophiatown... all followed by The Durban July. My images from the vibrant fifties Black World, “the rejected society”, have been extensively covered in South Africa because I felt it was important that both blacks and whites should see what the Verwoerdian ideology had successfully destroyed.

Throughout her career, Makeba insisted that her music was not consciously political – in an interview with the British times she said: “I’m not a political singer... I don’t know what the word means. People think I consciously decided to tell the world what was happening in South Africa. No! I was singing about my life, and in South Africa we always sang about what was happening to us – especially the things that hurt us.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
http://jurgenschadeberg.com/groupa.htm
http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/miriam-makeba

Miriam Makeba, Johannesburg 1955

1955
Silver gelatin print
43 x 27 cm
Signed, titled and dated in the margin. Signed, titled and dated, and stamped with artist’s copyright stamp verso
Gerard Sekoto (1913 – 1993)

From 1960, Sekoto painted a series of busts that he was to revisit and re-work repeatedly until the mid-1970s. These abstracted heads and portrait studies were usually executed in broad strokes using a blue palette. Sekoto explained that he chose to use the dominant blue palette because it was sufficiently strong, and contrasted well with the warmer colours, while also allowing for tonal adjustments when mixed with white in the highlighted areas. Apart from these technical aspects, he also liked the positive and expressive qualities of strong blues, which contributed to the grace and dignity of these iconic heads with elongated necks.

Sekoto inscribed a 1960 ball-point pen drawing of the South African singer extraordinaire, Miriam Makeba; ‘Inspiration – Miriam Makeba’. Deceased in 2008, she was ‘Mama Africa’ to the world and an anti-racist activist till the end – always supporting and identifying with the downtrodden and disenfranchised. Both Lesley Spiro and Barbara Lindop are of the opinion that it is most probable that this drawing provided the inspiration for Sekoto’s series of ‘Blue Heads’.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Barbara Lindop, Gerard Sekoto, Randburg, 1988, pp 212 to 213
Lesley Spiro, Gerard Sekoto: Unsevered Ties, Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1989, pp 54 to 56 and 89

Mother and child
1963
Gouache
46 x 33 cm
Signed and dated bottom right
Ephraim Ngatane’s artistic inspiration came from his daily experience of urban black township life on the Witwatersrand during the 1950s and ’60s. His paintings are, today, regarded as important documents of social realism, authentically depicting township life during this period.

Ngatane documented township life in all its forms; from the overcrowded living conditions to the social entertainment events like parties and weddings, sports, and memorable occasions such as when it snowed in Johannesburg during the 1960s. As an accomplished jazz alto-saxophonist, he also painted lively music and dance scenes, in which his individual abstract style managed to successfully capture the energy and movement.

In earlier African societies, a man’s wealth was traditionally measured by the number of wives he married, how many children he had, as well as the cattle and livestock he owned. A man without [a woman] in his household was a poor man indeed; women performed essential tasks like caring for the family, maintaining the home as well as producing food, clothing and household goods. After resettling into towns, African women continued, as far as possible, with the traditional home industry where they could be with their children while cooking and cleaning for the family. With the title of this painting, ‘Weight of the fatherhood’, Ngatane ironically comments on this practice; the single income of the father of the household is barely sufficient to sustain life for a large family in the township, and what may traditionally be seen as desirable, has become a burden from a modern cultural perspective.

Ephraim Ngatane
(1938 – 1971)

Weight of the fatherhood
1966
Oil on board
75 x 105 cm
Signed and dated bottom right

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Eliza Miles, Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre, Johannesburg, 2004, pp 42 and 94 to 97
Ivor Powell and Hayden Proud (Eds), Revisions – Expanding the narrative of South African art, Cape Town, 2006, p 154
http://www.sahistory.org.za/beer-monopoly
Ephraim Ngatane
(1938 – 1971)

In the Zulu & Ndebele religions the spirits of the ancestors are known as amadlozi, and play a very important role in the lives of their living descendants. The spiritual world is central to most African religions, and the spirits of the ancestors are greatly respected. Spirits (like Angels and demons in the Jewish, Islamic, and Christian traditions) directly communicate with and impact the lives of human beings, as individuals and as communities.

http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m14/activity2.php

Communication with the amadlozi is mediated by sangomas, who are the tribe’s spiritual leaders as well as healers. Our communal connection to the amadlozi is fundamental to our relationship with the ancestors; it means that we are not separate, unconnected. What we do to each other reverberates in the ancestral dimension and through the greater link to the planet we live on which is also our ancestor.

http://africashamanexperience.com/amadlozi-ancestors

After burying a deceased loved one, a family would go through an Ukuhlanziswa (cleansing) ceremony as it is believed that death is a bad omen to the nearest living relatives, and that such an omen could be passed on to their neighbours. After a year, the homeless and roaming spirit would manifest itself to the family in the form of a snake or a dream, or even a sickness. The family would then respond with an Ukubuyisa (bringing home) ceremony, presided over by the most senior of the relatives. After prayers to the new idlozi, meat from a sacrificial ox would be left overnight for the spirit to consume. The following morning the remaining meat would be eaten, and washed down with beer brewed especially for the ceremony. The idlozi could then join the other ancestral spirits to be worshipped as one of the amadlozi. Traditionally, such offerings and sacrifices are often made to the amadlozi, both to secure a good life for the people, and to appease the spirits, who can become Righteously angry if neglected.

PROVENANCE
Adeline Pohl Collection, Johannesburg, 2007

ILLUSTRATED
Rory Bester, Natalie Knight, David Koloane, Ephraim Ngatane: A Setting Apart, Cape Town, 2010, p 22

BIBLIOGRAPHY
http://www.bulawayo1872.com/history/ndebele_CultureReligion1.htm

Sacrifice for the dead Amadlozi
Watercolour
57 x 78 cm
Signed bottom right
Dumile Feni
(1942 – 1991)

As with his drawings the content of his sculptures were strongly based on social realism, drawing chiefly from the social conditions and urban circumstances and environment of his fellow Blacks. His drawings and sculptures are, therefore closely related and very successfully complement one another.

[...] The greatness of Dumile’s art lies in his ability to transcend his immediate environment into a universal reflection of human existence and suffering. This manifests his awareness of the link between art and life, beauty and violence, love and sorrow. Dumile’s art is clearly involved with human rather than aesthetic problems. As such his art has a compelling quality which draws the viewer again and again. The instinct of Dumile’s art is apparent and he communicated his emotions and feelings in intelligible pictorial language and images.


PROVENANCE
University of Fort Hare Collection, Alice
Bernard Janies Collection, Johannesburg
The Campbell Smith Collection
Omar Badsha Collection

ILLUSTRATED
Johans Borman (ed.), Persona Exhibition Catalogue, Cape Town, 2011, p 65
Hayden Proud (ed.), Revisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art, Cape Town, 2006, p 182

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http://www.pelmama.org/Johannesburg-artscape_DUMILE-sculptures.htm

Anguished woman
C1968
Bronze
Height: 26 cm
One of four casts
Dumile Feni (1942 – 1991)

Dumile Feni never received any formal training as an artist. In an interview with Eva Cockcroft for Art and Artists in 1983, titled I Come From a Long Tradition, he claimed that his artistic development was shaped by his childhood visits to the Bushman caves with his mother, where he saw the paintings of his ancestors. In an article published in SA New Writing, Photographs & Art (1987) he confirmed that these cave paintings were the most important influence on the style and sensibility of his work: ‘I am amazed by one thing that I’m glad never left me – that is the beauty of the lines, the fine lines.

While working at a pottery business in Johannesburg in the early 1960s, Dumile became acquainted with the painter Ephram Ngatane who was also employed decorating pots. They both suffered from tuberculosis and met again as patients at the Charles Hurwitz SANTA hospital in 1964. Their artistic talents were encouraged by the matron in charge, and they painted a number of murals in the wards and chapel of the sanatorium. This led to the formation of an informal art group under the leadership of Ngatane who acted as tutor for the younger artists who included Dumile and Welcome Koboka. They shared their skills and advice, and exhibited their artworks at the Open Art Fair in Joubert Park. It was during this period in 1964 that Ngatane painted the portrait of the young Dumile now held in the MTN Art Collection.

Dumile’s enthusiasm and dedication meant that the quality of the drawings and sculptures he produced impressed Madame Haenggi of Gallery 101 enough to invite him to have a solo exhibition in 1966. He subsequently received further encouragement from artists and intellectuals like Bill Ainslie, Lionel Abrams, Cecil Skotnes and Barney Simon. In Artlook in November 1966 he was described as the ‘Goya of the townships’ and this analogy remains entwined with his reputation.

His quivering line and scratchy style of drawing was admired and much imitated but rarely with the same intensity. As William Kentridge remarked in an interview in 1981: ‘Dumile…did drawings which at first sight looked like down and out scarecrows. But when you came within a few feet of them they would give you a kick in the guts.’

