

PUBLIC ART

Aesthetic, Evocative and Invisible?

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with Potsiso Phasha

7



a world class African city



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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

There is a story which is told that goes something like this: During the creation of *Fire Walker*, Johannesburg's most high profile, highest-priced and largest piece of public art, the drawings and sheets of stainless steel needed for the mock-up prototype maquette were left in a bakkie. The vehicle was burgled. The robbers took the stainless steel but left the drawings done by William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx. Those sketches were worth infinitely more than the metal sheets. The robbers of course did not see the value of the sketches, but did value the stainless steel as a material with a ready market re-sale value.

This incident provides a metaphor for public art in Johannesburg. The value of public art in the Inner City is often invisible in a context where survival and safety are paramount. Nevertheless, Johannesburg's public art programme is firmly entrenched in the City of Johannesburg's cultural policy. It is a policy that is based on several intentions surrounding the place and meaning of public art in place-making; the construction of identity; and, gentrification. After a decade, this programme has reached a maturity that demands critical reflection on the work done to date and on the relationship between intention and outcome in the execution of the programme. The debates and reflective writings on public art projects internationally highlight a number of questions regarding the utility and meaning of this physical work, questions that are also pertinent in Johannesburg. The overriding enquiry that this think piece addresses for public art in Johannesburg is: Has the work to date purely been an exercise in beautification or does it have a role to play in constructing city identity? Both in terms of how the City of Johannesburg wishes to construct its own identity as well as how inhabitants construct their own identity.

There are three categories of public art found in the Inner City of Johannesburg: That which is commissioned by the City of Johannesburg; that which is commissioned by private institutions; and that which is more organic and has been developed by artists working in public space. Potsiso Phasha makes the point that organic public art is not necessarily only the work of artists but also of citizens with an interest in participating in the transformation of their city. David Bunn's chapter 'Art Johannesburg and Its Objects' in **Johannesburg. The Elusive Metropolis** give an interesting overview of significant public art projects in Johannesburg prior to the City projects discussed in this report. This report will focus on public art that has been commissioned, selected and built by the City of Johannesburg for the citizens of Johannesburg using public funds.

The City of Johannesburg embarked on a deliberate and ambitious public art programme in 2007 and has to date commissioned around 680 pieces of public art – both big and small. Since 2007, it has used public art in public spaces as a mirror for reflecting the current reality of the city and also as a tool for urban regeneration. This focus on the public realm is significant in a city where public spaces generally are not viewed as spaces of recreation. While the focus area for the public art has been in the traditional city centre of Johannesburg

– referred to as the Inner City² – more recently public art is being imagined and produced in Johannesburg's former Black townships through a different, and more inclusive, methodology.

This paper will focus on Inner City City-commissioned artworks and will explore whose reality the artworks represent in a constantly evolving and complex city and what contribution the pieces make, if any, to modifying public space³. The City's Public Art Policy contends its objectives to be: *'To celebrate Johannesburg's unique character and identity and enhance the urban environment through a vibrant, diverse city-wide program of public art.'* (JDA, 2011:4). It is thus pertinent to examine whether or not city residents agree that this objective has been met. And further, should the objectives not include debate or interaction?

In posing these questions, it is worthwhile pausing to ask if it is a realistic expectation for the public to share the City's vision reflected in those artworks. Through interactions with members of the public working in the Inner City, commuting and engaging with the work, the report will demonstrate how public art is mostly the preserve of the *aficionado* or those with an interest in the visual. This situation is largely predictable and one that is clearly replicated across the globe.

However despite the bulk of public art work generated and the lack of general public awareness, there has been little discussion or controversy with regard to the process and content of public art. By this I mean, debate concerning its place in public space. Rather, those involved in the process are justifiably proud of the work done to date and this is validated by the very positive press coverage. Sharon Lewis of the JDA points out that public art has become a visual backdrop to normal city life and representations of city life. She confirms that in the past 2 years, public art in Johannesburg has appeared in at least 5 national adverts.

So, does public art serve a purpose as an important part of the urban form? Is it an instrument used to generate a self-styled identity? Public space is imagined, used and realised in most cities as an expression of both identity and governance. Jane Jacobs famously wrote in 1961 however that 'a city cannot be a work of art'. It needs to be a liveable space (cited in Jacobs, 1993: page unknown). The use of 'public art' as a means of aestheticising public space is a simple solution to more complex public space issues (Miles, 2008: 66-90).

The public realm is one of city government's tools for communicating with its citizens, creating order and projecting an image. Designing public space is a means of creating value and engagement in amorphous spaces and one in which the public interacts in unimagined ways. Public art is one way in which to impose a visual representation of what government wishes that reality to be. The public realm is a space that all residents share and thus should command much attention, especially in Johannesburg. If public art is truly able to create a 'city identity', can it serve an important function? This piece intends to further discuss these issues and poses the question: Has the City of Johannesburg bucked the international trend by generating more representative and democratic public art?

In Johannesburg, City-generated public art has been self-consciously constructed for beautification and urban regeneration. It has also been incorporated into existing urban projects. The pieces are a physical representation of a city identity and city thinking at a particular point in time, as one interviewee noted: *'But I still wonder if art isn't just an abstraction where the artist searches really a little too hard for something valuable and ends up giving us something that none of us really actually relate to.'*⁴

The report and discussion will be structured as follows. It will begin with an outline of the research methodology used in the study as this provides guidance as to who was targeted in the qualitative research component. The report will then outline the history and background to the public art story in Johannesburg's Inner City. This will be discussed in conjunction with the theoretical work done on public art internationally as well as in a local context. Thereafter, the report will focus on a number of case studies in the Inner City and review the impact of the artworks within the framework generated earlier in the report.

SECTION 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The overall objective of the research project is to better understand the public perceptions of public art work in the Inner City of Johannesburg. The intention is to venture beyond the work done to date. Current research (for example JDA, 2012) considers its impact and its contribution to the overall regeneration process and this information is primarily gathered through quantitative methodology. This research, instead, endeavours to understand how citizens residing and working in the Inner City interpret the intent and meaning of individual art works and whether they believe these pieces do represent Johannesburg's city identity.

The project examines:

- How the City officials view the public art pieces;
- How the artists involved in the commissioning of the pieces view them;
- How the citizenry engage with and understand the public art pieces; and
- Whether or not, public art in the Inner City reflects a broad city identity.

This is a limited exploratory research project based on desk-based analysis and qualitative methods. The theoretical framework was drawn from an international body of work pertaining to public art. Although South Africa has its own discourse, which has grown over the past 3-4 years, there are insights to be gained through analysing international experiences. Furthermore, there have also been two Johannesburg Development Agency's Public Art Conferences and City of Johannesburg-associated notes and reports that have contributed to the desk-based research material. The theoretical framework is drawn from both an urban literature as well as a visual arts literature. These have been used in order to better understand the Johannesburg case.

The research study has been written up as a case study of the Inner City of Johannesburg specifically. This was done in order to give the study a geographical focus. It was considered that if a broader geographical area was used, it would be difficult to draw coherent conclusions.

The experience of public art in townships has to some extent been different given the more participatory methodologies used with local residents and local artists and would be best reviewed through a different study. Although the Inner City itself is a heterogeneous space, the pieces that were selected for in-depth review share common features including, the specifics of their sites, the size of the pieces and the time at which they were installed. Each will be discussed in some detail in the project.

The research was undertaken between July and December 2013. In total, 33 qualitative interviews were undertaken for the report. The interviewees included government officials, public art practitioners, urbanists and members of the public interacting with the public art. Interviews were the key research tool utilised. The

intention of the project was to undertake ‘research dialogues’ with randomly selected members of the public in the vicinity of the selected public artworks. Initially, we selected three sculptures namely Fire Walker (Inner City core), the Angel of the North (Hillbrow) and the Pigeons. However, due to the conspicuousness of the Eland in Braamfontein, this was added to the report for further analysis. An on-site research assistant conducted the research in each of the research sites drawing participants from around the sites. The research questions were semi-structured in favour of generating a dialogue between the researcher and the members of the public. This was done in order to encourage a spontaneous discussion.

A number of limitations were faced in the work. In some instances, members of the public were not willing to be drawn into conversation, while in other instances in-depth discussions were held with passers-by. This had an impact on the content of the interviews resulting in some variation. There were also some difficulties experienced in doing the research in the vicinity of Fire Walker where many pedestrians were wary of pausing to be interviewed due to safety concerns⁶. The targeting approach thus became focused on slower moving pedestrians who looked more amenable to a discussion. Women especially were suspicious of being drawn into a discussion and were only prepared to stop if in pairs.

Those members of the public who participated in the study, mainly did so anonymously. In the writing of the report, interviewee numbers were attributed to participants who did not wish to be cited. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed for review. In addition to the interviews, participant observation was undertaken around the various public art sites. Observations pertaining to the sites and the artworks were also done and included in the analysis of the work.

A more structured approach was adopted in discussions with municipal officials and practitioners in order to maximise access to information. These interviewees were selected on the basis of their involvement with the public art project. The research questions asked were similar to those used for members of the public. In most instances, the interviewees were comfortable with being quoted directly.

The research methodology used in this study was approved by the Wits Ethics Department. Each interviewee was required to give consent prior to being interviewed. This researcher was obliged to give the interviewee an overview of the project and thereafter interviewees were informed of their right to withdraw from the questioning at any point. Furthermore, the name and contact details of the researchers were provided to interviewees should they have required further information.

I was involved, as a previous employee of the City, in the commissioning of a number of the initial artworks done. I have included reflections on my own experience and my insights of those pieces in the analysis. There are advantages and disadvantages to the author’s role in the works. The advantage is that I was part of the process and had a reasonable sense of the conceived role that the City wished public art to place in public space. In addition, I understand how each of the pieces were considered to be fitting for the sites on which they find themselves. My interest in the work that has been done in the research report arose out of an interest in understanding whether or not there was a connection between the intention of the commissioner and the experience of the viewer. The disadvantage of my involvement in the public art process is a feeling of sentimentality to each of the pieces which might obscure complete objectivity.



Photograph by Brian Boshoff.

SECTION 3

BACKGROUND

The public art discourse in Johannesburg has grown substantially over the past three or four years. Initially, the work was discussed primarily by the artists and the City. The content of the discussions were largely limited to discussions on the artwork's functionality and lessons learnt. There was also dialogue pertaining to the efficacy of location, the materials used in construction and its robustness for instance. The Johannesburg Development Agency (JDA) spearheaded both the production and practice of public art in Johannesburg. Slowly, further necessary dialogues on public art have begun to emerge. The dialogues include two public art conferences hosted by the JDA as well as a work done by the Goethe Institute on 'New Imaginaries' which directly addressed public art in public spaces⁷. There are also numerous media reports pertaining to public art. However to date, there has been little work done on understanding the broader narrative within which public art is located.

