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# Images of Swazi women living with HIV

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# Abstract

Swaziland has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world and a society marked by gender inequality. HIV positive women are therefore a marginalized and stigmatised group. This research explores the therapeutic potential of art for a group of nine Swazi women living with HIV. It is a qualitative exploratory study of a group's experience and the artwork produced by them. The images made within the art group were examined in order to discover what they communicate about the women's lives and what effect the image-making process has on the participants. An eclectic approach was adopted with concepts from art therapy theory, especially psychoanalytic, analytic, feminist and group art therapy, informing both the methodology and the analysis of the artwork created. The art work reveals how the dominant ideologies concerning motherhood, HIV and poverty inform the women's identities. The image-making process was found to be therapeutic in that it provided a useful way for these women to explore their identity, trauma and assess their future goals. The social value of the group was clearly evident. The art group was presented as a practical strategy which can be used to give marginalized woman a voice.

In my own practical work I explore the physical manifestation of AIDS deaths in the natural environment through the genre of landscape painting. My paintings are a witness to my empirical experience of the pandemic. A brief discussion of the concepts of the "uncanny", "The Sublime" and palimpsest in paintings by Paul Nash, Caspar David Fredrich, Paul Cezanne, William Kentridge and Anselm Kiefer are used to establish a conceptual framework to understand my work.