I’m glad never left me – that is the beauty of the lines, the fine lines.

Writing, Photographs & Art (1987) he confirmed that these cave paintings were the most important influence on the style and sensibility of his work: ‘I am amazed by one thing that I’m glad never left me – that is the beauty of the lines, the fine lines.

Michael Stevenson and Joost Bosland, Take your road and travel along, 2008, p 133

‘Banking deposit’ was one of the significant large-scale drawings that Dumile produced around 1967 prior to his going into exile in 1968. Because he had no formal employment, Dumile had been unable to secure authorisation to live and work in Johannesburg despite having a supply-contract with Gallery 101. Authorities threatened to move him to a tribal homeland, which would effectively have ended his artistic career. He was living with Bill Ainslie during this difficult time, and it was Ainslie who arranged for him to exhibit with the Grosvenor Gallery in London, and assisted him in getting a passport.

‘Banking Deposit’ is an auto-biographical work, as in it Dumile reflects on the love affair he claimed to have had with a white woman. Warren Siebrits writes: Dumile held what is arguably his most important exhibition of pivotal large scale drawings at Gallery 101 in Jeppe Street, Johannesburg. The exhibition was opened on 12 June 1967 by wealthy socialite Mrs Mary Harari. It was rumoured at the time that Mary Harari and Dumile Feni had become intimately involved – an illegal liaison in South Africa at the time due to the enforced colour bar and immorality act.

Given the emotionally charged circumstances under which this drawing must have been produced, the imagery and composition is highly symbolic. The artist depicts himself as the forlorn figure sitting with the bag marked Banking Dep – looking up at the scantily dressed white woman who is not returning His gaze. Part of the spine of a large leather-clad book, coloured in brown, can be observed on the right hand side of the work – possibly a reference to the authority of the state, the church, tradition and the social class system. The Banking Dep is juxtaposed with the cow behind the sitting figure – both symbols of wealth in the opposing cultures of the couple – placing the distraught figure in the middle. The woman has her hands up in the tree – reaching for the bird and the fruit; symbols of happiness and a good life. Dumile is expressing the impossible situation he finds himself in – he is intaluated with a woman he may not have – a woman culturally different, married to another man and accustomed to a lifestyle of privilege and wealth. He is contemplating his impossible position – how does he impress her or win her affection – how important is his lack of wealth?

We would like to thank Bruce Campbell Smith for his assistance with the research for this entry.

EXHIBITED
Dumile Feni Retrospective, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Cape Town, 2005

ILLUSTRATED
Prince Dube (ed.), Dumile Feni Retrospective, Johannesburg, 2006, p 53
Michael Stevenson and Joost Bosland, Take your road and travel along, Cape Town, 2008, p 130

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Bruce Campbell Smith, Dumile – Artist in Exile, Cape Town, 2004
Michael Stevenson and Joost Bosland, Take your road and travel along, 2008, p 133
Warren Siebrits, Family Relation, Johannesburg, 2007

Banking deposit
c1967
Charcoal on paper
243 x 102 cm
Ezrom Legae
(1938 – 1999)

Ezrom Legae is best known for his powerful visual commentaries on the pathos and degradation of Apartheid – a critique he extended to the persistence of poverty and racism in the post-apartheid years. He studied under Cecil Skotnes and Sydney Kumalo at the Polly Street Art Centre from 1959 to 1964. The training Legae received from Kumalo, and the stylistic influences gleaned from fellow students at Polly Street, such as Ben Arnold, Ephraim Ngatane, and Louis Magubela, resulted in his fusion of classical African and modernistic styles. Working in a neo-African idiom, as Elza Miles terms it, he applied these influences to his sculpture, to shape and interpret observations from life.

As with Skotnes and Kumalo, the African art collector and gallerist, Egon Guenther, had a seminal influence on Legae’s stylistic development and career. Guenther introduced these artists to German Expressionism and the sculptural traditions of West, and Central Africa, and familiarised them with the work of artists like Baumeister, Barlach, Kolwitz and Sharf. Elza Miles writes: According to Guenther, Legae, being exceptionally intense and sensitive, absorbed the spirit of the African pieces without copying them.

Ivor Powell adds: Perhaps more than any other artist associated with the Polly Street milieu, Legae’s practice as an artist is absolutely convincingly located at a cusp between African sensibility and reference on one hand, and the transcendent and universalist preoccupations of international modernism on the other. In this regard, many of his sculptures register equally the kind of abstractionist simplification of European and American figurative sculpture of the mid 20th century and the hieratic and animist charge and proportion of African traditional woodcarving.

In the sculpture ‘Young man’, Legae presents us with the male form stylized to the essence, his features angular and chiselled. Although passive, with hands behind his back, the sculpture beams with pride and confidence – virtually shouting: Black is beautiful!

Young man
1969
Bronze – Edition number 2/10
Height: 63 cm
Signed with the initial ‘L’, and numbered II/X
Sean O’Toole writes: Sam Nhlengethwa’s metier might be art but his inspiration is undoubtedly jazz. “Jazz simply inspires me,” the Johannesburg based painter and collagist once revealed in an interview. “Of all the subjects that I have dealt with, none has been revisited like jazz. Jazz is second nature to me.” Jazz, characterised by its syncopated rhythms and individual or group improvisation around a basic theme, also suggests some useful, if rather loose tangents for exploring the output of an artist who has long concerned himself with the specificities of place – Johannesburg – and the sounds that have animated life in it.

Nhlengethwa was born into a family of jazz lovers; his two brothers both collected jazz music and his deceased eldest brother was a jazz musician. “Painting jazz pieces is an avenue or outlet for expressing my love for the music,” he once said in an interview. “As I paint, I listen to jazz and visualize the performance. Jazz performers improvise within the conventions of their chosen styles. In an ensemble, for example, there are vocal styles that include freedom of vocal colour, call-and-response patterns and rhythmic complexities played by different members. Painting jazz allows me to literally put colour onto these vocal colours.”

Jazz was born out of a synthesis of many cultural influences. Its roots lie in the adoption by African-American slaves of European harmony and form, taking on those European elements and combining them into their existing African-based music. 

Ella Fitzgerald, born in 1917, was one of the most celebrated and successful jazz vocalists of the Swing Era. She was noted for her purity of tone, impeccable diction, phrasing and intonation, and a ‘horn-like’ improvisational ability, particularly in her scat singing. The artist adorns her with a beret, a symbol made famous by Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara, and adopted by several activist groups in the 1960s, giving her a revolutionary status as a jazz singer.

http://www.artthrob.co.za/03oct/artbio.html
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_band
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ella_Fitzgerald
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jazz
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beret
Kumalo is held in high esteem by all his fellow South African artists and the art community of South Africa. He was in many ways the doyen of South African Black art. As such he was an important influence especially on younger African sculptors, by whom he is greatly revered. Through his teaching at Polly Street and at the Jubilee Centre, as well as through his personal example of integrity, dedication and ability, he inspired and guided students who in their own right became outstanding artists, for example, Ezrom Legae, Leonard Matiso and Louis Majaphetla. (E J de Jager, Images of Man: Contemporary South African Black Art and Artists, Alice, 1992, p 109)

Sydney Kumalo enrolled at Polly Street Art Centre in 1953, and became a member of Cecil Skotnes' group of serious artists who were encouraged to acquire professional skills. Skotnes introduced a basic training programme with modelling as a component, which marked the introduction of sculpting (in brick-clay) at Polly Street.

Elza Miles writes that Cecil Skotnes' friendship with Egon Guenther also had a seminal influence on the aspirtant artists of Polly Street: Guenther broadened their experience by introducing them to German Expressionism as well as the sculptural traditions of West and Central Africa. He familiarised them with the work of Ernst Barlach, Käthe Kollwitz, Gustav Seitz, Willi Baumeister and Rudolf Sharf. It is therefore not surprising that some of Kumalo's sculptures show a definite affinity with Barlach's powerful expressionist works.

Dance plays an essential role in the culture of African tribes. Although ethnically and culturally diverse, these dances are used to teach values, help with bonding, communicate emotions, and are an integral part of various celebrations, religious ceremonies, rites of passage and even funerals. Using the whole movement of the body whilst singing to the beats of the drum, African dances are largely participatory, with spectators being part of the performance.

During Apartheid, the war dance of black South Africans – the Toyi-toyi – was used during protests and uprisings. The dance, which dates back to the Mau Mau people in Kenya, who rose against the English colonialists, symbolized the triumph of spirit through song and dance against one of the world’s most oppressive state apparatuses. The chant ‘Amandla’ was a popular rallying cry. Widely regarded as the trademark of the African National Congress (ANC), this is a Xhosa and Zulu word that means ‘power’. The leader would cry out ‘Amandla’ and the crowd would respond with ‘Awehlu’, which means, ‘to us’: This would complete the cry: ‘Power to the people’.

