

ABSTRACTION, AMBIGUITY AND MEMORY IN
SELECTED ARTWORKS BY
URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD AND KEMANG
WA LEHULERE

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Declaration

I declare that this Research Report, *Abstraction, Ambiguity and Memory in Selected Artworks By Ursula von Rydingsvard and Kemang Wa Lehulere* is my own work. It is being submitted for an MA by Coursework and Research Report at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this research report from the works of other people has been attributed, cited and referenced.



(Signature of candidate)

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March

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Abstract

This research report explores the influences of memory in selected works by two visual artists: South African Kemang Wa Lehulere's *Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb 2.1* and Polish artist Ursula von Rydingsvard's *Droga*. The report examines the ways in which personal memory can inform creative practice and the surface difficulties such endeavours may present. These works and writings on memory and creative practice inform my own practice, through which I investigate ways of expressing my memories of my grandparents' carpentry workshop in Sunnydale Eshowe in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

Key Words: Memory, Personal Memory, Creative Practice, South Africa

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Dedication

To my grandparents Ethel and Lawrence Belcher whose dedication, hard work and love pour through the work and writing of this report.

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Table of contents

Declaration.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgements.....	6
List of figures	8
I. Introduction: Ode to Workshop Nostalgia	9
II. Overview and Chapter breakdown.....	14
III. Chapter 1	16
IV. Chapter 2	24
IV.1 Ursula von Rydingsvard.....	25
IV.2 Kemang Wa lehulere	30
V. Chapter 3	37
VI. Conclusion	60
VII. References.....	62
VIII. Images	67

List of figures

Figure IV.1.1 Droga (front).....	28
Figure IV.1.2 Droga (back).....	29
Figure IV.2.1 Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb 2.1	34
Figure IV.2.2. X,Y,Z.....	34
Figure IV.2.3 Ukuguqula iBatyi 2.....	35
Figure IV.2.4 Ukuguqula iBatyi 3.....	36
Figure V.1 Powder and Paint (detail).....	46
Figure V.2 Untitled (detail).....	47
Figure V.3 Powder and Paint (detail).....	47
Figure V.4 Powder and Paint (detail).....	48
Figure V.5 Powder and Paint (detail).....	49
Figure V.6 Figure on table	50
Figure V.7 Powder and paint (detail).....	51
Figure V.8 Workshop Image.....	52
Figure V.9 Powder and Paint	53
Figure V.10 Workshop Image.....	54
Figure V.11 Workshop Image.....	55
Figure V.12 Workshop image	56
Figure V.13 Workshop images	57
Figure V.14 Workshop image.....	58
Figure V.15 Powder and paint (detail).....	59

I. Introduction: Ode to Workshop Nostalgia

Eshowe, my hometown...

This MA in Fine Arts project explored ways of articulating marginalized histories of Eshowe in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.¹ Being part of a third generation living in the former coloured area of Eshowe, named Sunnydale, I sought to test ways in which marginalized histories can be explored through my creative practice. I wanted to connect to the lost mundane histories of the place I called home before they completely disappeared. As a way of understanding my relationship to Eshowe, this report examined the manner in which personal memory informs the work of visual artists Kemang Wa Lehulere and Ursula von Rydingsvard.

Much of the literature about Eshowe tends to focus on its Zulu, British and Norwegian histories in the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly those of King Cetshwayo, John Dunn, the Zulu police enforcement (known as the *Nonqai*), the settlement of British colonies, Norwegian missionaries, the involvement of soldiers in the world war and other Anglo-Zulu battles. This focus on the ‘grand’ and ‘spectacular’² histories left somewhat of a gap in the recording and documenting of less dramatic community narratives, particularly in surrounding areas such as Sunnydale. These everyday narratives may seem pale in comparison to more well-known histories of the place, but they speak to the nuances of

¹ Eshowe is a former European settlement town located north of the Tugela River.

² This research is interested in ways of moving away from discussing history in a spectacularised way by focussing instead on the personal. Njabulo Ndebele beautifully discusses the notion of the spectacular in his essay, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa* (2017). Ndebele writes about literary texts that move away from speaking to or about South African history in a dramaticised way.

broader issues that collectively make up a picture of South Africa's history of racial segregation.³

My creative practice for this project aimed to give material form to my attempts to connect fragmented histories of Sunnydale. The resulting exhibition embodied a connection to a past that did not exist in any other tangible form. My project started with personal history as a route into the idea of missing histories. The history I chose to work through (in my writing and creative practice) were my memories of my grandparents' carpentry workshop in Sunnydale.

The decision to reflect on memories of my grandparents' carpentry workshop led to two central questions:

“Is it possible to share a history of my grandparents' carpentry workshop in a former coloured area without having to refer to the racial histories of the area?”

“How can I share my experiences and memories in the context of my creative practice?”

.....

Prior to leaving Eshowe to study in Johannesburg, I spent some time in my grandparents' workshop. I wanted to sit and just be in the space, to look and remember. I sat on a rusted metal and wooden stool, placed on the cement floor, unsure whether or not my grandfather had made it, and began to think about the times in the shop when my grandparents ran it.

I could vaguely, and still can, remember my granny trying to give us, my cousins and myself, Timjan.⁴ We would wait outside as, one-by-one, each child got their

³ Segregation was institutionalized under Apartheid laws from 1948 to 1991.

⁴ Timjan is a herbal tonic that is made of pure aloe ferox and fermented grape juice

spoonful and came out with a terrible look on their face. That taste stayed in your mouth all day and God forbid if you burped.

The cement I sat on formed part of the stoep on which my grandfather used to keep his band saws, table saws and a wood planer which my uncle Scotty eventually had to move into the workshop, to avoid the machines being stolen. There were a lot of break-ins. People would try to steal whatever metal they could find around the shop. I guess the machines were too heavy to carry, so they left them behind. I distantly recall — although I'm not sure if it is a real memory or one formed by desire — my grandfather letting me push some wood along the table saw.

While walking through the part of the space where my grandfather's worktable was, I thought about the workshop and its context. I was interested in why my grandparents had a workshop and furniture shop in the middle of a suburb as opposed to the business district of town and if my grandparents were only allowed to sell to a specific racial group prior to 1991. While I was in that room, I thought about the role the workshop had in the community and my grandparents starting out in a little shack and eventually being able to build a home as well as the workshop, using nothing but the skills they had. I thought about my mother who said she wished she could have had more time with her parents growing up because they were always working.

I also imagined what it must have been like when my uncles came into the workshop on their bikes as young boys. They would come from a show or festival in Eshowe after running out of money, to make three or four money-boxes which my grandfather would pay them for. Then they would ride back to the festivals. My grandfather taught his grandchildren to make the same money-boxes. Some boxes were used to store his nails. My grandfather used to save all his nails, even the broken ones which he would bend and straighten to be used again. He would

always say that, “A little bit of powder and a little bit of paint makes all things what they ain’t.”

So what do I make of these memories?

And how relevant are they?

In the context of South Africa, colonisation and apartheid⁵ led to the marginalisation and loss of countless histories and identities of people of colour. This research is interested in how personal memories and creative practice can be used to negotiate and articulate histories and identities that have been lost during these periods of history. Achille Mbembe explains that rearticulating lost histories becomes a way of activating the past in order to formulate some understanding of ourselves in contemporary South Africa (2015). Mbembe made his point while addressing the #FEESMUSTFALL movement in 2015.⁶ It was at the start of #FEESMUSTFALL that I began this research and, as a result, my creative practice and writing were both informed and influenced by the movement.⁷ My work thus became an attempt to re-articulate the past in order to understand my present experiences of contemporary South Africa.

