

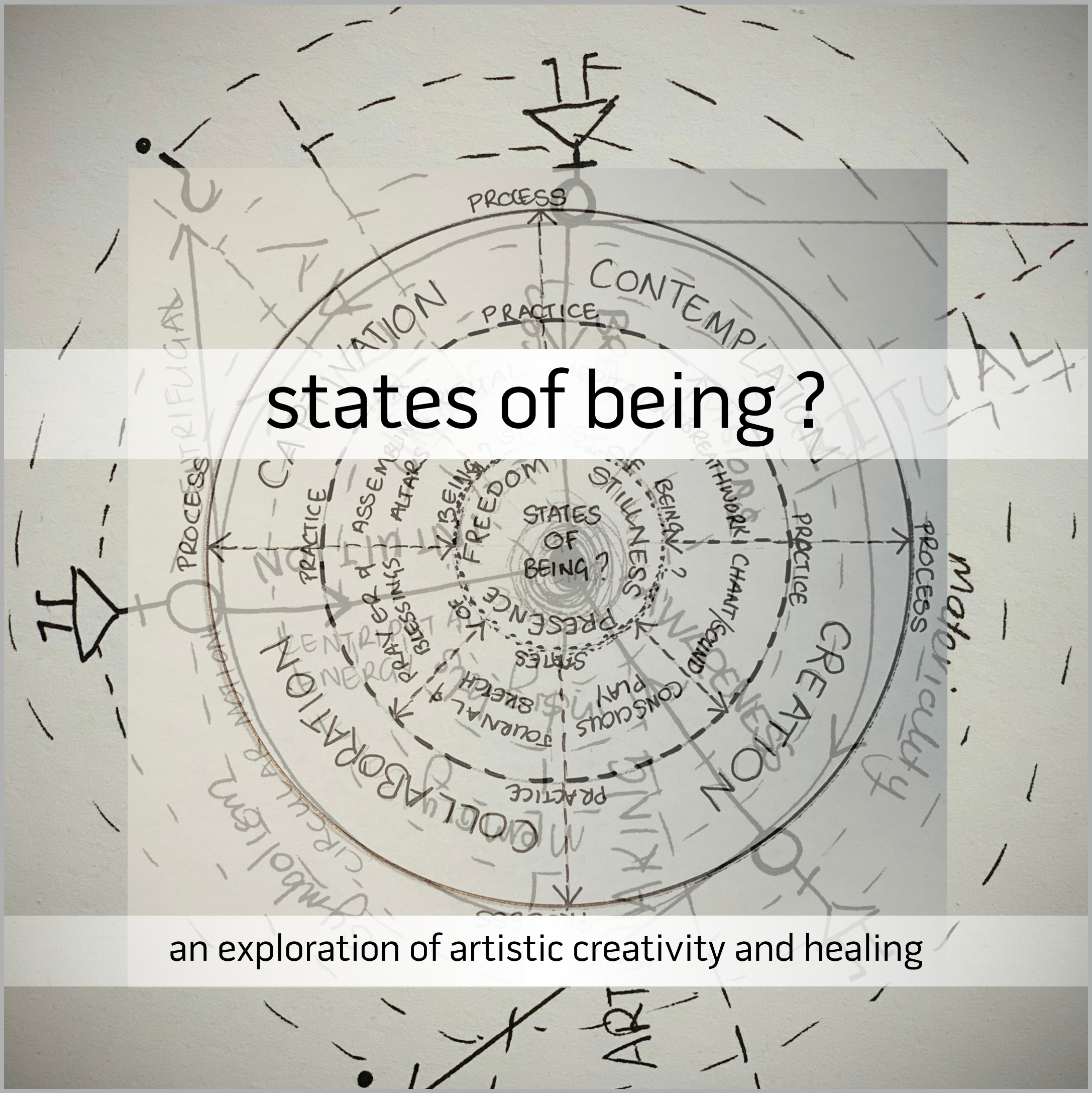
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States of being? an exploration of artistic creativity and healing

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states of being ?

an exploration of artistic creativity and healing

title

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declaration

I, Sarogenie Govender, hereby declare that this research report is submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Masters in Fine Art, University of the Witwatersrand. Apart from where recognised, this research is my own unaided work and has not been previously submitted for any degree to any other university.

Sarogenie Govender  Date 28/03/2020

abstract

This academic journey is an exploration of artistic creativity and healing. I adopt an autoethnographic, practice-based research approach by way of reflecting, recording and realising insights about creativity. This introspective account enabled the examination and surfacing of underlying processes, practices and states of being contributing to my creative process.

There are certain processes I follow when making art and essential to these processes are particular kinds of practices. My artmaking, imbued with ritual-like behaviours and activities, disentangled and made clear these creative processes and practices over time. Thinking through my making, I recognised the emergence of my creative process into four clear stages, namely, *captivation, contemplation, creation and collaboration*. These processes were in turn supported by practices that enabled an embodiment of particular states of being, contributing significantly, not only to my artmaking, but more importantly to healing.

Adopting a story-telling convention in writing about my making was important in that I was able to reflect and at times see new meaning and make new discoveries, long after the artwork had been completed. Reliving my process through observation of the finished body of work and reading over my in-process journaling and sketches of ideas, allowed me to recognise the magnitude of my process. In this magnification, my own healing and transformation were made visible.



photograph by simon kehagias

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prologue

After 18 months engaging in my artmaking and another month interacting with varied audiences at my exhibition and events, I began to view and appreciate creativity and the creative process in a new light. This self-reflexive exploration and introspective examination of my artmaking awakened me to the intrinsic aspects of my creative being that I can confidently affirm is a crucial tenet of my purpose and existence.

Creativity is a powerful force shaping my way of being in the world. It is a recognition of an innate intelligence. It manifests as a biological need, basic to my human nature, enabling me to continually bring forth something special or novel to me. Seeing creativity as a vital natural resource, at times being transcendent in its expression, enables me to access a myriad of possible creations from within. Creations that are a manifestation of meaning making or an expression of my authentic human experience.

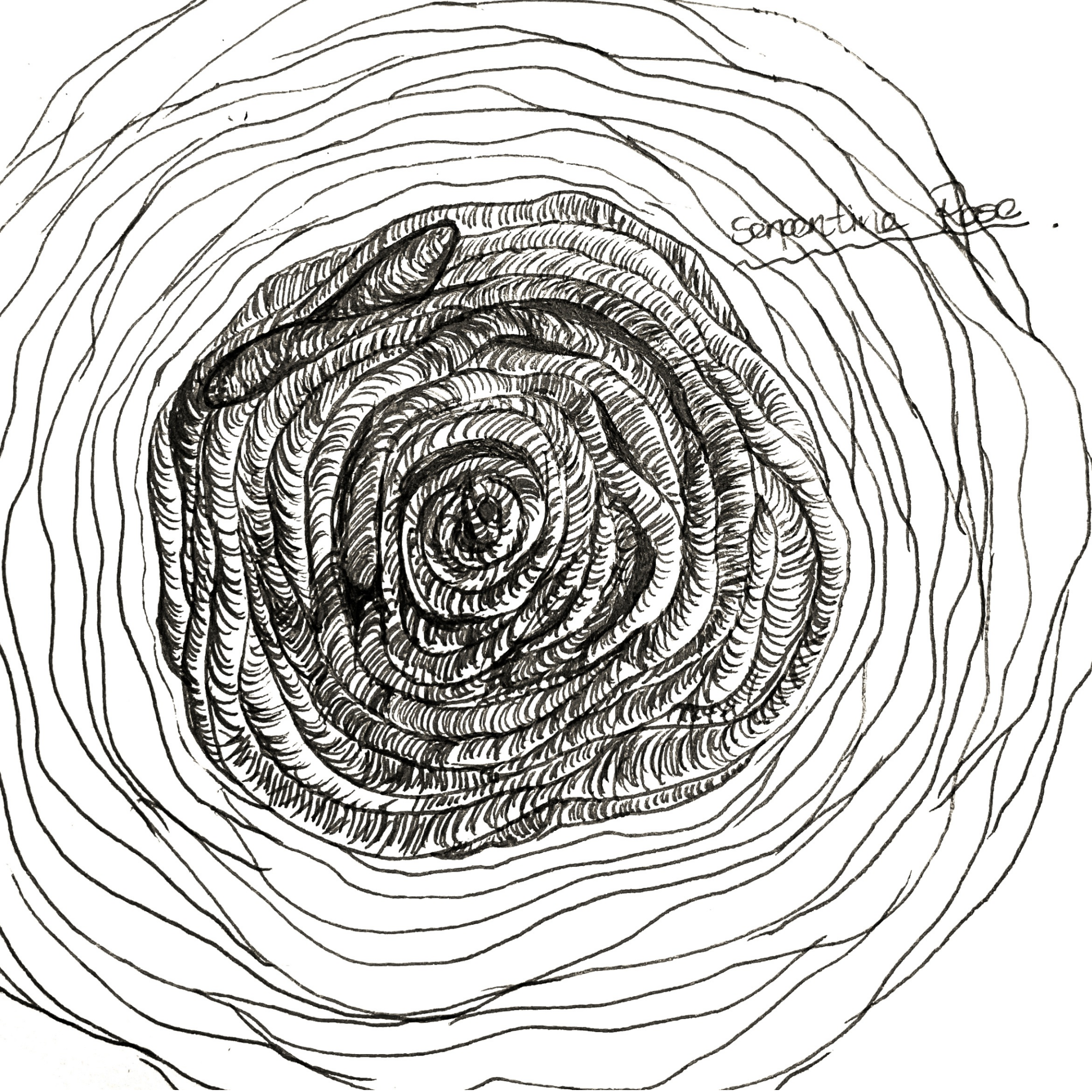
According to Mark Runco (2004), creativity has clear benefits for individuals and society as a whole through the facilitation and enhancement of problem solving, adaptability, self-expression, and health. He postulates that as the world advances through technology and digital transformations which make living easier than before, the complexities and chaos that come with this constant and rapid evolution also challenges us. At the epicenter of this rapid evolution lies the creative force and all that this implies is "[...] that creativity is more important now than ever before" (Runco 2004: 658). Becoming more aware of the value and importance of creativity within ourselves, for many fields beyond the arts into everyday life, needs to be acknowledged and encouraged.

There are certain processes that I follow when making art and within those processes there are particular kinds of practices. My making is imbued with ritual-like behaviours and activities. Over time these ritual-like behaviours have transformed into actual practices of making. My artmaking disentangled and made clear these creative processes and practices. Thinking through my making, I recognised the emergence of processes into four clear stages: **captivation, contemplation, creation** and **collaboration**. These processes were in turn supported by practices; practices that enabled an embodiment of particular states of being, contributing significantly not only to my artmaking, but more importantly to my healing and wellbeing.

In writing about my artmaking, including the experiences and events surrounding it, I made a radical decision to tell my own story. Adopting an autoethnographic and practice-based research approach, I delved into how my entire creative process unfolded prior to, during and after the artmaking. Each part of this research report tells a story of how it all began, the moments in between and the final resolution.

Part one is about becoming present in my purpose and my past, and connecting the past with the present laid the foundation for my making. In this section I draw on the insights and philosophy of medical (Leder 1990) and spiritual literature (Ferlic 2008; Krishnamurti 1999) as well invoking my own spiritual practices of healing. In part two I reflect and excavate insights from my own making. I write about my own process drawing from memories and encounters with self. I consciously choose to not dilute my story of making with stories of other artists or academic literature. This approach required much courage as it required revealing a personal story. Part three provides a rich assemblage of what happened after the making which was mainly triggered during the artmaking and showing the work. The events discussed in this section created opportunities to hold space for in-depth communication, healing connections and intimate collaborations. Once again, and similar to part two, I decided to share these experiences as they unfolded, telling a story of the possibilities that arise when the artist is present. Part four reflects on both my and other creative process models, the practices underlying my creative process and revealing my states of being. In this section, I reflect on other creative process models to gain a deeper understanding of my own process and its significance. Considering this research and mapping these models (Botella et al. 2013; Mace & Ward 2002; Runco 1997; Wallas 1926) provided me with insights on the healing potential of the creative process. I draw mainly on literature that explores creativity from a process perspective, which enabled me to interpret my own process and practices, seeking points of convergence and divergence. In concluding, I expose the healing potential implicit in my artmaking. I draw on specific literature (de Botton & Armstrong 2013 and Dissanayake 1998,2000) to ground my experiences and insights for healing through the creative process.

This introspection enabled me to tap into a reservoir of internal knowledge, embodied wisdoms and forms of intelligence, translated and made manifest through a visual language. My hope is that this experience will encourage artists and creatives to explore and realise their own artmaking practices and experiences in ways that facilitate healing.


Serpentine Rose

part one

becoming present

"While in one sense the body is the most abiding and inescapable presence in our lives, it is also essentially characterized by absence" (Leder 1990: 1).

Camouflaged in the form of visceral and physical manifestations, my internal universe speaks to me. Sometimes I sense these messages and maybe even decipher them, but often they are not even in my awareness. These messages may occur in the form of a quickened heartbeat, a change in my breathing pattern, an ailment, a feeling, an urge, a dream, a memory or a vision. Constantly channeled through my body, these messages manifest in some form or other.

My decision to make art is propelled by a need to return to the body. My artmaking is attributed to (re)discovering my being, and thus throughout the process, returning to the body was essential.

Our disconnected way of being in our bodies limits us from becoming aware of, giving attention to, and working with these messages. In his book *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder takes us on a journey to our inner, visceral body, revealing ways in which our bodies are absent in daily life, absent from conscious experience, and invites us to rethink the bodily basis of our lives. In many ways, technological innovations have reduced our direct corporeal engagement with the outer world and "[v]ia machines we are disinvested of work that once belonged to the muscles [...]" (Leder 1990: 3). Our disembodied way of life has led to '[a] rising interest in finding ways to "return to body," whether via exercise, hatha yoga, body therapies, craft-work, or intimacy with nature [...]' (Leder 1990: 3). It is further suggested that not only is this a rising interest, but also a reaction to this disembodied lifestyle.

Whilst contemplating the area of research for this master's project, I was engaged in creating a body of work *from body to being* that explored the subtle intelligences of the human body. Through my creative process I explored the body as a portal through which to enter and connect with my inner universe, imagining the physical and etheric body in all its complexity, mystery and wonder. During this time, my creative process enabled long periods of stillness, aiding me to become aware of the constant barrage of automatic and mostly wasteful thoughts entering my mind. As I worked recreating organs and systems of the body I was slowly becoming present in my own body. Many hours were spent churning and contemplating these experiences and artmaking practices. A critical insight that emerged during this time was that I was able to invoke a powerful state of being when engaged in the creative process and this state contributed significantly to my wellbeing. It is with this insight that I felt compelled to explore artistic creativity and healing focusing specifically on my own artmaking practice.

1. finding purpose and an approach

The purpose of this academic journey is to explore the creative process and practices underpinning my artmaking. I explore how these processes and practices transform my state of being, which is essential not only to inform the creation of the artwork but also to contribute to my own healing.

Adopting autoethnographic and practice-based research methods enabled me to record and reflect on my artmaking practices during this period of study. This self-reflexive exploration was essential for extracting authentic and meaningful knowledge, insights and ideas. Authenticity, in this instance, refers to acting on one's own authority and being truthful to one's process and practice in making art (Svejenova 2005). By being

present in my body and becoming aware of an inner guidance steering my making, I made choices and decisions that liberated me from my usual conditioned way of thinking and being.

As a research approach, autoethnography seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al. 2010). It combines the characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. Autobiography, involving writings of past experiences that are assembled in hindsight, using texts like photographs, journals, recordings, memorabilia, help recall and remember moments that have significant meaning in the trajectory of one's life (Ellis et al. 2010). Ethnography involves the study of a culture's practices, values and beliefs, offering insights and reflections to those within and outside of a particular culture. This method of research provided me with an opportunity to situate my artmaking in context and to examine and surface underlying processes, practices and states of being.

By making my own personal experience the central focus of this research, I document important details of my artmaking. In some instances, using a storytelling convention and writing a first person account freed me from stringent norms of academic writing, analysis and research. I focussed largely on telling my story and where appropriate chose to frame or fuse it within the context of the literature.

Reflections of my lived experiences formed the basis of my analysis enabling me to discover new insights about creativity and healing. While there are widely differing and contested views on the value of autoethnography, this approach proved invaluable to me in steering me towards discovering my voice in articulating my artistic practice. This is part of a broader shift in which “[a]utoethnography is gaining momentum as a research method within the creative and performing arts, partly because of the opportunity it provides for writers, artists, performers and others to reflect critically upon their personal and professional creative experiences”(Pace 2012: 2). He argues that autoethnography has gained a significant following as a useful research method to address limitations of traditional analytical goals related to abstraction and generalization. Elaborating on Ellis and Bochner's views on autoethnography, he further argues that despite autoethnographies containing analytical elements that are employed to interpret the stories being told, this form of analysis does not always sit comfortably and in some ways disrupts the analytical tradition.

Furthermore, practice-based research enabled me to become present in my artmaking, developing new insights through close examination and conscious engagement in the production of my artwork and to explore the means by which creativity and healing are made manifest. I concur with Peter Dallow's suggestion that a “practice-based approach to research augments and complements the more established or conventional research approaches *into* or *about* the creative arts which focuses upon the finished 'forms' of art works [...]”(2003: 53).

2. realising my topic

The title, ***states of being***, came to me one morning after attending a meditation class at a Brahma Kumaris centre in my neighbourhood. The sister leading the class talked about a state of being and as she spoke her words imprinted themselves in my mind. She spoke about an ideal state of being and as she elaborated on this topic she referenced certain Hindu deities who represented such "ideal or elevated states of being". For the rest of the class, days, weeks and months following, I remained captivated by her words, while reflecting on my own state of being. I felt compelled to explore my state of being, and the creative journey I was about to embark on and think through, synchronistically offered itself to this desire. While deliberating on the title, *states of being*, I began to question and attempted to identify what these states of being could possibly be, eventually settling on ***states of being ?***.

