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A critical analysis of the iconography of six HIV/AIDS murals from Johannesburg and Durban, in terms of race, class and gender

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ABSTRACT

This research report is a critical analysis of the iconography of six HIV/Aids murals from Johannesburg and Durban, in terms of race, class and gender. The six examples are community murals which were used as a social awareness tool to disseminate information on HIV/Aids to a supposedly highly illiterate Black audience public. This research focuses predominantly on the issue of stereotypes, and how certain societal stereotypes of Others are manifested in these HIV/Aids murals. My analysis also tries to make evident, how difficult it is for muralists to visually represent HIV/Aids facts, in addressing 'high-risk' groups. This report also tries to show that key issues of HIV/Aids transmission are often overlooked or omitted for various reasons. I argue that, given the importance of HIV/Aids murals as educative tools, muralists have to be made aware of their role in the possible perpetuation of societal racial, gender and class stereotypes, and how such perpetuation of stereotypes can contribute to the continued stigmatization of the disease.

The final chapter of this research examines my own practical work that was produced as a requirement for the MA (Fine Art) degree. It analyses my performance-exhibition *Walking the Line*. My commentary focuses on how the social phenomenon of street trade in the Johannesburg city centre and specifically the 'refurbishment' of the Johannesburg Fashion District influenced my art practice. My analysis is further extended to the use of my own body in the performance, to consciously engage notions of hybridized identity.

KEY WORDS: HIV/Aids, murals, iconography, stereotypes, gender, race, class, street trade, visual art, performance