... Both my grandparents came from mixed racial families. Their mothers were black and their fathers white. Neither of my grandparents were allowed to live with both parents in the same home because of their parents’ racial groupings. My great granduncle eventually denied the existence of my grandfather and his siblings at the funeral of my great grandfather, saying that my great grandfather

⁵ An ideology implemented in South Africa by the National Party which was the ruling, white minority, government party at the time. The ideology was focused on segregation and ‘separate development’ of different racial groups in South Africa.

⁶ This was a student led movement that took place between 2015 and 2016. It called for a free decolonized education system, which many believed entailed tapping into African and black systems of thought and changing the language of instruction to local tongues in order to achieve quality higher education in South Africa.

⁷ These influences on my creative practice are discussed later in this report.

had no children. As a result, my grandfather and his siblings were left with nothing after the death of their father, denying them a paternal history...

This in no way stopped my grandfather or my grandmother from creating histories of their own.

My research and creative practice served as an attempt to articulate a fragment of the memories I have of that history. This has led me to explore the artistic practices of two artists whose work explores and is influenced by memory: Kemang Wa Lehulere and Ursula von Rydingsvard

Von Rydingsvard's practice, as a sculptor working with wood, is poetic and avoids forming a direct dialogue with her personal memory and its elusive nature. On the other hand, Wa Lehulere's practice is situated in the consciousness of contemporary discourses pertaining to missing histories in national South African narratives. Contextually, I identify with the work of Wa Lehulere and at the same time, I was drawn to the fluid and ambiguous nature of von Rydingsvard's work.

Both artists' work spoke to the aims of my creative practice and research that sought to articulate the memories I have of my grandparent's carpentry workshop. Both use materials and forms with reference to memory in ways that resonate for me in my own practice. Von Rydingsvard's colossal sculptures, made up of fragments of wood, remind me of my own workings with wood. The sheer volume of these anamorphic works transcend their weighty material form to become something suggestive of a kind of labour and processing of memories that I feel I share when making sculptural objects/forms. Wa Lehulere's work, on the other hand, with its variety of objects and sketches installed in space, speaks more to the transience of memory.

II. Overview and Chapter breakdown

For the research towards my MFA project, I intended to create artworks that spoke to a recollection of the memories I have of my grandparent's carpentry workshop in Sunnydale, Eshowe. The accompanying report sought to further explore — through theoretical engagement as well as an engagement of selected works by Kemang Wa Lehulere and Ursula von Rydingsvard — the creative processes of making concrete sensations and memories associated to a particular place.

The methodological approach of my creative research was practice-led, autobiographical and theoretical in nature. The theory and practice are interlinked, though not always overtly, through both my writing and making processes. These linkages, my practice and the theory that informs it, are discussed further in each of the chapters of this report. In Chapter 1, I lay a theoretical foundation for my research into the influences of memory in creative practice. This first chapter sets up a theoretical framework through which to discuss the artworks featured in Chapters 2 and 3.

In the first chapter, I begin with a definition of memory. The definition is discussed in relation to artistic practice through a reflection of Olu Oguibe's concerns with creative practices that engage history and the challenges associated with its representation. Following on from this is a brief discussion of historical materialism, as Walter Benjamin describes the term in his *Thesis On The Philosophy Of History* (1970). Benjamin's understanding of historical materialism resonates for me in terms of measuring the successes and failures of my experiments in giving form to the memories I have of my grandparents' carpentry workshop, in relation to my present reality.

Chapter 2 looks at selected works by Ursula von Rydingsvard and Kemang Wa Lehulere. Von Rydingsvard's large-scale wooden sculptures carry influences from her childhood memories in post-war Poland. My interest lies in the way that von Rydingsvard materializes the memories of her childhood through large-scale sculptures that are suggestive, rather than illustrative, of past events. Closer to home, South African artist Kemang Wa Lehulere engages through his photographic works and installations with the absence of histories in the grand South African narrative. The textual and visual analysis of aspects of the work of Wa Lehulere and von Rydingsvard are discussed so as to understand how other creative practitioners explore personal memory through their artworks.

Chapter 3 focuses on my creative practice and the exhibition *Powder and Paint* (2016) that was informed by my grandparents' carpentry workshop in Sunnydale and my experiences as a student during the #FEESMUSTFALL movement. The chapter explores the works I produced in an attempt to link my recollections, associations and experiences with specific materials. These materials are then discussed in relation to the accompanying photographs I had taken in the workshop as a way of capturing the space visually. I then discuss the role of these photographs in the central installation drawing.

The report concludes with a reflection on the overall research process and my findings following this research endeavour.

III. Chapter 1

My investigation into memory and its representation came from an interest in expressing my recollections of my grandparents' carpentry workshop in Sunnydale, KwaZulu-Natal. This was initiated by a lack of information regarding my family's history which, in turn, spoke to an absence of documented history on Sunnydale.⁸

Sunnydale has been home to many families like the Belchers (my maternal family), the Clarks, Stocks, Apollosas, Jones' and the Dunns⁹ to name a few. Each family has their own stories within the greater community history. One of my favourites is how all the families in the area partnered up with the local government to build a swimming pool. Most of the pool's foundations were dug by members of the community. Today, the Sunnydale pool is the only functional public pool in Eshowe. The terrible thing about the pool is that almost every year, from as far back as I can remember, a child drowns around Christmas time. This could be because the person that looks after the pool while the children swim has always been someone that didn't know how to swim or had no lifesaving training.

In mid-January of 2015, a child drowned on the second day of the New Year.

On the day of the drowning, like many years before, the pool was full, making it difficult to keep track of everyone in it.

⁸ Sunnydale was the designated coloured area in Eshowe during the South African periods of segregation, under apartheid law.

⁹ These are decendants of John Dunn, an Englishman who fought on the side of both the Zulu and the British in KwaZulu-Natal. He is also known for having more than twenty wives and being the first white Zulu chief.

...A father walked around the pool asking about his child. Everyone in the pool was told to get out. His child lay at the bottom of the deep end of the pool, with a stomach swollen and full of water...

These are two memories of the pool around the corner from the workshop, two memories from two very different times recalled in the same moment.

Consider memory for a moment:

What is it?

How does it look?

What does it feel like?

The 2010 edition of the Oxford Concise Dictionary memory is defined as:

1. The faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information.
2. Something remembered, in other words, the remembering or commemoration of a dead person or the length of time over which a person or event continues to be remembered (Oxford Concise Dictionary 2010:732).

What the above definition does not cover is that memory is a fragile concept, "... essentially an unstable and variable phenomenon" (Gibbons 2007:147). My understanding of the past is of something "... that can only ever be partially reconstructed within the ideological and discursive frameworks of the present" (Jenkins in Gibbons 2007:52). The fragility of memory to which I refer lies in the difficulties that come with attempting to represent the past.

I have gone forward with my project with the simple idea that, no matter what work I create, the past event can never be rendered as it once was because the work representing it will continuously be re-interpreted in the present.

Can the past be retold in ways that encompass this fragility?

The word [memory] itself is related to the past, a past we can never get back, yet of which we are reminded in unexpected moments that play a role in our everyday existence. There is something intriguing about the things that trigger memories and the ways in which memory-triggers are explored in creative practice.