In the absence of a local theoretical discourse, it is difficult to move beyond the popular truths that exist to a more in-depth analysis of how public art affects the urban form, public space and those using the public space. The international literature offers two theoretical trajectories which seem appropriate starting points for analysis:

Firstly, the phenomenon of culture-led regeneration where public art is one of the tools used in the redevelopment of urban neighbourhoods in decline is a widely applied approach in many cities. This is important given that to date the Johannesburg Development Agency has funded public art projects in the Inner City of Johannesburg as part of a broader mandate of urban revitalisation⁸. Without this mandate, the *One Per Cent for Public Art* project would never have been realised. Thus, the main themes of this theory will be discussed with an associated reference to the Johannesburg case, although the research will review the literature as well as its appropriateness to our context. This theoretical perspective is less to do with the visual content of the artworks and more to the contributory role of public art in catalysing development in neighbourhoods.

Secondly, a more focused investigation of what constitutes public art as well as the utility of public art as a form of visual engagement is based on international discourse and debates. That section of the report will focus on the content of the pieces, accessibility of the art and their contribution to public space. There is a rich literature pertaining to this and the analytical framework that will form the basis for discussion is an international one. There has been much debate regarding the utility of public art, its various forms and its significance in respect to urban form. All of this work is relevant to the local context.

SECTION 4

THE STORY OF PUBLIC ART IN JOHANNESBURG

The story of public art in Johannesburg is one of timing and opportunity. It is immersed in the emergence of the post-apartheid city and its need to articulate an identity and celebrate its existence. Public art has had a role in Johannesburg historically, but not on the scale currently seen. There has been a distinct evolution in the scale and subject matter of public art since its inception in 2005. The public art project in Johannesburg has grown from a few small select pieces commissioned by the City of Johannesburg to a comprehensive portfolio of public art pieces throughout Johannesburg⁹. This has all been through the hard work of the City of Johannesburg. Many commentators, such as Lesley Perkes and Steven Sack¹⁰, have proffered that Johannesburg might have commissioned more public art pieces in a short period of time than any other city in the world.

What accounts for this enormous portfolio of work commissioned in under ten years? Steven Sack, the former Director of Arts, Culture and Heritage at the City of Johannesburg, contends that the case for public art in Johannesburg was made at a time where it was well received politically. Johannesburg's new democratically elected politicians had travelled to cities across the world and had seen memorial sites celebrating national heroes. Public art was conceptualised as and subsequently was viewed as a means for symbolic reparations and an appropriate method for the memorialisation of struggle heroes.¹¹

After a Sister-City trip to New York, the City of Johannesburg approved the *One Percent for Art Policy* which was adapted from the successful policy spearheaded in many North American cities. This policy advocated that up to one percent of all capital budgets be allocated for public art spend. The City of Johannesburg's political leadership accepted this policy enthusiastically, paving the way for the now *City of Johannesburg Public Art Policy*. The policy itself was approved by Council in 2006. Since then more than R19.5 million has been spent on public art with a budget peak in 2009/2010 on account of the artworks commissioned for the FIFA Soccer World Cup 2010 and for the Inner City BRT station precinct (City of Johannesburg, 2012:1). While a healthy budget certainly worked in the programme's favour, it was really the confluence of institutional relationships that underpinned the public art success story: a constructive relationship between the Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage and the JDA. This is significant because a major factor in the collapse of public art programmes elsewhere is internal institutional conflict.

Given the institutional alliance, it was the relationship between the Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage and the JDA that ensured that the production of public art could happen without institutional complications or bureaucratic bickering. Attaching public art to existing urban renewal projects catalysed its success and showcased the art along with the upgraded neighbourhoods. The Arts, Culture and Heritage Department continued to undertake its existing heritage programmes and projects while enthusiastically participating in the public art projects and undertaking an active oversight function in public art. Sack continues:

‘My sense, is that it is a completely unique story. A historic moment post-apartheid. Then when 2010 arrived, the conjunction of 2010 just handed this whole thing to us, delivered it to us because then there was a city beautification project in 2010’ [For the Soccer World Cup]¹².

A further element acting in the favour of fairly ‘independent’ public art was the fact that the City was structured in such a way that the Johannesburg Development Agency was in a position to create and generate public art at an arm’s length from the core city administration. The installation of public art was attached to economic development or urban regeneration overseen by the JDA, and was part of those budgets administered by the agency. This allowed the JDA a degree of independence in its commissioning process. In addition, the JDA commissioned Trinity Session¹³ to manage the process therefore ensuring that the artistic process was a step further away from the bureaucracy.

Sack comments

‘At the outset, there was a multi-pronged strategy so we were able to protect the public art so that it became a space in which artists could play in communities linked to the JDA prerogative of City upgrading or beautification and creating a sense of pride and creating visual markers in cities that tend to become amorphous.’¹⁴

The institutional enthusiasm for public art grew out of the success of the interventions and very soon other City agencies such as City Parks and the Johannesburg Property Company were also creating public artworks. An overview of some of the key pieces of public art commissioned by the JDA in the Inner City are tabulated below.

FIGURE 1: List of JDA Public Art Projects in the Inner City.

ARTWORK	TYPE OF ARTWORK	INNER CITY NEIGHBOURHOOD
Rissik Street Post Office	Sculpture	Inner city core (Ernest Oppenheimer Sculpture Park)
Park Texts	Street furniture (benches)	Inner city core (Ernest Oppenheimer Sculpture Park)
Oppenheimer Diamond	Sculpture	Inner city core (Ernest Oppenheimer Sculpture Park)
The Park Bokkies	Sculpture	Inner city core (Ernest Oppenheimer Sculpture Park)
The Standard Theatre	Sculpture	Inner city core (Ernest Oppenheimer Sculpture Park)
Heritage Signs 1-4	Street furniture (signs)	Inner city core (Drill Hall)
De-fencing/Fence Furniture	Functional art (fencing)	Inner city core (Drill Hall)
We Stand by Our Leaders	Mural	Inner city core (Drill Hall)
Library Gardens East Rea Vaya Station 1-2	Mural	Inner city core
Library Gardens West Rea Vaya Station 1-2	Mural	Inner city core
Carlton Station East Rea Vaya Station 1-2	Mural	Inner city core
Carlton Station West Rea Vaya Station 1-2	Mural	Inner city core
All Stars	Sculpture	Fashion District
Sewing Machine	Sculpture	Fashion District
Satellite Dish	Sculpture	Fashion District
Afro Comb	Sculpture	Fashion District
Fashion Gateway Flags	Street furniture (signs)	Fashion District
High Court Clock	Sculpture	Fashion District
Fashion Square North Rea Vaya Station 1-2	Mural	Fashion District
Fashion Square South Rea Vaya Station 1-2	Mural	Fashion District
Faraday Mosaics	Mural	Faraday Station Precinct

ARTWORK	TYPE OF ARTWORK	INNER CITY NEIGHBOURHOOD
Drinking Fountain and Benches	Street furniture (fountain and benches)	Faraday Station Precinct
Bottle-top Mural	Mural	Faraday Station Precinct
Rubber-woven Patterns	Mural	Faraday Station Precinct
Gates	Functional art (fencing)	Faraday Station Precinct
Consulting Room Mural	Mural	Faraday Station Precinct
Mapungbwe Rhino	Sculpture	Main Street Mining District
Steel mast Lights	Functional art (lights)	Main Street Mining District
Mosaics	Mural	Main Street Mining District
Untitled (pole spine)	Sculpture	Main Street Mining District
Billton Water Sculpture	Functional art (fountain)	Main Street Mining District
Sidewalk Mosaics	Mural	Jewel City / Maboneng
Wooden Diamond	Sculpture	Jewel City / Maboneng
Tribute to Walter and Albertina Sisulu	Sculpture	Diagonal Street
Heritage Signs	Street furniture (signs)	Diagonal Street
Memorial to Deaths in Detention	Sculpture	Westgate Station Precinct
Memorial to Duma Nokwe	Sculpture	Westgate Station Precinct
First Chinatown Gateway	Sculpture	Westgate Station Precinct
Paper Pigeons	Sculpture	Westgate Station Precinct
Chancellor House East Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Westgate Station Precinct
Chancellor House West Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Westgate Station Precinct
The Shadow Boxer	Sculpture	Westgate Station Precinct
Westgate Rea Vaya Station 1-3	Mural	Westgate Station Precinct
Mavumbi Station Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Westgate Station Precinct
Eland	Sculpture	Braamfontein
Juta Street Trees	Sculpture	Braamfontein
Braamfontein Metro Centre Rea Vaya Station 1-2	Mural	Braamfontein
Alleyway umbrellas	Sculpture	Braamfontein
Alleyway birds	Mural	Braamfontein
Alleyway artworks 1-6	Murals	Braamfontein
The Fire Walker	Sculpture	Park Station Precinct
Bollard Covers	Street furniture (signs)	Park Station Precinct
Metro Mosaics	Mural	Park Station Precinct
Metal Flowers & Cut-outs	Mural	Park Station Precinct
Mother & Child	Sculpture	Park Station Precinct
Skyline Retaining Wall	Street furniture (retaining wall and benches)	Park Station Precinct
Joburg Art Gallery Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Park Station Precinct
De la Rey Street Subway Mural	Mural	Fordsburg
Kippies Sculpture	Sculpture	Newtown Cultural Precinct
Labourer	Sculpture	Newtown Cultural Precinct
Newtown Bollard Heads	Sculptures	Newtown Cultural Precinct
Brenda Fassie Memorial	Sculpture	Newtown Cultural Precinct
Constellation Discs	Mural	Newtown Cultural Precinct
Waterfall Mosaic	Mural	Hillbrow
Embankment Fall Mosaic	Mural	Hillbrow
Welcome to Our Hillbrow	Functional art (stairs)	Hillbrow
The Southern Cross(ing)	Functional art (bridge)	Hillbrow

ARTWORK	TYPE OF ARTWORK	INNER CITY NEIGHBOURHOOD
The Messenger	Sculpture	Hillbrow
Cocopans	Functional art (play)	Hillbrow
Graffiti Wall	Graffiti	Hillbrow
Master-fibre Playground Equipment and signage	Functional art (play)	Hillbrow
Performance Platform	Sculpture	Hillbrow
Park Benches	Street furniture (benches)	Hillbrow
Tree Stump Carvings 1-8	Sculpture	Hillbrow
Park Signage 1-3	Street furniture (signs)	Hillbrow
Conceptual Park sculpture	Sculpture	Hillbrow / Berea
Games Area	Functional art (play)	Hillbrow / Berea
Male & Female Principle - 1& 2	Sculpture	Hillbrow / Berea
Mosaic Wall	Mural	Hillbrow / Berea
Elevator	Sculpture	Hillbrow
Le Roith Commemorative Plaque	Street furniture (sign)	Hillbrow
Courage	Sculpture	Hillbrow
Governor's House Trees 1 & 2	Sculptures	Hillbrow
Angel of the North	Sculpture	Hillbrow
Angel of the North bollards	Street furniture (bollards)	Hillbrow
Urban Furniture (bricks)	Street furniture (benches)	Hillbrow
Way-finders	Street furniture (signs)	Hillbrow
A Story of Portraits	Mural	Hillbrow
Alleyway murals 1 – 13	Murals	Hillbrow / Berea
Old Synagogue East Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Hillbrow / Berea
Old Synagogue West Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Hillbrow / Berea
Hillbrow Bath House Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Hillbrow
Optic Garden	Sculpture	Yeoville
The Book	Sculpture	Yeoville
Transport Tower	Sculpture	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Transport Square Mosaics 1-4	Mural	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Cow 1-7	Sculptures	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Taxi Hand Signs 1-5	Sculptures	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Four Angels	Sculptures	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Soccer Players 1-4	Sculptures	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
The Battle of Ellis Park Mosaic	Mural	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Mosaic Bench 1-2	Street furniture (benches)	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Saratoga Bridge Mosaics	Mural	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Invented Mythologies	Sculpture	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Doornfontein Campus Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Ellis Park North Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Ellis Park East Rea Vaya Station	Mural	Greater Ellis Park Sports Precinct
Metal Gates	Functional art (fence)	Troyeville
Domino Benches	Street furniture (benches)	Troyeville
David Webster Mosaics 1-4	Mural	Troyeville
David Webster Memorial Plaque	Street furniture (sign)	Troyeville
Steel Benches	Street furniture (benches)	Troyeville

The scale of the artworks undertaken in the Inner City alone is impressive.