Sydney Kumalo’s bronze ‘Dancer’ is a celebration of this age-old cultural history. With fists thrown into the air, and feet firmly planted on the ground, the dancer defiantly challenges oppressive systems with joyful ecstasy.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**
Elza Miles, Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre, Johannesburg, 2004, pp 42, 47, 49, 58 to 60 and 92
http://dance.lovetoknow.com/HISTORY_OF_AFRICAN_DANCE
http://www.capeptomagazine.com/whats-the-deal-with/toyi-toyi/125,22,17384
http://www.sapollitics.co.za/176/how-toyi-toyi-has-become-a-political-vehicle
Peter Clarke commented that his deliberate intention in the choice of subject matter in ‘Skomfaan drinkers’ was social critique.

[...] It was customary for drinkers of this home brew made from grain to share a single skaal, a tin container that was passed from hand to hand in a sociable way, each drinker taking a turn to buy a skaal.

“Drinking with a favourite companion can be such a beautiful thing, such a wonderful experience. How marvellous it is to be alive, one feels, while doing something one enjoys. One lives so greatly at that time” (Clarke 1991: 14-15)

But here each man has his own drink, and there is no convivial sharing. Alcohol provided escape, but could result in social breakdown. Clarke recounts that he was making oblique reference to the social breakdown he had observed during the clearing of shacks on the Cape Flats, and to how people were cut off from their communities, not knowing what the future held. Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin, Listening to the distant thunder: The art of Peter Clarke, Johannesburg, 2011, p 128

BIBLIOGRAPHY
http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/culture-survival

Traditional beer was originally brewed by women for their husbands, and formed part of traditional ceremonies and celebrations. It had a low alcohol content, and was made from a mixture of sprouted millet, mealie meal and water. Having moved to the cities, some women added to their monthly income by continuing with this tradition, which allowed them financial independence. By the 1930s, city brewers were making skomfaan skokiaan, which had a higher alcohol content, brewed from a basic recipe of sugar, yeast and warm water. When the brewing of home-made beer and drinking liquor became illegal activities for Africans in most towns, beer-brewing women were forced to do it illegally. Municipalities had to find ways of raising money for the building of basic houses, and by 1937 the Urban Areas Act insisted that municipalities either introduce beer monopolies or allow licensed brewers to supply beer.

Because home brewers were prosecuted and their beer confiscated or destroyed, they had to find ways to hide their brews and speed up the brewing process between the police raids. The usual brewing process required three days, which was too long and risky, and concoctions with additives like methylated spirits and brandy were devised to give it kick just hours before men would come home from work at weekends.

As a commodity, liquor soon lost its religious social value. It was no longer a drink to be enjoyed slowly, at leisure, as an aid to good conversation and relaxation. It became instead a form of escape, and a way of getting drunk as quickly as possible before the next shift or the coming week’s work.

http://www.sahistory.org.za/beer-monopoly

ILLUSTRATED
Phyllis Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin, Listening to the distant thunder: The art of Peter Clarke, Johannesburg, 2011, p 129

Skomfaan drinkers
Dated 24.3.1975
Gouache, ink and pastel on paper
43 x 63 cm
Signed and dated bottom right
George Pemba
(1912 – 2001)

During the political disturbances in South Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s, necklacing “sentences” were [regularly] handed down against alleged criminals by “people’s courts” established in black townships as a means of enforcing their own judicial system. Necklacing was also used by the black community to punish members […] who were perceived as collaborators with the apartheid government. These included black policemen, town councilors and others, as well as their relatives and associates.

The first recorded instance took place in Uitenhage on 23 March 1985 when black African National Congress (ANC) supporters killed a black councillor who was accused of being a White collaborator.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necklacing

Port Elizabeth street scene – political unrest
c1985
Oil on board
49 x 66 cm
Unsigned – Certificate of Authenticity by S Welz attached verso
George Pemba
(1912 – 2001)

Throughout his life, [George Pemba] expressed his anger and hatred towards the apartheid system by depicting the everyday struggle of black people in his paintings [...] Inkanyamba, painted in 1987, conveys the atrocities of the government’s covert ‘third force’ activities in the black townships [during this period]. The title refers to an uncontrollable snake that wreaks havoc like a tornado, terrorising the community and destroying lives by inducing fear and chaos.

Michael Stevenson, Johans Borman and Michael Graham-Stewart, Take your road and travel along, Cape Town, 2008, pp 83 to 84

PROVENANCE
Prof EJ de Jager

ILLUSTRATED
Michael Stevenson and Joost Bosland, Take your road and travel along, Cape Town, 2008, p 89

Inkanyamba
1987
Oil on board
48.5 x 65 cm
Signed and dated bottom left, and inscribed with the title verso
Willie Bester is regarded as one of South Africa’s most significant resistance artists. He uses the leftovers of the society he depicts in order to retrace the political history of South Africa. Bester was ten years old when the Group Areas Act of the apartheid government forced his family to leave their farm and move to a homeland. Like an archaeologist, Bester reconstructs the fabric of this history to reveal the hidden faces of the South African township. His works are vivid collages, juxtapositions of odds and ends, of rubbish found in the townships: shoes, bones, tin cans, newspaper clippings, pages of books, scrap metal. The artist has stated: “People have built up a resistance to anything that addresses the psyche of mankind or people or themselves. I believe that we must protest against that which is wrong. There is no form of escape; remaining apolitical is a luxury that South Africans simply cannot afford.”

In this mixed media collage, ‘White church, Crossroads’, Bester creates a monolith-like building out of found objects, towering over the people going about their daily chores. The dual meaning of the word ‘white’ – both descriptive and symbolic – can be read as an indication of the imposing nature of the Christian religion – just as the white Nationalists imposed the Apartheid system on those who did not fit their classification of ‘white’. By leaving the branding of the spray-paint cans on the whitewashed walls visible, the artist comments on the cover-up of the wrongdoings committed in the name of religion, and the powers that promoted it. It is significant that this work was created in 1994, the year South Africa was at a crossroads and chose a new direction in the hope of a better future.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**
http://williebester.net/

**Willie Bester**
(b 1956)

**White church, Crossroads**
1994
Mixed media
40.5 x 80 cm
Signed and dated bottom right
In an introductory note to Felix In Exile, Kentridge writes, “In the same way that there is a human act of dismembering the past there is a natural process in the terrain through erosion, growth, dilapidation that also seeks to blot out events. In South Africa this process has other dimensions. The very term ‘new South Africa’ has within it the idea of a painting over the old, the natural process of dismembering, the naturalization of things new.”


Felix in Exile was created in 1994, amidst ongoing public debates on the relationship between the country’s division of ownership and the formation of identity which accompanied the first open elections in South Africa. The film tells the stories of Felix, a man living in exile in Paris, and of Nandi, a woman working as a land surveyor. The woman is Felix’s alter ego. She stands for the longing for one’s homeland, and how for his sake someone bears witness to the incidents in the new, democratic South Africa. No differently than with the fears and memories that flood over him in his room, the world ultimately overpowers Nandi as well—she is shot.

Her many gazes are found in the mirror. The drawings Felix produce flood his sparse room like water, like memory and longing. On the other hand, Nandi is embedded in a cosmic distance that dissipates in the misery of black South Africa. In the topography of the landscape, Nandi’s surveying instruments search for traces of history, for a standard of existence, for a direction.

The drawings and images of Felix and Nandi pile up one atop the other, functioning in both cases as seismographic documents of an emotional shock. The victims of the story are discovered on discarded daily newspapers and written as such into the landscape. Nandi too, finds death. Felix, on the other hand, finds himself once again in the deserted landscape of his homeland, but now with a suitcase full of drawings. This film speaks to the longing for one’s homeland and bears witness to the incidents in the new, democratic South Africa.


ILLUSTRATED
Bronwen Law-Viljoen (ed.), William Kentridge Prints, Johannesburg, 2006, pp 50 to 51

Felix in exile
1994
Etching, soft ground, dry point and aquatint – Trial Proof, Edition of 35
55,5 x 77,5 cm
Signed and numbered in pencil in the margin
Johann Louw has been described as exploring the psychological landscape of South African identity. With their textured brush strokes and thick layering of paint, his canvases can be seen as a burial site for personal and public history. Preoccupied with the vulnerable intimate, as he calls it, Louw typically enjoys juxtaposing a nude figure with a consuming and impersonal landscape.