According to Olu Oguibe, what is missing from existing discussions and arguments on memory is an understanding of how artists engage with memory through their choices of media, techniques and strategies of execution and how these reveal a reflection of the vulnerability of memory (Oguibe 2004:91). My concern lies in ways of speaking to the specific history of the workshop that still encompasses an understanding of the nature of memory. I approach this through my use of materials, articulating a history of the Sunnydale workshop through the production of an environment that can speak back to the idea of partial reconstruction from the perspective of the present.

Jacob Dlamini, in his book *Native Nostalgia* (2009), explores alternative ways of representing memories from a repressed South African past. Through his writing, Dlamini reflects on the lives of selected people that lived in South Africa during apartheid, writing in a style that diverts from solely focusing on the socio-political horrors of apartheid. He reveals, through multidimensional narratives and anecdotes, a richness of township life, despite the fraught context of the period in which he is reflecting. Dlamini's book is an example of a narrative approach to the re-writing of marginalized South African histories.

Sheryl McEwan reflects on the emergence of individuals and nations seeking to overcome traumatic legacies of the late 20th century and early 21st century. McEwan speaks about the re-interpretation of histories, specifically in relation to archival practice:

These [re-interpretations] are not only aimed at dealing with a traumatic past but are also aimed at creating and questioning the structure of

archives that document the past and allow the voices of the previously voiceless and oppressed to be heard (McEwan 2003:741).

The structure of such archives would take on various forms and occupy various spaces that include public spaces (in the form of sculptures and monuments) or museum displays and exhibits. These structures, Oguibe refers to as, “the spectacle industry”, a term he uses in a reflection of the work of selected artists whose choice of medium and strategies of execution move away from the creation of monuments such as memorials (Oguibe 2004:91). When it comes to creating works that aim to reflect memory in this way, medium begins to play a particularly significant role. Mediums themselves have the “... ability to structurally and topologically encode the fragility of memory and our consciousness of this fragility” (Oguibe 2004:91). In other words, the materials one chooses to work with — in the case of this report, the materials I associate with my grandparents workshop — have their own histories and uses as a material embedded in them. By understanding the histories associated with those materials and complementing them with the layered histories of a particular place, I believe one can begin to allude to narratives without having to create a spectacle. My practice is directly concerned with this move away from the spectacle industry.

Oguibe then asks what can be learnt from artists engaging memory in this way through their practice (2004:92).

This question posed by Oguibe can be further understood in relation to Walter Benjamin’s writings on historical materialism. Benjamin opens a theoretical discussion of conflicting articulations, constructions and understandings of the past. Historical materialism, according to Benjamin, refers to the ways in which we materialize the past through our own subjective interpretation. Benjamin states that a memory can be triggered by anything and that a person can never truly articulate those memories in a single clear narrative without the aid of creative and imagined modes of expression (Benjamin 1970:260). Benjamin addresses the

challenges one faces when attempting to articulate memories or the past. This is largely due to the non-physical, intangible nature of memories, and of remembering. Benjamin believed that if, or when, one tries to remember something, in the moment one tries to speak about that memory, it becomes lost because it disappears in that same instant (1970:257). Benjamin explains:

If one was to remember something vividly in an unexpected moment, it could be triggered by a certain smell, texture, place or person [...] it would never be remembered in the same way [and] it would be difficult to articulate that memory to someone else (*ibid.*).

Benjamin argues further that, “A person might recollect history in a way that every moment is seen as being important and no moment is seen as being more or less important than the next” (Benjamin 1970:255). This approach sees every memory, or every historical moment, as a contributor to the bigger whole (the present), regardless of how mundane or insignificant it may seem. Though Benjamin speaks about a person recollecting history in a way that makes every moment of it important, he further claims “... that a memory needn’t be something only constructed in a linear narrative form, where a narrative is told in a sequence of events that go from one point to the next because this is not necessarily how one might remember (*ibid.*). Though one might not remember the past in a stream of narrative events that go from *a* to *z* in perfect order, it does not mean that those memories should be ignored.

If I remember something in a specific way, whether it is linear or not, it can define how I relate to a specific place or individual. Kenneth Plummer says that it is this aspect of memory that defines who we are and how we live in the world (Plummer 2001:232 - 253). An example of this is my association to *Timjan*, my memories of that vile concoction that relates so strongly to my childhood. As horrible as it tastes, *Timjan* nevertheless reminds me of a happy moment in my childhood and it is a memory that connects me with my cousins who shared that experience.

Someone else might have a different memory associated to the taste of Timjan and so the way they relate to the taste would be different to mine. Judith Lutge Coullie says that it is through associations like the one I am describing here that we not only shape how we feel and live in the world, but can also relate ourselves to others and, in so doing, constitute collective identities (Coullie 2006:1). If someone else had Timjan as a child they could relate to my childhood experience of being given Timjan and both of us would form a part of a collective identity of people who were given Timjan as children (to put it simply).

This research, my creative work, becomes a way of understanding my identity as a South African by reflecting on my family history in relation to a broader South African context. Robyn Fivush explains that it is through engagements with and re-articulations of memory that we define who we are as individuals and understand how we came to be the way we are (Fivush 2008:49-58). By understanding and unpacking my childhood memories in my grandparents' carpentry workshop, I am not only seeking a way of documenting an undocumented history but I am also making sense of this past, in relation to my present. In pursuing this act of tying together past and present, I hope to make sense of these experiences and place myself in the South African present.

But how does one go about tying together memories of the past and the present through creative practice?

Chus Martinez regards memory (and history) as ambiguous, as something that can be imagined (Martinez 2012:46). For Martinez, memory should not be solely understood or used as a tool for recording, remembering and correcting. Instead, it should be placed on an equal level to imagination, the same imagination that forms part of that uncertain space, where knowledge can be unpacked, questioned and broken down (*ibid.*). She argues that imagination plays a significant role in understanding and articulating art (*ibid.*). Martinez's arguments bring about an

important point when it comes to artistic practice and the recollection of memory, that of potential failure.

Not everyone can imagine something in the same way and re-presenting a memory can often result in the intended meaning being lost. However, this is not a problem when it comes to art praxis because it aims to remain ambivalent and allow for different understandings. Artists, in contrast to historians, play an interesting role when it comes to the imagining — rather than the retelling — of history, of what has happened and what is still happening.

The result of an artistic enquiry is generally understood differently to every reader or viewer, due to the nature of the various materials used (or not used) and how those materials are then re-imagined in (or as part of) an enquiry. Understanding artistic research as ambiguous and ‘free’ of finite conclusions moves away from a traditional academic understanding of how and why research is conducted. Sarat Maharaj explains that, like science, which is made up of different fields, each with its own approaches to researching and extracting knowledge, artists too have their own individualized approaches when conducting research on a theme or topic, which may include the use of different modes of expression (Maharaj 2009:1-11).

Similarly, Martinez claims that artistic research is not like traditional academic research precisely because it occupies this ambiguous, uncertain space (Martinez 2012:46). Its nature is not the same as, for example, the sciences. Science avoids expressing its results in an overly philosophical manner, whereas artistic research tends to be philosophical in nature. In both disciplines, however, knowledge is generated through a practical engagement with materials and the end results are always analysed. The difference between the two is that one would conclude with a *yes* or *no* result (in the case of the sciences) and the other with an open-ended result, where there is no definite conclusion, or single reading. Indeed, there is:

... a permanent wavering between positioning us here, in the ambiguous mental space — isolating some features of the real, performing

representation, giving form to matter — and at the same time, taking us away from the present time (Martinez 2012:47).