IMAGE 1: Sculpture of the Sisulus done by Marina Walsh on the intersection of Diagonal, Ntemi Piliso and Market streets.
Photograph by Brian Boshoff.

It also became another automatic facet to urban development projects. The hype around the public art was media-generated. The work was also commended by the private sector and other inner city players. The installation of the Eland and Fire Walker, for instance, were both large media events as were some of the other works commissioned as part of the FIFA Soccer World Cup 2010 work done by the City.

One of the first large investments in public art as a significant component of the urban renewal project was the JDA's intervention in Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville in 2007. With a sum of R178 million to spend in these neighbourhoods, the JDA made a commitment to spend R5 million on public art for this project, larger than the City-specified one percent. There was much internal questioning regarding whether or not this was the wisest way to spend the money but ultimately it was a commitment that was adhered to and which paved the way for public art in the Inner City of Johannesburg from then onwards. The commitment was a JDA one and public art was attached to all large-scale spatial interventions.

Key public art installations also accompanied the so-called legacy projects – large scale capital investments associated with the FIFA Soccer World Cup 2010 that was hosted in South Africa. With a capital budget of more than R1 billion being allocated to the Johannesburg Development Agency for the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Soccer World Cup 2010 projects, public art was well placed to flourish. In addition, the City had ring-fenced an Inner City budget which was a commitment to upgrading Inner City neighbourhoods. Public art was part of these spatial interventions too.

The public art commissioning process was in its infancy but even at this point the objective of the programme was to create context-specific public art and art that would provide visual relief for the residents living in some of the most disadvantaged inner city urban environments. Parks and managed spaces in Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville were targeted for many of the pieces in this initial Inner City Fund project. It was during this process that some of the initial interactive methods were used in order to involve the local users. In the parks, inner city children participated in the design processes for their playgrounds.

These Inner City neighbourhoods were not easy sites for the artists. This was dangerous terrain for them. Hillbrow and Berea, in particular, are high density residential neighbourhoods where housing choices are dominated by unmanaged and hijacked buildings. They also have some of the highest crime rates in Johannesburg. In Berea, one morning the artists were confronted by a dead body in a park. Pullinger Kop and its surrounds was a notorious spot for drug users, police raids and the neighbourhoods had their fair share of social and safety problems.

In the early 1990s, the population demographic was largely single men living a transitional existence in the city. Over time, these areas have become home to larger numbers of families, including young children, as well located low-income rental housing opportunities are scarcely available elsewhere. These demographic changes spearheaded many of the public art installations in residential neighbourhoods such as Yeoville, Hillbrow, Troyeville and Bertrams.

Working in these spaces was in no way equivalent to constructing a piece of public art in a large managed, sanitised public square *a la* London, Chicago⁴⁶, New York or even the nearby affluent environs of Sandton. Furthermore, in many instances, these pieces were constructed in unreceptive urban spaces not necessarily associated with urban recreation. This is equally true for other pieces. Mark Gevisser writes of the site for Fire Walker:

‘Only months before the launch of Fire Walker at the end of 2009, the triangular site, which the work now inhabits, was used as a car-wash area occupied by eighty taxis at the time. The site is now a small green landscaped park, with new lighting, bollards and pathways. If you didn't know it, you would never guess what used to be there. Like an old scab, the past has fallen away from the city's surface’.
(Gevisser, 2011: 15).

It is the choice of location in these kinds of unmanaged public spaces - selected in order to optimise impact and to offer the artworks in stressed urban space - that have in some instances undermined the recreational impact of the work. These are places in which many people do not wish to take pause and look at the pieces.

Notwithstanding some of the context and process difficulties, the portfolio and experience of those involved in the public art process matured. The public art portfolio grew and the methods and approaches were refined. The portfolio of work has now grown so much that there are even dedicated Public Art Tours¹⁷. Steven Sack offers,

‘I mean it is the one, amazing thing still: you can drive around the city and you can show people still, artworks, and it also taught us about city making. It taught us about the issues to do with safety, and security and the extent to which public art could help to humanise the environment and could help to change people’s attitudes to public place.’¹⁸

Internationally, critics argue that public art, in general, suffers from a lack of constructive evaluation. Unlike other forms of art, public art is subject to less critique. This is equally the case in Johannesburg where most research to date has focused primarily on a number of practical issues rather than critiques of the pieces. Lesley Perkes suggests:

“I think the work is being made in the hottest place in the world to be if you are interested in public art or making it because, firstly, rightly or wrongly, there is so much work being made over so little time and, secondly, because we are pushing the envelope on hot issues including budget for temporary and performative works - and recognition of them as public art - but in terms of the volume of permanent works being made we already know that it is a shame we did not have more time.’¹⁹

Given that the artwork process worked in tandem with the municipal budgetary process, it was often the case that the artworks were rushed. The pieces are required to be finished ‘on time and in budget’. According to the artists, who were interviewed, there is an understanding that these time frames have acted as a constraint to the integrity of the pieces. So while on the one hand, this process can be limiting in terms of content, it is also most likely the reason why so many pieces have been produced in such a short period of time. Realistically, there are the practical realities of constructing art within municipal government frameworks.

One of the most comprehensive reviews of public art in Johannesburg was undertaken by Alex Cunningham, on behalf of the JDA. The study looked, through a quantitative methodology, at the impact of public art in Johannesburg. She investigated the public response to various pieces of public art. The criteria used were as follows:

- City image
- Awareness of the arts
- Diverse portfolio
- Place making
- Job creation
- Safety
- Tourism
- Community Social Impact (2011: 7)

Although Cunningham’s study is the first that goes some way towards measuring the impact of public art by asking simple questions regarding its role in the upliftment of an area or the role that public art plays in attracting tourists to an area, it does not, by design, interrogate further how the public interprets the pieces of art and their meaning. An overview of the responses to the artworks suggest that the ‘public’ interviewed interacted very little with the artwork. None of the participants in the study indicated that the artworks had generated any conversation nor had it improved public safety. There was, however, a positive response to the question regarding the aesthetic improvement of the area as a consequence of the artwork. This suggests that it has succeeded in beautifying the space.

The City of Johannesburg has, through its Public Art Policy, committed itself to installing public art that speaks to the public. Yet, in the JDA's study they noted that much of the public did not, in fact, notice individual public artworks. These are interesting findings but also concerning. As Lucy Lippard, cited in Knight (2008: 31), contended in 1967, *'being noticeable is a necessary prerequisite of public art'*. In the qualitative work done for this study, a similar sentiment of largely 'visual oblivion' was reflected. Aside from those with an interest in public space and art, more generally, the artworks were largely unnoticed. This could be attributed to the context and condition of the artworks. It is pointed out that in some instances, the artworks such as The Angel show *wear and tear* that allows it to blend in with the surrounding bad buildings.²⁰



IMAGE 2: The Shadow Boxer by Marco Cianfanelli located in the southwest of the Inner City in the Westgate Precinct. Photograph by Brian Boshoff.

SECTION 5

CULTURAL REGENERATION AND PUBLIC ART

It is important to situate public art in the broader urban debate on cities and regeneration. Culture-led regeneration²¹ is one of the many approaches to urban regeneration that have emerged since the 1960s. Public art is one component used in this approach. This method is centred on the powerful role of aesthetics and design in regenerating an area by attracting new development and capital to the locale (Jones and Evans, 2008: 112). In many instances, culture is used to generate tourism for a city, thus putting it into the competition for global city status (Evans, 2005: 959). This is done through the development of an ‘iconic building’ or creating flagship public spaces. In this genre, public art is one of the means used in order to achieve this ‘cultural’ focus. This mode of development has evolved further in recent years with a move towards creating whole ‘cultural clusters’ in cities. The efficacy of this approach is discussed in detail in Mommaas’s work on the Netherlands (2004). In the local Johannesburg context, Newtown has the same aspiration. However, much like international experience, Newtown has not quite managed to live up to its ambitions.

The genesis of this form of urban development is attributed to post-industrial economies. The fundamental reconfiguration of the economy towards the knowledge economy has dictated the need to create different forms of leisure and recreational space (Jones and Evans, 2008). The literature focuses on cities in developed countries or those with a long history of urban revitalisation and accompanying public art. The work by Miguel Kanai and Iliana Ortega-Alcáza which speaks to Mexico City and Buenos Aires is a rare foray into culture and regeneration in cities in the developing world (2009). The authors show the ways in which cultural interventions have been used both to support existing cultural assets in these cities but also for upliftment in deprived areas of the cities.

Much like debates on urban regeneration, the opinion regarding the utility of public art is split between those in the policy domain (usually the advocates for public art) and a more critical audience, namely the academics.

Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, citing the Policy Studies Institute, suggest that the following are some of the benefits of public art in urban spaces. Namely:

- It can contribute to creating a local identity
- It is a factor in bolstering investment
- It boosts cultural tourism
- It has a role to play in improving land values
- It encourages the use of public spaces, and
- It discourages vandalism (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2005: 1004).

A more critical dialogue, such as David Pinder’s work on arts and pedagogy, declares that in many instances public art has been appropriated by the capitalist establishment. This has been done through its use in

urban development projects and its use to lure a more economically advantaged populace to determined sites (Pinder, 2008). Mathews argues that in the broader cities literature, art has been reduced to economic goods, measured by and regarded for their '*symbolic value in attracting other cultural industries, attracting tourists, or bolstering the cultural image of a nation, city or region*' (Mathews 2008: 255). Critiques of public art further argue that public art in regeneration is not politically neutral but rather presents an aesthetic pleasing to the elite (Sharp et al, 2005). In Deutsche's work (1996), she argues that 'public art and architecture appears to neutralise politically its use within the city yet masks its political outcomes, particularly on those excluded from the new image created' (Sharp et al, 2005: 1002).