Louw’s paintings are intense responses to notions of identity and space, as well as to the particular relationship that exists between the artist and his subjects. Introspective and empathetic, Louw’s ambiguous subjects and deserted scenes are testament to a particular psychological spirit of place and time, experienced with discomfort across social structures within a fast transitioning South Africa. There is a pervading uneasiness as vulnerably exposed figures and forsaken landscapes occupy non-descript and paradoxical spaces.

http://www.smacgallery.com/artist/johann_louw

In the painting ‘Liggende torso met landskap’, a gaunt, almost lifeless figure lies on the bare earth, witnessing the barren landscape illustrated below. His skeleton protrudes through his aged and fragile skin, echoed by the ancient rocky desert landscape. Disconnected from the land, the forlorn figure serves as a metaphor for those dispossessed, uprooted and removed from what was once familiar and dear to them. As the figure wanes, so his tracks and the evidence of his existence slowly disappear into the soil, as if he was never there.

EXHIBITED
The Fourth Beijing International Biennale, 2010

ILLUSTRATED
Johans Borman (ed.), -scape Exhibition Catalogue, Cape Town, 2011, p 59

BIBLIOGRAPHY
http://www.rosekorberart.com/artists/louw.htm

Liggende torso met landskap
2006
Oil on canvas
160 x 95 cm
Signed and dated verso
Jagersfontein is a small town in the Free State Province named after Jacobus Jagers, the Griqua who originally owned the land. The town was established as a result of the 1870 diamond rush, and developed quickly because of the successful diamond mine which produced two of the ten biggest diamonds ever unearthed. Many residents left after the closing of the mine in 1969, leaving behind the remnants of a town that once was.

In the painting ‘Jagersfontein’, Walter Meyer turns his focus to one of the uninhabited houses – now unkempt and abandoned. The design of the house, which appears to have been built just after the War when the town was still flourishing, is based on South African colonial architecture, fondly known as ‘Cape-Dutch’. Named after the initial Dutch settlers, it was a prominent style in the early days of the Cape Colony – its most recognisable feature the grand, ornately rounded gables, reminiscent of the townhouses of Amsterdam. Surrounded by the encroaching veld, and framed with alien Mediterranean Cypress trees, the house stands as a reminder of the original settler’s dreams of colonization – representing the ideals and aesthetics of a culture far removed and unsympathetic to this continent.

This style was recycled and adapted into a Neo Cape-Dutch style in the 20th century, making it look even more misplaced on the African plains. Strategically placed in the front garden, as if guarding the residence, is a sculptural interpretation of a sitting Bushman. It is not only the style of the house, but also the symbolism of this sculptural feature, which further emphasizes the lack of understanding and empathy for an African setting. The sad irony of this setting is emphasized by the image of the earliest human inhabitant of the land, presented here as a curiosity – like some extinct species. Painted in 1994, this painting can be seen as strong social commentary on the arrogance and injustices of colonialism which disenfranchised people not only from their land, but also from their identities.

ILLUSTRATED
Amanda Botha, Walter Meyer, Cape Town, 2011

BIBLIOGRAPHY
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Dutch_architecture
"I’m interested in machines that make you aware of the process of seeing and aware of what you do when you construct the world by looking. This is interesting in itself, but more as a broad-based metaphor for how we understand the world."

“When you look through a stereoscopic viewer, you’re aware that you have two completely flat images, and that all that is happening is that your brain is constructing an illusion of three dimensional depth, which is very clear when you look at the stereoscopic view because you know you’re seeing two flat images. What’s much less obvious is that that’s what you’re doing all the time in the world.” —William Kentridge

http://www.art21.org/anythingispossible/slideshow/on-perception/

This drawing forms part of a series of tests for making stereoscopic drawings. It confirms Kentridge’s use of the landscape as a metaphor for a historical document — witnessing and recording events; gathering the evidence of social change. This is also evident in his 1994 film Felix in Exile, and there are obvious conceptual similarities present in this drawing. Man’s exploration and re-shaping of the terrain has turned it into a wasteland with overwhelming evidence of his markings on, and dominance over his claimed prize. The three figures in the background of this drawing are dwarfed by the posts and surveying markers. Displaced by the industrial action, their future appears uncertain in this desolate landscape — their only option to flee in search of a new home and livelihood.

The landscape often also absorbs and, over time, obscures such evidence from our view, hiding its history — what Kentridge refers to as disremembering the past. This process of erasing and reformulating the look and lay of the land is echoed by the artist’s technique of drafting, erasing and remodelling the drawing. It serves as a metaphor for the shifts in, and reconstruction of the changing South African socio-political landscape.

Kentridge’s reference to the metaphorical meaning of the stereoscopic viewing process is key to uncovering the intended meaning of this drawing. The artist urges us to be aware and vigilant of how we see, of what our points of reference are and of how our brains construct images which may only be an illusion and not necessarily the truth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
The name ‘Newtown’ was adopted by city administrators in 1904 following the clearance of Brickfields and other multi-racial ‘slums’ in Johannesburg’s first forced removal. [...] The destruction of Brickfields and subsequent development of Newtown was an attempt by the post-South African War administration of Lord Milner to refashion Johannesburg along ‘modern’ lines. This involved formalising the townscapes, developing infrastructure and strictly enforcing racial segregation.

Braamfontein, a central suburb of Johannesburg, saw large scale commercial development during the apartheid era. The area began to drastically deteriorate after the abolition of Apartheid, but urban renewal efforts have led to the district’s regeneration as a corporate district, educational centre, and entertainment and arts hub.

By capturing this view from a garbage dump in Newtown towards Braamfontein, photographer David Goldblatt draws attention to the dramatic contrast between the high-rise office buildings of central Johannesburg, and those who occupy them, and the makeshift plastic shelters of those who make a living from scavenging through the waste of society’s privileged. The shelters are almost indistinguishable from the detritus, and become a metaphor for the ‘ghost’ citizens who have been lost in an economic system without any hope of a better future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Braamfontein

Braamfontein from Newtown, 1st November 2001
Dated 1/11/01
Archival pigment digitally printed on cotton rag paper – Edition number 1/6
56 x 70,5 cm
Signed, dated and numbered in the margin
Nicholas Hlobo spent time at Mogalakwena Craft Art Village, situated in a remote part of the Limpopo Province, to work with beadworkers and embroiderers of the project to create this work. He explains: “Umgubo Wengxowa Enye” is a Xhosa phrase meaning “the meal of the same grain”. The beadwork over the bowl is in reference with the screens women make for bowls/milk jugs to keep flies off the contents of the bowl. By this, the work attempts to protect art and craft from elements that tend to create wide boundaries between the two.

Hlobo is proud of, and draws strongly on, his Xhosa heritage, invoking the rich idioms of the Xhosa language and using them to present uniquely South African stories in a fresh manner. He states: Through my works I attempt to create conversations that explore certain issues within my culture as a South African. The conversations become a way of questioning people’s perceptions around issues of masculinity, gender, race and ethnicity.

Umgubo Wengxowa Enye may also be interpreted as a metaphor for narrowing the gap between the various groupings in South Africa’s diverse and unequal society. The concept that we are all meal from the same grain – can be interpreted as meaning that we are all human, African and interconnected by the love our motherland, which we are dependent on for our livelihood and survival as a nation.

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http://www.artthrob.co.za/06june/artbio.html
http://prezi.com/6uc52m6silnf/visual-arts-historical-and-critical-task-22012/-/

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**Umgubo Wengxowa Enye**

2005
Enamel bowls, kudu hide, impala hide, beads, embroidery cotton and raffia
110 x 130 cm

In collaboration with Mogalakwena Craft Art – Liesbeth Nkoadi, Sina Mathikihlela, Elisa Mankga, Rebecca Sepaela, Elbe Cotesee
Marc Stanes (b. 1963)

Marc Stanes recalls the occasion on a fine English summer day in June 2003, when he photographed Nelson Mandela in the Beit Room at Rhodes House in Oxford: He turned on the Mandela smile for the camera, amused that he was sitting in Cecil Rhodes’ chair observed by the bust of Alfred Beit, another great 19th century entrepreneur and benefactor who made his fortune in Africa. Madiba did not like it when I asked him *not* to smile but I was very keen to see the other side of him. Suddenly I was faced by the tough, driven leader hidden beneath that smile, and I noticed the sorrow of an individual whose family had become so damaged because of his beliefs and imprisonment. In that moment, I was faced by a completely different person, and this was the one I wanted to capture.

There is a multi-layered significance to this fine portrait of our iconic Madiba. As Stanes observed, the most striking aspect is the statesman’s steely character which underpins his unassuming authority as a leader. Then there is the wonderful irony of the revolutionary literally taking the seat of the oppressor – de-throning the evil ruler. Rhodes, as a politician and businessman, was instrumental in introducing legislation that paved the way for what later officially became the apartheid political system. This image also comments on the rejection of the colonial ideal – claiming back self-rule and independence with the accompanying political power and commercial benefits. Rhodes and Beit were two of the most successful Randlords, and both became spectacularly wealthy by claiming the mineral wealth of the newly colonized Southern Africa in the name of the British Empire. Mandela’s contemplative expression is therefore a culmination of all these aspects, brought about by his quest for a peaceful transition to a free and democratic South Africa.