This is achieved by the nature of the materials used and how those materials are re-imagined and then re-arranged. Martinez explains the mental space of confusion and ambiguity as one of the aims of artistic research. For example, she describes the phenomena of the mega exhibition, *Documenta*, as consisting of a number of artists, artworks, curators and themes, each related to different ideas and concepts (Martinez 2012:47). At some point, she argues, things contradict each other, leaving the viewer confused. Martinez explains that it is in this state that the viewer is then asked to think deeply and question what they know or think they understand (*ibid.*).

The works created in my practice ask the viewer to question what they know or think they understand regarding the ways in which history may be articulated at a local level, in the South African context. It also begins to explore how an individual can take ownership of and share the untold histories of her community. My work, and the materials I use, are the means by which I attempt to move away from the idea of an outsider looking in. Instead, my personal memories of my grandparents' carpentry workshop serve as an emotional evocation of this childhood place and form a connection to the setting within which the place exists. In following this particular trajectory of using memory in creative practice, I link to a tradition of visual artists who are concerned with personal memory and what they can say about greater narratives. The chapter that follows focusses on specific works by Ursula von Rydingsvard and Kemang Wa Lehulere that present highly individualistic visualizations of past events.

IV. Chapter 2

This chapter explores the praxis of two artists whose work resonates with my own. I selected the artists, Kemang Wa Lehulere and Ursula von Rydingsvard, based on my interest in the different approaches and modes they use in engaging personal memory through their creative practice. By including the practice of von Rydingsvard, who is influenced by an unfamiliar living context to my own, my intention is to nuance the conversation about memory. By way of comparison, Wa Lehulere's practice lies in a consciousness of contemporary discourses pertaining to missing histories in national South African narratives. Both artists reflect on personal memory in ways that speak back to broader contextual discourses. Importantly, this is achieved through an engagement with material in unique ways.

IV.1 Ursula von Rydingsvard

Ursula von Rydingsvard works with large scale wooden sculptures that indirectly explore themes of her childhood memories of post-war Germany. Von Rydingsvard creates unique sculptural pieces that are influenced by her recollections. My interest is in the way she constantly attempts to rework her material in different forms that evoke, rather than describe, her childhood experiences and memories.

In an interview with Jan Castro, von Rydingsvard explains that she spent five years of her life, with her parents and six siblings, in different Polish refugee camps across post-war Germany, from 1945 to 1950 (Castro 2003:22-27). When von Rydingsvard was around eight years old, her family moved to Plainville, Connecticut, in America, the country in which she would later study and become an artist (*ibid.*).

Von Rydingsvard engages indirectly with her memories of trauma and displacement. The manner in which she works with wood encourages reflection on how the material can be manipulated to speak to emotions and experiences, particularly those of childhood. Von Rydingsvard's sculptures — made with slices of timber, joined together to create monstrous looking forms — are uniquely fluid and ambiguous. The manner in which she constantly reinterprets wooden forms and surfaces could be seen to mimic the elusive nature of her childhood memories. A noticeable characteristic of Von Rydingsvard's work is her repeated use of solid cedar wood beams. Upon completion, each of von Rydingsvard's works take on different characteristics, with some resembling organic forms created in and by natural forces, while others adopt more of a man-made appearance.

Roderick Conway Morris writes that the artist's sculptures are not necessarily autobiographical. Rather, they contain elements of her experiences and thoughts in a sublimated way (Morris 2014:2). This way of evoking her experiences through her practice speaks back to Martinez's exploration of the ways creative practice allows memory to occupy spaces of uncertainty, encouraging the viewer to unpack, question and break down the way things are understood. Von Rydingsvard's process and materials occupy a space where meaning becomes subjective and, as a result, work that is inspired by the past, takes on a new form in the present.

Von Rydingsvard's works merge past and present in a way that is organic, monumental and abstract. This is achieved by the process and materials used, as well as in the chosen titles of her works, which form part of how she remembers and articulates her memories. Through a labour-intensive practice, her work attempts to capture something that is simultaneously elusive and loaded with personal significance.

Von Rydingsvard's work relates to "memories of the makeshift structures, that her Ukrainian-Polish family inhabited while moving from one displaced persons' camp to the next, across post-war Germany" (Sutphin 2015). Her sculptures are not autobiographical, in the sense that they record scenes from her history, but they contain elements of her experiences and thoughts (*ibid.*). Her works do not describe literal experiences to the viewer but instead allow for an open interpretation, where the sheer scale of organically shaped forms affects how human bodies experience them.

Though her works are able to stand independently, without prior knowledge of their making, they tend to take on a different meaning once the viewer becomes aware of the thoughts and experiences to which they make reference. It is through von Rydingsvard's making-process that a physical engagement of abstract ideas, around what is remembered and what is imagined begins to form.

Von Rydingsvard does not attempt to relive or re-enact her past. Instead, she works with wood and other materials to sensorially evoke a dream-like experience that engulfs the viewer into something that is not quite explainable. An example of the elusive sensorial experience that von Rydingsvard's work facilitates is *Droga* (Figure IV.1.1). The title refers to a Polish word that means "dear one." *Droga* looks like a living thing with a head-like form protruding from one end. This protrusion is faceless, with a central cavity that runs through the entire body of the piece. Light from the other end of the hole is insufficient to examine the inside of the hollowed sculpture in any detail. Under this head-like form is a suggestion of an arm that appears to push off the ground, as though about to move. The large wooden sculpture lies flat on the floor. Like many of Von Rydingsvard's sculptures, *Droga* is rough-hewn, its surfaces patterned with what appear to be natural furrows. The sculpture carries clear traces of the laminated wood cedar beams that make up its structure, like cells of a living entity.

On closer inspection, the sculpture's little crevices and folds reveal themselves, accentuating its illusion of being a natural entity. Cuts from the hand-held machinery (used to shape the wood) create an appearance of scars in the wood's surface that transform what were once cedar beams. On the other side of the sculpture, the gaping hole in its face is exposed. Cedar beams rip through the bottom end of the sculpture, creating an anthropomorphic illusion of a mouth screaming in the agony of its body's mutilation. The gaping wound (see Figure IV.1.2) appears as though it could be resealed and the contents 'returned' into the form. However, the nature of the material contradicts this possibility and emphasises the sustained formal tension of the work.

I was initially interested in the process von Rydingsvard employed, coupled with the material she uses. Wood is one of the primary materials with which I work and an examination of von Rydingsvard's practice led me to explore the relationship between wood and memory. As my project developed, there was a need to find

examples of artworks that speak specifically to the South African context from which I operate. Hence an investigation of Wa Lehulere's work and practice arose.



Figure IV.1.1 Droga (front)

2009

Cedar and Graphite,

121.92 cm x 15.24 cm by 274.32 cm x 17.78 cm by 548.64 cm x 7.62 cm

(Bodycomb M, (2015))



Figure IV.1.2 Droga (back)

2009

Cedar and Graphite

121.92 cm x 15.24 cm by 274.32 cm x 17.78 cm by 548.64 cm x 7.62
cm

(Zalimani, K, (2014)

IV.2 Kemang Wa lehulere

Kemang Wa Lehulere is a South African artist from Gugulethu in the Western Cape. His work explores South African history from a contemporary perspective. The artist explains that, when he moved to Johannesburg, he began reflecting on his family history which included the shooting of his aunt in the head during the 1976 student uprisings, “She recovered to some degree. She hates anything to do with June 16 or 1976” (Wa Lehulere in Perryer 2012:51). The silencing of family conversations surrounding June 16 and 1976 began to intrigue Wa Lehulere and inform his practice. He writes that, “The idea of these unwritten or unspoken narratives, trying to imagine her as a kid, this deformed figure, decapitated... I began developing these characters, or figures from that” (Wa Lehulere in Perryer 2012:51).