3. a state of being

My state of being determines the quality of my existence in this world. In our lifetime we experience multiple states of being, some being expansive and others quite limiting. Ken Ferlic writes that "[i]ntellectually, a state of being would be defined as a way of thinking and functioning in the world with a set of definable characteristics that can be used to distinguish one state of being from another " (Ferlic 2008). Alternatively, our state of being is how we experience ourselves physically, emotionally, cognitively and spiritually in the world. Ferlic further suggests that "[a]nother way of stating this is that the state of being we are experiencing is all of what is occurring both internally and externally" (Ferlic 2008: 1). In this state I am able to see, think, speak and act intuitively, holding the awareness of my body and my environment. I become present in my way of being. I am not on autopilot, allowing my thoughts, words and deeds to be orchestrated by my conditioned mind and body. In a state of being I am a conscious observer and actor in the drama of life.

The renowned philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurthi suggests that the conditioning we have received from our teachers, our authorities, and our books have contributed largely to us being "[...] second-hand people" (1999: 6). He writes: "We have lived on what we have been told, either guided by our inclinations, our tendencies, or compelled to accept circumstances and environment. We are the result of all kinds of influences and there is nothing new in us, nothing that we have discovered for ourselves; nothing original, pristine, clear" (Krishnamurti 1999: 6). The above statement is reflective of my state of being a few years ago, when I was engaged in full time employment. I had awakened to the reality that my worth, time and presence in the workplace centered on serving authoritative and material needs, including my own, rather than value generating and creative aspirations. It was around this time that I started to reflect on creativity as well as my earlier experiences of artmaking. The more time I spent reflecting, the stronger the impulse grew to make art again. Although my time in the work environment gifted me with advantageous skills and capabilities, it certainly limited my way of being in my body and in the world.

4. an invocation

A significant shift in my approach to artmaking is the realisation and acceptance that my artistic practice is my spiritual practice. The one is meaningless without the other. Hence, this creative exploration commenced with invocations and salutations to Lord Shiva[1]. Shiva is one of the many Hindu gods worshipped by my family. From an early age I was encouraged to worship Lord Shiva through fasts, special prayers, night vigils, temple visits and daily rituals. We would visit local temples on the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivaratri, an all-night devotion to Shiva beginning at sunset and ending at dawn. These nights were filled with the singing of devotional songs and performance of rituals. I remember feeling special on these occasions as I believed I would always be protected and guided by Shiva. A memory of one such night surfaced during my making. I was about six years old, attending a Maha Shivarathri prayer where the pundit (priest), whilst in a Shiva trance, gifted me with a white miniature statue of Shiva in a seated meditation pose. This moment felt as if an unlimited desire in my body was being fulfilled. I was ecstatic, I felt special, I felt loved by something greater than I could fathom. As time passed the memory faded and the statue lost its meaning, until now.

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1 "Who is Shiva? When we say "Shiva," there are two fundamental aspects that we are referring to. The word "Shiva" literally means "that which is not." Today, modern science is proving to us that everything comes from nothing and goes back to nothing. The basis of existence and the fundamental quality of the cosmos is vast nothingness. The galaxies are just a small happening - a sprinkling. The rest is all vast empty space, which is referred to as Shiva. That is the womb from which everything is born, and that is the oblivion into which everything is sucked back. Everything comes from Shiva and goes back to Shiva. So Shiva is described as a non-being, not as a being. Shiva is not described as light, but as darkness. Humanity has gone about eulogizing light only because of the nature of the visual apparatus that they carry. Otherwise, the only thing that is always, is darkness. Light is a limited happening in the sense that any source of light - whether a light bulb or the sun - will eventually lose its ability to give out light. Light is not eternal. It is always a limited possibility because it happens and it ends. Darkness is a much bigger possibility than light. Nothing needs to burn, it is always - it is eternal. Darkness is everywhere. It is the only thing that is all pervading" (Sadhguru 2014: 3-4).

Prior to and during my artmaking I prayed for divine guidance and nurturing, freedom from authority and conditioning and sustained vitality throughout this creative journey. Performing energy cleansing rituals in my studio space became part of my daily practice. In addition, I created an altar in my studio that I could surrender to when needing to integrate into my body or quiet my mind. A statue of Shiva Nataraja formed the centerpiece of my altar. Feeling connected to the divine energy of Shiva, this statue naturally became the locus of my meditation.

Artwork 1



Snakes & Lingam

It started with an atomic structure... I was trying to imagine myself as a densely packed body of atoms and with no spaces in between. But then I would be solid. Then I decided to be loosely packed atoms, so now I am fluid. I can flow. I flow in all directions, I glide, go under, go on top. I start to feel my whole body come alive. I am a body riding on a snake. In my dreams I see snakes, 2 of them, both albino. They intertwine each other obstructing and framing my view. What do I see through this frame - my past, my future... I need to integrate, the spaces between my atoms are increasing, so I start to make dots... 1 dot, 10 dots, 100 dots, 500 dots, 1000dots, a million dots, I don't keep count, but I know much more is needed. From tangling lines to dots, big dots to little dots, black dots to white dots, and then silver dots... why the need for dots, whats the point. Then it comes to me... I feel slightly integrated, I've filled the spaces between the atoms. I'm dense but light, filled but empty

part two

in the making



Trusting my intuition and consciously co-creating with the dynamic energy of Shiva, I proceeded with my artmaking. To initiate my process, I purchased two large canvases, which were 1.5m in length, 2m wide and 10cm in depth, a surface dimension that was larger than my physical body and a deep frame structure that would also allow me to work with heavy materials. The decision to work on canvases was influenced largely by my previous body of work, however, this time I chose to work on a much larger scale. Positioned in my studio for a few months, the canvases remained untouched until the night Shiva Nataraja cast his shadow on them.

One evening I had placed a candle in front of the Shiva Nataraja statue and switched off the lights in my studio. I soon noticed that the light from the candle had cast a huge shadow of the dancing Shiva. The image of Nataraja's form on the wall and on the canvas, and his dance as the flame flickered, captivated me. I felt strongly compelled at that moment to capture this image, which became the starting point of my first artwork.

I revisited this moment, asking myself, "What have I experienced?" Reflecting on it I came to understand it as being a moment of captivation in my creative process, which gave birth to a series of cascading events in my creative exploration. The immediate events following this captivation led to the creation of my first two artworks. These events were two significant dreams and a recollection of long forgotten memories and memorabilia.

My first dream was of two entangled albino snakes, which seemed to guide and direct my line of sight. Appearing before my eyes, I was coaxed into gazing through their shimmering white entanglement. There was more to the dream but it is this image that remained with me long after. My second dream was that of an enormously strong and agile black snake, moving fast and effortlessly through a dense forest-like environment. I was riding the snake as it manoeuvered its way through and over obstacles. Strangely enough I felt neither fear nor discomfort in both these dreams; it felt more like an unquestionable symbol of divine guidance.

I recorded these dreams in my journal knowing intuitively that they were important signs. While contemplating these dreams I remembered a wooden snake I had sculpted as a teenager when I lived in my hometown of Ellingham, Umkomaas. Growing up on a farm, I spent much time in the company of trees, often climbing them to harvest fruit or chopping them for firewood or building structures. I recalled finding a remarkable branch on one of my walks. Excited by my find, I spent hours scraping off the bark and sanding the rough surfaces. In this process the snake revealed itself. I painted it green to resemble a green mamba that we had so often encountered on the farm. This sculpture was probably one of my earliest creations. Reconnecting with the snake recently, I sanded off the green paint. There was something significant in revealing the wood. The snake found its place in front of my altar and in random spaces in my studio. I could feel its presence leading me forward.

Contemplating this wooden snake and its meaning ignited a stream of forgotten memories of my encounters with snakes on the farm. A remarkable memory was finding a snake under rocks, which I had used to create an altar honouring Lord Shiva, situated under a lychee tree in the backyard of my childhood home. Made with specially decorated rocks collected from the river nearby, my altar resembled the stone idols or lingam stones found in backyard temples.

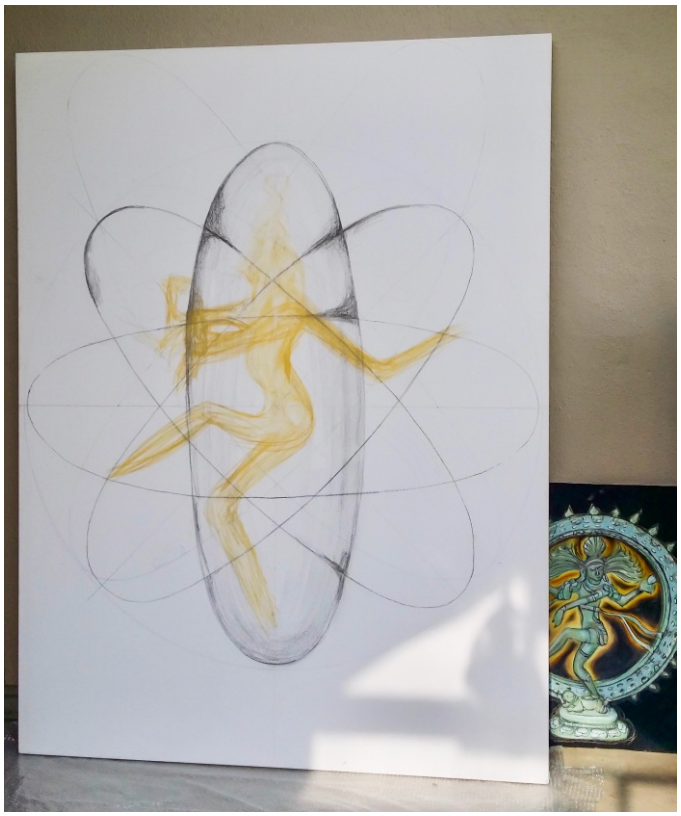
Growing up in a small, Indian farming community, I spent much time playing games that imitated religious and cultural activities. Enacting religious ceremonies was quite a popular game amongst my friends and I because it had an element of mystery that allowed our imaginations to run wild. We would perform the rituals and trances

we had either witnessed or participated in. Sometimes we would also make up our own rituals and trance-like performances. It was mostly fun but sometimes mysterious especially if one of us had a strange encounter, like the one I had with the snake.

I had lifted one of the rocks from my Shiva altar to clean and rearrange it when a black snake appeared from under it and slithered past, almost touching me. Terrified to the core, having heard of many incidents of people bitten by black mambas, I abandoned my altar and never went back to play under that lychee tree again. When I related this incident to my family, I was told that this encounter was my punishment for making fun of the gods.

Another significant memory that slithered into my mind was that of snakes killed on my dad's farm during the mango and lychee season. To harvest the fruits, we would have to climb the trees to either break or shake off the ripened fruit. Together, with local children who worked seasonally to earn a few rands, we would climb these fruit trees, competing to get to the highest branch first. This was fun and adventurous work but also quite risky because of the snakes. Whenever someone heard the birds' snake alarm calls or even spotted a snake, they would signal a warning and we would all climb down to safety. We would then listen and observe attentively, secretly wishing to be the one to spot the snake. One of us would then be sent to fetch my dad's shotgun. If the snake was spotted, my dad would be the one to shoot it. Many snakes were killed in this way. The dead snake would then get shared three ways - the local sangomas would take the venomous parts, the body would be taken by the locals who ate snake meat and I would take the snake skin to use in my art projects.

The above dreams and memories seemed very normal and ordinary at the time they occurred, but reflecting on them now and weaving the common threads or signs occurring over a span of time, an unexplainable, visceral tension began to manifest in my body. What was happening was beyond my limited understanding but it was sufficient to work with energetically. To explore this phenomenon I began creating by playing with the dancing shadow and the snakes.



genesis in process (shadow of shiva nataraja), 2017

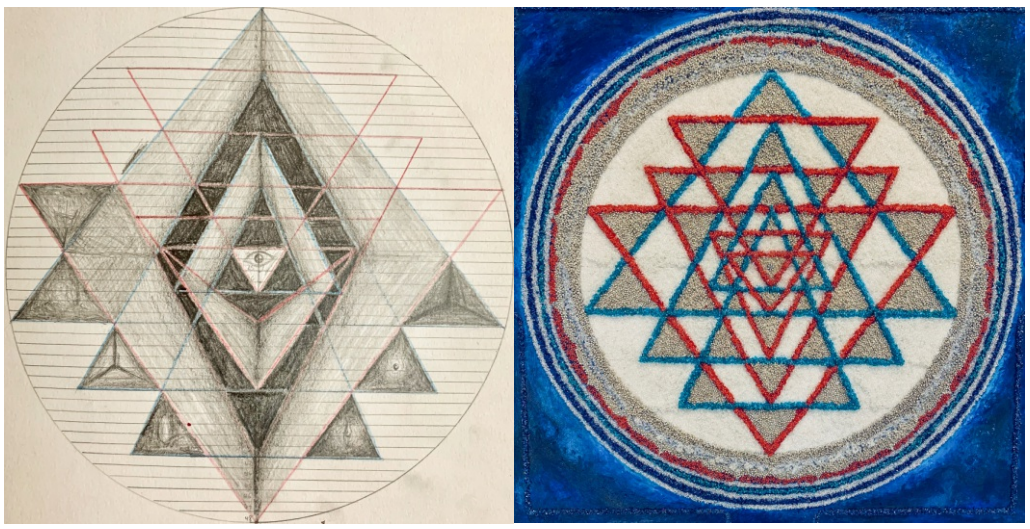
5. genesis and bindu

My dance with **genesis** lasted just over 8 months. At times making this work felt like a prison sentence and other times like a necessary meditation. Either way, I had to do my time. Reflecting on the period of making and remaking this work, an internal struggle became evident. It was a struggle between reason and intuition. My reasoning mind brought in the symbols, shapes, colours and material in a way that was organized, sensible and symmetrical. My intuition on the other hand said *play*, blend the visions, dreams, memories and feelings in a way that allows the making to become *special*. Let the dancing Nataraja become the locus of entanglement holding the past, present and future. Let this creation be the point of emergence for all that follows. The dance between reason and intuition became vivid in the making of **genesis**.

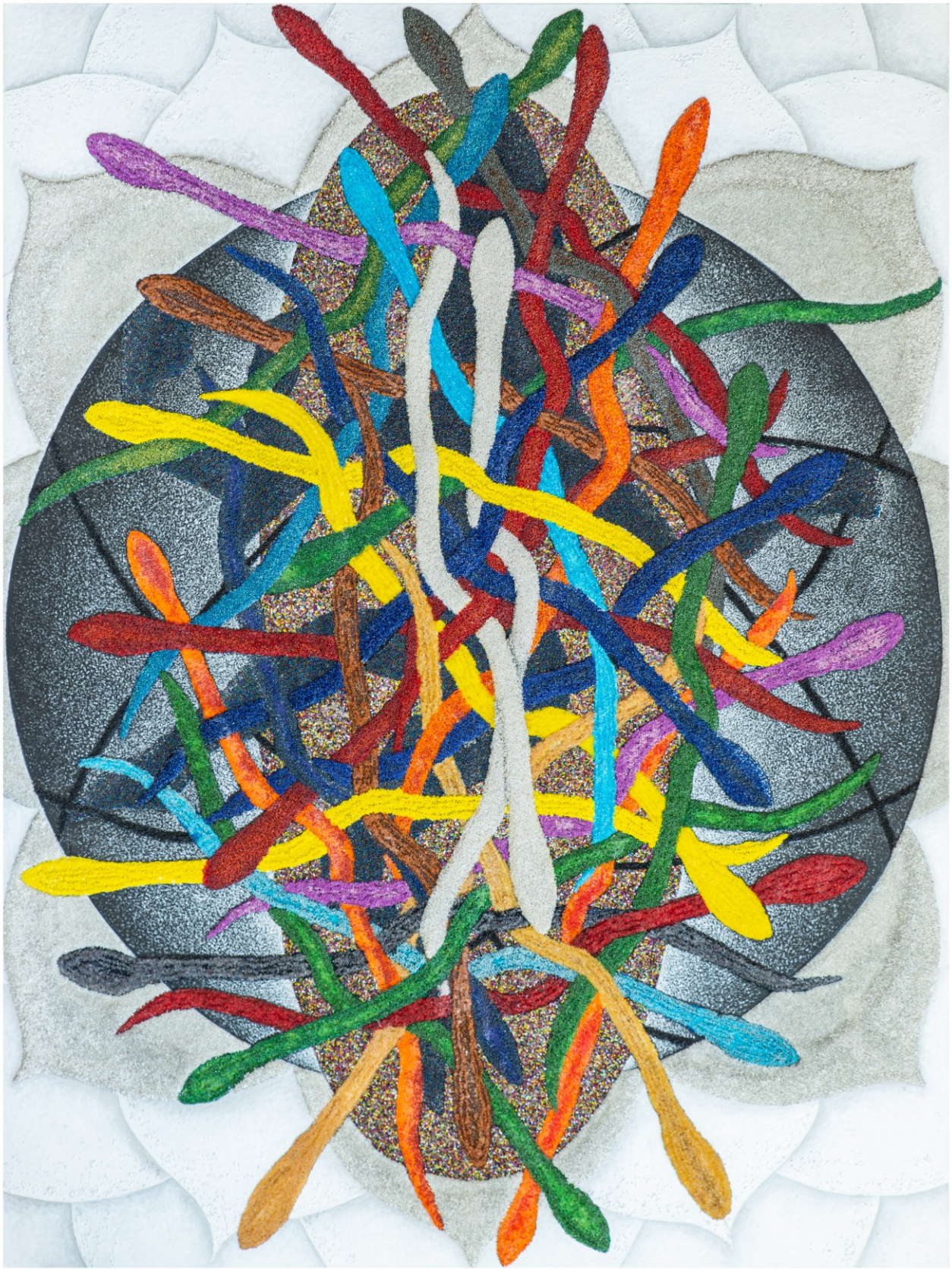
I would often experience explosions of creative insights and my reasoning mind would have no choice but to find a way to make those explosions manifest in the artwork, like incorporating the two albino snakes or the dancing shadow of Shiva Nataraja. Reflecting on the making of **genesis** I have come to understand my creative process at this stage as "[...] a repeated exchange of tensions and releases [...]" (Dissanayake 2002: 77). **genesis** was the start of disentangling and releasing visceral tensions that had physically manifested in my body.