While this might be the case in cities with a long history and relationship with public art, it does not seem to be so in Johannesburg. In Johannesburg, opinion on public art seems to be positive – with a steadfast emphasis on public art as a public good. This is most likely because public art is not uniformly associated with gentrification although it is mostly found in areas targeted for urban regeneration efforts. The Inner City of Johannesburg, despite its large collection of public art, cannot – in general – be situated in the genre of the commercialising of culture to which Zukin refers (Zukin, 1998). Zukin's work on New York is concerned with the use of culture-led development as a method for creating exclusionary spaces for the elite to the detriment of other city residents (Miles, 2005: 891). She and Miles both challenge the approach of commissioning a piece of public art or architecture designed by someone internationally-renowned as a method for attracting investment to cities (Miles, 2005: 890). Miles argues further that public art or cultural industries in many instances do not work to the benefit of the local cultural industries. Instead, local cultural communities are displaced by the developments as neighbourhoods become more gentrified.

The success of cultural-led regeneration as the mode through which to ensure profitable urban regeneration is in itself questionable. However, if there is to be a chance of some benefit, there need to be multiple factors at play, not just public art. In most instances where this strategy has been pursued in the United Kingdom, for instance, there has been the development of a waterfront, a gallery or museum²² and other critical interventions to go with it (Miles, 2005: 894). Interestingly, to date, there is little empirical evidence to suggest this kind of intervention yields broader economic benefit. Although this is difficult to accurately measure, there are some proxy measures that have been used to date such as the number of visitors, the number of jobs created and the cost of rental space. In Johannesburg, Newtown is the only large scale City-generated cultural intervention with Drill Hall, Sci Bono, upgrading of the Market Theatre and the Bus Factory. However, the private sector is having success with Maboneng.

The reality of most Inner City neighbourhoods now, except of course areas such as Main Street, are sufficiently gritty that public art is not going to overwhelmingly represent vocal bourgeois interests. The City Improvement Districts come the closest to qualifying as sanitised public space. David Bunn in his chapter '*Art Johannesburg and Its Objects*' contends, however, that there is that element in some of the projects done to date:

'Elsewhere in the city, however, the collaboration between urban renewal and public art has been grander in scale and defined around thematic and rejuvenated precincts.

'These initiatives imagine public art in Johannesburg as the prophetic forerunner of development, capitalising on links between art and gentrification that stabilised many run-down neighbourhoods in European metropolises. Newtown, in the inner city, has always been imagined as the core cultural precinct. Other precincts are part of this cellular, defensive strategy that have City Improvement Districts (CIDs) at their core. These tend to be sterilised, modernist block developments, organised around corporate anchor tenants who are able to seal off the districts as a defensible space with CCTV camera surveillance and privatised police and waste collection. Public art, for the most part, in the imagination of corporate clients, plays a mainly anchoring role: statuary, monumental parklands, artistic street furniture, these are all the new points de capiton that stabilise the contradictions of the cleaned and emptied spaces. Patrolled zones and monumental images such as these are of course at odd with the loosely connected alliances of street vendors, informal garbage collectors, refugee networks, and park portraitists who make up the actually existing city' (Bunn, 2008: 159).²³

This is the incongruity that makes up the Inner City of Johannesburg. It is also the reason why an absolute statement about the utility of public art is so difficult to make. Much of the public art in the Inner City attempts to create connections between the piece and public space and allow the individual to have a relationship to it either as a way finder or as a nostalgic or personal symbol.

Ideally, all pieces of public art should be meaningful to some constituent of the public, to ensure its longevity at least. This means appealing to people who use the space. As Steven Sack comments *‘Yes I think it is very important for the public to like it, to comprehend it to want to engage with it. The really interesting examples, because otherwise what happens at later stages when city planners want to remove it, (is that) no one is there to fight for it. That is not right. There should be people who love it, and for whom it has meaning and memory and association’*.²⁴

International case studies, such as those in the United Kingdom and North America, demonstrate a growing weariness with public art²⁵. This is both a consequence of the impressions that there is too much public art but also because much of the artwork is created by big name artists, often to attract tourists or investment, leaving little of a local flavour. If the longevity of these permanent urban features is to be assured (in a time once the subject-matter is no longer relevant or appropriate) in the context of Johannesburg, then they need to resonate with generations of Inner City users. This requires integration into the urban environment beyond just acceptance or oblivion, to a situation where people are invested in their presence.

SECTION 6

WHAT IS PUBLIC ART?²⁶ – LOCATING THE VISUAL ARTS DEBATE IN JOHANNESBURG²⁷

It is argued, that in most cities in developed countries, public art has become a ‘dirty word’ (Cartiere and Willis, 2008: 1). This is not least because after decades of installing public art in various localities, the debate on what constitutes public art is a fraught one. Cartiere (2008: 5) argues that public art internationally has taken a range of forms including ‘*permanent works, temporary works, political activism, service art, performance, earthworks, community projects, street furniture, monuments, memorials and – let us not forget – “plunk” and “plop” art*’. He argues further that it needs to have one or more of the following characteristics. It must be:

- In a place that is accessible to the public
- It must be in the public interest
- It must be maintained by the public or be in a public space
- It must be paid for by the public (Cartiere, 2008: 15).

In Knight’s book on ‘Public Art’, a definition of public art is presented thus ‘art placed in public places and spaces and those spaces are open to everyone to use and enjoy’ (2008: viii). Malcolm Miles defines it as follows: ‘*the term public art generally describes works commissioned for sites of open public access.*’ (1997: 5)

In Johannesburg, public art, in its formal definition, includes the following forms:

- Murals
- Sculptures
- Outdoor advertising
- Graffiti
- Buildings
- Cemeteries
- Landscaped Gardens (People’s Parks)
- Monuments
- Temporary Installations (City of Johannesburg, 2005: 7)

However, it is interesting to note that the public art in Johannesburg does not cover all of these forms to date.

The academic discourse on public art vacillates between the visual arts focus on the artworks themselves and the urbanist discourse pertaining to how public art fits into public space more broadly. In Johannesburg, the discourse, perhaps subconsciously, has been a coming together of regeneration, visual appeal and public art as a social good. Public art programmes in Johannesburg embrace a more local understanding

of public art. Given the novelty of ‘democratic’ public art in the past decade, installations and commissions have been experimental and in many instances peppered with an earnest symbolic intent. Miles argues, *‘There are then several problems in the advocacy of public art as a social good: the exclusivity of taste; the lack of specificity of the public(s) for whom it is intended and the transcendent aesthetic of modernism which separates art from life (Miles, 1997: 16).* Miles in his extensive work on public art, contests the probability that public art can serve a purpose as a social good (Miles, 2008: 71).

In local debates, amongst experts and commentators, public art is viewed as a positive ‘gift’ to the public environment. But if public art is regarded as a social good, then surely the public themselves need to share that sentiment? Or perhaps the influence of public art is more subtle than that. Ash Amin, in his work on urban public space, draws attention to the role of public art ‘to jolt settled cultural assumptions’. (2006, online resource). In this respect he refers to symbolic public art which demonstrates city plights such as inequalities, or in the case of our own city, draws attention to past injustices or painful experiences. He equally speaks of public art as a mechanism ‘to force public reflection’ and by this he refers to using public art in more activist terms. Perhaps Johannesburg’s public art fits more neatly in this box and is a reflection of a series of historical points, past and present. Fire Walker, for instance has a very strong message. It recognises the silent women of the Inner City. Kentridge cited in Barstow and Viljoen says of the piece:

‘This is just one of many public sculptures which are re-animating and re-imagining the city... and I am very pleased to be part of this moment in which there is a great possibility for further change to happen in the city’. (Barstow & Law Viljoen, 2011: 21).

It is clear from this comment that the intention of the piece is to provoke thought.

Provoking thought is not however a proxy for advocating social change and both thought and activism require the conscious engagement of a public. In Minty’s fascinating article on public art and symbolic reparations he notes, *‘It is virtually impossible for artists working in public art in South Africa to escape the burden of history embedded in the landscape’* (2006: 423). This is a difficult absolute statement to confirm or deny, but what is apparent in the public art found in the Inner City is that all of the pieces are *‘Johannesburg-inspired’*. The ‘social good’ attributable to public art might therefore more easily be associated with its role as an instrument for storytelling and histories. This is often the bedrock of public art in Johannesburg. But has the Inner City portfolio of public art created a city identity or indeed a method through which to inspire public thought?

There is general consensus that there is not one ‘public’ but many: hence who is the audience of these Johannesburg pieces? Whose Johannesburg does the art reflect and speak to? This concern is particularly valid in a heterogeneous setting like the Inner City of Johannesburg. This space accommodates long-term residents, short-term visitors, migrants, commuters, different socio-economic groups and South Africa’s top listed companies. The formal and the informal live in close quarters.

While local artists and to a limited degree, the public, are encouraged to participate in the conversation in order to create a story, further engagement is spurious. Often, despite good intentions, these stories do not appear to resonate with the local public. While the public are not against the notion of public art, many of those interacting with public art on a daily basis, do not notice it or engage with it.

If limited engagement by ordinary people with the artworks is a reality on the ground, then what should dictate the subject matter of the pieces? Ironically, in the Inner City, a notion of a ‘city identity’ has been the motivator of many of the commissioned pieces of public art. The Inner City as a canvas has been the inspiration. The nature of representation in the built environment in Johannesburg has been fundamentally influenced through the artworks. ‘Who is being symbolised now’ is significant. The artwork reflects a post-apartheid city, one inhabited by women working in the informal economy, by mothers and children (Metro Mall²⁸), a space celebrating political heroes (the Sisulus²⁹ and the Shadow Boxer³⁰ featured in Figures 2 and 3), musical heroes (Brenda Fassie and Kippie Moeketsi)³¹ and even acknowledging Johannesburg pre-1886 (the Eland). As one interviewee noted what is really missing in the Inner City is an artwork reflecting taxi drivers, perhaps the most powerful players in the space³².

The Inner City itself is a vast milieu of residents and visitors and even for the artist, what it represents is a personal reflection. Thus, whether the art refers to significant events, historical figures or an imagined and romanticised past or present, artists on the whole represent a fragment of these. There are obvious references to significant events and people in Johannesburg's history such as the Sisulu sculptures, the 'Boxer' (Nelson Mandela) and the memorial to Duma Nokwe, to cite a few. A local graffiti artist when asked if he thought these works represented the Johannesburg of today said *'No, but it plays on Johannesburg nostalgia which is alright. The one is a political kind of thing, you know, love being timeless [reference to the Sisulu piece] and that is kind of universal and that theme has been around from dawn of man to now.'*³³

There is often a deeply symbolic celebratory purpose to the pieces. The Duma Nokwe artwork, for instance, was commissioned by the Sunday Times Heritage Project. Duma Nokwe was the first black person admitted to the Bar in South Africa as well as being the Secretary General of the African National Congress. However because of apartheid, he was not allowed to enter the Court to practice. Lesley Perkes says, that in the process of managing the Duma Nokwe commission, *"bureaucracy became the work", "just like apartheid's laws" became everything.*

The piece, by architect Lewis Levin, was intended to be installed on the steps of the High Court as a celebration of Duma Nokwe's struggle to work there and a symbol of final access to the Court in a democratic South Africa. However, says Perkes: *'The Judge in charge said no, just like the Judges during apartheid. bureaucracy denied him again.'*³⁴ Instead, the piece was installed outside the Court on a small triangle of sidewalk in the street. In Perkes's opinion this is a ridiculous yet weirdly appropriate site: *'The irony of him still being disallowed is perhaps the truth about the fall of apartheid. We may not have the laws but we have a nation of bureaucrats brought up with 'no' in their brains. It is a catastrophe. If we had more time perhaps we could have tried to change their minds, if we had generations or years'*³⁵.