Though Wa Lehulere’s works are influenced by family narratives, they are not nostalgic. His works are probing and use personal memories to talk about larger political and historical narratives. Wa Lehulere explains that his work questions how people decide on what constitutes as memory, in the collective sense (Art Basel 2012). According to the artist, this means that his work speaks to the tangible and intangible expressions of the experience of history, as well as the failures of literal memory (*Kemang Wa Lehulere* 2016).

Wa Lehulere makes use of a variety of materials that include, but are not limited to, chalk, school desks, ceramic dogs and photographs. It is through these modes that the artist seeks to engage the individual in relation to the forces of history and the ways in which we make sense of this relationship (Khoabane 2016). When Wa Lehulere exhibited as part of the Art Institute of Chicago’s *Focus* series, his work was described as a conflation of personal and collective storytelling that begins to re-enact missing and untold narratives in South African history, which often results in animating individual narratives of exile or displacement through means that are ephemeral, found and notational (Art Institute of Chicago 2017). An

example of such a work is *Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb 2.1* (2012).

Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb 2.1 (Figure IV.2.1.) is an installation that includes a drawing and an arrangement of found objects, made up of ceramic dogs and desks.¹⁰ The amalgamation of the objects together allow for his work to be read as a whole, with each element that makes up the installation contributing its own layered narrative and/or history. It is the chalk drawing that I focus on as the object of my visual analysis. The drawing is made up of simplified drawings, combined with text, rendered in white chalk on a black painted wall. I am interested in how the drawing visually narrate Wa Lehlere's thought-process and way of working. The style of drawing used by the artist appears playful and childlike, with abstract figures that float freely in a black space. Athi Mongezeleli Joja, a member of the artist collective Gugulective, agrees that Wa Lehlere's drawing style is intentionally childlike and states that the "drawing also evokes something mechanical and automated as well as resembles Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*" (Artthrob 2012).

Moving from the left to the right of the image, there is what appears to be a white form in the shape of an abstracted figure. The figure looks up at a haloed spherical construction, comprised of layers of rectangular shapes. A line emerges from below the spherical form and points to the word *white*. Just in front of the form is another deformed figure, that seems to operate as both a support structure and a table surface. Below, tiny deformed figures, each of which resemble the large white abstract figure, appear to walk towards it. A line moves down the height of the drawing, directing attention to the back-end of a knife that protrudes from the base of what resembles a hut. Above this hut-like structure sits a black bowl with the label "black bag."

¹⁰ Each object carries its own unique history, as mentioned in chapter 1, by understanding those histories, and combining with another object in a specific context, a discourse begins to develop. This is a strategy I have worked with in my practice.

Throughout the drawing, floating figurative and abstract forms interact with drawings of objects, like knives, combs, plastic bags and text. Overall, the drawing seems to be a plan for Wa Lehulere's past and future works. This is suggested in various texts dispersed throughout the image, which include tags such as, "strap onto performer," as well as the text following the tag, "scene 2," that reads:

Make many little ships these should be made from off white pages with green lines install them on the opposite side of the road - in a pile. Diagonally across from the performer use black plastic bags instead of wheel a wheel barrow. This might look more poetic.

This text sits above an object that resembles a wheelbarrow, pushed by a deformed figure. In the wheelbarrow is a pile of unrecognizable, minuscule forms, that could be the little ships referred to in the text above. Surrounding this scene are numerous *x*'s that stand in four columns, going the height of the drawing. At the base of the wall, the *x*'s merge into what looks like four old school desks — a recurring motif in a number of Wa Lehulere's works, such as *X, Y, Z, 2016* (*Figure IV.2.2.*)

There are other recognisable elements, such as a grater, of which Wa Lehulere makes use in some of his performance works — for example, *Ukuguqula iBatyi 2* (*Figure IV.2.3*), which took place at the Bag Factory, Johannesburg in 2008.¹¹ In this performance, the artist wore a long coat and walked around the gallery barefoot whilst grating black charcoal.

The title, *Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb 2.1* emanates from Wa Lehulere's *Ukuguqula iBatyi 3, 2008* (*Figure IV.2.4.*), which was a performance that saw the artist digging a hole with an afro comb and led to the discovery of a cow's remains. According to Joja, the metaphor of the hole communicates life and death, fact and fiction (Artthrob 2012). He is able to form a dialogue between

¹¹ And formed part of the *Rites of Fealty/Rites of Passage* exhibition

found and reworked objects in conjunction with his performances and ephemeral drawings.

Both artists are able to refuse a distinct *a to z* type narrative while still allowing for subjective readings of their works. Ursula von Rydingsvard's works are tactile and process driven. Wa Lehlere's work is able to encompass the elusive and fragile nature of memory through his temporary drawing installations and the way in which he engages his materials. Von Rydingsvard's engagement with memory lies in the monumental size of her works, the material itself and the way in which she manipulates the two, creating her own unique forms that suit her understanding of her own memories. Von Rydingsvard evokes her own memories in a way that is fluid, abstract and devoid of any distinct narrative. However, the monumental scale of her work does speak back to the idea of the spectacular industry making her work read as memorial in nature. This is, however, not evident in the work of Wa Lehlere. His work evokes memory with an understanding of its elusive nature in a way that von Rydingsvard fails to achieve. This is emphasised by his integration of found objects and ephemeral drawing installations. It is these kinds of considerations and understandings that I seek to encompass in my own practice.

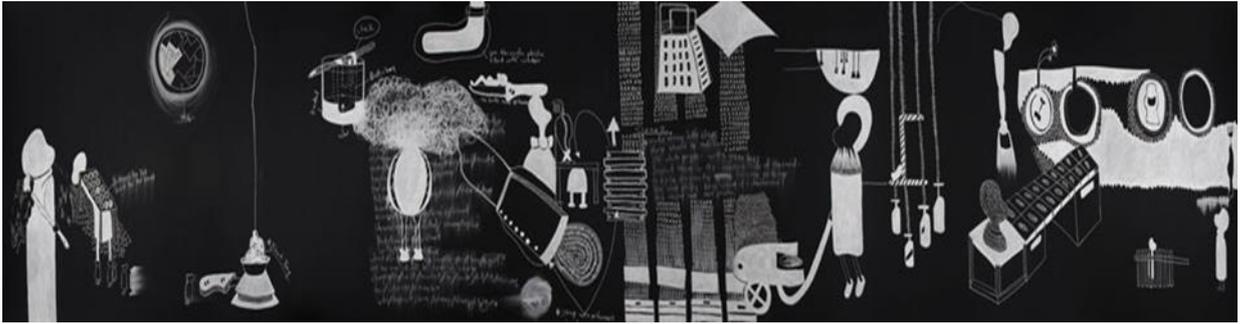


Figure IV.2.1 Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb 2.1

White chalk on black paint
273 x 1570cm
2012
(Lehelere, 2012)



Figure IV.2.2 X,Y,Z

Salvaged school desks
2016
(Lehelere, 2016)



Figure IV.2.3 Ukuguqula iBatyi 2

Performance

2008

(Rites of Fealty/Rites of Passage 2014)



Figure IV.2.4 Ukuguqula iBatyi 3

Performance
2008
(Lehulere, 2008)

V. Chapter 3

In a present lived experience, specifically located within a South African context, memorials such as public sculptures, museums and landmarks exist as a frequent reminder of our apartheid past.¹² However, as discussed in the previous chapters, memory is a fragile, abstract and ambiguous concept that different individuals relate to or understand in unique ways. I attempt to convey this understanding of memory through an engagement with materials and attempt to consciously cultivate a way of working that can articulate my memories of my grandparents' carpentry workshop and experiences of the #FEESMUSTFALL movement in order to negotiate an articulation of my contemporary South African experience.