Towards the end of making **genesis**, another artwork beckoned to be realised. Meditating on **genesis**, a powerful vision that emerged was seeing the snakes in a synchronized dance. The snakes were transforming into symbols of energy. The message for me was to channel my energy, as symbolised by the snakes, to a single point. I had to find a method, or rather a powerful structure, to weave and channel this energy.

I thought about spiders and their webs quite often, but it suddenly dawned upon me that a few months, prior to making **genesis**, I had been practicing drawing the Shri Yantra. I had chosen this particular yantra because it's geometry intrigued me and I drew it as a form of meditation. This was a critical moment of confluence whereby my past actions had found particular purpose in my current thoughts and future actions. The Shri Yantra serendipitously found its place in my next artwork guiding its formation and channeling energy to a point as I had envisioned. I named this work **bindu**, as it symbolized a meeting point of energies. Maintaining elements and symbols of **genesis** in **bindu** was necessary as both these artworks were a transformation from one state to another, **genesis** being a centrifugal energy state and **bindu** being centripetal.



my early studies of the shri yantra, 2017



shanti govender, ***genesis***, 2017, glass beads, acrylic, wood glue & resin on canvas, 200 x 150cm
image courtesy of sean brand



shanti govender, ***bindu***, 2017, glass beads, white quartz, acrylic, wood glue & resin on canvas, 200 x 150cm
image courtesy of sean brand

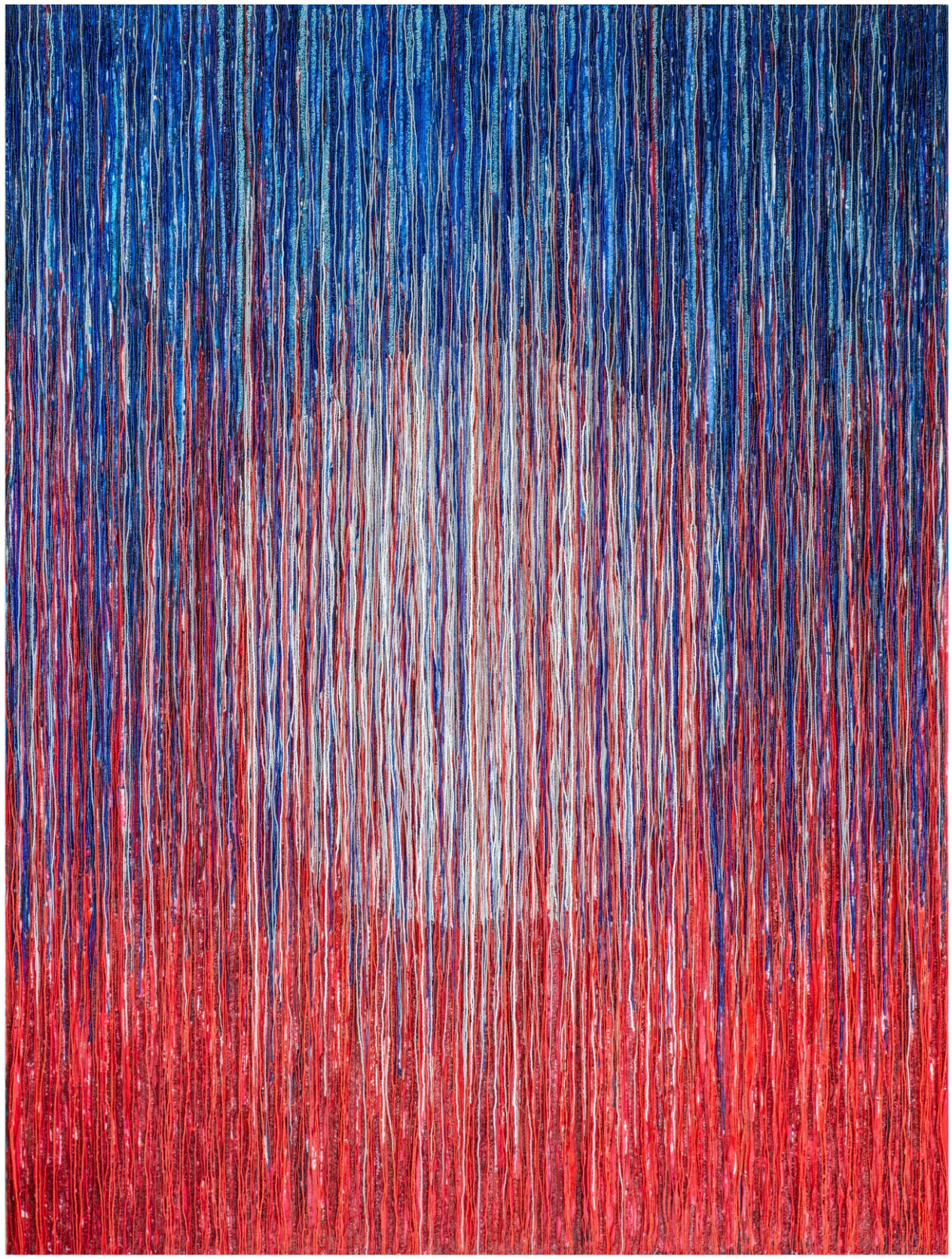
6. convergence & c[ircu]larity

The making of **bindu** delivered me to a critical point in my creative process leaving me in contemplation of the Shri Yantra. "This mystical diagram made up of nine interlocking triangles that surround a central point known as a *bindu* represent the totality of the cosmos and express non-duality" ("Shri Yantra" 2019). It further symbolizes the union of the masculine and feminine divine. The four upward pointing triangles represent the masculine while the five downward-pointing triangles symbolize the feminine. During my creative process of constructing this sacred geometry, I brought my awareness to my own masculine and feminine being. How aware was I in my daily manifestations of these energy states? Not knowing the answer, I proceeded with my artmaking.



convergence in process, 2018

To intuit and actualize this artwork required a way of making that was ceremonial. This was mainly done through reciting mantras, visualizations, holding certain postures and deep breathing. As I attached each string of blue beads to the canvas I activated my masculine energy. With each string of red beads, my feminine energy. Attaching each beaded string to adorn the canvas required my absolute presence. Over time my way of making became a breathing meditation which contributed significantly to the actualization of convergence and c[ircu]larity.



shanti govender, ***convergence***, 2018, glass beads, acrylic, wood glue, super glue & resin on canvas, 200 x 150cm
image courtesy of sean brand



shanti govender, ***c[ircu]larity***, 2018, glass beads, acrylic, wood glue, super glue & resin on canvas, 150 x 150cm
image courtesy of sean brand

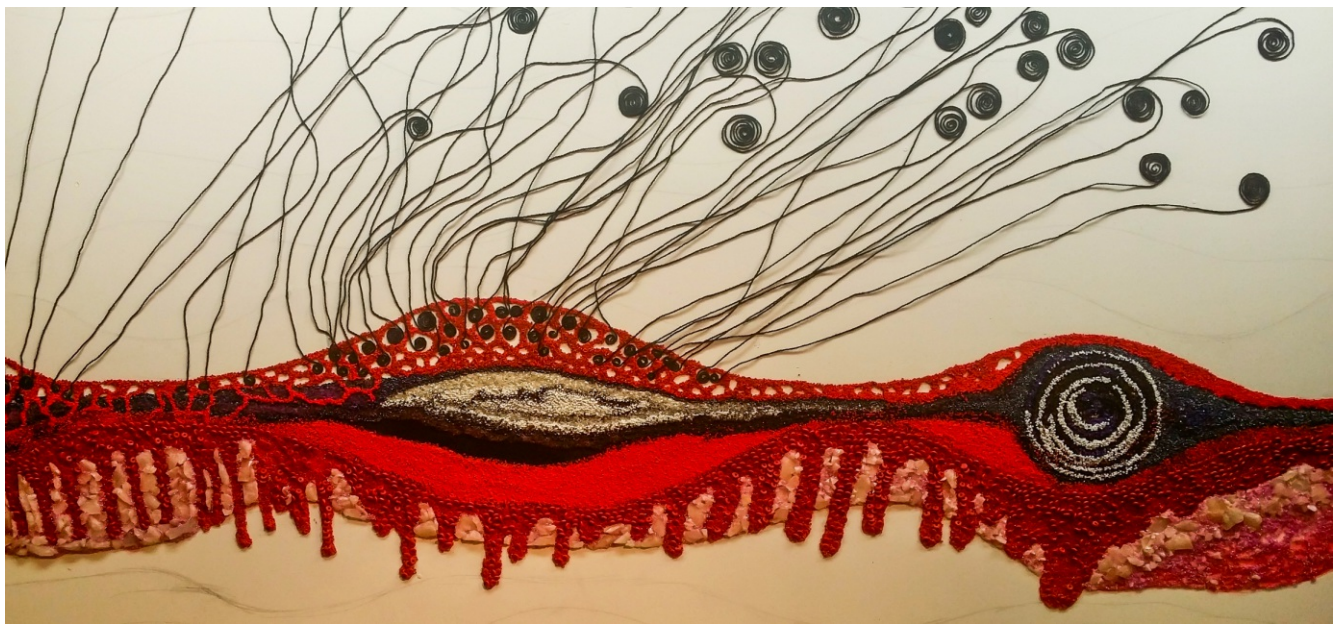
7. her flow

With **convergence** almost complete and **c[ircu]larity** still in the course of its making, I proceeded to my next creation. After spending hundreds of hours repetitively sticking down stringed beads, my body yearned for a different experience and process of making. My mind, having quietened significantly since the start of this creative journey, made it possible for me to perceive my body's yearning. A message I was constantly receiving was to "create in a state of flow". Surrendering to this message I began playing with the same material used in the previous pieces. Creating in a state of flow meant being present, and allowing my senses and the material to guide my making. Thoroughly immersed in this state I experienced an incredible sense of freedom. Free from the known, from authority, from ideated structures and concepts. My awareness was wholly arrested by what the material dictated and directed, through its colour, texture, pattern, movement and energy; and my body responded to these qualities.



her flow in process , 2018

At a point in the making, I was captivated by the form that was emerging. It revealed a powerful feminine energy. I was astounded and invigorated by the discovery and manifestation of this form, but after a while I discerned a subtle shift in my state of being. Being captivated by this form I was no longer able to create in a state of flow. My reasoning mind kicked in automatically trying to figure out this phenomenon. The freedom I felt at the start of making this artwork was fading. This organism-like structure was summoning my reasoning mind and this created an anxiety within me. Was this another message for me to unravel? At this juncture it became necessary to step back from the making and reflect on what was actually happening in my process.



her flow forming, 2018

I created **her flow** tuning into the wisdom of my body. At the start of making this work my creative process was playful and free, not constrained by mental constructs. At a point in the making a form began to emerge and the recognition of that form destabilized my process. I could no longer create playfully and freely, I was captured by this organism-like structure. So what now and where to next? Retreating into my internal universe to seek guidance I received a powerful insight: "Freedom is not being free from structure, rather it is being free within structure."

Seeking freedom outside structures that fundamentally make us and our world is almost impossible. As much as I was trying to create in a state of flow I was still bound by the structure of the canvas, the material, the unplanned formations of lines, colours and textures. So to progress from this insight, I had no choice but to immerse myself in this organic form that revealed a powerful feminine energy. After days of reflection and meditating, my gaze fixed on this form, the insight that dawned was that this form represented the source of creative energy within me, my creative centre, my womb. Visualizing and connecting energetically with my own womb and that of other women who entered my studio space, I continued my process of making, now flowing with the source of my creative energy. Learning to become free within structure, within my body, was slowly becoming a possibility.



shanti govender, ***her flow***, 2018, glass beads, wooden beads, rose quartz, acrylic, wood glue, super glue & resin on canvas, 200 x 150cm
image courtesy of sean brand

8. ener[chi]

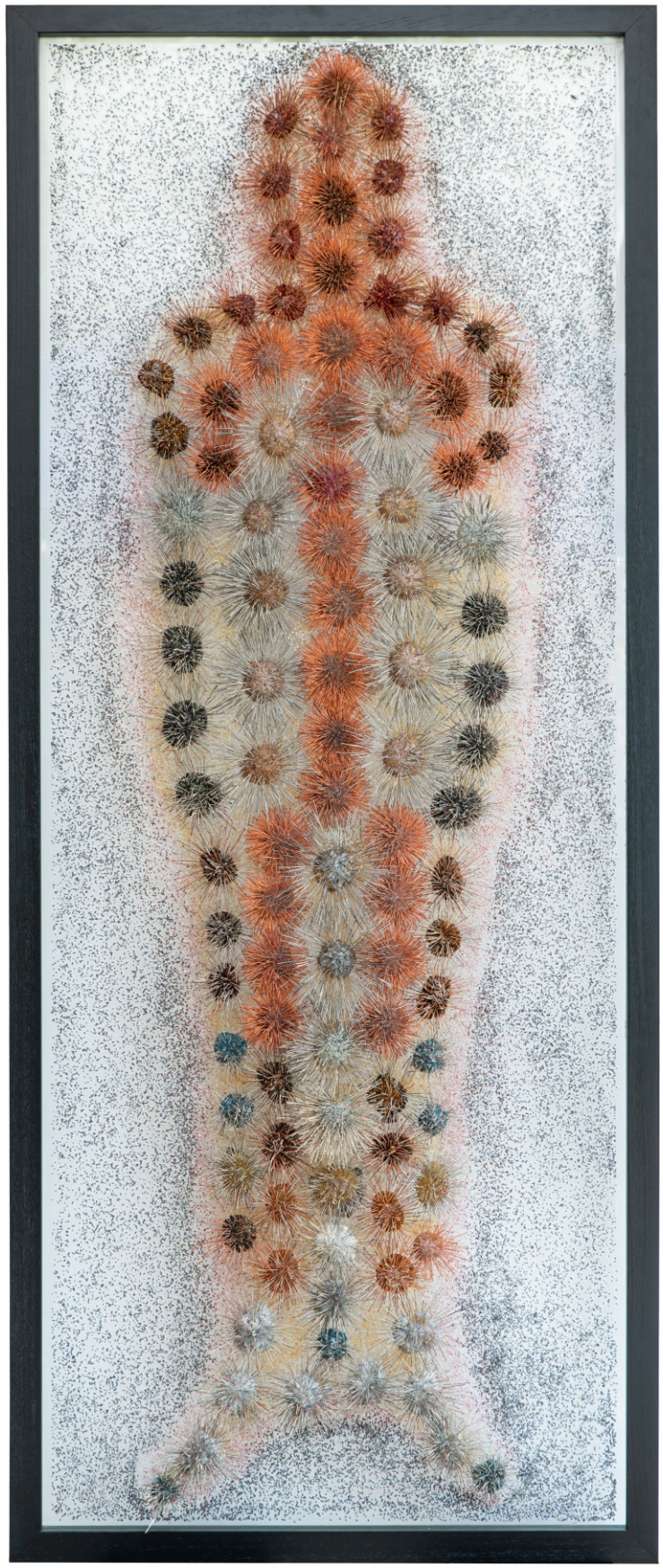
The nature of the materials I worked with and its production process meant physically bending over and holding specific positions for long periods of time which caused much discomfort to my body. I often found myself seeking the services of an acupuncturist, massage therapist or reflexologist for some physical healing. During one of my acupuncture sessions, I noticed a heap of acupuncture needles in a jar. Thousands of steel and copper needles in a tantalizing mesh awaiting disposal. Captivated by the spectacle of these healing tools, I asked to be the disposer, or should I say transformer, of these phenomenal needles whose primary healing work was complete. I played with the needles until they eventually found their form. One hundred and three "sea urchins" later, **ener[chi]** was realised. **ener[chi]** was probably my most energetic and therapeutic experience. Working through this creation I was the healer and the healed. Just as these needles performed their healing on bodies they performed their healing through this creation.



ener[chi] in the making, 2018
image courtesy of sean brand



shanti govender, ***ener[chi]***, 2018, glass beads, acupuncture needles, silicon, wood glue, super glue & resin on perspex, 210 x 88cm (back)
image courtesy of sean brand



shanti govender, ***ener[chi]***, 2018, glass beads, acupuncture needles, silicon, wood glue, super glue & resin on perspex, 210 x 88cm (front)
image courtesy of sean brand

9. stillpoint

stillpoint began to germinate while I was working with my fourth piece, **her flow**. New neighbours had moved in next door and one of the first noticeable changes they made to their pavement garden was to plant a row of nine tree aloes. I often observed these trees while entering my driveway. After a few months of being planted, the lower, older leaves of the trees started browning. I began to watch them even more closely wondering if they would survive their new environment. I wished that they would, as their sculptural presence charmed me every time I passed by. I watched as the fleshy green leaves metamorphosed from succulent, into dry, brittle, brown husks . At some point the tree aloes began to shed their browning leaves. What captivated me was the way these dry, brittle leaves appeared on the ground. Their curvy and twisted form looked so alive and in motion as if they had been released from the mother tree to continue their journey into death. Captivated by them, and not knowing why at the time, I collected the fallen leaves.

After months of accumulating a pile of dried leaves, the time had finally arrived for me to start working on my final piece. I had also previously collected some dried grass remains from a funeral ritual of a family member, a few dried proteas which I had gifted to myself for a recent birthday and wood chips from an artist whose work I admired greatly. I sealed the organic material to slow down its further decomposition. Working in a quiet and ritualistic way, I imagined the embalming of bodies. I reflected on the time I washed, dressed and adorned my mother's body the morning of her funeral as well as other people I supported in their time of dying.



tree aloes shedding, gerard street, observatory, jhb

Once again, my artmaking was different. There were definitely moments of catharsis but there was also something more. My perception of the material was changing. For the first time, I was able to understand the material as a separate entity, independent of its role in creating art. The material was now dictating its form.