ILLUSTRATED
Johans Borman (ed.), Persona Exhibition Catalogue, Cape Town, 2011, p. 79
The American writer James Baldwin asked the thought-provoking question: ‘Which of us has overcome his past?’ when he studied American history at the time of the slave trade and considered his country’s inability to come to terms with its historical underbelly of racial violence. Baldwin also struggled with the idea of moral progress and questioned whether people really change when their historical context changes.

This question becomes important and very relevant when one considers the present realities in South Africa. The honeymoon period of the “Rainbow Nation” is over and we are in the process of re-thinking and re-defining our relationships with history and with our fellow countrymen. Baldwin’s gripping statement: ‘People are trapped in history and history is trapped in people’ confirms the energy that currently exists in our country.

With these questions and issues in mind, I have created the ‘Coffle’ series in which I set out to portray the reality that people (we) are inseparably connected to each other, and each other’s past, present and future. To quote Baldwin freely: ‘We are trapped in each other’s past, present and future.’

To bring this concept to life I have used the haunting images of coffles. A coffle is a line of slaves tied together and is derived from the Arabic word ‘cafile’, which means ‘caravan’. I have used historical images of actual coffles as reference points to strengthen the concept. Although the coffle recalls a painful time in the history of humanity, it is also a symbol of an inseparable unit or chain of people brought together by circumstances and moving towards a shared destiny. Acknowledging this unity becomes the coffle’s strength and hope for survival.

Jaco Sieberhagen

The race
Painted mild steel – Edition number 7/7
Height: 25 cm
Signed and numbered on the base
Robert Hodgins
(1920 – 2010)

‘Men carry an awareness that the world is theirs,’ says Hodgins. ‘But there’s a pathos about arrogance because it’s not unassailable really.’ For Hodgins the dissimulation of power is best seen in the emblematic sign of ‘the suit’. The suit is a ‘straitjacket’, an ‘armour’, ‘with its stripes and folds it is as tailored as steel. If you draw or paint a suit, whatever you put on top immediately becomes interpreted as a head. And because it’s on top of a suit it becomes interpreted as a powerful head. It doesn’t matter if it’s exploding or collapsing.’

http://web.uct.ac.za/org/cama/CAMA/countries/southafr/Makers/hodgins/HTML/index.htm

It is almost impossible to impose an absolute reading on a work by Robert Hodgins, because to him the meaning of a work is mostly incomplete, usually uncertain and sometimes completely unintentional. His works are mostly satirical interpretations or mockeries of those who abuse their power, and no-one’s – not the general’s, the dictator’s or the businessman’s – flawed nature escapes his critical eye. Direct indictments of power are however avoided, always leaving the viewer to make ‘accidental’ readings, much like the ‘likenesses’ Hodgins paints. And what better way to portray such figures of power and authority than having them wear Hodgins’ trademark tailored suit.

In ‘Director’s meeting: 2pm Old boardroom’ the heads of five such figures of power are precariously balanced atop their scribbled collars. The businessmen and their trappings can be interpreted as metaphors for the deceptiveness of outward appearances which, at a cursory glance, seem to subscribe to convention, whereas on closer inspection it becomes clear that the rotten core is in the process of devouring the image, from the inside out. Behind the pin striped safety of a dark suit lurk the lurid ogres of rampant convention, the sloths of greed and priests of emotional apathy.

Although this can be seen as a projected reading, Hodgins wickedly guides the viewer to make an accidental reading – that this stale game of power is barely a new one, but that it has been built on a centuries-old tradition – just as the reference to ‘Old boardroom’ in the title implies.

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Anita Pyke, Robert Hodgins, 2002, Cape Town, p 67
http://www.unit6.co.za/artist/bio/robert-hodgins/

Director’s meeting 2pm: Old boardroom
2005/6
Oil on canvas
35 x 100 cm
Signed, dated and inscribed with the title verso, inscribed with ‘For Linda on her 70th birthday’ on the stretcher frame
Warrick Kemp
(b 1968)

John Dewey said in 1931, As long as politics is the shadow cast on society by big business, the attenuation of the shadow will not change the substance.

The ‘revolving door’ practice, where big business is in bed with government, promotes greater rights to a select few. State officials leave government to lobby on the side of corporations that seek lucrative state contracts. In turn, corporate executives move into politics to attain positions of influence over government.

On 21 January 2009, US President Barack Obama signed into law a revolving door ban to combat the practice of lobbyists entering government and government officials leaving to become lobbyists.

ILLUSTRATED
Warrick Kemp, Warrick Kemp: The Pigs are Coming, Cape Town, 2009

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http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Executive
Order-EthicsCommitments/

Swingers
2009
Bronze – Edition of 6
Height: 61,5 cm
Signed ‘WK’
Brett Murray's art is known for its satirical attacks on bad government, both pre and post-Apartheid, raising questions of power, patronage and sycophancy, whilst attempting to define his own identity. In the introduction to his exhibition, ironically titled White like me, he explained: My concerns moved from external issues of bad government, power abuse and the like, to a concern with notions of identity, memory and to defining a psychological sense of place. The artist found it necessary to redefine a sense of place as a white male in South Africa, as the structures that used to define this identity have drastically changed since the democratic elections in 1994. As Ivor Powell notes: To be white is to have a share in the shame of the apartheid past; to be white is to have been formerly unfairly advantaged; to be white is to have much to elucidate and, not to put too fine a point on it, to be inescapably morally suspect, having been a beneficiary of apartheid; to be white is also to be on the wrong end of social engineering and to be excluded from processes of redistribution.

In her essay Touching a Nerve: Identity, Caricature and Confrontation in the work of Brett Murray, Kira Kemper writes: [Murray] grapples with his place in the world as a kind of “white middle class cultural hybrid”, being a white male who was formally “unfairly advantaged” and who carries “anxiety, guilt and opprobrium” because of the shame of apartheid, as Ivor Powell puts it. (2002: 7-9). As a person and an artist he is greatly influenced and affected by his place in the world and the way in which he exists in the body that he is in. He does not shy away from touchy subjects and he says: “My objective is not to insult, it is to provoke”.

In the diptych 'I am an African too', Murray cynically juxtaposes the title of the speech made by Thabo Mbeki, then deputy president of South Africa, in Cape Town on 8 May 1996, with a portrait of Robert Mugabe. Chris Thurman comments that Murray’s dismissive approach is motivated by a collective frustration: Mbeki’s stance on Zimbabwe, like his HIV/AIDS denialism, undermined whatever inspiration SA’s citizens might have taken from him. The artist not only plays the two leaders off against each other, but he also claims his own white Africanness by adding the word “too”, reconciling his struggle as a South African white to discover or create an African identity.
All people instinctively respond to potential danger, as it threatens their well-being and survival as individuals or a group. Fear is the emotion that occurs in response to a threat of pain or danger, and usually leads to a fight-or-flight response, with the possibility of a freeze- or paralysis response in extreme cases of terror. In a socio-political context, the concept of power-fear is the tool power hungry governments and despots utilize to exert their authority and dominate subordinates. Such regimes would blacklist, intimidate, jail, and eliminate (murder) their opposition and constituents in order to retain power – a scenario that has been witnessed in African countries such as South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

William Kentridge has expressed his outrage against the unjust and cruel Apartheid system through his innovative animated films which connect the dots of capitalism and colonial exploitation. He exposes and commentates on the psychological and material misery caused by the acts of dispossession resulting from this lethal system. Through the continuous enforcement of colonial ideals by means of fear and terror over centuries, the African peoples were bludgeoned into submission. This example of how to rule by fear has had an unfortunate following amongst power hungry leaders who grabbed the opportunity to mimic their former masters in the post-colonial era. In spite of the supposed equality and ‘checks-and-balances’ that a democratic governmental system should offer, it appears that it struggles to overcome the intimidating forces of a natural history of fear where such regimes are in power.

This work was reproduced as a limited edition lithograph in the iJusi Portfolio #2 in 2011. The portfolio of ten signed lithographs, in an edition of 50, showcased key works by selected artists which explored concepts surrounding lettering and typography that are integral to the image in the context of the African Experience. Kentridge’s interpretation of the theme is obvious – the idea of peace, symbolized by the whimsical image of a dove, is dominated by the heavy black lettering of its nemesis – fear.

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http://www.south-africa-the-real-issues.org/Intangible1/PowerFearCulture.aspx#.Ud1U9zswdyw
http://www.ijusi.com/portfolios/

William Kentridge
(b 1955)

A natural history of fear
2011
Ink on paper
18.5 x 27.5 cm
Signed bottom right and inscribed with the word ‘Lunch’
In his series of bronze sculptures titled ‘Eleven Deadly Sinners’, David Brown comments on the injustices that can be inflicted on a citizenry as a result of the ideological goals of a powerful political regime.