...I lived in residence between 2015 and 2016

I was at Solomon Mahlangu House (then still officially Senate House) during the discussion around the march to Albert Luthuli house and later participated in the march that followed. I was also at the church gathering which was moved to Senate House. After this, I spent two weeks with family and watched the movement on the news. Later, I went back to residence and volunteered in one of the safe zones at the Wits School of Arts. There were several days where I (I don't recall specific dates) walked into a tear gassed area, tried to avoid rubber bullets or walked past an intimidating number of armed police vehicles on my way back to residence...

It was during these periods of the #FEESMUSTFALL movement that I was engaging my personal South African history and how it began to influence the way I interacted with/in my surroundings and understand my own identity as a South African. These themes and experiences were amalgamated in the practical component of this research in the form of an exhibition entitled *Powder and Paint*. The exhibition included photographic prints and an installation drawing which did not reflect a clear linear narrative of my grandparents in Sunnydale, but rather

¹² Examples include, Freedom Park (2004), The Voortrekker Monument (1949), both in Pretoria.

became ways of seeking an association to a version of the past in relation to my experiences of contemporary South Africa.

The relationship between the recollection of fragmented memory and artistic practice is crucial to my process. This body of work emerges from a personal nostalgic memory of a particular South African setting. While it reveals a difficulty inherent in the materialization and depiction of memory, it simultaneously articulates a post-apartheid South African experience. A conversation emerges between memory and practice, as the work evolves and changes over time through construction and deconstruction, resulting in a personal exploration of fictional and sensory experiences that engages with experiential creative practice.

Both the report and practical component that make up this research stem from my inherent need to identify place.¹³ Using memory association as a means of access, my research and practice focuses on the representation of a place that has not been documented, outside of the stories shared amongst friends and families in informal conversations.

The aim was to give physical form to certain associations of my childhood memories in my grandparents' carpentry workshop, in relation to its current state. Consequently, the research led to a personal account of the importance of articulating histories that are lost or forgotten to the popular consciousness, outside of scattered family memories.

At a personal level, the opportunity to engage with some of the histories of Sunnydale and Eshowe led to a deeper understanding of where I come from and how the broader history of South Africa feeds into the small community of Sunnydale. Though these narratives and influences are not directly referenced in my work, a general awareness of them has informed the artworks. I have attempted to make work that withholds the retelling of a linear history. As

¹³ A sense of place and or belonging in or to a community.

mentioned in Chapter 1, my aim was to move away from the language of the spectacle industry.

The artworks, which included photographic prints I had taken of the workshop space, installation, drawings and sculpture, formed the exhibition titled *Powder and Paint* (2016), at The Point of Order (TPO) in Braamfontien, Johannesburg. The works included in the exhibition were intuitively informed by my childhood memories in my grandparents' carpentry workshop. The exhibition as a whole did not tell the story of the workshop directly, nor aim to create some kind of archive of the place. Rather, it is comprised of visual dialogues between the workshop space, the materials that make up the exhibition and the forms that speak to my process of remembering.

Walking into the gallery, the viewer's eye is drawn to a large blue wall (*Figure V.1*) at the far end of the downstairs gallery. The blue strikingly contrasts the pale white walls that surround it. This wall acts as a backdrop, welcoming the viewer into the space. A framed photograph (*Figure V.2*) quietly sits in the far left of the blue square drawing the viewer closer into the world of the carpentry workshop. The white, framed photographic print shows the inside of a sunlit room.¹⁴ The photograph is made up of a portion of an old face-brick wall, door, windows and some used tools. The window in the image has a broken bottom half and is barred up with flush metal bars. A glance through the bottom half of the window reveals a flat, red face-brick wall on the other side. Resting against the old, dark bricks are tools. The lime green plastic rake, showing clear signs of wear, stands out amongst what appear to be broom sticks. The rake's missing teeth reveal evidence of prior use. A noticeable feature of the image is a blue door with its worn-out doorknob and crooked nails, the door appears old. A worker's face-mask, a flat rectangular wooden block and some old document pages and what appears to be a wooden chair-leg template hang from it. The blue door carries a resemblance to the wall on which the photograph is mounted.

¹⁴ This was the first of the photographs I had taken in the workshop as part of this research.

The blue wall in the exhibition is a reference to the doors in the actual workshop, as seen in the photograph. All the doors in the workshop and shop are painted with the same or very similar shades of blue. However, the blue on the exhibition wall is not exactly the same as the colour used in the workshop. I chose the colour based on my memory of it, in order to suggest a disjuncture between my memory and its materialization. This speaks back to the ideas of Oguibe and Benjamin, who look at the difficulties inherent in the materialization of memory.¹⁵ In Chapter 2 of this report, Joja's description of the titling of Wa Lehubere's *Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb 2.1* also poetically illuminates this disjuncture between memory and its materialization. He describes how a work and its title has the ability to persuade a consideration to something [a memory], however that something remains mysterious and illusive (Joja 2012). The framed image against the blue wall offers a fragment into the "everyday" of someone else.

On the right of the blue wall, in the gallery space (*Figure V.3*), is a freestanding wall covered in an assemblage of wood pallets and pencil drawings. The abstract pencil drawings on the freestanding wall do not make up any recognizable scenes. The assemblage installation takes up the entire freestanding wall and bursts into the gallery space. The style of drawing used in this piece is intended to have a playfulness (in the same spirit as Wa Lehubere's childlike wall-drawing), while subtly evoking suggestions of structures and forms through the straight pencil lines and planes of wood. The combination of pencil drawings and sourced wood pallets explode into the space of the gallery.

The pallets, spread throughout the gallery (*Figure V.1*), obstruct the path of the viewer and cast shadows across the pencil drawings on the freestanding wall, adding new ephemeral layers to them. In some parts of the installation, the viewer can manoeuvre between and around old nails embedded in the pieces of wood that occupy the space of the gallery. The mounted wood creates strong contrasts to the

¹⁵ As per the discussion in Chapter 1.

white wall, while the shadows are elements in themselves, producing perspective shadows which are emphasized by the pencil drawings dispersed around the wall. The condition of the pallets is suggestive of previous uses, alluding to modes of recycling, a practice my grandparents used when making the most of their furniture. When my grandparents started out, my grandfather and his sons would collect materials by bicycle from the local dumpsite. These salvaged pieces of wood would be restored into straight reusable pieces which he would then use to make furniture or coffins. The wood used in the exhibition is intended to allude to the embedded potential which a certain effort of labour and working can draw out.

The assemblage did not make a direct representation of the workshop. Instead, it alludes to processes of working, a constant yet subtle theme repeated throughout the exhibition. This also comes through in the photographs I took of the workshop. These provide a glimpse into a world informed by wood-working.

On the second floor of the gallery, opposite the assemblage, lounges a wooden figure (*Figure V.5*) made up of multiple and varying pieces of wood glued together. It lies on its stomach, with one hand supporting its head, along with a missing arm and part of a leg from just below the buttocks. The pieces of wood that make up the figure are of various sizes, shapes and types, with some pieces neatly formed or rounded and others rigidly square-shaped. The figure itself is not fully formed. It contains gaps, spaces and missing limbs, as it rests flat on the gallery floor, facing both the entrance and ground floor displays of the exhibition. At first glance, this piece does not appear as a relaxed or contemplative figure. Instead, it comes across as an organised pile of wood blocks on the floor. It has no plinth for support and looks as though it is either being pieced together or falling apart. The positioning of the figure is subtly confrontational, making the sculpture look as though it is both watching the viewer and reflecting on the installation displayed opposite it.