Just as the fallen aloe leaves begged me to pick them up, so did the dried grass, proteas and wood chips. The material began to dictate the process of its afterlife and I obeyed. Even though working with the material opened up creative channels to contemplate death, the impermanence of the body, time and other meaningful concepts, there was another message. The concept of the creation had not yet formed but the materials to actualise it showed up and captivated me. I vividly remember rushing home from work one day excited by the insight which finally came to me; I had to actualize a stillness. The kind of stillness that one experiences in death, in the dying material, in deep meditation. I named this work, **stillpoint**.



shanti govender, ***stillpoint***, 2019, glass beads, dried tree aloe leaves, dried grass, wood chips, dried proteas, wood glue, super glue & resin on canvas, 150 x 150cm
image courtesy of sean brand

Exploring my own being - my body, my self, my life experiences - through artmaking became the central focus of my research. I started this process of introspection and self-reflexivity, trusting wholly in the processes and practices unfolding. Paying attention to my physical and visceral feelings, my conscious and unconscious thoughts and visions as they surfaced, I created a visual language, rich with meaning. Meaning that was born through contemplating past and present states. Being present in the reliving of my past experiences created opportunities for me to release old patterns through entering, re-entering, exiting, and closing portals of both cognitive and corporeal memories. And listening to my invisible yet powerful internal universe, propelled me into spaces of exploring my state of being continually. Becoming vulnerable with sometimes conflicting thoughts, ideas, visions, materials, knowledge systems and processes made me understand myself deeply, in ways that were meaningful not only to me but to the world I occupy and interact within. Using autoethnography as my research method provided me with the opportunity to write my personal narrative, making my process, practice and states of being familiar and available.

Turning Inwards – Turning the Ego Inwards | Artwork 2

Synchronicity / Balance / Acceptance / Connection

What happens when we turn the ego inwards to serve us and not outwards to project a sense of self.

Everything I see/perceive out there is what I feel inside, depends on my state of being. The snakes moving inwards are a metaphor of my anxieties, feelings, thoughts being channelled back to the self. In the 'self' there exists a space where I can morph into whatever I want to be, my authentic self. It's a space where magic happens, not easy to hold this space, but if you practice long enough you can. It's a magical space, a virtual space existing in the physical space of the body and the artwork. Its a space that can carry everything and anything I empty out of my body & mind.

part three

holding space

Being present with people is fundamental to my artmaking process. I often invited people into my studio space to either participate, observe my making process or just be in the space with me. Sometimes they were there in physical form and other times they were there with me in memory, inspiring and contributing to my making. In this process there is an exchange of energy, a sharing of experience, a holding of space.

When preparing for the showing my artwork, either in process or the completed work, I consciously chose spaces that enabled connections with people known and unknown. Throughout my making and month long exhibition processes, I connected with hundreds of people in both fleeting and significant ways. This part is an assemblage of experiences related to in-depth communication, healing connections and intimate collaborations.

10. creating the space

Installing my artwork at The Point of Order (TPO) was the next step on my creative journey. Being present and alone in the empty space, while cleaning and clearing, was essential to understanding its flow and possibilities. With the support of the TPO coordinator, my supervisor, my family and my installation support team, the positioning and installation of the artwork was done seamlessly.



installation view of **states of being ?** installed at the point of order, 17 february 2019



balancing tree and **snake**, 2019

As noted previously, having an altar in my studio was important for integrating into my being and quietening my mind. This led me to fashion an additional installation for the duration of the exhibition, **balancing tree and snake**, which had an arrangement of loose beads at its base. The triangular shape echoed the triangles of the Shri Yantra. Trusting my intuition, I invoked an *altered state* within the space. Each morning I would perform daily rituals of energy clearing through meditation and prayer while reassembling the altar, as visitors would often lose themselves playing with the beads, rose quartz, the branches of the tree and the snake. Energy clearing in the space was necessary for healing to be invoked.

11. connecting spaces

I was honoured to have art students accompanied by some teachers from the National School of the Arts (NSA) to be the first audience to view my exhibition at the TPO on the morning of 19 February 2019, which was also the day of the formal opening of my exhibition. For some time, I had been trying to facilitate opportunities for collaboration between the NSA and the Wits School of Arts (WSOA). A critical first step I thought was to have both institutions explore each other's exhibition spaces. This was accomplished when I used the gallery space at the NSA for one of my master's reviews and by hosting my exhibition at TPO, which is a WSOA exhibition space.





my work displayed at the national school of the arts (nsa) gallery for a studio review in may 2018

12. the opening

Exhibition spaces can feel intimidating, cold, unwelcoming and authoritative. This could be because of our own conditioning, exposure, discomfort or even the ease with which we access such spaces. TPO, being linked to the university, is used specifically for the Wits School of Arts projects which tend to limit the audiences or people that would enter or interact there. However, during an exhibition opening a different atmosphere and experience attracts passersby who feel sufficiently comfortable and curious to venture in.

Having been allocated the space for the period of a month, it gave me the opportunity to understand its location and open it up to as varied an audience as possible. The opening of **states of being ?** further offered an opportunity to activate the space for captivation, contemplation, creation and collaboration.

Two of my collaborators performed a special supporting role. The first, Dr. Tindile Booi, is someone whom I lovingly refer to as my muse. Ever since my re-entry into artmaking she held a very powerful space for me, nurturing the healing possibilities of my creative work. Being a healer, both medically and spiritually, her presence on this opening night created an invigorating and inclusive atmosphere. Zen Marie, my other collaborator, is my supervisor, and he has held a stimulating and courageous space throughout this academic journey, supporting me and my artmaking in the context of the institution. I have chosen to include some excerpts from the opening speeches that shed some light on the nature of our collaborations:

excerpts from the opening

> ... the English is all broken and I keep speaking Xhosa and he keeps speaking English. And I keep speaking in Xhosa and he is speaking in English. And finally I say to him, "Umm...?? And he looks, You speak Xhosa. I've been doing it for a while now. And for me this was particularly important because you have these spaces, you my son, not for any particular reason but that you dress the way you do, you speak the way you do, and you carry yourself the way you do... (applause), thank you. They see a guy. They see that guy. I see that guy ... (laughter). But the very fact that you are born male and black, means there are spaces you will never go into [...]



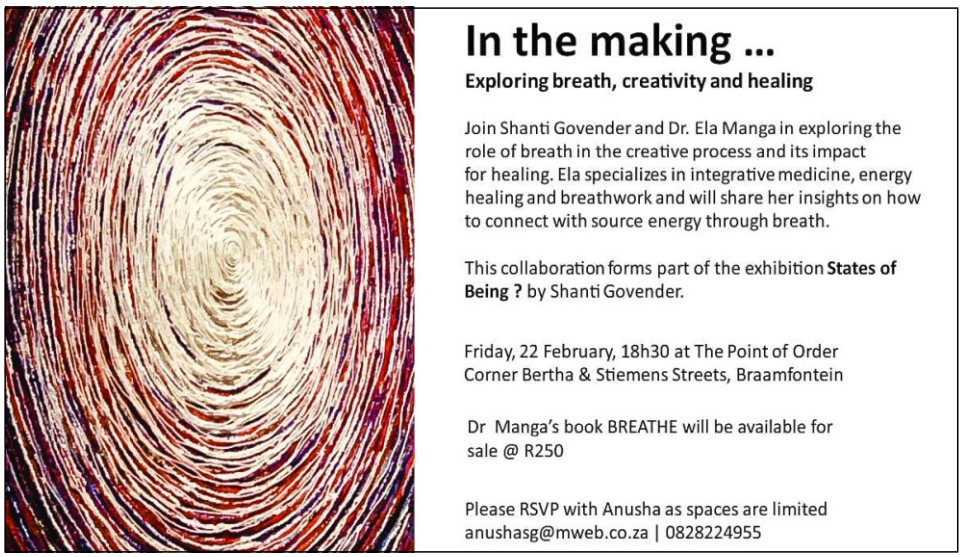
my muse, dr. tindile booi

... I think we need to give it some time to unwind, some time to understand what your words meant. How the word is an invitation to me as a person, as a viewer, as someone who feels and thinks to enter these works. And as Shanti said, I'm her supervisor, which is a very strange and awkward relationship with me and Shanti in relation to these works. I mean there is very little supervising that one can do. The words are a challenge. A challenge to this space. A space haunted by the administration of creativity across the road, the university. Shanti is seeking the pursuit of her masters. It's haunted by that structure but the one definite thing that exceeds all those constraints in such valuable and positive ways. There's something very personal about each of these works and having had access to some of the discussions around them without knowing the people with who she had conversations with, I'm deeply [...]



my supervisor, zen marie

13. breathwork



invitation to the breathwork collaboration with dr. ela manga

"I met Ela, well, through her book. I was in Rosebank with my children. I felt I needed to find a book. Or I felt I needed to find books to help me write about my work. You know, you read through all the philosophy and you read through all the literature that's been researched and you think I'm not finding something that's helping me. And I guess that day when I walked into Exclusive Books in Rosebank and I was looking for something around energy, and consciousness and I saw The Energy Code by Dr. Ela Manga ...".

Excerpt from my introduction of Dr. Ela Manga at the event

Flipping through the pages I paused at a chapter titled, "Conscious Breathing". Sensing a serendipitous moment, I read through the chapter knowing that this discovery was going to have an impact on how I would express and describe my artmaking. Enhancing the serendipity, I soon found out that Dr. Manga's practice was located just five minutes away from my home, at a venue I was quite familiar with called, The Sanctuary. A few days later I had my first breathwork session with Ela, which I can only describe as a phenomenal physical experience of energy. I experienced powerful concentrations of energy in parts of my body which surprisingly, felt similar - just in less intense doses - to the visceral sensations I experience when fully engaged in my creative process. With gratitude to Ela and her integrated healing practices, what I was now knowingly experiencing was authentic energy, "[...] the full expression of natural energy or source energy [...]" that is within me (Manga 2017: 6).

Journal entry of my first breathwork session with Ela.

02-11-2018

I experienced my first breathwork session with Ela today. The process and experience was beyond anything I could have imagined. The simplicity of the process and the intensity of the breathing was extraordinary. My hands, my chest and my head felt overwhelmingly charged. This intense energy that permeated parts of my body felt like pins and needles amplified a thousand times. Whilst following Ela's guidance I travelled to the memory of my mum taking her last few breaths before she left her physical body. Sometime into the session a tear started to form in my left eye which took me to my mom's tear, that one tear which slowly rolled down her left cheek as she inhaled/exhaled her last breath. Reliving this moment through breathing made me feel that this was the moment when I stopped "breathing". At this point tears began to stream down my face and I burst into a sobbing state. As much as my mind could not understand or believe this action, my body needed to do this. I also noticed that when my sobbing began my hands become lighter and I started to feel its physical form and texture again. Whilst in this state I also had visions of my artwork and why I created such pieces. My body/mind/heart intelligence was speaking to me at the time of creating these pieces and I now know that what I do in my practice is to intuitively decode/express those intelligences in the form of these artworks. Other elements of my current artmaking practice also surfaced, specifically the longing to connect and create with the plant, the tree, the flower, its (up)rootedness. The intensity of the energy that travelled through my body is still lingering on as I write this. I am grateful for having had this experience and for the amazing souls I connect with on this journey of healing and becoming. Thank you Dr. Ela Manga!

I revisited Ela hoping to better understand and harness source energy. My consultation with her taught me much about conscious breathing and I have come to realise that in addition to the material, knowledge, technical capability, talent and space required, the way in which our body shows up in the making is of genuine importance, especially if we are to create from a place of originality and authenticity. To share and expand on this novel experience was exciting to me. I contacted Ela asking her to consider collaborating with me at TPO and she enthusiastically agreed. What followed was conceptualised in a way that guided the audience through breathing with self, breathing with each other and breathing with the art.



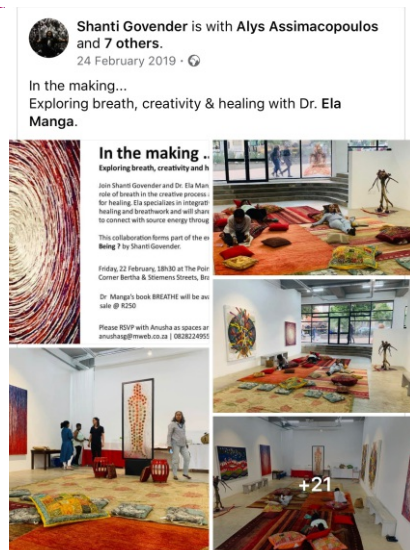












ela guiding participants through breathwork as they stand in front of my work

14. the university space

Professor Sharlene Khan asked if I would meet with her second year fine art students. When the students arrived, Tindile Booi was visiting with her two young daughters. With permission, she initiated an intimate acknowledgement process asking each student to speak their names which she either recited or deliberated on. This was a powerful gesture as the simple act of meaningfully saying one's name creates a sense of being. This name-saying ritual encouraged the group to feel comfortable and open to engaging in the conversations that followed. Many topics were discussed and questions asked relating to the exhibition, my creative process, the materiality of making, aesthetic decisions and sometimes even touching on the special qualities of making - meditation, intuition, ritual and embodiment.



tindile booi acknowledging the students

15. visitors

The location of TPO was ideal for encouraging diverse people into the exhibition space. Surrounded by learning institutions, student residences, places of worship, private and public sector businesses, informal businesses, NGOs, cafes, pubs, homeless shelters and galleries, I found myself welcoming and meeting with various people. The conversations would range from describing my process , to what inspired the artwork, the meaning of the work, the time it took for me to make the work and selling my work. There were times when people just looked at the work, experienced it through touch or by quietly sitting in front of a piece. Sometimes people would come in for a drink of water or a place to sit for respite and unexpectedly find their senses captivated by the space. This captivation was not always directed by the visual; there was an almost palpable energy, an atmosphere of openness and freedom that drew them in and kept them there longer than they intended.

I further activated the energy of the space daily by burning palo santos or incense and chanting healing mantras. I played background meditative music depending on the audience to enhance their experience. This was enabled by me choosing to be personally present or ensuring that someone else could hold the space in a similar way. Reflecting on this, I recognised how *being present* encouraged connections into the lives, feelings and needs of people.

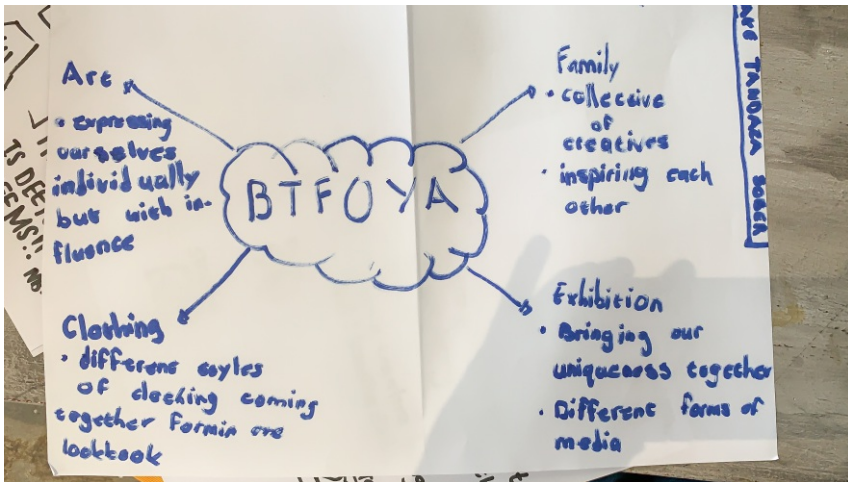
Over time we were faced with the dilemma of whether to keep the front door of the gallery open or closed. TPO is located in a high traffic area filled with dust, fumes and noise. After some deliberation we opted for an 'OPEN, PLEASE COME IN' sign. Even with the sign on, people would still ask for permission to enter, which prompted us to keep the doors open with the sign on, reminding me again of the reticence with which we navigate commercial gallery spaces.

During this period of holding space at TPO, there were in excess of 350 people who visited, some returning a few times, either bringing a new friend along or wanting to talk more about the artmaking. An experience that moved me was when some creatives came into the gallery wanting to showcase their own work by using the space or be part of my exhibition. Most being young artists, they brought in their portfolios, shared their poetry and some left their contact details for possible collaborations. I was humbled by yet others who were interested in finding synergies and points of overlap between my process and theirs, which led to some of them being included in an upcoming event. At the same time, I reflected on the limitations that exist in our current spaces of creativity. Being fortunate enough to have access to TPO for a month, I offered it as a platform to some of them who just needed a space to create in, to be inspired by and offered an audience. One of these opportunities I was blessed with was to provide access to a collective called BTFOYA (bethefaceofyourart), on 3 March 2019, the artists needing a space to come together and talk through their creative ideas. Holding a space for these young creatives while they explored their ideas and made decisions about their future initiatives , at times even inviting me to participate in their process, demonstrated the need for collaborative environments between artists and the broader art community, to create spaces and opportunities of encouragement, support and guidance.

an assemblage of social media posts and photos taken during the month long exhibition,more images and posts can be viewed on my facebook pages: shanti govender or shanti govender art.









Shanti Govender
24 February 2019 ·

Post by **Frank Meintjies**

If you can, make a point of seeing Shanti Govender's new art - on show in a gallery at the corner of Siemert and Bertha, Jhb. Some of the pieces show a progression on earlier work - works that use the form of the body and its insides as a way of depicting what people (women in particular) go through. Psychic and artistic mapping. There are also new strands. I was taken by the media used -- the use of beads and organic material together with paint -- as well as the new concepts and ideas she brings to the fore. Shanti emphasizes art and healing. But the work is not just about points of balance and stillness, but also the gritty processes involved in reaching that deeper understanding and state of grace/balance. In one of the works, the body is like a hardy desert plant, and its spikes are comprised of needles/pins. Shanti explains that the pins are acupuncture needles; ones that were once used in treatment processes. In another, a face is trying to push through a dark substance, to find its expression. Shanti is soft spoken yet her work is bold. The art pieces are much larger than works one normally sees in small galleries. Also, she has curated the space so that each art piece has 'presence'; at the same time, the works are arranged so thay they talk to each other.



Shanti Govender
12 March 2019 ·

Shanti Govender is with **Reshma Chhiba**.
12 March 2019 ·

States of being ? Week 3
It's been another wonderful week connecting and reconnecting with special people at my exhibition. The conversations in the space has been insightful and inspiring.