Not all the Inner City artworks are derived from historic or political intent. There are also, however, many pieces related to nature – either an idealistic nostalgia to a time gone by or alternatively a means of softening the harsh urban environment that is the Inner City of Johannesburg. Most pieces were conceptualised by the artist on the basis of a selected site. This was the case for the Paper Pigeons, the Eland and the 'bokkies' in Ernest Oppenheimer Park. Small, discrete bunnies were carved into tree trunks in the Pieter Roos Park on the outskirts of Hillbrow.

Even if the public does not question or reflect on the works, the pieces remain physical signifiers in the built environment. While some of the pieces attempt to create a neighbourhood-feeling, such as works found in the parks and the Fashion District³⁶, others function as way finders in the urban environment. Visual sociologists and urbanists overlap in their outlook of how mental maps are used in order to create order and repetition in urban life, particularly in crowded and chaotic spaces. (Gottdiener and Hutchinson, 2006: 188). Within this collection of mental mapping components is that of the 'object', be it a mall, a building or a significant architectural element (such as the Mandela Bridge or the Carlton Centre) which acts as a way finder or a reference point. A socio-spatial perspective of the art requires the art to be meaningful and recognisable and there are many pieces in the Inner City that do just that *'You might meet at the Angel. It might be a thing of "I'll meet you at the Angel" and you can do whatever you were gonna do'*.³⁷ At the same time, the notion of a solely 'visual' (read designed) experience of the city has been critiqued because of its lack of cognisance of other non-visual experiences of space. Public artworks are not immediately 'way finders', there is a process involved in creating meaning for the pieces contingent on people's daily movements around them. However, as will be discussed later, in the Johannesburg context the lack of visibility of the artworks remains a constraint to them taking on a real way finding role.

Beyond the spatial role of public art, a social development function is often attributed to this urban phenomenon. Lines of enquiry here include: In order for public art to be viewed as a social good, does it need to be constructed with that intention? It is possible that art as the social good is not necessarily directed at the public itself, but rather performs a developmental function? One that translates into supporting the artists, particularly in the context of developing artist capacity? Stephen Hobbs, who commissioned much of the

public art in the Inner City (on behalf of the JDA) through his (and Marcus Neustetter's) organisation Trinity Session, argues that the commissioning, creation and the construction of the works are extremely beneficial to up and coming artists. This is a consequence of methodology but also of the rather powerful narrative of the Inner City.

Stephen Hobbs suggests:

'So whether you are running a workshop process or doing a commission based on a short list of artists, a direct commission or running a competition focused process there is always an enormous amount of information that it is unearthed through various levels of storytelling. It is either the commissioner's perspective, the curator's perspective, the artist's "thing" that informs the proposal. I always think of public art as a mode of research, a process of interrogating urban space and context. People bring their relevant memory and associated consensual world to that project. It becomes a particularly effective process where the city is committed to a sustained and predictive relationship with artists in these various procurement processes be it workshop or commission. And what we start to get, albeit subjective to varying degrees, are personal reference points provided by the artists informing the economics, social frameworks, the urban design and so on. So, much of the private internal engagement with artists and the site, the commission, is invisible in the final outcome of an artwork, and it is therefore interesting to work closely with journalists reporting on the work; finding ways to engage writers and researchers to be a part of the process. Or at least to be knowledgeable that the process is layered and complex and to hopefully convey that to an interested public, with a broader reflection on the histories unearthed by such process and their relevance to the city we know now.'³⁸

Despite the narrative, public art seems to require an intermediary in order to advance its 'social good' status. To date, the media has played this role to a certain extent. But the media does not access the majority of people interacting or even just co-existing with the pieces. Fire Walker is a case in point. Despite the media frenzy surrounding this piece, the content and meaning is better known to those who live outside of its context, than those that share a daily existence with the sculpture. Ideally the content of the pieces should themselves act as an intermediary between the artist and the public. Furthermore, empirical research suggests only people with an actual interest in the built environment will be drawn in for further discussion of its meaning³⁹. One interviewee suggests the following when asked whether or not works reflect an Inner City identity.

'I think they're trying to represent the face of the city, but the truth is we live in a city that is very dynamic and ... very complex. I think they achieve the goal of being beautiful works, that you can look at these works, I pass them daily [points at the Fire Walker, the Eland], the Angel I don't know as well but the bull [Eland] I pass daily, and I smile every time I pass it. I enjoy that it exists. I enjoy that all these artists exist. But now I am taking it a step further and I am putting it almost in JDA's hands to say, what more could they be doing? So I think they succeed and they're great, but what more could they be doing? I think what could be happening is some level of engagement... I don't know.'⁴⁰

Some artists and some of those involved in public art, insist that it is not the function of the art to speak to the general public as ultimately not every person will engage with the piece. Phillips (1999) writing in a North American context suggests, '*the professionalization of public art is antithetical to the artistic process; to navigate the choppy waters of bureaucracy, artists might forsake their creative edge, producing conformist and predictable projects*' (cited in Knight, 2008: 95).

However, not aspiring to connect with the 'people' of the Inner City seems counterproductive especially in a context where the setting acts as inspiration. Miles argues of public art in general that, '*the failure of much public art to create a public is linked to its location within the ethos of modernism, in which the interests of the artists and publics may be contradictory; modernism imposes constant revolutions of style within a largely static conception of art as constituting an autonomous aesthetic realm which acts as an alternative to*

everyday life and endows the artist with a freedom which Marshall Berman describes as 'a perfectly formed, perfectly sealed tomb.' (Miles, 1997: 13)

The crux of the theoretical discussions pertaining to public art as visual art often centre around the relationship between the audience and the content of the pieces. Knight captures it thus *'I suggest we can best understand art's public function when we consider the interrelationship between content and audience; what art has to say, to whom it speaks and the multiple messages it might convey.'* (2008: viii) Therefore, is the success of public art contingent upon public appreciation or is it sufficient for the pieces to be artistically accessible? Knight contends that *'Unfettered physical access is an empty gesture if the public does not feel other forms of accessibility are within its grasp too'* (Knight, 2008: X). The kinds of access to which Knight is referring includes visual access.

The opinion of a local public art practitioner is pragmatic: *'I think like democracy, that all things get done by people that vote, but my feeling that every citizen who uses that space having relative engagement with that subject matter or object, is something idealistic anyway. However, there should be some modicum of sharing of intent or meaning or place or whatever.'*⁴¹

So, how does one determine the success of public art in the Inner City? The public art policy established objectives but there are no further City-led criteria for examining the success of public art in the Inner City. If the measure of success is mass appeal then in many instances its attainment is limited.

Arguably, the success has been to bring this scale and quality of public art to an urban context where beautification is largely secondary to survival and furthermore, is unexpected. It is also a feat to have produced pieces that can simply survive in the context. The creative options have been controlled by a context where it is a key to generate sustainable pieces of public art with the usage of robust materials. For pieces to survive they need to be made both of hardy materials and also 'vandal' and 'robbery proof' unless they are in managed places such as City Improvement Districts (CIDS).

There is much made of the fact that many of the art pieces have not been vandalised despite being in some of the city's most crime-ridden neighbourhoods. Or where there has been vandalism it has been insignificant. This is anecdotally attributed to people's connection to the pieces. However, this research suggests that the 'connections' are most likely site-specific. For instance, the restoration of the waterfall done in Pullinger Kop in Hillbrow in 2007 is now derelict. Pullinger Kop, historically, was a park that was widely used by residents of Hillbrow and Berea. The natural waterfall in the park was used as a backdrop for many photographs. The waterfall was mosaicked as part of the public art programme in 2007 to be reminiscent of its former status as a feature of the park.

The fact that the public art is 'vandalism free' is also an interesting Johannesburg quirk. Sharp et al (2005: 24) share how the statue of Donald Dewar, a longstanding MP and advocate of Scottish devolution, in Glasgow, is frequently vandalised. This is attributed to its overt political subject in this context. The real reason behind the lack of vandalism (in general) of public artworks in Johannesburg is not really known but could be a consequence of the invisibility of the works or the complete opposite – due to public appreciation of the artworks.

The importance of 'site specific' pieces arose in the USA where practice emphasised the interaction between the site selected and the piece constructed on that site (Knight, 2008:7). While this practice took some time to evolve in other cities, it has always been intrinsic (if not always successful) to the Inner City pieces. Some of the artworks analysed in this report suggest that the selected site is, in fact, not the correct one and in some cases undermines the approachability of the artwork. As one interviewee commented *'all the ills of public space become the ills of public art.'*⁴² The quotation suggests further that the endeavour to generate placemaking is a complex set of dynamics which have to date not been sufficiently understood by the City.

SECTION 7

THE CASE STUDIES: AN ELAND, A WOMAN, AN ANGEL AND THREE PIGEONS

The Inner City of Johannesburg has been the subject of numerous government policy documents and academic texts: From Achille Membe and Sarah Nuttall's '**Emerging Metropolis**', to Tanya Zack's work on the Ethiopian Quarter⁴³, to Kihato's chapter and book on migrant women⁴⁴. It holds an academic fascination. These works detail the lives of ordinary people pursuing a living, or a life, in the Inner City. The Inner City with its informality, fluidity and highly contested spatial conditions constitutes a challenging environment in which to pursue a public art agenda. The geographical scale of the Inner City is large. It is 18 square kilometre, and has so many paradoxical neighbourhoods varying from high density residential, to the financial district, to the so-called cultural arc, to the 'chaos' district. It is both formal and informal. It is a perplexing, yet inspiring, space to begin to generate a collection of artwork that ventures to reflect different dimensions of its urban reality.

The Inner City's steady economic decline from the 1980s is the main reason why it has been the focus of large scale regeneration efforts by the municipality. This phenomenon is well documented in numerous texts including the Inner City Regeneration Charter (www.joburg.org.za). The first Mayor of a democratic Johannesburg, Councillor Amos Masondo, sensing the importance of the area, prioritised the Inner City during his term of office and substantial project funding followed for the Johannesburg Development Agency.

The City's regeneration projects have used an urban planning methodology which has the 'neighbourhood' as the core organising framework. Therefore, each piece of public art has been done within the framework of its geographical location. For instance, the artwork for the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup is focused around Ellis Park; the Brenda Fassie sculpture is found in Newtown (the culture precinct); and the regeneration of Ernest Oppenheimer Park is imbued with historical references including the recreation of a large diamond (www.joburg.org.za). The artworks vary widely in physical form. They range from the monumental such as the Eland, to the functional (such as concrete benches, bollards, street lights and fencing) to the interactive (such as the works found in the parks).