Although the figure is not intended as an attempt to tell the story of the workshop, it evokes certain memories associated with it, like how my grandparents used

recycled materials to make things. The piece begins to move beyond a singular reflection of childhood memories in that it is a vessel through which I consider the experiences I had growing up, in relation to the situation I found myself in around the time of the sculpture's making. Here, the symbolism of using the old remaining pieces of wood from the offcuts of students speaks to the context in which the work was made.

When I created the figure, I did not have the necessary finances to construct the work I had originally intended. The only material available at the time were offcuts of wood left behind by students. I was reminded of the recycled materials my grandparents used in their carpentry workshop and how my brother and I would play with the discarded offcuts. In this sense, the sculpture evokes a circularity in the early stages of both mine and my grandfather's careers — as we both turned towards recycled materials in order to make objects.

The 'stitching' together of the fragmented pieces of wood reminded me of the mixture of emotions I experienced during the 2015 and 2016 *Fees Must Fall Movement*. At the time, I watched the movement and the university structure continuously fall apart and piece together, stirred by sentiments of confusion and uncertainty as well as anger and fear.¹⁶ I found this resonated with the sculpture's multifaceted structure, which seems to deconstruct and construct itself at the same time.

Viewed through this lens, the sculpture is intended to exist as a materialization of multifaceted narratives that include missing histories, childhood memories and my experiences as a contemporary student in South Africa grappling with the legacies of apartheid. The process of creating the piece, which started out as a way of remembering my childhood with my grandparents through making, became a way of trying to process the reality of the *Fees Must Fall* movement which I found

¹⁶ For me, this was a fear of being shot by police rubber bullets and being ridiculed for both not participating and participating in the protests.

myself a part of in 2015 and 2016 while I was living in the post-graduate residence at Wits.

Behind the sculptural figure are framed photographic prints (*Figure V.7*). This series of images is mounted close to the figure and displayed in an unconventional longitudinal format, with a single image placed alongside the center of the top two prints, making a cluster of five group-prints. The first print among these five photographs hangs at the top of the series and shows a passageway that is interrupted by a single wooden pole (*Figure V.8*), balanced on a point between a rusted corrugated roof and concrete floor. The building looks aged because of the rusted metal sheets that comprise the ceiling. Various materials lie along the sides of the building, leading down the passageway towards the sunlight and plants at the end.

Directly below this print hangs a photograph of old wooden materials leaning against a bright, mustard-yellow concrete wall. The photograph that follows is of a space filled with machinery, tools and objects. The space in the photographic print appears difficult to walk in, due to the large number of objects occupying the space. Quietly, in the corner of the same image the following hand-painted white words, contrasted against a dark wood board that reads, "no tools to leave this workshop by order."

Following the photograph of the overflowing space, almost touching the floor, is a photograph of two white coffins that seem to be for toddler-sized children (*Figure V.2*). The coffin in front has its lid ajar while the other is shut. The lid is being used as a surface for storing tools. Between the two coffins lies an old swollen book, resembling a bible, with the letters *D U* from the word *DULUX* on the cover. Mounted to the concrete wall behind the sealed coffin hang two fairly large drill-bits that appear to be the last two in the doorless wall cabinet. The entire photograph is lit from a far left source of sunlight. Given the way the light casts strong shadows across the objects in the image, it is challenging to see the ajar

coffin's bottom and contents. The placement of these images in an unconventional format was a way of moving away from displaying the works in a linear format that would allude to a narrative reading.

Sitting in line with the centre of the first two framed photographs that make up the longitudinal series, hangs a black and white photograph of a small room, overcrowded with objects and tools (*Figure V.3*). In the foreground, the focal point of the photograph is an upside-down table, standing on top of an already crowded wooden work-bench. It is complimented by a concrete circular entity that rests next to it on the same table. The circular object has a wooden x-shape located at its centre, with a large bolt coming through the middle. Some of the other structures in the print include old dust-filled shelves that rest against all the walls and windows, limiting the amount of sunlight entering the space. The viewer can recognise additional objects, such as trolley wheels, bicycle rims and what looks like old machinery.

Moving away from the longitudinal series of images, toward the back-end of the first floor, is another photographic print of a block of wood that hangs in the centre of a wooden board, under a single light source (*Figure V.4*). The piece of wood looks as though it could have been a section of an old railway sleeper, with two rusted bolts emerging from the bottom of the wood as it rests flat on a surface of wet soil. Water-laced leaves surround the wooden block. Their green colour creates a strong contrast to the dark brown soil and wooden object. The piece of wood looks like it is in the early stages of decaying into the soil that surrounds it. This is emphasised by the rusted bolts and the way the colour of the block resembles the surrounding moist soil.

The final photographic print is mounted in the centre of a pillar, opposite the longitudinal prints (*Figure V.14*). This image is a close-up of a number of glass draws, making up a black and white image. There were several noticeable fingerprint marks on some of the glass, as well as some missing shelves and glass pieces. The tools and objects inside the shelf are only just noticeable.

In the left window façade of the gallery, a framed image and caption (drawn in pencil and written in Times New Roman font) is displayed and lit by a single light source (*Figure V.5*). The text reads, “a little bit of powder and a little bit of paint makes all things what they ain’t – L.F Belcher.” The words belong to my grandfather. They are intended to evoke the way he used to work, especially in the early stages of his career when he would re-cycle and re-use old pieces of wood to create furniture. Alongside this text sits a framed drawing comprised of an assemblage of wood, together with pencil and ink on old, yellowed and torn newsprint. The abstract image contains black squares, rectangles, lines and wood pieces, layered with both recognisable and unrecognisable forms. The drawing is busy, with abstract elements and lines that resemble architectural plans. The drawing, and text carry elements that speak to the other pieces in the overall installation. As a result, the sketch becomes a plan for the entire exhibition, acting in a similar way to the drawing by Wa Lehlere, *Remembering the future of the whole as a verb*, while its position in the gallery window makes it an invitation for the public that passes by.

The entire exhibition also occupies a virtual space online, where a stop-frame video piece of the assemblage installation, deconstruction and reconstruction are documented¹⁷. The site also includes images from the exhibition and opening, together with details on the process and conceptualisation of the project. The online element of the exhibition allows the viewer visual access to the exhibition’s conceptualisation, materialization and installation process.

The exhibition aimed at trying to connect to a place and time that was long past. Producing the work and exhibiting it in a context that was hours away from the locus of my memory became a physical way of making tangible the act of remembering and articulating those memories. The particular placement of drawings, objects and photographic prints represented a distant past. These were

¹⁷ Natashajacobs.co.za

then displayed in dialogue with the sculptural piece which referenced my more immediate experience of events taking place at the institution of Wits University and became a way of including the context in which the work was displayed. The mysteriousness of the work was intended to invoke themes of place, history and abandonment, all of which are linked to my exploration of finding physical forms for personal memory.