Shanti Govender

Alys Assimacopoulos added 17 new photos — with **Mary May Wellbeloved** and **2 others**.
2 March 2019 ·

Shanti Govender is an artist to watch. I have seen her exhibition twice. The first time a breathing workshop was held in the venue and the second was at the walkabout, where I was fortunate enough to speak to the artist one on one for quite some time as she spoke of her process and growth through the creation of these ten pieces. It is very seldom that I have been to an exhibition where I was entranced by every piece. It was a privilege to experience this work. It is still there for another week or two. Worth a visit!



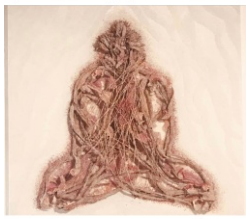
On the tree are dried aloe leaves which remind me of snakes shedding their skins. The wooden snake she had carved as a teenager.

Alys's post



This piece draws you in. She felt it was possibly to be entitled Breathe or balance. During the creation of these works she drew in many artists and thinkers. One of the books and processes which helped her a lot is the book by Ela Manga a Western/Ayurvedic/ Chinese Medical Doctor, entitled now Breathe (at the time she read it it was called The Energy Code)

Alys's post



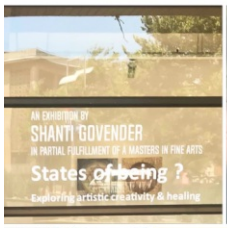
The only work with a title: Stillpoint. It is created from Dried aloe leaves, dried proteas and dead twigs that she picked up from a funeral 600 km away

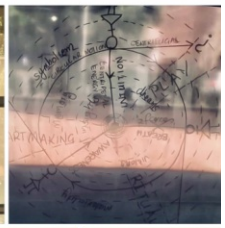
Manda Ananda and 5 others

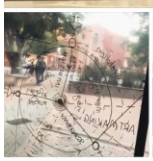
Like Comment

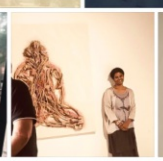


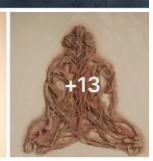
This is all beaded!













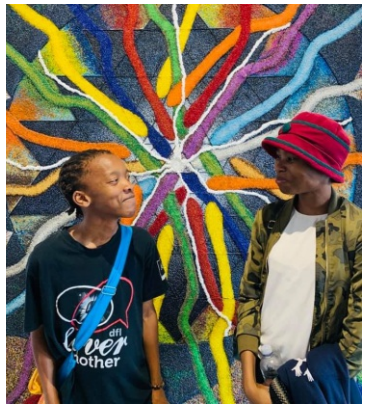




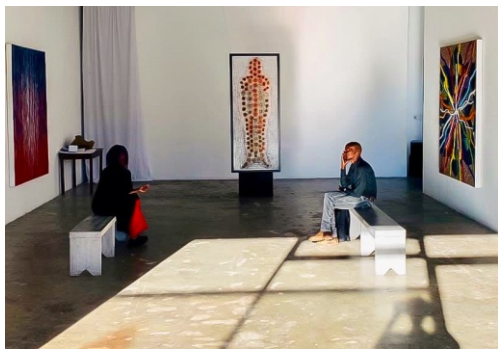




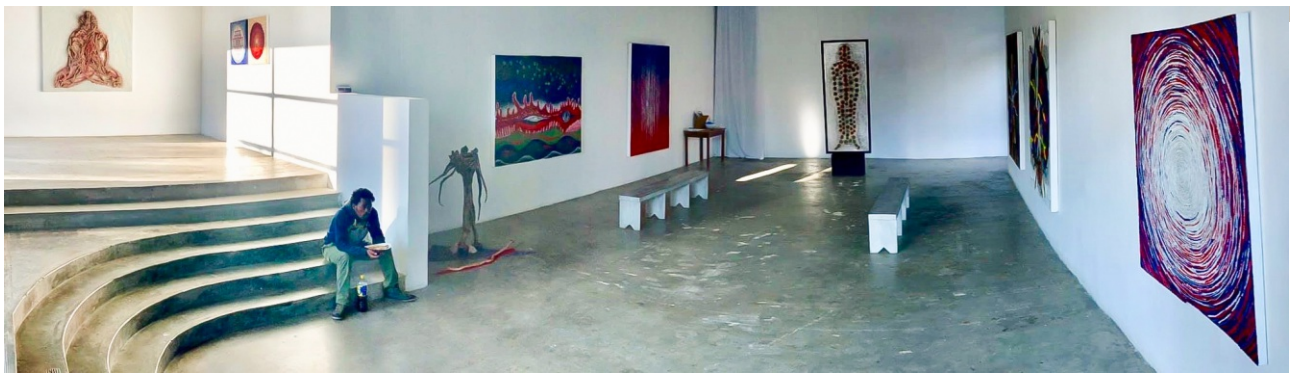


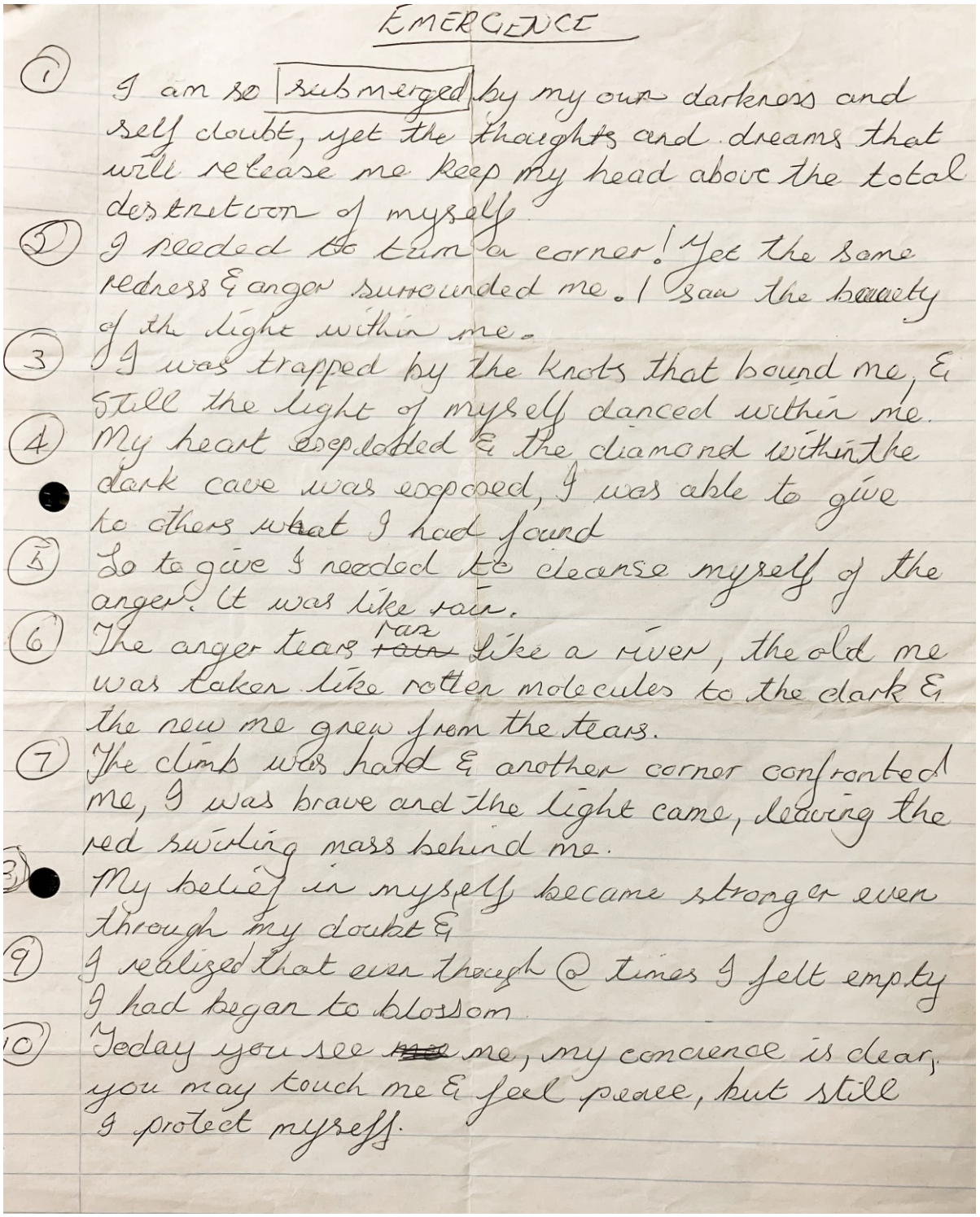








A blessing for me was seeing many who live on the streets or in shelters come into the space. We had brief, intense moments of reflecting on each other's lives. Deep discussions of the artwork would lead to conversations about their own life experiences and at times gave me further insights into my own art making and healing which I had thought I had fully explored. The letter below is from a person living in a woman's shelter. After several visits to the space she wrote her interpretation of each artwork. This was special as her experience of the artwork made her recognise her own internal struggles and helped her unravel the "knot" she felt within her.



EMERGENCE

1) I am so submerged by my own darkness and self doubt, yet the thoughts and dreams that will release me keep my head above the total destruction of myself.
2) I needed to turn a corner! Yet the same redness & anger surrounded me. I saw the beauty of the light within me.
3) I was trapped by the knots that bound me, & still the light of myself danced within me.
4) My heart exploded & the diamond within the dark cave was exposed, I was able to give to others what I had found
5) So to give I needed to cleanse myself of the anger. It was like rain.
6) The anger tears ~~rain~~ tear like a river, the old me was taken like rotten molecules to the dark & the new me grew from the tears.
7) The climb was hard & another corner confronted me, I was brave and the light came, leaving the red swirling mass behind me.
8) My belief in myself became stronger even through my doubt &
9) I realized that even though @ times I felt empty I had began to blossom.
10) Today you see ~~me~~ me, my concience is clear, you may touch me & feel peace, but still I protect myself.

The letter interpreting the exhibition. I have named the artwork on display as per her numbering:

1) remember-release-reintegrate
2) c[ircu]larity
3) genesis
4) bindu
5) convergence
6) her flow
7) balancing tree and snake
8) genesis study
9) bindu study
10) stillpoint

16. creative collaborations

The idea to provide a collaborative platform began to germinate in the later stages of my artmaking and continued to evolve during the early days of the exhibition. In my making I was spiritually and energetically nourished by a community of artists and healers, some of whom were both healer and artist. It is without doubt their knowledge, practices and our shared experiences contributed meaningfully towards my making and the outputs of my creative process. They worked with me in subtle and direct ways which shaped my state of being. To acknowledge their contribution, I invited them to share the space with me. Below are vignettes that capture the programme of events and essence of our collaboration.

creative collaborations invite



dinner

Sharing a home cooked meal with everyone created a convivial, nourishing and relaxed atmosphere. The meal was prepared by Ashika from Fantasia Caterers and an invitation was extended to the public to eat together.



a mantra
Thuli Mdlalose (performer, singer and social activist)

Thuli sang in the international hit musical production African Footprint staged several years ago. Having had an unforgettable experience in this production, she often shared her memories and sometimes even sang in the gallery. Intrigued by her immediate connection to the space, the artwork and myself, I invited her to be part of this event. She wholeheartedly accepted this opportunity, settling her anxieties about singing in front of an audience again. As a way to transition from dinner and conversation into the evening's programme, Thuli sang an ancient sun mantra which she sometimes asked me to play as background music. Later in the programme she also sang African Footprint, and seeing her perform this song with such passion was quite special.

ancient sun mantra lyrics (Mahakatha - Meditation Mantras, 2018)

Om Japa Kusuma Sankasam Kashya peyum mahadyuthim
Thamorim sarva papaghanam pranatosmi divakaram

Translation
I pray to the Sun, the day-maker, destroyer of all sins, the enemy of darkness, of great brilliance, the descendent of Kaashyapa, the one who shines like the japa flower.




a meditation
Dr. Sumayya Ebrahim (healthcare practitioner, having specialized as a gynaecologist and obstetrician)

As my gynaecologist, Sumayya guided me through two inspiring water-birthing experiences. Arriving at my exhibition a day early, it was a sign that she had a role to play in my life once again. We laughed about her early arrival and then engaged in conversation about artmaking and healing. Being a healer, I asked her if she would be a collaborator in an upcoming event. She wholeheartedly accepted by offering to do a healing meditation.

Excerpt from Sumayya's introductory talk...

My name is Sumayya and as you've heard from Shanti, I'm very much involved in her life and we've become friends over the time that we've known each other. And thank you Shanti, you are not performing tonight but you very much a presence all around us and to hold this space and we all get to say our piece. So thank you for that.

When Shanti asked me to be part of this, she said come and talk about healing and so we had a conversation about it and traditionally... so traditionally healing or to heal in my view, means cure. Cure from a disease, an illness, but tonight, I'd like to invite you to consider a very different perspective on healing. A perspective that healing is more of a transformative process, a transformation. A transformation of you - a transformation of who you are, of who you are not. A transformation of being. A rotation so to speak of your consciousness. Of who you are, who you want to be, who you think you are, who you are not. And this transformation, it happens when we encounter an illness...





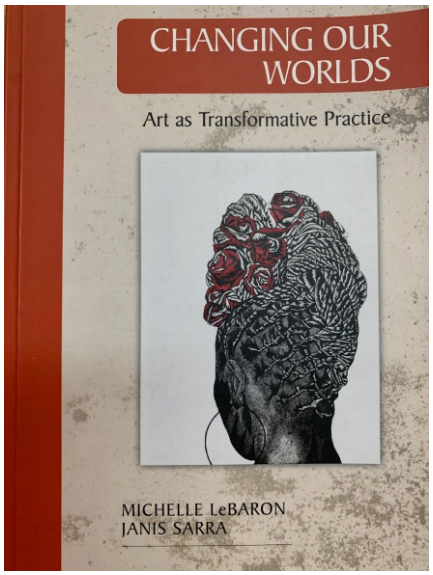
a conversation

Frank Meintjies (poet, writer, social activist and strategic management consultant) and Dr. Lucienne Abrahams (director and senior lecturer at the Wits LINK Centre specialising in matters of digital innovation and digital transformation in African economies and societies)

Frank and I worked many years ago in the public sector environment, and I also attended a few of his poetry readings and events in recent years. I received a text message from Frank one morning asking if I would be at the gallery as he was planning to come through to see the exhibition. I looked forward to reconnecting with him on my creative process. We discussed a project with which he had recently been involved, the result being a book called, *Changing Our Lives - Art as Transformative Practice*. Excited by the theme of the book, I asked Frank if he would be willing to discuss it at the collaborative event I was planning. My friend Luci engaged in a conversation with Frank discussing critical insights from the book.

I found the following insight quite meaningful as it mirrored my own process and reaffirmed my ideas on why I had begun to make art again:

> "Transformative arts practices, by definition, are about re-infusing beauty into parched lives. Beauty is not a goal, but a synchronous discovery of the practices themselves [...] Because these practices are restorative and physically nourishing, they provide developmental scaffolding for re-apprehending meaning. In the aftermath of trauma, previous meanings or ways of making meaning may no longer serve. An unfamiliar arts practice may provide a path both physical and imaginal toward finding new coherence" (LeBaron and Sarra 2018: 13).





a poetic expression of gender identity
Sibusiso Madida (actor, director, writer and poet)

Sibusiso, a visitor to the exhibition, could not hold back from telling me about his own creative processes and experiences. Moved by his passion and determination, in talking about his current directing of a play, I invited him to join this collaborative event. How artists support, encourage and hold spaces for each other became quite significant for me during this time as I encountered many artists, both old and young, who felt that very few opportunities existed for them to be artists, exhibit or perform their work.

The poetry piece performed was called "I'm Watching " focusing on biological sex, gender identification and birth assigned sex.



exploring soul space and intuition
Lynda Lograsso (medium, spiritual teacher, author of Butterflies and Umbrellas and visual artist)

Years after my mother's passing, I decided to reconnect with her through a medium. An artist friend recommended Lynda, and three months later I finally got to meet her. Lynda's extraordinary gift of connecting intuitively and sensorially with souls (energy), fascinated me. Keen to develop the power of one's own senses, I attended a course she facilitated on intuition. This contributed significantly to helping me decipher the subtle messages which showed up in my body. Lynda being involved in artmaking and art therapy herself, took a keen interest in my own work from a perspective of healing. Being reticent by nature she carefully considered my invitation to collaborate. Her participation and presence at this event provided guidance for the audience to explore their own intuition.



sonic healing
Daniel Gray (artist, chief technician and workshop manager at the Wits School of Arts)

I recall trying to assemble an earlier version of **[ener]chi** for a masters group show and it was just not coming together the way I had envisaged. Making a decision to display my work amidst Daniel's installation of sonic sculptures for this show was an idea that had been brewing in me from the first time I experienced his work. Listening to sounds that emanated while Daniel was tuning and testing his installation, I felt a shift in me. I realised that experiencing his sound vibrations had stopped my thinking mind and I was able to assemble **[ener]chi** with ease. Daniel's creations enabled another dimension of experiencing my own work and making. His performance on this night was viscerally exhilarating, transporting many of us into unfamiliar dimensions of sound, space and time. Even as the sounds became too loud and overwhelming in our bodies, it forced me to seek quieter spaces within.





a state of being

Vaishnavi Govender (hypnotherapist, shaman, Enneagram coach, NLP master practitioner and a project management consultant)

Vaishnavi has been my healer in more ways than one. She has helped me understand and explore and heal the different dimensions of my being - working with me energetically on physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions through hypnotherapy and plant ceremonies. I extended an invitation to Vaishnavi to collaborate with the aim of exploring forms of healing connecting the spiritual with the artistic creativity. Below are excerpts from Vaishnavi's talk:

"This is how I started off. Feeling pain, being sad, being disappointed, but being hopeful and that is the journey that we start with in our healing. And today I'm here as a healer - I would say I'm more than a healer - and being a healer allows me to understand, it allows me to accept and to not judge. To understand that everybody is on their own path. Regardless of where that path is or takes you. It's about discovering. It's about remembering. It's about exploring. I think the biggest thing is actually helping to make a difference. It's helping each and every soul that I work with.