With public art now a mainstay of the regeneration efforts, the empirical research done for this report focused on the following three pieces in the Inner City: Fire Walker, Angel of the North and the Paper Pigeons. Although the Eland in Braamfontein was not initially part of the project, due to public interest, it was included as artwork number four. Each of these works was created as a slice of a broader precinct development project. The three artworks share the following features:

- Firstly, they are all self-standing pieces located in different neighbourhoods of the Inner City.
- Secondly, none of the pieces are in a managed space such as a park or CID.
- Thirdly, the content of the public art varies.

- Fourthly, the artworks are all sculptures.
- Fifthly, each piece is visually accessible to pedestrians and motorists.

Each piece will be briefly reviewed to provide some illustration of how the public feels about the works. The artworks are not discussed in terms of the artist's intention, process or meaning. There is no pretence in this report to offer an in-depth analysis of the sculptures as artworks⁴⁵. On the basis of the research some conclusions regarding their influence will be drawn. These conclusions are sketched within the context of the 'urban' more generally. The conclusions, however, cannot be applied to all public art, as these pieces are in 'unmanaged' spaces, and responses to them are variable. Public art in managed spaces, such as parks, have not been reviewed and an examination of those will most likely result in a different set of conclusions.

7.1 'Is it a cow, is it an Eland?'

Despite driving past the Eland in Braamfontein daily, there is something about the piece that still delights the viewer. It might be the incongruence of such a large concrete sculpture at a busy intersection. Or it might be the planters atop it. It might equally be attributable to where it is found – on a space where Wits students historically walked into Braamfontein past the original group of antelope sculptures that stood on that site. Either way, this is a piece that speaks to the public. Although it was not selected for the study originally, it was the most recognisable to members of the public interviewed and therefore requires some commentary. The interviewees were not shown any picture of the Eland but were asked a generic question about which pieces of public art they had noticed in the city. The Eland turned out to be the most recognised.



IMAGE 3: Eland in Braamfontein on the corner of Ameshoff and Bertha.

Photograph by Brian Boshoff.

The first major piece commissioned with the City's involvement was the Eland created by Clive van den Berg, an already well known artist. Selected from a series of entries in a closed competition, the Eland was installed in 2007. It is situated on the corner of Bertha and Ameshoff in Braamfontein, is 5.5 metres high and weighs 20 tonnes (www.joburg.org.za). One of the criteria used by the judges in the selection process, was that given its location, the chosen piece was required to be sufficiently robust to withstand being driven in to by a bus. Apparently, buses had historically experienced some difficulties at the corner.

Despite its size and grandeur what is significant about the piece is the meaning attached to the subject. As Clive van den Berg explains:

"I started with a sense of what I did not want to do. Having worked in, studied and theorized public space for some years I knew that I did not want to make a heroic sculpture of the Mandela Square ⁴⁶variety, nor a sculpture that would be too immediately located in time and place, like say a memorial to the Sharpville Six. This is not a claim to the universal but rather an attempt to explore what for me are underlying and persistent themes; simply stated, the relationship we have to land, our need to find ways to share it, to understand and use its resources and capacities, as well as its historical, economic and cultural meaning. Eland places a large representation of an eland on a corner where it has long since disappeared. This slightly forlorn image of a majestic animal would I imagine bring beauty and grandeur to a busy place. I hope it would also be an emblem that prompts reflection on our relationship to the past, and to the interconnectedness of environmental, cultural and spiritual destinies. The gateway corner is a busy connector of lateral geography but what I am concerned with here is the geography of memory and the spirit." (www.clivevandenber.com)⁴⁷

The piece itself was created and imbued with a very powerful narrative from the artist. But how many passers-by interpret the piece in the same way? In an interview conducted with a local artist, the significance of the Eland and its historical, economic and cultural meaning was captured and appreciated as follows: *'That's the thing about art. All art has a deep concept and a real reason why it exists. Whether the viewer can explain what that is, is irrelevant. The point is the artist does work from a place of substance. When the viewer looks at the work, they grasp the substance, whether they grasp the specifics or not. I don't think it always matters. Like, this Eland is based on the fact that there used to be elands going around in the city before there was a city. Now, it no longer belongs to them so it gives them an amount of space once again. So there is some kind of conceptual reason behind that. The other truth is that it is just visually appealing. I come from a commercial arts sector so the concept matters but the appeal of the work itself has also to exist. It has to be a combination of both.'*⁴⁸

But for many members of the public, the inevitable question of **'is it a cow or is it an eland or even a kudu'** was commonly heard. One interviewee when questioned about his favourite piece of art work in the Inner City responded thus:

'There is some art there in Braamfontein when you drive over the Mandela Bridge, a cow...yeah. It's great. It shows people who don't know what a cow looks like. There are people who don't know. They just see meat at the butchery but they don't know where it comes from or what the cow looks like'⁴⁹

Another inner city artist when asked if he thought the Inner City reflected the current social, economic or political context, answered: *'So when the Eland came up, I did perceive it as art. And whether it actually reflected society, I don't think so. It didn't even pose a social question when I saw it ... it was more of "is it a cow or eland?" and for me it was an eland.'*⁵⁰

Anecdote suggests that there was conversation about the content of the piece and a measure of engagement when it was installed. However, the ongoing appeal of the piece is partly due to its geographical site. It is situated on one of the best possible sites for public art being on the watershed ridge of the Witwatersrand, located at the entry point to Braamfontein and one of the few northern entrances to the Inner City, at a busy pedestrian and vehicular intersection and facing a landmark educational institution of the city. It also has a

simplicity in its use of materials, subject matter and it is relatable in a very literal sense. The commentary on land and its implicit narrative on the Johannesburg that was, is, however, lost to most who see it. It would be interesting to see the response to the piece, should the artist's intended meaning be known to the public.

7.2 The Fire Walker

Fire Walker is the tour de force of public art in Johannesburg. It was at the time of installation the most expensive piece of public art in Johannesburg. It is also the work of William Kentridge, South Africa's most well-known local artist. For this reason, it is the one piece of public art that has been analysed and reviewed in the way in which it gives interested parties insight into all iterations of its creation, construction and installation. Its genesis and the meaning behind the piece have been well documented in Barstow and Law-Viljoen's fascinating book **Fire Walker**.



IMAGE 4: Fire Walker by William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx. Photograph by Brian Boshoff.

Fire Walker is a collaboration between William Kentridge⁵¹ and Gerhard Marx. It stands 11 metres high and is constructed from laser cut steel. The work symbolises a woman carrying an *mbawula*⁵² on her head (Barstow and Law-Viljoen, 2011: 15). However, the work is visually abstract as explained by Kentridge and Marx thus:

‘At times it seems as if she strides ahead with great certainty, at times she seems about to trip and fall and at times the work is evocative of a riotous, or perhaps joyous mass of people, just before the work flies into complete abstraction.’ (Barstow and Law-Viljoen, 2011: 15).

It is, in fact, the expectation that the public will take the time to figure out the piece that undermines possible broad appeal. This is a visually sophisticated sculpture. In dialogue with the public, the meaning of this important piece was not recognised. For some of the public, it represented an incomplete work, to others a map, a puzzle,⁵³ a rural woman carrying luggage on her head or Johannesburg’s Statue of Liberty⁵⁴. There has been critique of the work because of its representation of black women in official spaces⁵⁵, although one woman interviewed regarded it as a noble representation of the resilience of African women. She gave the following poetic analysis of the work:

‘It’s an African woman, have you seen in the rural areas how they carry luggage? Instead of holding a bag by the handles, they tie things and wrap them around their waists or something like that. If they are going on long distances they put them on their head.’ When the interviewee was further probed as to whether or not it was an African woman, the response was as follows: ‘Because of the structure. Like, look how she is dressed and the structure. And she is wearing a doek⁵⁶. Have you ever seen a white women wearing something like this [the doek] on her head?’⁵⁷

Staggeringly, though, many pedestrians had never noticed the sculpture despite walking past it on their daily route.⁵⁸ What is telling is how fully assimilated it is into the urban fabric, although not necessarily as a thought-provoking artwork. In fact, those who use the space most, seem to notice the sculpture the least. Potsiso Phasha recorded these observations as part of this research project which highlight its integration:

‘On this particular day, I saw one person lean against the Fire Walker as a wind shield while he rolled his joint, another one using it as a shade. Another two men have a cooking facility right next to the sculpture, cooking cow heads and hooves. Their clients are mostly the taxi drivers in the vicinity and other men who use the adjacent park for gambling. People seem to interact more with the black bollards surrounding the sculpture and not the sculpture itself. They sit on the bollards, two guys have placed boxes and crates on them from which they sell sweets and loose cigarettes.’⁵⁹

Is this then the real democratisation of space when an expensive public artwork is arrogated by the regular users of the space without fear of reprisal by the state? On the one hand, this specific location seemed to play a huge role in the widespread inaccessibility of the artwork to some ‘publics’ while to others who occupy the space, the work is just another material form, much like the paving, street lights or a tree. For many of the pedestrian passers-by interviewed, the site was a major impediment to further connection with the artwork. It was described by some as ‘creepy’ while for others as ‘a place that was not right’⁶⁰. Perhaps the most discouraging findings regarding the piece was the lack of connection with it. As one local artist explained the following when questioned as to what Fire Walker meant to her:

‘Nothing! Umm...Nothing the Fire Walker I don’t get it and I’ve been told that from one angle it all comes together and it’s a person with a thing on the head. Aaah... I don’t know. A part of me thinks sometimes.... Is it necessary? This work is.. I know it’s done by a top artist but it does not trigger anything in me, per se.’⁶¹

7.3 The Angel

Of the artworks examined in this study, the Angel of the North was the piece least recognised outside of its neighbourhood by the public interviewed, despite being situated in close proximity to the Constitutional Court and also on a pedestrian route from Braamfontein to Hillbrow. It is located slightly off the pedestrian path but is sufficiently large to be noticeable. It is surrounded by bollards but this does not seem to be a place of pause. Despite the writing on the plinth of the sculpture, people are not drawn to reading the text.



IMAGE 5: Angel of the North by Winston Luthuli, corner Queens and Kotze Street, Hillbrow.

Photographed by Potsiso Phasha.