Figure V.6 Powder and paint (detail)

Exhibition detail

2016

Photo Credit: Natasha Christopher



Figure V.7 Untitled (detail)

Exhibition detail

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Christopher



Figure V.8 Powder and Paint (detail)

Exhibition Detail

2016

Photo credit: Tatenda Magaisa



Figure V.9 Powder and Paint (detail)

Assemblage Detail

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Christopher



Figure V.10 Powder and Paint (detail)

Figure

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Christopher



Figure V.11 Figure on table

2016

Photo Credit: Natasha Jacobs



Figure V.12 Powder and paint (detail)

Exhibition detail

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Christopher



Figure V.13 Workshop Image

Passage

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Jacobs



Figure V.14 Powder and Paint

Mustard wall

2016

Photocredit: Natasha Jacobs



Figure V.15 Workshop Image

No Tools Too Leave
2016

Photo credit: Natasha Jacobs



Figure V.16 Workshop Image

Coffins

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Jacobs



Figure V.17 Workshop image

Table on Table

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Jacobs



Figure V.18 Workshop images

Sleeping sleeper

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Jacobs



Figure V.14 Workshop Image

Workshop Curiosities

2016

Photo credit: Natasha Jacobs

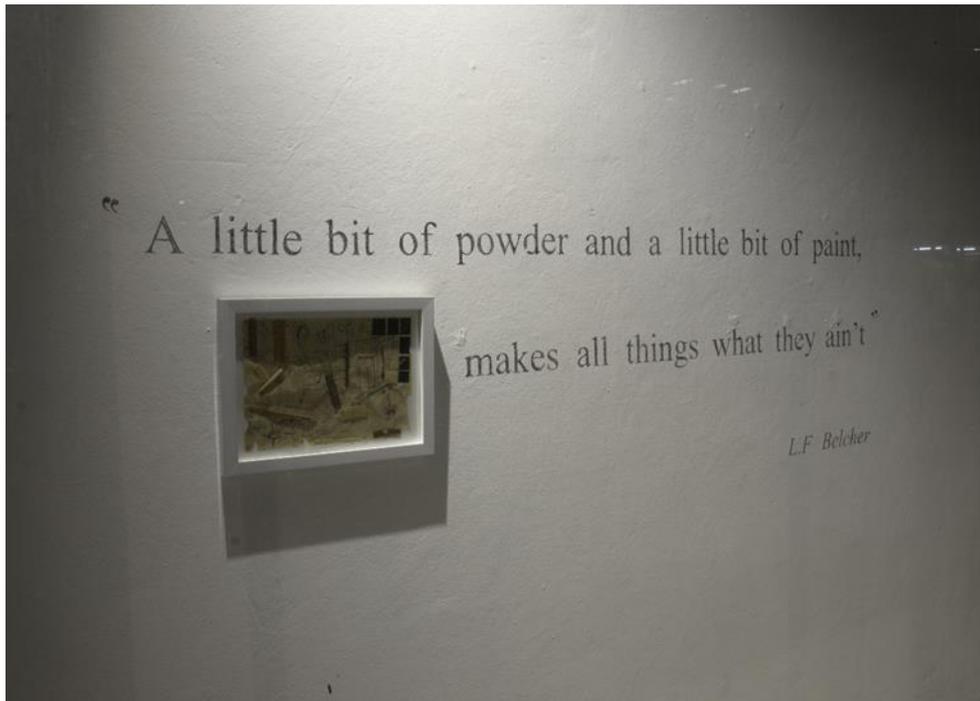


Figure V.19 Powder and paint (detail)

Exhibition detail

2016

Photo Credit: Natasha Christopher

VI. Conclusion

At the same time as building a sensory set of associations, I became increasingly aware of the lack of documentation on Eshowe in the collective history of South Africa. I found myself continuously researching the area and describing the people that live there, particularly when writing the first drafts of this dissertation. I felt myself ‘working’ these descriptions and research into the photographs I took and the body of materials I was using to create artworks. In this regard, the collective memory of what was once an apartheid area, specifically designated for coloured people, is moulded into the deepest foundations of my work. Thus, race is unavoidably, yet perhaps more subtly, an essential element of the way I explore place and space through my memories.

Although the aim of my work is not to tell a linear narrative of the workshop nor create a history of the surrounding area, throughout the process of this investigation there were several stories shared by my grandmother, uncles, aunties and parents about the workshop, my grandparents and the surrounding Sunnydale area. The investigation led, in this way, to many informal discussions about and with the families in the area, especially regarding the lack of Sunnydale’s documented history. These conversations brought to light the necessity of projects that aim to document and include histories of areas like Sunnydale into the collective narratives of contemporary South African history. This, in turn, resonates with Wa Lehulere’s work, which similarly focuses on articulating the missing narratives in a broader understanding of South African history. On the other hand, the works of both Von Rydingsvard and Wa Lehulere become examples of how such narratives might unfold through creative practice.

While working through the project, the roles of historian, archivist and artist became hazy. When sharing the history I knew about the area, I transitioned into a kind of historian. In contrast, my sense was that of an archivist when visiting and

photographing the workshop, or when speaking to family about their memories of the location. I found the unfamiliar spaces of historian and archivist challenging to occupy. The adoption of each role was equally unavoidable and unintentional, yet essential throughout the creative research process.

The workshop became a point of reference to memory and my engagement with various materials became the language through which those memories were articulated. The materials used throughout the process, in one way or another, spoke to the workshop's environment, as direct or indirect evocations of the space and my memories of my grandparents' lives in Sunnysdale. This was achieved through an engagement with materials that resonated with my grandparents' carpentry workshop and its processes. I felt that including any images of my grandparents in the workshop — or any images of the workshop over the years — would have made this project take on more of an archival role. Indeed, writing the story of the workshop and its surrounding area would have rendered the project a mere 'documentation' of past events. Instead, I was interested in open-ended, ambiguous and evocative expressions that alluded to aspects of the workshop and its history, from the position of the present tense. The goal was to create artworks that demonstrated a labour intensive process and a desire to make something from nothing.

Through this work, I explored the often neglected significance of both knowing and documenting histories that are particular to the individual, rather than a community as a whole. I have treated the 'mundane' aspects of history as if they carry the same weight as 'grand' collective narratives of the past and will continue to do so.

VII. References

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VIII. Images

Figure IV.1.1 Droga (front)

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Figure IV.1.2 Droga (back).....

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Figure IV.2.1. Remembering the Future of a Hole as a Verb 2.1

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Figure IV.2.2 X,Y,Z

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Figure IV.2.3 Ukuguqula iBatyi 2.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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Figure IV.2.4. Ukuguqula iBatyi 3.....

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Figure V.1 Powder and paint (detail).....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Exhibition detail*

Figure V.2 Untitled (detail).....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Exhibition detail*

Figure V.3 Powder and Paint (detail).....

Magaisa, T .(2016), *Exhibition Detail*

Figure V.4 Powder and Paint (detail).....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Assemblage Detail*

Figure V.5 Powder and Paint (detail).....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Figure*

Figure V.6 Figure on table.....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Figure on table*

Figure V.7 Powder and paint (detail).....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Exhibition detail*

Figure V.8 Workshop Image.....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Passage*

Figure V.9 Powder and Paint.....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Mustard wall*

Figure V.10 Workshop Image.....

Jacobs, N. (2016). *No Tools Too Leave*

Figure V.11 Workshop Image.....

Christopher, N. (2016), *Coffins*

Figure V.12 Workshop image

Jacobs, N. (2016) *Table on Table*

Figure V.13 Workshop images.....

Jacobs, N. (2016) *Sleeping sleeper*

Figure V.14 Workshop images.....

Jacobs, N. (2016) *Workshop Curiosities*

Figure V.15. Powder and paint (detail).....

Jacobs, N. (2016) *Exhibition detail*