And in shamanism, this peace that we are seeking ... is the peace I feel now that I've always been seeking. In the end, regardless of whether you are walking in the street, sitting in a four-cornered office or whether you are sitting alone on your bed, there is a peace that permeates inside of you, that is just an internal part of your being. Whenever I walk in here (indicating TPO), I always tell Shanti, "Your paintings actually change their states of being all the time", it really does. I walk inside and I see something new. It's being in a new way today. The sound will play and it's changed again. We're ever-changing, ever constant, and our dream is just about remembering."

I also include here a poem by Vaishnavi that elaborates on a particular state of being

Peace

Peace is what I sought since the beginning of this insufferable existence.
Peace is what I craved for in my world of psychosis.
Peace, I cried for thee in my hours of dire pain.
I yearned for that which eluded me since the beginning of my many unknown lives.

Peace, my saviour, my soul,
the wildflowers that charismatically run along riverbeds,
the sumptuous candy floss clouds that move gingerly across the dazzling skies,
that quiet cat that stalks past my window in the wee hours of the night,
the giggling sounds of the secret brook that exists within the tangled maze of my garden,
the afternoon cricket calls, welcoming the impending dusk,
the mischievous laughter of the children in the streets,
the army of ants marching in silent unison up my bathroom wall...'

Why could I not infuse them in my being... let their peace permeate into my mind,
settle my boundless thoughts,
calm my senses like a potent drink.
Peace, my music,
Peace, my language,

Peace, my pleading,
Peace, my longing,
Peace, my suffering.

Peace is what I have sought, what I will continue to seek ...and that which I will attain,
be it in death or in life.




energy flow
Lee Jardine (martial arts professional, teacher and artist)

I first met Lee at his final undergraduate group show, where I experienced his mesmerizing performance of Tai Chi. His extraordinary ability to draw and direct energy through martial arts was a unique and energizing experience in the Wits Art Museum. We met again during my exhibition, and there was an instant connection as we recognised the similarities in our artmaking processes. The drawing and directing of energy in his practice of martial arts revealed aspects of my own process , especially when holding postures for long periods of time, using my core strength and focused breathing. Lee moved meditatively through a series of Tai Chi movements, mesmerising and energising the audience. Below is an excerpt from Lee's introduction:

So, when I came to Shanti's space, there was this incredible energy and I think that this idea of a state of being, I always think about those hidden moments and all these moments that we have that really makes us special and who we are. I only met Shanti last week and you know it was in that small moment that we had, for some reason we just had a very strong connection. So I would like to, well first, thank you Shanti for allowing all of us to share our moments with you and please I would like to share one more moment with you.




poetic expression of love
Shelley Barry (award-winning filmmaker, poet and lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Johannesburg)

My connection and collaboration with Shelley began in 2016, when she agreed to screen her film, *Trinity of Being* at my second exhibition ***from body to being***. That exhibition focused on moving beyond our physicality and physical limitations in exploring our being. Having spent time with Shelley I came to understand and admire her originality and ease with which she is able to create and write. Shelley has and continues to create work that is meaningful and authentic to me. Being an appreciative supporter of my creative process and artwork, Shelley offered her poetic expression of love at this collaborative event.

A poem by Shelley

beads

my spine/wounded
jutting
raised

your hands flutter on my skin
i pull inside like a tortoise
your whisper thrills as you say
my bones-
feel like beads
decorating my back





poetic embodiment through dance
Reshma Chhiba (visual artist, dancer and exhibitions coordinator at TPO, Wits School of Arts)

At the beginning of this master's research I had planned to write about the artmaking processes of other artists in addition to my own. Reshma was one of those artists I had identified in my proposal. During my initial research I read her masters dissertation and was struck by her poem on Kali. Working with the energy and consciousness of Shiva, I was drawn to her embodied expression of Kali in both her artwork and dance performances. Having communicated my interest in how she worked with the energy and divine femininity of Kali, Reshma considered performing her poem in relation to some of my artwork. Her powerful performance of Kali left the audience mesmerized.

The poem recited and performed by Reshma

The ferocious face of the black goddess imprints itself on my retina
leaving a rapturous after effect.
From my halo of flames and an eruption of red garlands
emerges the beautiful and mysteriously radiant, dark goddess.
To she, who is the eternal light and the eternal darkness.
To she, who is devoid of form, the great illusion.
Vast and expansive. Space itself.
Vast and expansive, like the kala pani, the dark waters frosted by my ancestors.
To she, who is both great nurturer and the slayer of demons, black, naked, unbridled,
bedecked in skulls, swords, demonic heads and pots of blood.
Her blood-stained tongue outstretched in provocation.
To she, who stands on the chest of the supine Shiva,
and in her bloodthirst, straddles him into being, on the burning grounds.
Salutations to they, whose dualities vanishes as they merge into oneness.
Salutations to she, the endless void from which we are birthed and into which we fold back.
The great devouress of time, Maha Kali.





closing

Dr. Tindile Booi (healthcare practitioner having specialised in psychiatry, obstetrics and gynaecology)

Always being present and often playing a vital role in my artistic events, Tindile sang a song of gratitude. This event was made very special by the diverse and meaningful collaboration of each performing artist and healer. Feelings of community, co-creating and compassion devoid of competition, unfolded and expanded throughout the night. Drawing the event to a close required a special voice accompanied by drumming. A melodious gratitude was delivered in Tindile's unique way channeled through her greater wisdom.

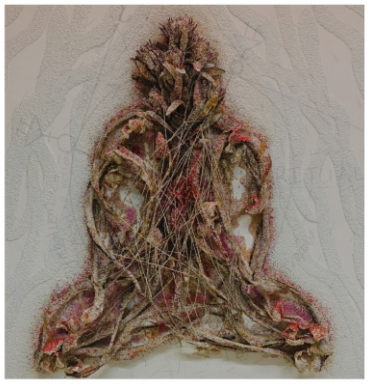




17. creative meditation

In the early days of the exhibition, while walking from the parking lot (at WSOA) to TPO, my senses were awakened by all that I saw around me. Groups of young students chatting between classes, street vendors, car guards gesturing and workers hurrying by or sitting down to eat and others engaging in activities like gambling and drinking alcohol. A vivid memory one morning was seeing a few students drinking beer. Being rather curious and captivated by this sight, I started a conversation with them, trying to understand why they felt the need to consume alcohol at such an early hour of the day. One of the students drunkenly and enthusiastically shouted out that perhaps if he learnt to meditate, he wouldn't resort to such extreme measures to suppress his worries and stress. This unexpected response was both thought-provoking and inspiring. Walking into the gallery I churned his response, wondering if offering meditation could be a possibility.

This led to me hosting a meditation event on the last day of my exhibition. Supported by the local Braamfontein community of students, security guards, car guards and people living in nearby shelters, who frequented the TPO during my exhibition, I distributed flyers in and around the area. Sister Pratiba from the Brahma Kumaris Centre in Observatory eagerly agreed to collaborate with me, to make this experience possible. We started our session talking about meditation and once the attendees had shared their views and asked their questions, Sister Pratiba led a guided meditation bringing us into our own meditative state of being. The meditation, initiated by a provocation, had a meaningful impact on everyone present. It created a space for sharing our own personal experiences of quieting the mind. The opportunity to be quiet together, to enter into a state of presence while holding each other in our silence and stillness brought a peaceful closure to this exhibition experience.



States of being ?
Exploring artistic creativity & healing

CREATIVE MEDITATION WORKSHOP

Wanting to meditate but not knowing how to begin. Join us for some insights and a guided meditation experience with Sister Pratiba (Brahama Kumaris, Johannesburg)

Saturday, 16 March, 11h00 for 11h30 until 13h00
The Point of Order, Wits University
Corner Bertha & Stiemens Streets, Braamfontein







sister pratiba daya, from the brahma kumaris in observatory, leading the discussion and meditation

Excerpts from the talk and discussions facilitated by Sister Pratiba at the ***CREATIVE MEDITATION WORKSHOP***

I think our human experiences are very similar in some ways. It's an individual journey but it's very similar. There were two things that were coming to me (referring to ***genesis*** *and* ***bindu****). One was from entanglement to clarity. You go through that point when it's unclear what's next, how to make sense of our surroundings. How do I make sense of what's happening around me? How do I claim my own pathway? How many of us feel that the world is telling us to be something, but it doesn't feel right for me. And so how do I create and navigate my own path within all of this? So that kind of entanglement is something that we can all resonate with and I actually think it is a necessary part of our journey. We need to find ourselves in the bigger picture of things. And so, from that (gesturing to* ***genesis****) to getting to that (gesturing to* ***bindu****), that's the journey, because I think that's a very important process. Entanglement, chaos, uncertainty, sometimes we resist this.*

How do you deal with chaos? *What is our usual response? To resist it. Block it off right? Go into isolation. Withdraw from it all. Dismiss it, ignore it. Pretend it doesn't happen and put it under the carpet. Medicate. Some of us are very action orientated so we try to pull up our sleeves and fix it. But one big lesson that I learnt in my own journey was to welcome the chaos. It's a bit of a paradox but actually, welcome the chaos. Welcome the uncertainty. Because as I hold it and as I am with it and as I work through it, it actually is fertile space for creativity. Because it's in that space where it's not very clear. It's in that space where it's not going as I think it should that it gives birth to something powerful and beautiful. Something new, something real, something deeper, something meaningful. But to allow for that process that's where I found the practice of meditation very, very useful and so that second picture (****bindu****) for me is what meditation represents. Because what it is, it's about, from the outside going in. Coming into my centre. Coming into being and connecting with my centre.*

So what is meditation? *Meditation actually means to heal. We've been so engaged with our physical realities, our physical bodies, which actually is a reflection of what's happening in the mind, what's happening in our inner world. So the starting point for meditation is really about becoming more aware. Everything starts with awareness. It's about what am I focusing on to create or focusing attention on. Whatever I focus my attention on, I tend to make visible. And so one area of our life that we have never really often given attention to or created awareness of is what is happening inside. We process and analyse the world around us, but we don't often reflect and understand the world within us. So the mind really is a reflection of what I'm absorbing.*

So the first step of meditation is, you need to relax. I use breath to help me relax. Breath is a very simple, immediate process. It just helps us, as we become more conscious of breath it helps us to slow down and when we just take deeper breaths, it helps us to relax. When we relax, we give ourselves space then to actually turn inward and start thinking about ourselves inside. Then we learn to observe. Observe the mind. Because the mind is telling you what's pulling your attention. What's stimulating me. What's leaving impressions in me. And most times when we are not observing, I'm identifying. Meaning that I'm absorbing. You know sometimes we're in a space and there's different vibrations, there's different things happening. You may not even have time to process it but what's happening is, you are being stimulated and one way or another we end up absorbing it. And then when we absorb it, we identify with it. It begins to influence our emotions. It begins to influence our thinking patterns.

The secret to observing and not absorbing is, don't judge it. See it for what it is. Just understand that it is there. And then we take it a step further from there. So as I observe it, who is it that is observing? Is there an intelligence within which I am observing? I am an intelligence within that actually creates my thoughts. My thoughts are my creation. And when I begin to understand and recognise this process, that I am the creator of my thoughts, which means that I am not subjected to my thoughts. But I have a choice because I am the creator *of my thoughts. So this inner energy, this deeper intelligence, this subtler energy is where the practice of Raja*

Yoga meditation comes in. We help people to come back to this awareness that we are not matter and we are not the many roles that we have to play. We are not the many labels that are attached to us but that we are a consciousness and this consciousness is a subtle energy and this consciousness is intelligence. And this consciousness is love.

And so what I really loved when I looked at this artwork (gesturing to ***bindu****), this picture that represents clarity, purpose and sense of awareness and in the middle is this crystal. And for me that crystal encapsulates our essence which is clear. Our essence is one and our essence is peaceful. So the soul for us is peace, is light, is the subtle energy.*

We speak about there being five qualities that define the soul. Peace, power, purity, love and joy. When I return to that core again, to that stillness again, I'm reconnecting with what's most powerful within me. And that power begins to express itself. One is that when I return to a place of peace it begins to activate and emerge the wisdom that is within the soul. The creative energy that is within the soul. Real power is creative energy. Real power is the capacity to transform, to give birth, to elevate, to give beauty, to emerge beauty, to recognise beauty.

The quality that relates to that inner essence is the quality of love. Love is the highest expression of the soul and when we express that love and are being that love, which we are, it makes us feel whole. And it enables us to feel connected and it's that sense of connectedness that actually gives a sense of meaning to everything that we do. Bliss is that state of being where the self is completely free. No matter what we are doing in life, ultimately, we seek this state of being. State of being when we are completely free. When we feel completely whole.

I want to use here an example of Victor Frankl who was a neurologist and he was also imprisoned during the holocaust, in one of the camps. And [...] when he wrote his biography especially his experiences during the holocaust, it's very interesting his reflections because he observed one thing among his fellow prisoners. Those who survived were the ones who actually had a reason to survive. So it wasn't necessarily related to the physical strength of their bodies. It was related to the strength of the will. They had something meaningful to live for. And in his own experiments he realised that irrespective of the conditions that they were in, he had a capacity to create a different condition within himself. He didn't have to allow the external conditions that he found himself in, to dictate his internal conditions, his internal world, his internal state of being. And so that's the power we want in our being. And that's the capacity we want in our being. That irrespective of where we find ourselves, etc, we can create an inner state that's based on what we choose to focus on. We choose to give energy on. So for me meditation is that. I'm choosing my space to give attention to me, to empower, to strengthen, to emerge, to experience that peace that is created within me.

Meditation helps us to live from the inside, out. We tend to live from the outside in. The world is telling me how I need to see myself and how I need to feel about myself. And what I need to do and how I need to think about myself. And what is my work. But through meditation you are reversing the process and say, I create, I focus, I give attention to an aspect of myself that is sacred and when I reconnect with that feeling and I bring that out to the world. So it's inside out that I respond to the world and in that way it takes a very strong foundation of self-worth. And it's out of that self-worth that irrespective of the challenges that I face there is a resilience. There is a resilience that comes from connecting with the strength that is within me. Because the way we are conditioned to think is that we are nothing and we have to become something.

According to our understanding the subtle energy is most concentrated in the centre of the forehead.

Sometimes if you engage in spiritual literature you may hear of the third eye. It's not like there is a physical eye there. It's the most concentrated energy of the soul in the space there and why it is specifically in that space is because through the vibration of the soul we influence our brain which is the organ which controls the whole body. So coming back to the centre, coming back to the point of this energy, as we understand it, is in the centre of the forehead.

Through meditation you can experience an altered state of awareness. I'll share my own personal experience and that is that when one begins to focus on this awareness of the self as consciousness, as energy, as this light, and you step into that state of peace, the stillness of being that energy, you do feel a sense of separation from your environment but also separation from your body in a way. And it's an interesting experience that I had when I went into that state of just being a soul was that I felt separate from everything and yet connected to everything. Because at a spiritual level you feel connected but physically you feel you are not bound by this. Your sense of awareness is more expanded. So that was a personal experience.

I want to share also the experience of a woman that had a near death experience which she described in her book, "Dying To Be Me". She had an advanced stage of cancer and had slipped into a coma. The doctors thought that she had about three days left and even discussed with her that her organs were slowly failing and she was going to die. She shares the experience that in that state of coma, she was completely aware. She was aware of the doctors and the discussion with the family. She was aware of her brother who was catching a plane to fly to where she was. She was also aware of her father who had passed on and his presence. It was almost like physically she was there, but her experience and her awareness were not confined to that place. So that was a very powerful experience that the state of the soul is not limited and I'm not limited. We do have a more expanded experience of who we are.

One practice that I also like is journaling and what I'm doing when I'm journaling is that I'm just affirming. The mind has a certain capacity and sometimes when you release it onto paper, you are creating an ability or an opportunity to be here. It creates space and that space helps you to then observe and detach from your thinking. So, I find journaling a very useful way of undoing the congestion in the mind in a way and creating a mental space for you. And in that space you can then begin to think for yourrself.

Another practice which is a useful one is, what we call, traffic control. Traffic control creates moments in your day when you just take an opportunity to pause and become peaceful. You just take an opportunity to breathe and pause and tap into stillness in your day. And so a practice like that also helps you to then not get too tense and absorb the stress too much but to help yourself to almost manage your energy differently.

The way we understand it, is that the original state of the soul is goodness, is purity but what happens is because of bad conditioning what we begin to do is, we begin to move away from that innate awareness of ourselves and we begin to create an identity of ourselves based on various influences of our environment. And that identity which I create of myself that's based on circumstance, that's based on environment, that's based on experience, that's based on influences, is what I call the ego identity. So it's that ego identity that then feels a need to accumulate, to control, to have power and if we look at the world today, we see some of the destructive energy that's a reflection of this ego identity. The ego identity ignores the sacredness of life. It's that ego identity that gives birth to greed, to arrogance, to anger, to fear,

The insight was that light doesn't have a shadow. Shadow is only cast when you put something in front of the light. And for me that was very significant. The innate self is that light but yes, in a way, in the way we contextualise ourselves, the way we engage with our world, the way we are conditioned, we put things around that and define ourselves and that casts its shadows. But in knowing that the innate self is this pure light

energy, part of our journey is also embracing the shadows. So it's not denying them or dismissing them. It's knowing that I created a shadow as a way of surviving or coping or engaging or fitting in or whatever the case may be, and that it's when I embrace that part of me as well, that is to say, I've learnt this and because I've learnt this it's served me in a way. But I have a choice now whether I want it to continue serving or do I find another way of serving myself. So that's how I embrace that. It's not about shutting out that part of us but understanding that it's a way, it's a learnt experience and I have a choice whether I want to hold onto it or I want to shed it.

When I talked about from the inside out, from here (touching forehead) and from my centre, I play my roles, I give expression, I use my creativity, I use my skills, everything. Where the entanglement comes sometimes is that we make what we do, to measure ourselves. Or how others see us. We use that as a way of measuring and valuing ourselves and that's where all the emotion is. That's the ego identity. So when I come back to centre and say I am, and I am a soul, this is what I share and it's how I share. It's from that point of being centred that I give expression to that energy in my doing. I mean, Shanti's art is her very lovely reflection of that. Centre you in you and then give expression to this. If we don't do it that way then what happens is we get caught up with, "How will this be taken?", "How is it appreciated?" , "Will this be the right thing?", and those kinds of thinking and thoughts which are coming from the ego self, blocking the real power and capacity of the soul.

