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South African art historical writing: investigating the genealogy of taxonomy in the selected works of David Koloane

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the roots of taxonomic terms such as 'township art' and 'black modernisms' found in South African art history produced during colonialism and apartheid. South African art history shows a penchant to differentiate the work of black artists from that made of white South African artists. Since white South African writers mostly wrote this history I explore the beginnings of the classifications 'township art' and 'black modernisms' through the selected work of the black artist, writer and curator, David Koloane. Through the exploration of Koloane's work I demonstrate that the labels 'township art' and 'black modernisms' are allegorical; in other words, they can be interpreted to reveal hidden ethical and political meanings. The thesis explores how, at different junctures in the discourse of South African art history, these terms are used to render the work of black South African artists different (read as inferior) and thus, less valuable. Consequently, through the discussion of Koloane's interest in abstract expressionism, this thesis offers new ways of interpreting the work of black artists in South Africa through drawing on Koloane's oeuvre.