The artist, Winston Luthuli said of his Angel of the North on the corner of Queens and Kotze Street in Hillbrow: *'Its presence serves as a kind of sentinel, and is incongruous with what one might expect to find in this crime and grime-ridden part of Joburg. It does not represent any particular religion, as angels are present in the folklore of many different cultures and generally represent a higher state of being.'* (www.joburg.org.za)

The beautiful sentiment of this piece made more significant by the fact that it stands across from the Constitutional Court and also because the Angel is looking down the hill into Hillbrow – home to a substantial number of foreign migrants from countries north of South Africa⁶². But its location is not a place of pause. It stands opposite a notorious 'hijacked' building and overlooks a street where people are more likely to move swiftly than to take respite. Whilst most pedestrians walked past the piece, when probed about its meaning, people saw it as an Angel but it evoked distinct meanings:

*'I love the Angel. For whatever reason.. I just thinks it's ... it's such a nice part of a nice space. You walk out of ConHill, you got the old governor's house, government house, whatever it is close by ... and, you are walking towards Hillbrow and there's the Angel. That for me is quite powerful, you know, because of all the stereotypes that Hillbrow has and people stand under this statue and look towards Hillbrow and you can see people kind of reconcile and say "what's going on here? What does it mean?" I can't explain why but the Angel for me is fantastic.'*⁶³

Impressions of the Angel included *'My immediate first impression was HIV. It just felt ...that's really... I had all these things to say about HIV after I saw that. But I suppose I'm thinking death, salvation, you know... a reminder.. something like that. I didn't think anything religious when I saw it. It has something almost .. too simple, like, made by ordinary people in remembrance of something.'*⁶⁴

But for others, there was different meaning attributed to the sculpture when probed. People liked the artwork as part of the urban landscape. For some interviewees, the Angel indicated an embrace, a welcome, a hug.⁶⁵ The symbolic intent of the Angel is evocative. It acknowledges the 'invisible' people of Hillbrow, the immigrants and fortune seekers. This is one artwork where the symbolic attempt seems to be recognised.⁶⁶

7.4 It's not a cat among the pigeons – it is pigeons, among the pigeons

The paper pigeons of Pigeon Square were commissioned in 2009. These three large origami pigeons are located on a square (colloquially referred to as Pigeon Square) on the corner of Main and Main Reef Road in the Inner City. This sculpture was the winning entry in a competition commissioned through the JDA, University of the Witwatersrand and University of Johannesburg. When commissioned, the pieces were required to consider the historical and physical specificities of the sights and its relationship to surrounding buildings include the Family Court, Turbine Hall, the Johannesburg Central Police Station and others. The artists, Gerhard and Maja Marx said of the work two important things: Firstly,

'Constructed from steel, these large pigeons reference the oriental paper folding technique known as origami, homage to the oriental and Chinese community that has played a significant role in this part of the city,'(www.joburg.org.za)

And secondly,

'The pigeon is primarily famed for its profound homing ability, known as a messenger, and this focus on the home and community is appropriate to both its position in front of the Family Court and to those who enter or return to the city from its western side' (www.joburg.org.za).

These Pigeons have proved to be a favourite with those members of the public who interact with the pieces. This can be attributed to a number of factors: their obvious similarities to a real pigeon, their accessibility at street level and the irony of having three large 'paper'⁶⁷ pigeons amongst real pigeons. This piece of work

seemed to conjure a lot of opinions but everyone interviewed liked the fact that there were live pigeons in the space. The presence of the live pigeons provided a sense of peace but also created a more welcoming sentiment for everyone in the space. Given the physical environment of the Inner City with a lack of green spaces and recreational facilities, finding a connection to nature is powerful. Many Inner City residents come from more rural settings and thus the concrete-ness of the Inner City provides another level of alienation. Therefore, the pigeons are not seen as ‘pests’ but rather a rare sighting of nature in the Inner City.

The sculptures seemed to augment the appeal of the site. For an interviewee from East London they invoked a nostalgic feeling of the ocean⁶⁸. He felt the Pigeons looked like fish jumping in and out of the water. This same interviewee loved the artwork and felt it had really changed the space in a positive way for the benefit of the public and the pigeons. He also felt the artwork was visible, a way-finding landmark commenting, ‘*Yes they make the space visible. Even when someone who doesn’t know this place well, they are able to say emajubeni [at the birds].*’⁶⁹

Some interviewees even attributed characteristics to the pigeons by virtue of their site location. One interviewee contended that the pigeons of Pigeon Square were ‘lazy, naughty and unorderedly’ because they lived in Johannesburg. Another interviewee said:

‘The other statue I did like was the pigeon’s downtown, the giant pigeons. Now that one... when I first saw it I was like these pigeons are sitting on top of those pigeons! And that just what I like. You never see people by those things but the pigeons are always there.’⁷⁰



IMAGE 6: Paper Pigeons by Maja and Gerhard Marx, corner of Main and Main Reef Road.

Photograph by Brian Boshoff

In a sense the artwork was created specifically for the real pigeons of Pigeon Square. The intent of the project was not to eliminate the existing pigeons but rather create an artwork where the pigeons and artwork could coexist. The birds in this space were not seen as intruders and the artworks acknowledged that. It was that sense of welcoming and irony which appealed to all the interviewees. These statues invoked a sense of connection from the public.

SECTION 8

WHAT IS NEXT FOR PUBLIC ART?

Johannesburg's public art portfolio has to date evaded real critique. Certainly, there have been questions raised regarding the commissioning of artists but controversy regarding the content of the pieces has largely been avoided. The JDA, the organisation with the greatest financial clout articulates the main aims of its public art programme until 2016 as follows:

- To build an interesting, diverse and high quality portfolio of public artworks for the City of Johannesburg
- To support the development of the public art industry in Johannesburg. (City of Johannesburg, 2012)

Strategy documents indicate that the JDA will continue in its public art programmes, which includes the creation of new large scale artworks in different parts of the city. However, given the finding of this research which highlights that the general public is not engaging optimally with public art, it might be worth considering an enhanced strategy. In order to avoid the cynicism associated with cities that have too much public art, there needs to be a move to the next conceptual level. The findings of this work suggest that there is an indubitable nexus between public art and public space. There are multiple interrelationships through which these two factors interconnect and this is at the heart of the question as to whether or not public art is aesthetic or evocative. To reiterate, despite local artists specifically representing a story fitting to the context, the public are mostly unlikely to engage with the content or the piece. This suggests that public art might need to take another form or be present in different public spaces?

Johannesburg is in a remarkable position to be able to fulfil many of the positives of public art. The post-apartheid city requires new representations of itself, not only political. Johannesburg can generate a narrative based on its renewed set of values. The City's art policy also supports this new imagining project. The obstacle for the Inner City is that the nature and utility of public art cannot be removed from the public space in which the works are inserted. Tanya Zack observes that South African cities are notoriously bleak. This is not only a consequence of inequality and poverty but *'they also suffer the effects of spaces designed for management, control and exclusion. It behoves public administrators to shift that'*⁷¹. She suggests that public artworks offers an opportunity for people to interact in a space.

The focus on aesthetic and design in complex and contested public spaces does not address the bigger challenge of 'ownership' of the space. The work of Jane Jacobs, for instance, highlights this fact clearly. Negotiating the challenges of public space in the Inner City preoccupies the user: this is the reality for the pedestrian fearful for her security, the informal trader fearful of the metro police or the shopkeeper fearful for their goods⁷².

For there to be real appreciation of public art, there needs to be a shift in how the Inner City users experience its public space. The most expressive reason for the invisibility of the public art is largely to do with an unwillingness to pause in public space. Without this pause, it is somewhat irrelevant as to whether or not the works represent city identity and other issues. In the current circumstances, the best one can hope for is engagement from those with an interest.

This does not preclude the art from serving a function as way finders. It is possible for artworks to function as markers in the built environment but to date this has not really been the case. In the research conducted, it was more likely for the Mandela Bridge or the Carlton Centre to be referred to as visual markers, than the artworks. The exception to this is the Eland.

For the artworks to have any sustained impact – people need to enjoy them or they need to inspire conversation or debate. Some academics, such as Malcolm Miles, argue that it is too much to ask a public artwork to perform a social good. David Pinder however does see a role for public art as a form of political activism, public art can be provocative and innovative (Pinder, 2008: 730).

This think piece agrees with Pinder and argues that in a context, such as ours, public art has the potential to become a compelling visual exhibitor of a maturing post-apartheid city. But in order for this to be fully achieved, public space needs to be humanised and embraced by active citizens and engaged government. The public art that was relatable in the Inner City was humanising and in some instances easy to relate to⁷³. The unexpectedly giant Eland and ironic giant Pigeons seemed to appeal the most.

The qualitative work demonstrates that the aesthetic appeal of public art has not been captivating to the ‘public’ in general. The evidence gathered indicates that public art can be invisible. This is a concerning finding and denotes that new approaches should be considered. The public art needs to be more provocative and interactive. It needs to appeal to the public on more than just a visual level. Sacks makes a salient point when he suggests:

‘Our cities are about the pedestrian. The pedestrian is family. It is parents of children. The kids who live around the taxi ranks where the cows are, they play there. It play into their fantasy world and their fantasy life. You can have part of the city that is very corporate and very adult and you have geometric forms and dramatic pieces of colour and stuff but as you go into neighbourhoods and weave into the fabric. And bus stops, you want to be more creative.’⁷⁴

Creating interactive public art requires accessible and inclusive public space. This kind of public space cannot only be the preserve of CIDs and managed parks. The majority of the Inner City public are living, working and residing in the unmanaged spaces. Permanent public artworks might not be the best instrument through which to animate a space. Performance art and temporary installations have been used very successfully internationally as the means through which to re-animate public space. The City of Johannesburg has commissioned a very limited type of public art. This is partly as a result that only a capital budget can be used to fund public art. Miguel Kanai and Iliana Ortega-Alcáza showcase this in their work on Mexico City. They use the case of Iztapalapa, a neighbourhood in Mexico City, which is characterised by disadvantage, both socially and economically. Through the work of FARO, a government-sponsored cultural collective, cultural interventions were used as the method to promote local community engagement in the area. This was very successfully pursued through performance art, concerts and workshops (Kanai and Ortega-Alcáza 2009: 489).

Hall and Robertson (2001: 19) contend that it is vital for public art to raise controversy. If the pieces pro-pound to represent different people using the space then the artworks should challenge rather than conform ‘to myths of harmony based around essentialist concepts’ (Sharp et al, 2005: 1004). As discussed earlier, there is little controversy around the artworks in the Inner City. This again is a consequence of not having conversations about what or who is represented in public space. Yet unlike many other cities, the Inner City artwork actively attempts to integrate into its context. There is a self-conscious, site specific identity that is

being expressed, but not discussed. Or perhaps as one interviewee suggests, public art needs to be more than visual:

‘Perhaps this is where our art is missing stuff. It doesn’t have the robustness you know... where it can be used for more than one purpose. If only we could sit on Brenda’s lap when we are in Newtown and we could all sit, so that its not a matter of “sit to take a picture” but it is really... something that is not the statue, sometimes you are just there. At the moment I think maybe our art is a little more about seeing the art rather than just experiencing the city and then the art... by just being there; being aware of it.’⁷⁵

In conclusion, the public art narrative needs to be discussed with a broader public. Understanding the constraints of public space in the Inner City suggests that instead of pursuing public art only as an important visual and physical intervention, it should become a contributory element in the reactivation of public space. This can only be done through inviting the public to experience it in a much more tactile way.