I want to share one story. Benjamin Zander is a teacher, and a conductor of an orchestra. He teaches music and in working with his students he noticed one thing. Sometimes he sees his students coming with so much potential but something is blocking that potential and he recognised that it's really about how we tend to measure ourselves, how good we are that actually blocks the real potential and creative energy. So his wife, a human resource specialist, who he works with, said that everyone walks into that class with one thing in mind, I must get an A. So she said, okay, when you walk into the door of your class the first day give them all an A. So what does that do? It eliminates this comparison and competition and then you ask them to reflect why you got the A. And so it meant that the students were with themselves inside as to what their creative gift was and how to give expression to it without this element of how am I perceived? How am I being judged? How am I being measured? It's the pure expression of the self. And that unleashed the potential that he didn't see before.

There is so much in us that is waiting to create something wonderful and beautiful and if we believe and know how to work from that space inside ourselves. And not this ego identity that we are so limited by in really connecting with essence. There is power and there is beauty in this.

What stops me from being free in my creative expressions

Why do I take so long to get going...

How do I master my body

These habits constrain me, this body constrains me

I wish to be free.....

How do I remain in a connected state of being when I create.... why all the interruptions, I become exhausted before I go. back. It almost like I've got to bribe my senses with sound, smells, tastes to get it to align with my soul purpose in order to create. And then my mind starts to sabotage this process by bringing to the fore all the things I need to do, the distractions come flooding in... When will I be able to master my mind, body, soul aligment and connection so that I can be my most creative self at any point in time. Baba please help me flow...

part four

exploring process, practice and states of being

When embarking on this creative exploration, I did not anticipate the emergence of a creative process model. My intention was to capture insights and experiences of my creative practice focusing on, but not necessarily documenting, a conceptual model of my creative process. When compiling the introspective account of my artmaking (part two - in the making), the patterns of making revealed themselves and I was intrigued by this discovery.

18. reflecting on process

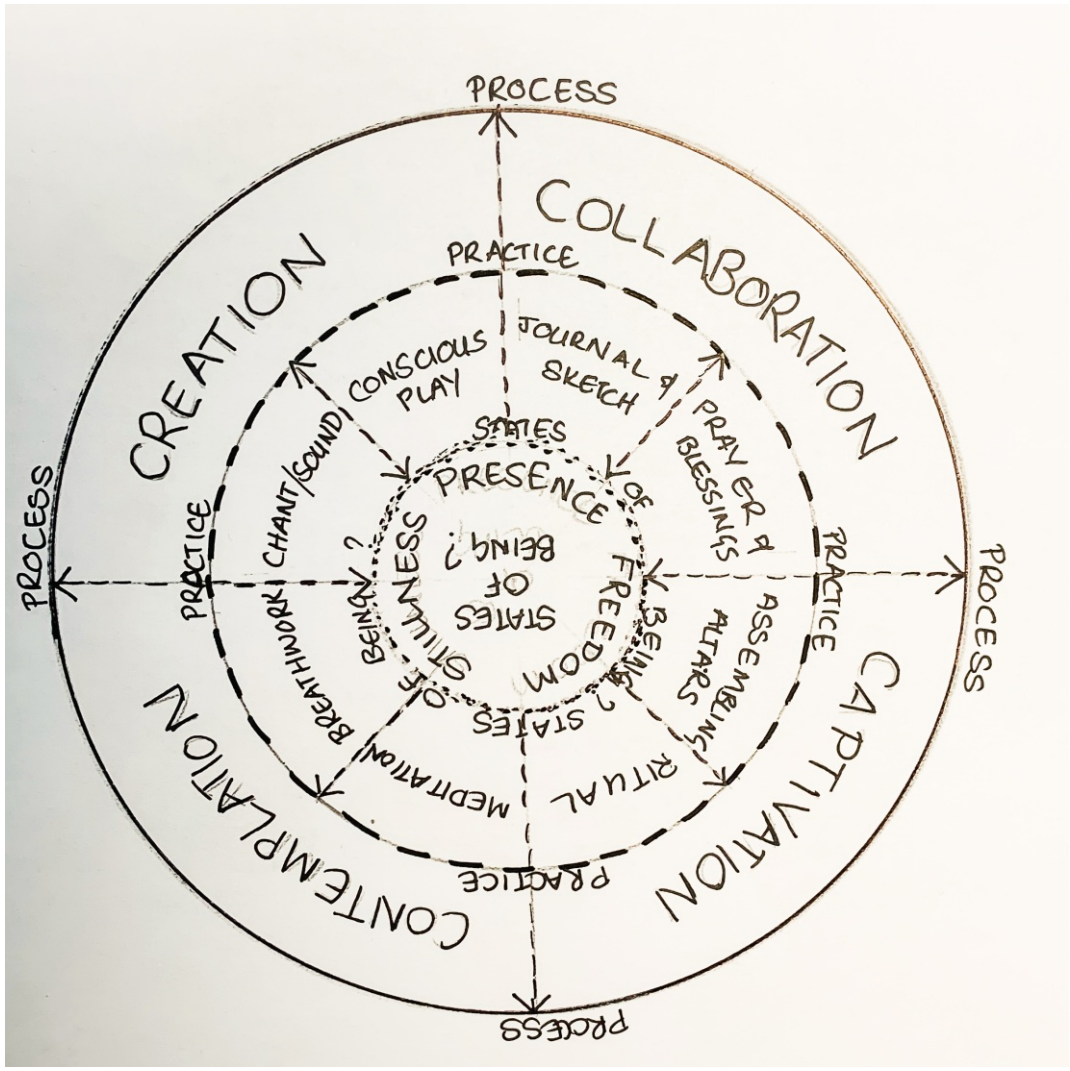
Looking back, I recognise that the creation of each artwork almost always began with a moment of **captivation**. A captivation spurred on by being in awareness of or present to a sighting, a dream, a vision, a message, a memory or even a material. It would manifest as a feeling, an internal knowing or a visceral desire that demanded my attention.

Once captivated, I would enter a period of **contemplation**. In this contemplative state my captivation is internalised through reflection and meaning making, assessing its value and finally trusting it to propel me towards creation.

Armed with these insights and wisdom, I am then able to activate my process of **creation**. I don't often know the next steps of my process or have a well-defined concept, idea or vision, but what I do have at this stage is a powerful sense of knowing which enables me to make courageously and authentically. The externalization of my internal state can, at times, be a struggle as I come to terms with the essence of my captivation and contemplation. Drawing on past, present and future states I enter on a journey of making, that in essence makes me.

Reflecting on all the work that was created during this period of study, it is clear that my ability to intuit and contemplate the sightings, dreams, visions, messages, memories and material were significant contributors to not only my own making, but also to my healing and wellbeing. Being privileged with phenomenal and powerful experiences in my work begged for the inclusion of a broader platform for sharing and further exploration. This led to **collaboration** being the final stage of my creative process with artists, healers and other creatives synchronistically showing up in my space and captivating each other.

In time I came to see clearly that these four stages of my creative process followed a sequential, cyclical and, at times, even an iterative flow.



conceptual map of my creative process, practices and states of being

other creative process models

Recognising and documenting my creative process and associated practices, I became interested in what other creative process models offered. The table below outlines a few models of the creative process that interested me. I assessed these models to examine possible similarities and differences relative to my own processes as discussed.

table 1: examples of creative process models

Author	Stages of the creative process					
Wallas (1926)	Preparation	Incubation	Illumination	Verification		
	Information gathering and analysis	Unconscious processing of information	An insight or breakthrough moment or sudden appearance of the creative solution (Aha! moment)	Validation of the creative solution – has the challenge/ problem been resolved		
Runco (1997)	Orientation	Incubation	Illumination	Verification	Communication	Validation
	An intense interest and curiosity leading to information gathering	Conscious or unconscious processing of information in search of a solution	Excitement, openness and divergent thinking	Own evaluation and comparison of the creative solution in the field	Expert evaluation of the creative solution based on quality and usefulness	Society's validation of the creative solution
Mace & Ward (2002)	Artwork Conception	Idea Development	Making the Artwork	Finishing the Artwork		
	Could entail a vague concept or feeling becoming clear or a clear vision in the form of an image. This could be an implicit or explicit idea	Includes activities like decision-making, problem-solving, information gathering and experimentation, all directed towards structuring an artwork	The artwork moves from a conceptual idea to a physical reality	Artists evaluation of the artwork deciding if it is acceptable, requires postponement, abandonment or destruction		
Botella et al. (2013)	Idea or vision	Documentation and reflection	First Sketches	Testing forms or Ideas	Provisional object or draft	Final work or series
	Usually triggered by an image, a sight or a sound that resonates with the artist	Careful consideration of incomplete visions or the gathering of information about material and technologies to realise the vision	First attempts to give the artwork a material form. Could be in the form of a drawing or model	An extended period of testing the forms and ideas that originated from the reflection and first sketches	The tests of making and remaking, perfecting features of the artwork and evaluating of the creation by the artist	The first object giving form to the vision could be followed by a series of variations

The first stage of my creative process, captivation, can in some ways be compared to the stages of preparation, orientation, conception or vision as defined in the above-mentioned models. In the case of Botella et al., (2013) this idea or vision is triggered by a sight or a sound that resonates with the artist. Based on my own experience, I feel that this initial stage is more of an embodied resonance, a captured resonance that cannot escape until it is resolved.

I am captured by a desire that speaks to my entire body and not just my mind. I then begin my process, trusting wholly in this captivation. I stay in this feeling of captivation; it is visceral and thought provoking, it churns and hovers until it becomes impressed within me, an impression that has the magnitude to keep me captivated throughout my making, even when obstacles, negativity or doubt start to creep in. Captivation opens itself to an exploration of something necessary, which may not always be known to me at the time but stays with me until its resolution.

In the second stage of my creative process, contemplation, I sit with this captivation. I hold the fragments of the thoughts, ideas, visions or materials of my captivation, consciously contemplating them, while engaged in practices underlying my creative process. I meditate on these fragments with the intention of deciphering their meaning and receiving guidance on transforming them into visual expressions. Even when these insights don't immediately make sense to me or seem unrelated, the fact that they came to me, matters. I explore and play with them in ways that activate my sensory body in action, beginning my process of creation.

Referring to the creative models tabled above, contemplation can be compared to the stages of incubation, reflection, ideation or even preparation, where there is a conscious and unconscious processing of information to devise solutions or strategies for structuring and planning the art to be realised. My reference to this stage as contemplation is quite significant in the sense that it embodies a quality of meditation through which my captivation is internalised. It is a process that does not necessitate working out the art object but rather it is about expanding the meaning of the captivation on a personal or biological level. What does it mean? Where in my body does this impression sit? What sensations do I feel? This kind of embodied meaning making is an intensive internal germination of an expression guided by the body's wisdom and intelligences, and in some ways is congruent with the processes of incubation. If not germinated consciously these insights disappear as quickly as they appear. The contemplation creates a kind of permanence, allowing enough time for meaning to be recognised and realised.

The conversion of the concept to a physical reality is what Mace and Ward (2002) refer to as "making the artwork". Botella et al. (2013) break this process down further into four stages: first sketches, testing forms and ideas, provisional object or draft and final work or series. Reflecting on my own process I refer to this stage as creation. Guided and enabled by the practices underlying the creation of the artwork, my contemplated captivation is actualized and activated, revealing expressions, vital insights and meaning. Energized by an internal knowing, I create consciously and in this process, I learn continuously, as I don't always create in the same way. The creation is dictated or informed primarily by the medium and materials as well as my state of being. I venture courageously into necessary struggles and tensions of my making knowing fully that they have a purpose with or without a plan. What remains significant in the creation of the artwork are the practices underlying my making and how these contribute significantly to my state of being.

With reference to the process models, my final stage of collaboration refers to what Runco (1997) defines as stages of validation and communication of the creative solution. In my view, validation and communication happen throughout the process of creation, not only at the end stage. I would often invite audiences, participants or friends who visited to either participate in my process or share their experience of the work in progress. I consciously tested my subjective knowledge, even if I chose to discard the feedback given to me. During this master's programme this was done through studio reviews where I had to show, describe or explain my in-progress work, inviting feedback, guidance or advice.

When I reflect on the period after my creation is complete, I consider the conditions required for my work to speak. Once an artwork is made, it has to assume responsibility for its own voice. Hence, the process of collaboration resonated strongly with me in my own practice. Audience collaboration, rather than audience validation seemed radical especially if the body of work had specific messages to communicate. Being grounded and authentic to my creative process, the input by a trained or authoritative eye was welcome but validation through that eye was not necessary.

I remember my body's visceral responses vividly when my artwork was being validated during my undergraduate years. There would be an intense nervousness, anxiety and even fear that would creep into my gut in the days leading to the review. These reviews being the institution's process of validating the students'

creative process and products triggered those feelings again during my first master's studio review. Even though these reviews did not have the same atmosphere or create conditions for nervousness and fear to grow, the mere fact of having trained or authoritative eyes giving critique on what may be expressions of personal vulnerabilities or explorations created a sense of discomfort. This reason, among others, encouraged me to make an important decision during my final showing of my work. A message from my internal universe was to provide a collaborative space rather than a non-interactive viewing and experiencing of the artwork. The artist being present was necessary for the work to fully perform its responsibility.

My examination of similarities and differences of existing process models relative to my own, has led me to believe that these stages are researched and reported on in a controlled or scientific manner, whereby the researchers attempt to understand or perceive the artists' method and experiences at various stages of their creative process. Tools and techniques used to extract data and information to construct meaning and communicate this meaning is summarized as general results or findings. These results in turn become authorities that define and shape the processes of how one should be taught to think and act when creating. It is my hope that the creative process and its underlying methodologies and knowledge systems be researched and communicated more widely by artists themselves, using methods of practice-based research and autoethnography to make this possible.

19. reflecting on practices underlying my creative process

As stated earlier, the practices I adopted during my creative process have become essential to my process of working. The term practices implies repetitive performances that aid one to attain recurrent, habitual or routine mastery of certain actions or behaviours (Jarzabkowski: 2004). These practices can exist on their own and are not necessarily artistic activities, however, they are performed intentionally for the enrichment or enhancement of the creative process and product. In some instances, it may be the material or medium of the artwork that gives rise to, or demands, a particular practice and in other instances it may be the practice that determines the material or medium. Practices that either emerged from my artmaking or that I intentionally integrated from my spiritual practice. According to Stroud (2016), practices require time, dedication and a focused approach and they enhance not only the creative process, but the quality and efficacy of the work is also enhanced. The following are practices that I adopted in my artmaking:

- **ritual**
  Performing ceremonious activities like cleansing my space to clear energy is a practice that I often perform in my home to feel intimate with and connected to the space. My studio being an extension of my home became the locus of this cleansing and clearing, seeing that most of my hours were spent in this space, making. When doing this I use aids like incense, spiritual music and sounds to activate my senses. The cleansing and clearing of the space is actually a cleansing and clearing of energies within myself. The externalization of this act actually works on my internal space. I begin to feel connected again with the studio space and in that state of connection I can start to create again. I have always had difficulty working in spaces that I felt no connection with or if the energy of the space felt heavy or stagnant. Thus, these daily rituals became a necessary daily practice of grounding myself whenever I arrived in my studio to work.

- **meditation and conscious breathwork**
  My mind, being constantly barraged by thoughts entering and exiting it, often needed quieting. A quieting that makes me feel and receive the messages from my internal universe. Catching and releasing wasteful thoughts, sometimes with my gaze fixed on Shiva Nataraja, and other times with my eyes closed, I breathe consciously, slowly becoming present in my body.

- **chanting and sounds**
  When engaged in the process of making I am very aware of my body's vibrational state. When in a low state I find it quite difficult to engage in the creative process as it often leads to doubts, negative thoughts and my making feels disconnected and energetically draining. When in a higher vibrational state my mind and body work harmoniously and I can create with ease, feeling connected to my process and energized. In a high vibrational state viscerally charged messages reach my awareness and I am able to use these messages to inform and support my process. To heighten my vibrational state, I chant mantras or sacred sounds and at times I use Tibetan singing bowls, drums or chimes. The chanting and sounds resonate through my entire body physiologically altering my vibrational state.

- **conscious play**
  Dissanayake (2002: 75, 77) argues that "play is self-rewarding" and that it "is intrinsically rewarding 'in itself', and not for the sake of an extrinsic goal," such that it encourages behaviours that are "spontaneous and unpredictable, unlike strongly motivated serious behaviours which tend to follow a predictable, almost programmed sequence." I imagine the materials coming alive and finding their place on the canvas or any surface I am working on. We have lengthy conversations about where they come from, their purpose, their intention, their need. Sometimes we disagree and I put them aside only to reintroduce them later to fulfil another purpose. Other times I play with them on my own or invite others to play with me. It is a conscious play where an intention is set and through play the intention is made manifest in the form of ideas, actions or an object. Play is an important practice in my making as I am able to enter my making with no defined expectations, becoming free in my making.

- **journaling and sketching**
  Through journaling and sketching I begin to unravel my creative process. Whether it relates to my captivation, contemplation, creation or collaboration phase, the journaling and sketching enables a kind of sense making or meaning making. At times it is also just a release of cognitive actions that haven't quite grounded. The journals and sketches also serve as reflection of my current state of being, giving me clues as to what needs to unfold or be unravelled further.

- **prayer and blessings**
  Invoking the divine is another essential practice that gives meaning and purpose to my creative process. From the blessing of my canvas to the preparation and embellishment of the material, to communicating the artwork with audiences, acts of prayer and blessing are initiated in various ways. Sometimes through reciting a prayer or lighting a candle, at other times through holding a space for those who enter my studio or those who engage directly with the artwork. In my artmaking I pray for divine guidance to be able to create from a space of freedom. I bless the material I work with, affirming its role in my process and honouring its qualities through application or repurposing.