Inspired by Anne Applebaum’s book Gulag: a history, Brown comments: ‘I made the Engine Driver, struck by the harrowing train journey to the forced labour camps. I wondered what the train drivers must have thought. This series developed further around the concept of complicity by the sometimes seemingly innocent participants who individually and collectively helped maintain the status quo of such an unjust system.

During the 1980s, South Africa’s government became increasingly dominated by then State President PW Botha’s circle of generals and securocrats who managed the various States of Emergencies. Black townships became the focus of serious political violence as anti-Apartheid organisations aimed to make them ungovernable. These militant actions were met by the strict enforcement of security legislation by the police and the army, and political offenders were brutally punished.

David Brown’s ‘Sinners’ typically represent those who unquestioningly obey such a regime’s directives, sometimes unwittingly, and act as cogs in the wheels of state machinery to ensure it stays in power. These grotesque figures with their adornments of straps, braces, belts and helmets are the embodiment of Brown’s vision of the insanity of Apartheid and the inevitability of collapse. The fact that art imitates life is confirmed when one reviews how PW Botha’s government forces suppressed the political unrest by any means possible: An increasing number of organisations were banned or listed (restricted in some way); many individuals had restrictions such as house arrest imposed on them.

During this state of emergency about 2,436 people were detained under the Internal Security Act. This act gave police and the military sweeping powers. The government could implement curfews controlling the movement of people. The president could rule by decree without referring to the constitution or to parliament. It became a criminal offence to threaten someone verbally or possess documents that the government perceived to be threatening. It was illegal to advise anyone to stay away from work or oppose the government. It was illegal, too, to disclose the name of anyone arrested under the State of Emergency until the government saw fit to release that name. People could face up to ten years’ imprisonment for these offences. Detention without trial became a common feature of the government’s reaction to growing civil unrest and by 1988, 30,000 people had been detained. The media was censored, thousands were arrested and many were interrogated and tortured.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid_in_South_Africa

Commemorating the first anniversary of the Marikana massacre more than twenty years later in post-Apartheid South Africa, one cannot help but question the continuous abuse of power at all levels of society. The SA Police Service was responsible for these murders, but commanders on the ground were surely taking orders from those in power.

http://issuu.com/arttimes/docs/saat_september_2011_ws

ILLUSTRATED
Johans Borman (ed.), Persona Exhibition Catalogue, Cape Town, 2011, p 114

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The lion tamer
2009
Bronze – Edition number 4/6
Height: 66,5 cm
Signed with initials DJB, numbered and dated
The preacher man  
2009  
Bronze – Edition number 4/6  
Height: 51 cm  
Signed with initials DJB, numbered and dated

The prison warder  
2009  
Bronze – Edition number 4/6  
Height: 44 cm  
Signed with initials DJB, numbered and dated

ILLUSTRATED
Johans Borman (ed.), Persona Exhibition Catalogue, Cape Town, 2011, p 106

ILLUSTRATED
Johans Borman (ed.), Persona Exhibition Catalogue, Cape Town, 2011, p 108
Guy Tillim  
(b 1962)

South African photographer Guy Tillim has spent nearly 20 years documenting the colonial and political legacies that dominate contemporary African history – often seeking out a humane moment in a world of torment and death, an approach that gives many of his photographs a lingering disquiet. He has been photographing in the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly Zaire) over the past decade, and these portraits were taken in December 2002 of Mai-mai militia training in camouflage near Beni, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

At the time he photographed the child soldiers they were not being used as a traditional defence militia but being drafted into one of the rebel factions in the battle for the mineral riches of east Congo. These portraits are a poignant reflection on the sad similarities between the colonial powers and the African dictators empowered by them.

Mai-mai means water. The name refers to their belief in magic that turns their enemies’ bullets to water. They are a traditional defence militia who are often co-opted by political groups, or are forced to choose sides in disputes between rebel factions. These troops, boys ranging between 12 and 16 years old, were sent for immediate deployment with the Armée Populaire du Congo (APC), which was the military wing of the Rally for Congolese Democracy-Kisangani-Movement of Liberation (RCD-Kis-M-LJ). The RCD-Kis-M-LJ, allied to the Kinshasa government, 2,000 kilometres to the west, was arrayed against another RCD splinter group in the region, led by Jean-Pierre Bemba, and the notorious Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), led by the 26-year-old Thomas Lubanga.

ILLUSTRATED
Michael Stevenson, South African Art Now – Catalogue 23, Cape Town, November 2006

BIBLIOGRAPHY
http://www.stevenson.info/exhibitions/soldiers/soldiers.htm

Portrait VI, Mai Mai militia in training near Beni, eastern DRC, for immediate deployment with the APC (Armée Populaire du Congo), the army of the RCD-KIS-ML, December 2002
Archival pigment ink on 300gsm coated cotton paper – Edition number 5/5
86.5 x 59.5 cm
Signed Certificate of Authenticity
Guy Tillim
(b. 1962)

Portrait III, Mai Mai militia in training near Beni, eastern DRC, for immediate deployment with the APC (Armée Populaire du Congo), the army of the RCD-Kis-ML, December 2002
Archival pigment ink on 300gsm coated cotton paper – Edition number 5/5
86.5 x 59.5 cm
Signed Certificate of Authenticity
South African comic writer, Anton Kannemeyer, is unflinchingly committed to using the polemics of race to explore the vigorous debates about racism that still enliven and shadow daily life in South Africa. As the shimmer of the rainbow nation has faded, issues around race continue to underlie the most contested issues in the country [...] Kannemeyer confronts us with the fears that underlie these debates about race, his works possessing a frankness and humour that often leave us awkward and uncertain of our own position.

Using a satire of Tintin in the Congo, Kannemeyer has parodied the perceived racist nature of the book in order to highlight the continuing racist undertones of South African society. [...] Tintin in the Congo is the second volume of The Adventures of Tintin, the comics series by Belgian cartoonist Hergé. The series was commissioned by the conservative Belgian newspaper Le 20e Siècle as colonialist propaganda for its children’s supplement Le Petit Vingtième, and tells the story of young Belgian reporter Tintin and his dog Snowy, who are sent to the Belgian Congo to report on events in the country. [...] In the latter 20th and early 21st centuries, several campaigners and writers characterised Tintin in the Congo as racist due to its portrayal of the Congolese as infantile and stupid.

Kannemeyer’s Tintin is a white Afrikaner with racist views of the indigenous people – deliberately rendered as savages reminiscent of Hergé’s depiction of ‘the natives’. Tintin, now ‘...a white African trapped in his own incriminating skin [...] cannot escape his colonial past regardless of his personal political convictions’, and in this series of large-scale drawings Kannemeyer satirises the white fears and prophecies of doom and gloom leading up to the Soccer World Cup in 2010.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**
- http://www.stevenson.info/artists/marais_essay.htm

Image: © Anton Kannemeyer. Courtesy of STEVENSON Cape Town and Johannesburg
Bruce Campbell Smith’s assessment of Makhoba’s artistic importance is worth noting: As a painter, his artistic contribution to the milieu in which he lived is immeasurable. In my opinion, this painting tradition was started by the pioneer artists of KwaZulu-Natal such as Simon Mnguni, Arthur Butelizi and Gerard Bhengu. Trevor often worked in a similar idiom to these early Zulu artists, a fact which needs to be confirmed and which warrants further exploration by researchers ... Whereas the pioneer artists illustrated rural themes, Trevor extends that tradition by introducing urban imagery into his paintings, often joining the former with the latter. He celebrates Zulu culture much as those earlier painters did, but with a zest that adds an extra dimension to his art, and which consequently elevates it.

In this Makhoba painting, ‘In the garden of history’, a Zulu man in full traditional regalia receives a book from a scantily clad young European woman – the viewer is offered a modern day take on the original fall of man, when Eve presented Adam with the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The artist juxtaposes two cultures; a traditional African culture represented by a Zulu warrior with his guard down, literally standing on his shield, and the Western culture, symbolized by a typical temptress, a Delilah of sorts. Delilah – meaning [She who] weakened or uprooted or impoverished in Hebrew – was the downfall of Samson, according to the Bible, and is here posed to be the downfall of the Zulu culture. The artist makes reference to Zulu customs and traditions by placing a clay beer pot, used in celebratory ceremonies to honour ancestral spirits, between the two figures. The colonial ideal of converting Africans to Western / European religions and customs, here symbolized by the handing over of the book, threatens the future of these African traditions.

The composition is framed by two pillars of stacked skulls – a possible reference to the pillars that a blinded Samson reputedly pulled down in a final act of faith to wipe out his enemies. It alerts the viewer to the inherent danger of this liaison, which could have fatal consequences for African culture and customs – as has historically been proven. Central to the composition is a stairway to heaven in the garden – a symbol of the quest for moral upliftment and enlightenment; of rising above the temptation and overcoming the potential threat of extinction. The painting does not offer any suggestion as to what the outcome of this interaction will be – it merely sounds a warning, and questions the potential gains or advantages of accepting the ‘gift’.