REFERENCES

List of Interviewees

1. Joy Jacobs, Development Manager, Johannesburg Development Agency, 15 July 2013.
2. Sharon Lewis, Executive Manager Planning and Strategy, Johannesburg Development Agency, 10 November 2013.
3. Stephen Hobbs, Trinity Session, 17 July 2013
4. Steven Sack, Former Director of Arts, Culture and Heritage, City of Johannesburg, 6 November 2013
5. Lesley Perkes, Artatwork, 6 November 2013
6. Mariapaola McGurk, 19 August 2013
7. Mawabo Msingaphantsi, 21 August 2013
8. Wesley Pepper, 21 August 2013

Anonymous Interviewees

The list of interviewees is structured in such a way that it gives the date and location where the interview took place. The first two interviewees are recorded differently as they were part of a selected group of young urbanists who were targeted for the study. They wished to be cited anonymously. The interviews are not equally spread in terms of numbers as the Pigeons were included in the study only after there were frequently mentioned by the public.

1. Interviewee 1, 21 August 2013
2. Interviewee 2, 21 August 2013
3. Interviewee 3, Fire Walker, 05 November 2013
4. Interviewee 4, Fire Walker, 05 November 2013
5. Interviewee 5, Fire Walker, 05 November 2013
6. Interviewee 6, Fire Walker, 05 November 2013
7. Interviewee 7, Fire Walker, 06 November 2013
8. Interviewee 8, Fire Walker, 06 November 2013
9. Interviewee 9, Fire Walker, 06 November 2013
10. Interviewee 10, Fire Walker, 06 November 2013
11. Interviewee 11, Fire Walker, 06 November 2013
12. Interviewee 12, Fire Walker, 06 November 2013
13. Interviewee 13, The Angel, 12 November 2013
14. Interviewee 14, The Angel, 12 November 2013,
15. Interviewee 15, The Angel, 12 November 2013,
16. Interviewee 16, The Angel, 12 November 2013
17. Interviewee 17, The Angel, 12 November 2013
18. Interviewee 18, The Angel, 13 November 2013
19. Interviewee 19, The Angel, 13 November 2013
20. Interviewee 20, The Angel, 13 November 2013
21. Interviewee 21, The Angel, 13 November 2013
22. Interviewee 22, Pigeons, 8 December 2013
23. Interviewee 23, Pigeons, 8 December 2013
24. Interviewee 24, Pigeons, 8 December 2013

LIST OF FIGURES AND IMAGES

FIGURE 1: List of JDA Public Art Projects in the Inner City.

IMAGE 1: Sculpture of the Sisulus done by Marina Walsh on the intersection of Diagonal, Ntemi Piliso and Market streets. Photographed by Brian Boshoff.

IMAGE 2: The Shadow Boxer by Marco Cianfanelli located in the southwest of the Inner City in the Westgate Precinct. Photographed by Brian Boshoff.

IMAGE 3: Eland in Braamfontein on the corner of Ameshoff and Bertha. Photographed by Brian Boshoff.

IMAGE 4: Fire Walker by William Kentridge and Gerhard Marx. Photographed by Brian Boshoff.

IMAGE 5: Angel of the North by Winston Luthuli, corner Queens and Kotze Street, Hillbrow. Photographed by Potsiso Phasha.

IMAGE 6: Paper Pigeons by Maja and Gerhard Marx, corner of Main and Main Reef Road. Photographed by Brian Boshoff.

NOTES

- 1 The fieldwork and interviews were primarily done by Mr Potsiso Phasha.
Many thanks to Dr Tanya Zack for her comments on the work.
- 2 The Inner City of Johannesburg has been written about extensively. The work of Gotz and Simone (2003) suggests that the inner city of Johannesburg has changed at a faster rate than any other inner city in the recent history. This they attribute to a number of factors including the collapse of apartheid legislation, the influx of foreign migrants and the outflow of capital. They argue 'Today the inner city of Johannesburg is a cauldron of diverse peoples and agendas. Corporations, once accustomed to thinking that they owned the city, now agonise over whether to stay there and bet heavily on the chance that the inner city might be revitalized or to flee to the safer and greener suburbs (2003: 128). The City of Johannesburg itself defines the inner city as such: 'The inner city covers Yeoville and Braamfontein in the north to Marshalltown and Benrose in the south, and Vrededorp and Fordsburg in the west to Jeppestown, Bertrams and Troyeville in the east. (<http://joburg-archive.co.za>).
- 3 This paper does not however intend to provide a detailed analysis of the artwork from a visual arts perspective.
- 4 Interview with Mawabo Msingaphantsi, 21 August, 2013.
- 5 The JDA is a municipal entity of the City of Johannesburg. The JDA is the City's urban development arm responsible for most of its large-scale urban development projects.
- 6 This could be due to the interviewer being a male but also because people did not wish to be stopped by someone 'asking for something'.
- 7 The JDA's public art conference held in 2011 and focused on public art trends in South African cities. For more details refer to www.joburg.central.co.za. The second Public Art Conference in 2012 had 'Public Access' as its theme. The conference content was general without specific focus on an analysis of public art or the artworks themselves. The details of the Goethe Institut's work is available on www.goethe.de/southafrica
- 8 The JDA's regeneration of Newtown is a local example of culture-led regeneration given its intention to create a cultural arc.
- 9 An example of this is the Juta Street Trees in Braamfontein.
- 10 Lesley Perkes is the CEO of artatwork and Steven Sack is the former director of the Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage at the City of Johannesburg.
- 11 Interview with Steven Sack, 6 November 2013.
- 12 Interview with Steven Sack, 6 November 2013.
- 13 The Trinity Session is an art consultancy which manages the public art projects.
- 14 Interview with Steven Sack, 6 November 2013.
- 16 One of the best known pieces of public art is Anish Kapoor's 'Cloud Gate' found in Chicago.
- 17 Sharon Lewis notes that there are at least 5 tour operators offering public art walking tours.
- 18 Interview with Steven Sack, 6 November 2013.
- 19 Interview with Lesley Perkes, 6 November 2013.
- 20 This is the insight of Alex Parker.
- 21 The City of Johannesburg might not term its public art interventions as 'culture-led regeneration'.
- 22 This would include developments such as the Tate Modern and the South Bank or Gateshead in Newcastle.
- 23 This chapter pre-dated Fire Walker, one of the initial attempts to represent the 'unsung heroes' of the Inner City.
- 24 Interview with Steven Sack, 6 November 2013.
- 25 See the work of Miles, Evans and Cartiere, amongst others, listed in the Bibliography.
- 26 Public art in this research refers to permanent pieces of art and not to performance art or temporary installations.
- 27 This paper does not purport to deliver a detailed theoretical perspective on visual arts.
- 28 There is a sculpture of Walter and Albertina Sisulu created by Marina Walsh on the intersection of Diagonal, Ntemi Piliso and Market streets. www.joburg.org.za
- 29 There is a sculpture of mother and child outside the Metro Mall. www.joburg.org.za
- 30 A shadow boxing sculpture of a young Nelson Mandela is installed in the Westgate Precinct. Councillor Parks Tau, Mayor of Johannesburg said at the launch: "We are faced by a City whose spatial form still resembles the architecture of apartheid masters. Ours is to transform this City to, as I said when I presented the State of our City a couple of weeks ago, our hearts' desire. In that transformation, we have elected that we shall develop a City whose public space talks to liveability and talks to a City that will not ever be a City that Nelson Mandela lived in when that photograph was taken six decades ago." www.joburg.org.za
- 31 The Brenda Fassie sculpture in Newtown created by Angus Taylor is was one of the memorials created by the Sunday Times in 2006. (www.joburg.org.za). The Kippie Moeketsi bronze sculpture is also located in Newtown as part of the Market Theatre Complex. (www.joburg.org.za)
- 32 Interviewee 6, 5 November 2013.
- 33 Interview with Wesley Pepper, 21 August 2013.
- 34 Interview with Lesley Perkes, 6 November 2013.

35 Interview with Lesely Perkes, 6 November 2013

36 Fashion District is a district in the Inner City which was historically home to businesses involved in the production and selling of fabric, clothes and related goods. The creation of a 'Fashion District' was one of the JDA's first projects.

37 Interviewee 2, 21 August 2013.

38 Interview with Stephen Hobbs, 17 July 2013.

39 Observation made by Potsiso Phasha.

40 Interview with Mariapaola McGurk, 19 August 2013.

41 Interview with Stephen Hobbs, 17 July 2013.

42 Interview with Mawabo Msingaphantsi, 21 August, 2013

43 Tanya Zack's most recent piece entitled 'Seeking logic in the chaos precinct: The spatial and property dynamics of trading spaces in Jeppe' appears in the book *Rogue Urbanisms*. Pieterse, E. and Simone, A. (eds) (2013). *Rogue Urbanism. Emergent African Cities*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

44 Caroline Kihato's piece on migrant women titled 'The city from its margins: Rethinking urban governance through the everyday lives of migrant women in Johannesburg' also appears in *Rogue Urbanisms*. Pieterse, E. and Simone, A. (eds) (2013). *Rogue Urbanism. Emergent African Cities*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

45 This kind of analysis would require more penetrative work.

46 There is a large statue of Nelson Mandela in Mandela Square in Sandton.

47 The Eland have spiritual significance to the San.

48 Interview with Mariapaola McGurk, 19 August 2013.

49 Interviewee 22, 8 December 2013.

50 Interview with Mawabo Msingaphantsi, 21 August, 2013.

51 William Kentridge is one of South Africa's most famous artists. He has used Johannesburg as the inspiration in some of his work.

52 An mbawula is a burning brazier which in the context of Fire Walker refers to African women in the inner city who carried these braziers on their heads.

53 Interviewee 4, 5 November 2013.

54 Interviewee 6, 5 November 2013.

55 Mpho Matsipa writes a fascinating chapter in **Fire Walker** entitled '*Urban Mythologies*' which further explores the issue of representation.

56 A doek is a square head scarf that is worn by women. It comes from the Afrikaans word for cloth. www.wordreference.com

57 Interviewee 6, 5 November 2013.

58 Interviewee 3, 5 November 2013.

59 Observations made by Potsiso Phasha, August 2013.

60 Interviewee 7, 6 November 2013.

61 Interview with Mariapaola McGurk, 19 August 2013.

62 The title 'Angel of the North' refers to all residents of Hillbrow/Berea who are from countries to the north of South Africa.

63 Interviewee 2, 21 August 2013.

64 Interview with Mawabo Msingaphantsi, 21 August, 2013.

65 Interviewee 20 and 21, 13 November 2013.

66 Thank you to Tanya Zack for this insight.

67 The pigeons are actually made out of steel.

68 Interviewee 22, 8 December 2013.

69 Interviewee 22, 8 December 2013.

70 Interview with Mawabo Msingaphantsi, 21 August, 2013.

71 Personal communication with Tanya Zack, 29 January 2014.

72 As discussed earlier in the work, the conclusions are drawn from interviews in and around the three pieces of artwork reviewed. Artworks in managed public space might draw different conclusions. However, what is significant is that there was a general lack of awareness of public art throughout the Inner City.

73 I am not suggesting the meaning was frivolous, but the interpretation was.

74 Interview with Steven Sack, 6 November 2013.

75 Interview with Mawabo Msingaphantsi, 21 August, 2013.

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