- **assembling altars**
  Creating a smaller space, an altar, within a larger space, the studio; the larger space drawing energy from the smaller space. The altar becomes the locus from which I integrate the practices described above. It serves as a point of entry, a passageway, to recalibrate and revitalise my being to create with my heart, body and mind intelligences.

The practices supporting my creative process are ritualistic behaviours that are instrumental in shifting my state of being. Shifting states, from a busy mind to a quiet mind, for example, the ritualistic behaviours, whether it is chanting, meditating, tuning in to the frequency of sounds, shifts and transforms the energy of the body and the space it occupies. Ritualistic behaviours are about energy, shifting energy. These

experiences, to an extent, are complemented by what Dissanayake (2002) has phrased "making special". According to her, "making special" implies a more than ordinary intent or deliberateness when shaping or giving artistic expression to an idea or embellishing an object. She explains that by making special, we make in a '[...] "realm" different from the everyday', a special realm different from one that is purely aesthetic (Dissanayake 2002: 92).

20. reflecting on states of being ?

I experienced many different states of being throughout this creative process. Three particular states of being - presence, stillness and freedom - were most significant for my artmaking enabling me to become present, still and free in my making.

- **presence**

  A state of presence is essential to create authentically. Eckart Tolle (2011) explains that as long as one is in an intense state of presence, we are free of thought, and to stay present in everyday life one has to be deeply rooted in the body. Furthermore, to fully inhabit the body one has to tune in to the inner energy field of the body, to feel the body from within. "Body awareness keeps you present" (Tolle 2011: 78). Tolle further makes a comparison between a state of presence and waiting:

  > "It is not a waiting in which your attention is focused on some point in the future and the present is conceived as an undesirable obstacle that prevents you from having what you want. There is a qualitatively different kind of waiting, one that requires your total alertness. Something could happen at any moment and if you are not absolutely awake, absolutely still, you will miss it"(2011: 78).

  My presence throughout the creative process made it possible for me to sense messages from my body - my internal universe. According to Leder (1990: 7), "[s]uch sensorimotor abilities are not merely a form of conception, they do not depend on explicit judgements, categories or rules", but "[r]ather, they exhibit a more primordial intentionality, which must be accorded its own logic". Trusting in this logic, I was becoming present in my artmaking.

- **stillness**

  The artwork **stillpoint** arose out of a need to reflect a stillness I yearned for throughout my process . Toward the end of my making, this piece came into fruition teaching me yet another lesson of my way of being. Using material that was in its process of afterlife, dead and decomposing, I created what I envisioned to be an absolute embodiment of stillness. When naming this artwork, I turned to the words of Ela Manga: "Stillpoint: A moment in time when the noise of everyday life is filtered out and a state of deep peace, joy and wellbeing is felt, and authentic energy can be accessed" (2017: 208). According to Manga , when the law of stillpoint is at play, one feels a feeling of expansion, clarity, greater perspective and inspiration, "[i]t is the feeling of freedom and calm from anxiety", helping us to navigate the "change and the complexities of life" by anchoring to a place inside ourselves and from this place we stretch into the demands of the world (2017: 15). Manga elaborates that we tap into this space every now and again in fleeting moments. My experience has been similar, however, after spending many months practicing conscious breathing and meditation, I am able to hold this stillness for longer periods of time allowing myself to connect to what she refers to as source energy, "[...] the source of natural energy or life force energy" (2017: 15). Tolle's words expand this stillness aptly: "True intelligence operates silently. Stillness is where creativity and solutions to problems are found" (2003: 7).

- **freedom**

> "To be free of all authority, of your own and that of another, is to die to everything of yesterday, so that your mind is always fresh, always young, always innocent, full of vigour and passion. It is only in that state that one learns and observes. And for this a great deal of awareness is required of what is going on inside yourself, without correcting it or telling it what it should or should not be, because the moment you correct it you have established another authority, a censor" (Krishnamurti 1969: 20-21).

Being influenced or conditioned from birth by knowledge systems and its embedded knowledge structures including religious, traditional, educational, political and social systems, the need to create in a state of freedom became necessary. This meant creating with what Manga refers to as heart, body and mind intelligences: heart intelligence being, "the wisdom and energy that we experience when we are deeply connected to ourselves and our feelings to others and to nature", body intelligence being, "the optimum functioning of the human body as a vehicle and expression of source energy" and, mind intelligence being, "the ability of the mind to optimize energy through focus, concentration and self-awareness and to be a channel for source energy through creativity, innovative thinking and inspiration (2017: 206-208).

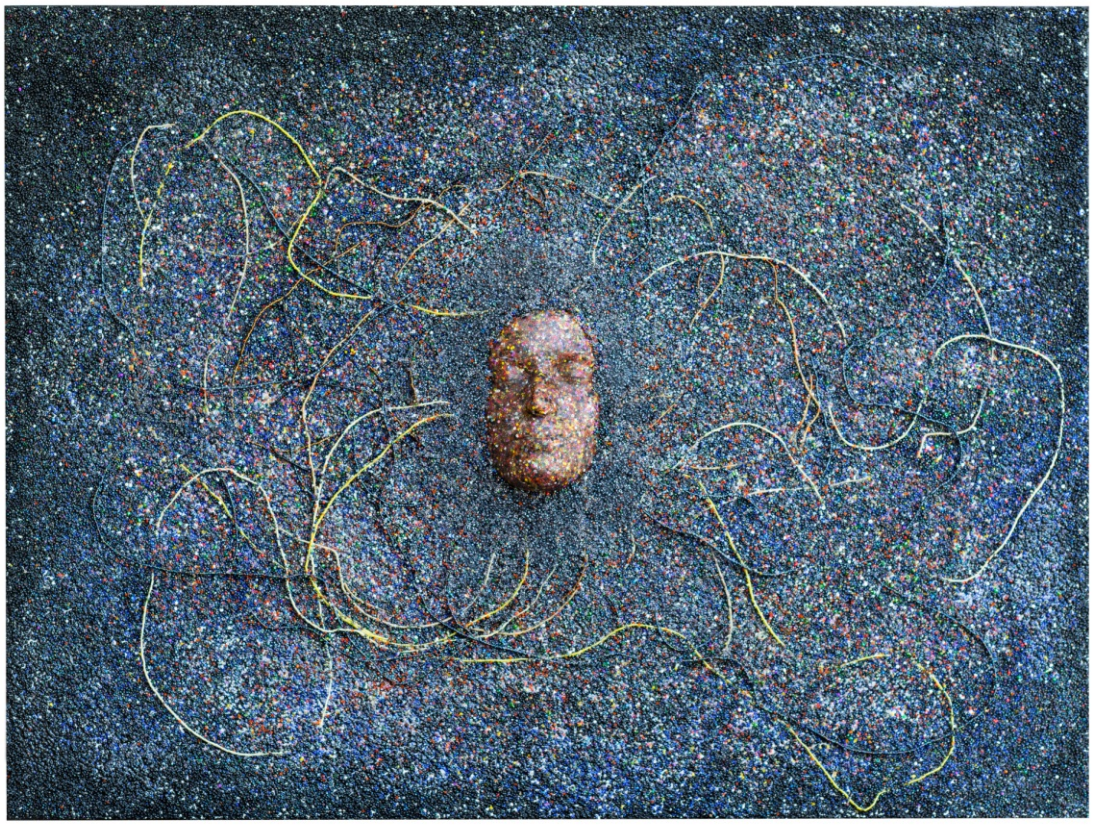
When creating **her flow**, my understanding and experience of a state of freedom was challenged which forced me to reflect on my conditioned way of working within the boundaries, structures and systems. Submitting to a message from my internal universe, to create in a state of flow, I had to find ways to free myself, from and within these systems and structures, by integrating my heart, body and mind intelligences in my artmaking.





epilogue

artistic creativity & healing



shanti govender, ***remember-release-reintegrate***, 2018, glass beads, acrylic, wood glue, super glue & resin on canvas, 110 x 76cm
image courtesy of sean brand

I was in high school when I purposefully began making art and believed that I possessed a natural gift to create with my hands. I recall myself, at an even younger age, perhaps about six years, collecting clay from the riverbanks, which I kneaded and moulded into forms. I still remember how my senses were awakened to the feel, smell and possibilities of the cold wet clay. In my process of making art, I intuitively draw on my subtle and gross body wisdom and intelligence. My hands, experiencing the stimulus through touch, heighten my awareness as my physical body receives information. Apart from visual sensitivity, my physiological sensitivity to the material is vital.

This biobehavioural aspect of my being enhances my way of seeing, knowing and doing. Zelda Stroud (2016) regards handwork as one of the wellsprings of creativity. She argues that in separating handwork from creativity, we cut ourselves off from this avenue of inspiration, as "[o]ur hands are not merely an obedient labour force employed by our minds, but may, in fact be the very impetus for creativity" (Stroud 2016: 75). Aligned to Dissanayake's view, I regard the human hand as "a specialized anatomical adaptation of physical precision and emotional expressivity", and that serves as "the tool of the soul as much as of the will" (Dissanayake 2000: 100 & 99).

The intimacy and connection through touching and repurposing the material, sensing its vibrations, and then bringing those sensations to the awareness of my own energetic vibration, opens me to the possibilities of the material and my own making. In a state of stillness, I am able to decipher the silent messages emanating from my body's visceral experience, using it to direct my artmaking, while remembering, releasing and reintegrating important aspects of myself. In this way, I am able to create art that is sacred and valuable in themselves, not because of their material value but for the authentic energy and power they embody. The experiencing of this energy and power by audiences during the exhibition, encouraged and confirmed that not only does the creative process hold possibilities for healing, but engaging with works of art, activated with authentic or source energy and body intelligences, can be transformative and healing. It can be used as a tool to remember what really matters, preserve experiences and intensify the emotional meaning of memories, transcend ordinary and limiting realities, explore the sublimation of sorrow or sadness by converting base and unimpressive experiences into something noble and fine (de Botton & Armstrong 2013). What I find resonating with my own artmaking is this process of sublimation, and how, through engaging with art or artmaking we can find "honour in some of our worst experiences" (de Botton & Armstrong 2013: 25).

Dissanayake suggests that "[...] human nature consists of a certain range of powers or abilities and tendencies", that is brought out under favourable conditions (2002: 17). According to Dissanayake , these 'powers' imply potentials that can be enhanced or discouraged for improving individual human lives and the 'tendencies' imply that how we feel about things is important, usually choosing what makes us feel good on the basis of our physiological and psychological feelings. She explains that these feelings are ultimately influenced by our biological makeup. Accepting this ethological view, we can then presume that "art contributes something essential to the human being, who makes or responds to it", and is beneficial for one's "biological fitness" in addition to the usual sense of being good for the soul or mind and spirit (Dissanayake 1998: 8).

Artmaking has the capacity to rebalance me, help me return to the missing portions of my being and I concur with the view that the task for artists, therefore, is to find new ways of prising open our eyes to tiresomely familiar, but critically important ideas about how to lead a balanced and good life (de Botton & Armstrong 2013). By putting us in touch with our missing dispositions, art and artmaking has the ability to "restore a measure of equilibrium to our listing inner selves" (de Botton & Armstrong 2013: 29).

final reflections

Reflecting on my creative process, practices and states of being, I delved into how my own healing unfolded during my artmaking. Healing on cognitive, emotional and physical levels became apparent. Cognitive healing, relating to remembering and re-experiencing memories, played a vital role in reconfiguring my way of seeing, thinking and being. Reflecting on the memories that surfaced throughout my creative process, I realised how those memories encoded certain behaviours and strongly influenced my way of being with myself and the world. By choosing to consciously recall these memories I found ways to rethink and accept these memories that held me captive. Ultimately, it is about letting go of memories that no longer serve me.

Associated with these memories, I travelled through many emotional states, both my own and that of others through interactions initiated during my creative process. Recognizing and feeling these emotions while consciously creating, allowed not only for catharsis, but it also lent itself to meaning making and self-understanding. This release of emotional tensions enhanced by self-understanding shifted me into a state of being that led me to progressively create, expanding on the original ideas. This is evident in the progression of each artwork and the manner in which they unfolded. The evolution of **genesis** to **stillpoint** reflects this progression (as outlined in Part Two - In the making).

Healing on a physical level meant re-integrating my body intelligences of heart, body and mind. The practices underpinning my creative process made this possible, allowing me to work with source energy and physically create in an authentic way. The ritualised nature of these practices enabled an embodiment of certain states of being that not only contributed to my artmaking but also to my own remaking through integration of all three levels, the cognitive, the emotional and the physical.

My lived life is a mixture of feelings, emotions and thoughts guided by an invisible web of past, present and future. Consciously and subconsciously I tread, run and sometimes fly in different directions. But no matter which path or direction I travel I always come back to the apex of my web (my body, my heart and my mind) where I recognise and reinvent my state of being.

I am steadily becoming aware of a *concentrated awareness* when creating. In this state of awareness, I am able to reimagine, reconstruct and release impressions and memories in a conscious and embodied way through my artmaking. This creative dance vitalizes and nourishes me in ways that feel empty yet full, elated yet calm, loud yet silent, masculine yet feminine, powerless yet powerful.

Little moments of interruption / intervention

21/03/2019

Today I start a new piece of work.
I am guided by a vision of a form... that came into being a few days ago. I was not quite sure about what the form was and what it means or even looked like. Often when these visions appear, and I ignore it long enough (maybe a week or a few days) they disappear again. I even forget about it completely. This particular image has stuck to me... it keeps sending me signals. I have come to understand so far that it is teaching me to trust a process. So I have started to make this vision visible through my artmaking... the process will unfold as it is meant to be and I will trust the process... This does not mean that my intellect will be ignored, it will all be active in this process of discovery...

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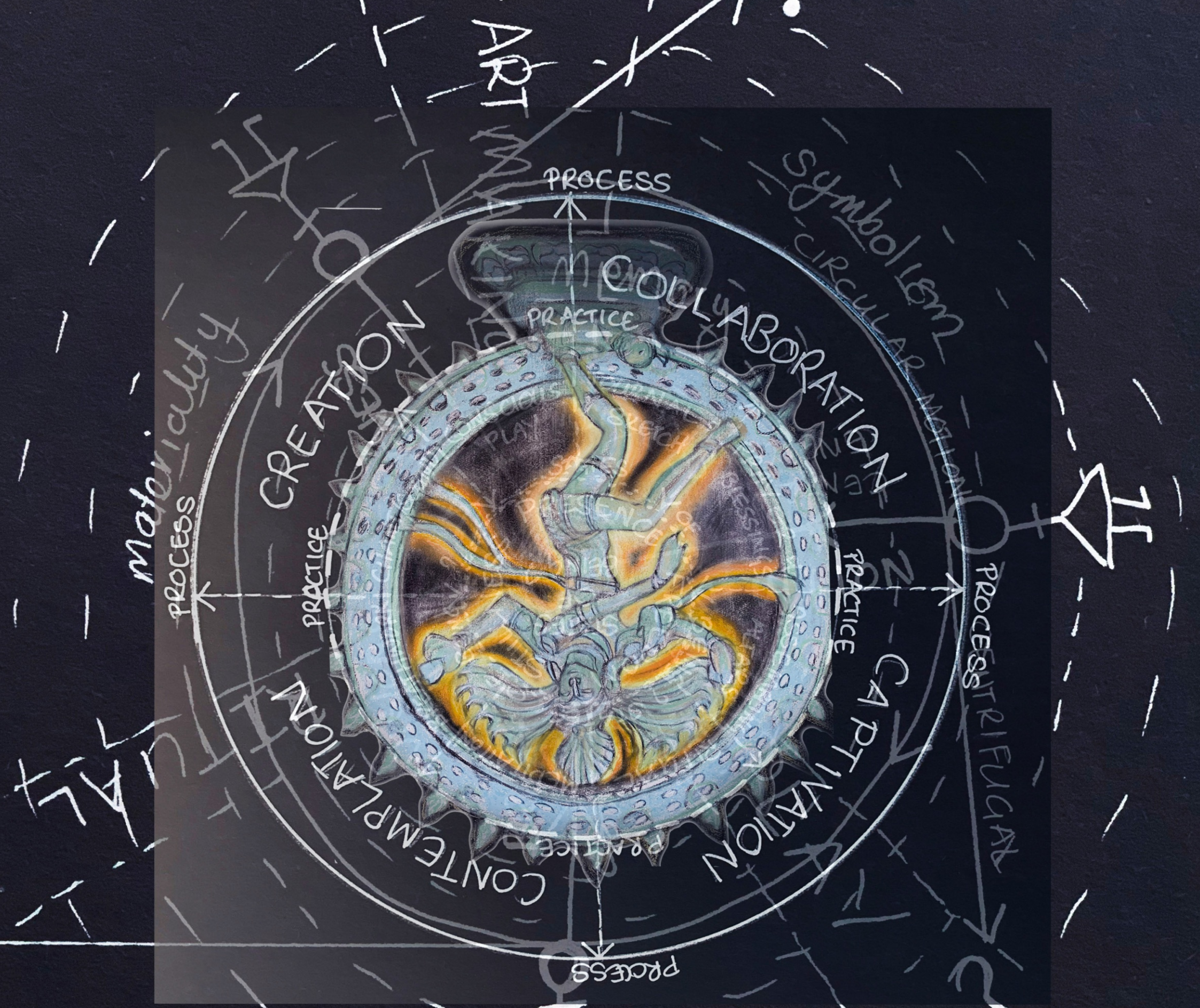


a drawing of shiva nataraja by enoch makanda, 2017

gratitude

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to travel this life changing exploration. This masters programme has certainly tested my resolve, my ability to stay true and connected to a path of creativity and self-discovery. Since embarking on this journey I have had the opportunity to work, share and create experiences with and be supported, nurtured and nourished by many amazing beings in phenomenally meaningful ways. To the people who have travelled this path with me, I thank you from the wellspring of my heart. My wish is that you continue discovering and walking your authentic path of healing and wellbeing.

Om Namah Shivaya.
I bow to Shiva.
Om Namah Shivaya.
I bow to my inner divinity.
Om Namah Shivaya
I bow to the divinity in you.


PROCESS
PRACTICE
COLLABORATION
CREATION
CONTEMPLATION
CAPTIVATION
PROCESS
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