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http://www.revisions.co.za/biographies/trevor-makhoba/
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Man

Trevor Makhoba
(1956 – 2003)

The garden of history
2002
Oil on paper
50 x 63 cm
Signed and dated bottom right
Richard Mudariki
(b 1985)

This painting depicts a president in his political laboratory, operating on a cockerel, the symbol of his political party. He tries to cure the diseased bird while the country – symbolized by a bird in a cage – is held hostage. He formulates his next political moves by studying an x-ray of the cockerel. The president’s cabinets are filled with objects which signify his 3-decade-long rule – death, fear, intimidation, greed and destruction – in contrast to the victory medals from his better early days. Will he be able to cure this disease, or will he continue with his tyrannical rule?

Richard Mudariki

The surgeon
2012
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Signed and dated bottom right
Richard Mudariki
(b 1985)

This painting is a statement about some powerful African leaders who are, in fact, puppets to wealthy masters who manipulate the way they run their governments/countries. They are fed money, and given projects that bring personal gain, to support their extravagant lifestyles, whilst they steal resources that should benefit their constituents.

Richard Mudariki

Puppet on the throne
2013
Acrylic on canvas
80 x 60 cm
Signed and dated bottom right
When the leader of a sovereign state refuses to become a puppet for a foreign government or corporation, regime change is often engineered. Evidence of this has been the replacement of Mossadegh by the Shah in Iran in 1953, Sukarno by Suharto in Indonesia in 1970, and Allende by Pinochet in Chile in 1973. All these coups were engineered and supported by the US and/or the UK governments.

The common thread is the active support of a dictatorship or oligarchy that pursues privatization of its state enterprises and natural resources, and opens its borders to big business and foreign governments at the expense of its population. Such actions are often sanctioned by the aggressor’s civilian population, whipped up by propaganda and spin, but usually benefit only a small ruling class in the target country.

George Kennan, head of the US State Department’s Policy Planning staff between 1947 and 1949, is quoted in Derrick Jensen’s End Game as saying that if we are to maintain a position of disparity over those whose resources we must take, we should cease to talk about vague and [...] unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratisation, and instead should deal in straight power concepts, not hampered by idealistic slogans about altruism and world-benefaction.

Noam Chomsky, in Hegemony or Survival, writes, George Kennan, in this case, briefing US ambassadors to Latin America on the need to be guided by a pragmatic concern for the protection of our raw materials, ours, wherever they happen to be located, to which we must preserve our inherent right of access.

These actions are initiated under various guises; the fight against Communism, terrorism — anything to scare the population into believing that intervention in the affairs and leadership of a sovereign state is required and justified. Highly decorated US Major General Smedley Butler carried out many Capital Crusades: I spent 33 years and 4 months in active service as a member of our country’s most agile military force – the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from a second lieutenant to Major-General. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism, Butler wrote in Time of Peace, an article in Common Sense magazine, November 1935.

Noam Chomsky, Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance, 2003, New York, p 34
MG Smedley Butler, Time of Peace, Common Sense Magazine, November 1935, pp 8 to 12
Richard Mudariki
(b 1985)

This painting questions China’s involvement in Africa. The tailor is stitching newly defined borders onto the map of Africa – is China transforming Africa positively or negatively, or is its involvement in Africa a form of neo-colonialism? Their economic activities range from small stores selling cheap consumer goods manufactured from the resources of Africa, to their involvement in infrastructure developments, the oil industry and mining projects. The Chinese government, private and state companies, as well as individual Chinese immigrants are changing the commercial face of the continent – often with exploitative labour practices, and usually at the expense of the growth of local African business. Surely one should question the political and economic motives of this powerful global player in Africa.

Richard Mudariki

Chinese tailor
2013
Acrylic on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Signed and dated bottom right
To most South Africans, the mention of the name Miriam Makeba recalls memories of the songs she became famous for, such as ‘Pata Pata’. This shows that we have been deprived of who she really was, because to the majority of her countrymen, her death meant only the loss of a Diva. Should she, however, be fully represented as the multi-faceted artist and revolutionary she was, we would have a better understanding of what it means to be an African. As the Grammy Award-winning South African singer who popularized African music around the world in the 1960s, she was nicknamed Mama Africa – playing an activist role and using her position and exposure to promote civil rights.

After 1994, the media in our newly liberated country created a distinction between those activists who served jail sentences for carrying guns, and those who used different methods and other platforms in their fight for liberation. This is evident in how we celebrate their memory. The gun was not the only umshini, and the battlefield was not only the bush – Apartheid was also fought by using the microphone and typewriter; for guns alone can’t win freedom.

Like Che Guevara, the Argentinean-born, Cuban revolutionary leader who is today considered by many to be a symbol of rebellion and idealism, Miriam Makeba should, above all, be remembered for championing the liberation of her fellow Africans.

Khaya Witbooi

Che Makeba
2013
Oil and spray paint on canvas
50 x 40 cm
Signed bottom left
Khaya Witbooi  
(b 1977)

In the 1980s most homes in my neighbourhood did not have TV, and we, the children, would flock to the nearest home that did to watch 80s pop culture programs, such as The A Team, for 5 cents. Our experience of the struggle was limited to insipid, censored radio broadcasts and iconography, and our memories of that time are linked rather to what we saw on TV – The A Team, Star Trek, Knight Rider, and Steve Austin, die man van staal.

During this time, my father hid all the material that referred to black empowerment – even the newspaper clippings of Nelson Mandela and the others imprisoned during the Rivonia trial. We grew up conscious of the struggle, yet the iconography that told of it was invisible – even the paintings of Madiba painted at that time lack his resemblance. Radio, on the other hand, was accessible to all, but it was severely limited in conveying relevant information due to government censorship. I remember the adults twisting the dial in search of the news, hoping to get a better interpretation on a different station, and the shhhhhhh between channels as the signal was lost in the process.

It is as though we have now again come to that point where the signal is lost as we twist the dial forward in search of a meaningful interpretation of this Democratic South Africa. It is as though every channel we find only offers the same insipid broadcast of current affairs – that’s when moving forward feels like following a trail to the place you thought to have left behind.

When Neil Armstrong took his first step on the moon in 1969, he said: That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind. It was a significant move forward, as was the hoisting of South Africa’s new national flag on 27 April 1994 – an event that signified a new beginning for all, and commanded respect from the rest of the world. Now, the pride and honour we attributed to our national flag has been eroded, and old compliments are replaced by criticism of our country’s lack of progress, rampant corruption and violence. Rather than a giant leap forwards, South Africa took a giant leap backwards on 16 August 2012, with the shooting of protestors at the Marikana miners’ strike – symbolizing the indifference and abuse of power by our leaders.

Khaya Witbooi

Giant leap for mankind  
2013  
Oil and spray paint on canvas  
150 x 120 cm  
Signed bottom left
The killings on the Marikana fields were caused by a bigger problem – a problem that plagues all leaders – the failure to respect the rights of every human being without violating the rights of another. This imbalance is created by those entrusted with the power to rule, as they often look down on those they receive this very power from through votes.

Township residents will confirm that the behaviour of the blue uniform force has never changed, even though they are mostly black these days. It’s as though the uniform has a curse which manifests itself in the resistance of the police force to accept that they work for the people. When vigilante killings occur in the townships they are used as billboards with a straightforward message: ‘IF WE CATCH YOU STEALING, MUGGING, RAPING, etc., WE WILL KILL YOU IN FRONT OF EVERYONE’. That is the message that Pilate sent by crucifying the criminals on the hills while everyone one was watching in fear.

Was it not the same unlawful and unjust action when police dragged a taxi driver behind their vehicle? How different is that from the necklacings that occurred in the townships? Then the failing government still calls for votes from the same people it disappoints, while politicians spend their time and taxpayer money on building mansions for themselves, rather than on enforcing and upholding our rights.

When one receives the right to vote, all other human rights are supposedly included, but when the police murder our people then it’s as if my vote authorizes the indecent to do as they please. That’s what I call being sold out.

Khaya Witbooi

Sold out
2013
Oil and spray paint on canvas
150 x 120 cm
Signed bottom left
Jaco Sieberhagen
(b 1961)

In a controversial speech during a traditional event in KwaZulu-Natal, President Jacob Zuma, a Zulu traditionalist, declared that having a pet dog is not the African way; Black South Africans who buy a dog, take it for walks and to the veterinarian are copying white culture. He added that Black South Africans should stop adopting the habits of other cultures. Zuma’s office said the message of the speech was the need to decolonize the African mind post-liberation, and added that the message merely emphasized the need not to elevate our love for our animals above our love for other human beings.

Jaco Sieberhagen hints at The Fool in a Tarot card deck by placing a jester’s wand in the dancing President’s hand. Wearing his traditional dress with modern trainers, he is depicted in silhouette whilst kicking high during a traditional dance. The dog — a symbol of ‘white culture’ — playfully pulls at the President’s leopard tail skirt. Is he trying to stop him from dancing toward the brink of a precipice, or is he simply expressing his opinion of the placard the President is carrying?

ILLUSTRATED
Jaco Sieberhagen, Jaco Sieberhagen: The Carnival (no dogs allowed), Johannesburg, 2013

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Who let the dogs out
2013
Painted laser cut mild steel – Artist Proof, Edition of 4
Height: 47 cm
Signed and numbered on the base
Johannes Segogela
(b 1936)

Johannes Mashigo Segogela had no formal art training, but did an apprenticeship as a boilermaker. Although he has carved wood sculptures for many years, it is only since 1980 that he has practised as a full-time artist. His works are inspired by the Bible and developed further through his own visions. His activities in the anti-Apartheid ANC movement, and his membership of the Church of Five Missions from 1954, influenced his work considerably.

Rayda Becker writes: [...] the iconography of Segogela’s work is essentially religious. Like Hungwane he regards his work as ‘a means of proselytising the public into the Christian faith’. However, many of these themes are adapted – and the modern world intrudes in the most engaging and witty ways.

The pair of carved and painted figures, ‘Couple in black suits’, has a resemblance to the early Colonial figures found throughout West Africa. These sculptures can be described as traditional African figurative woodcarvings, bearing influences of European design. The stern and upright posture of these figures in their suits and various accoutrements has been carefully composed to demand respect and their place in a global society. Segogela not only embraces the Western traditions that the Christian faith demands, but ‘spreads the Gospel’ by promoting its positive values.

In her research paper The Power and Politics of Dress in Africa, Giselle Arts writes: From the perspective of the colonial powers, fashion was a way to colonize the hearts and minds of the individuals residing in their newly conquered lands. Fleur Way-Jones explains the influence of early missionaries on African dress: In the 19th and early 20th century Victorian period when Queen Victoria dominated Britain and the Empire [...] conversion, and then baptism into the Christian faith, was marked by external manifestations of dress. For example, servants showed their conversion to Christianity by wearing white dresses signifying purity of spirit, or cotton prints and aprons indicating service to the mission. [...] Not only did Missionaries encourage certain dress, they controlled the access to cloth by being traders and in so doing, limiting the choice for dress.

Nelson Mandela has also, throughout his life and career as a politician, realized what impact his choice of dress-code can have – Bill Keller writes: Facing charges in 1982 of inciting a riot and trying to leave the country without a passport, he entered the formal Pretoria courtroom dressed in a traditional Xhosa leopard-skin cap to dramatize that he was an African entering a white man’s jurisdiction. And then he essentially confessed to the crime. In an extract from A Long Walk to Freedom Mandela explains his actions: That day, I felt myself to be the embodiment of African nationalism, the inheritor of Africa’s difficult but noble past and her uncertain future. The kaross was also a sign of contempt for the niceties of white justice. I well knew that the authorities would feel threatened by my kaross as so many whites feel threatened by the true culture of Africa.

PROVENANCE
Goodman Gallery, 2004

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By drawing together humans and animals as the subjects of double-portraits rather than objects of anthropological study, Hugo’s photographs reveal both the distance and proximity between humans and animals that define this zone of indistinction.

In Dayaba Usman with the Monkey Clear, a human and a monkey sit side by side on a narrow bench. They are dressed similarly, with the monkey in children’s clothing. A long thin chain tethers them together—a precaution that appears superfluous as Clear grasps Usman’s leg. With their heads tilted at almost exactly the same angle, both seem to address the camera. Yet while Usman stares directly at us, albeit with uncertainty, the monkey’s gaze is just off, vacant and distant. The monkey is equally the subject of the portrait, but nonetheless without subjectivity.

The modern discipline, dedicated to the study of “man,” assumed a definitive and measurable split between the human and the animal, but because humans and animals share a basic biological existence, identifying the precise nature of that split has not always been easy. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes an “anthropological machine” that produces the human by isolating and excluding the inhuman, i.e. animal life, which exists within people. He writes: “It is possible to oppose man to other living things... only because something like an animal life has been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place” (The Open: Man and Animal, trans. Kevin Attell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004: 16). The presence of an animal existence within all humans has generated the constant need to re-articulate the human as a space beyond the animal, i.e. a space that constitutes the foundation of human rights. However, the ambiguity as to where the animal ends and the human begins also raises the possibility of those in power warping the category of the “human” in order to deny fundamental rights. Agamben refers to the split between human and animal as a zone of indistinction. On this unsteady ground, certain rights and values have been established, while, at the same time, the greatest crimes against those designated as less than human have been justified.


ILLUSTRATED
Pieter Hugo and Adetokunbo Abiola, The Hyena and other men, Munchen, 2007
Johans Borman (ed.), Persona Exhibition Catalogue, Cape Town, 2011, p 103
Michael Stevenson, SOUTH AFRICAN ART 1848 – NOW Catalogue 18, Cape Town, December 2005

Dayaba Usman with the Monkey Clear, Abuja Nigeria 2005
2005
Archival pigment ink on cotton rag paper – Printer’s Proof, Edition of 8
50.5 x 50.5 cm
Signed, numbered and inscribed with ‘Hyena men of Nigeria 2005’ in pencil in the margin

(The Open: Man and Animal), trans. Kevin Attell, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004: 16). The presence of an animal existence within all humans has generated the constant need to re-articulate the human as a space beyond the animal, i.e. a space that constitutes the foundation of human rights. However, the ambiguity as to where the animal ends and the human begins also raises the possibility of those in power warping the category of the “human” in order to deny fundamental rights. Agamben refers to the split between human and animal as a zone of indistinction. On this unsteady ground, certain rights and values have been established, while, at the same time, the greatest crimes against those designated as less than human have been justified.


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50.5 x 50.5 cm
Signed, numbered and inscribed with ‘Hyena men of Nigeria 2005’ in pencil in the margin
The dated perception of Namibia’s indigenous Himba culture as static and visually iconic of the past, begs for a re-evaluation. Self-portrait photographs of two young men, Vezepaumwe Hembinda and Vapwakuapi Thom, which form part of the Himba Youth Self-portrait series, signify the development of a hybrid, more integrated cultural identity amongst the contemporary Himba youth.

Namibia’s visual history has been dominated by colonial representation – promoting ideological perceptions in order to shape and influence public opinion that favours the hegemony. For the Himba this meant being presented as an everlastingly traditional and ‘primitive’ culture. An image also used for the sake of stimulating tourism – a situation that continues today under a free, democratic government.

The young Himba men depicted in this series have found themselves in a state of transformation. The northern Kunene region has previously provided a suitable environment for their traditional lifestyle, however it has become increasingly susceptible to ‘Western’ influences with the influx of Chinese and Ovambo entrepreneurs, who set up small businesses selling western food supplies, tobacco and alcohol. Furthermore, the Himba youth are increasingly subjected to foreign cultural influences through their exposure to mass media and its proliferation of socially constructed concepts, such as fashion and the idealized lifestyle that transcend cultural borders. As a result, they are extending their individual identities and self-expression beyond the traditional, experiencing a transformation of identity and maybe even a form of cultural and conventional escapism.

Kyle Weeks

For this series, I have chosen to photograph only young Himba men who are more or less the same age as me. My objective was to narrow the perpetual gap between myself, as a young, white Namibian male (arguably ‘Western’), and them, as young, black Namibian males. The relationship between photographer and subject is of paramount importance in this series, as it attempts to neutralize the power imbalances inherent in most representations of African peoples, particularly those by white photographers. I eliminated myself from the photographic process, and the sitters took charge in an act of self-portraiture. These images are meant to provide the subjects with a means of self-representation. It’s an opportunity for them to present themselves in a way that they would like to be seen by an outside audience. I like to think of it more as a collaboration with them, as opposed to taking something from them – as most tourists would.

The aim of this series is to change the way we look at the Himba tradition in contemporary society – the seeming dislocation between what is read as ‘traditional’ and what is read as ‘Western’. It calls for an end to preconceived visual assumptions, as the hybridization of their culture no longer facilitates a distinction between traditional and contemporary Himba identity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kyle Weeks

The author of the text, Kyle Weeks, provides a thorough analysis of the transformation of Himba culture, emphasizing the role of colonial representation and modern influences. The text highlights the self-portrait series of two young Himba men, reflecting on the hybridization of their culture and the need for a re-evaluation of traditional perceptions. The bibliography includes a reference to Joanne Entwistle’s work on fashion and modern social theory.
Kyle Weeks
(b 1992)

Vapwakuapi Thom, 18
2013
Chromogenic print on dibond – Edition of 5
Image size 59,4 x 49,6 cm
Signed and numbered in the margin