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INTRODUCTION

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In the two years which have elapsed between the first and second Arts Research Africa conferences, the recognition of creative practice as a research modality in South Africa has increased in leaps and bounds. The question of what to call this research modality, be it practise-based, or practice-led, or artistic research remains unresolved, but these two conferences have gathered together a stimulating array of approaches to this new mode of research, while raising the banner for 'artistic research'.

This second conference, with its focus on how artistic research has transformed pedagogy as well as art practice in Africa, recognises that many academic practitioners, who have themselves completed advanced degrees with a creative practice component, are now looking to pass these learnings to their students through a transformed pedagogy. The 2022 conference thus provides an opportunity to assess the pattern of this development, still largely limited in Africa to the South African arts and education environment.

The first ARA Conference was held as a live event on Wits campus in February 2020.[1] Unknown to the organisers or any of the participants, the world was on the brink of the Covid-19 epidemic, and the draconian responses to the crisis by national governments, which locked down most of the world for the rest of 2020 and 2021. As a live event, however, the 2020 conference gave the ARA organisers the opportunity to experiment with different formats of presentation, breaking with the conventional mode of paper presentations and instead offering space for workshops and what we called 'lecture-performances' or 'lecture-demonstrations'. The second conference, planned during the uncertainty that followed the waning of the pandemic in 2021/22, was initially envisaged as an entirely online event; but as the effects of the pandemic began to subside, we chose to offer the first two days as a purely online event to facilitate international engagement, and a third, final day, again on Wits campus, as a live face-to-face event. Sadly, as a result of this structure, the bulk of the 2022 conference presentations were conventional textual outputs, albeit often reporting on creative research that was embodied or performative in nature.[2]

The emergence of artistic, or practice-based research in South African universities has been propelled by two institutional vectors. The first vector has been the increasing pressure on all academics in South African universities, including those teaching the creative arts, to get advanced research degrees, usually the PhD. This development has been facilitated by the recognition of creative work as an acceptable part of the PhD submission at many South African universities. The nature of this creative work as research has usually been left quite open in the regulations for the PhD, and the relationship between such work and the written component of the submission has not often been defined with any exactitude. Rebekka Sandmeier, a professor of Music at the University of Cape Town, in her close reading of the university regulations governing doctoral study in music at South African universities, notes that they don't "entirely support the requirement that research is embodied in the creative output of the degrees"(2020). Nevertheless this opening has created the opportunity for many academic teachers of the creative arts to get their PhD through what has increasingly been categorised as artistic or practice-led research.

The other vector was the adoption in 2017 by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) of a policy that awarded research subsidy to what were deemed "creative outputs".[3] (Prior to this, South African government research subsidy was only granted to conventional textual research outputs limited to journal articles, scholarly books, or academic conference papers.) Although the policy was gazetted in November 2017, the first round of submissions were only accepted in late 2019, a few months prior to the first ARA Conference. The policy requires the research offices of South African universities to administer the initial stage of creative work submissions to the DHET, which created a pressure on the universities concerned to engage with creative work as a form of research.

While the DHET policy on the recognition of "creative outputs" has been a welcome step forward there are major conceptual inconsistencies that permeate both the wording of the policy and the associated guidelines for the evaluation of such work. As Mareli Stolp has noted in her careful analysis of the documents: "there is alarmingly little clarify concerning divergence or similarity in terms of creative outputs and research" (100). The ARA project and the two ARA conferences have committed to using the term 'artistic research'. The nomenclature has become widely accepted in the institutionalised tertiary art systems, following along the European and Anglophone traditions, but has yet to be completely accepted in the South African context, where, as evidenced by the papers in these proceedings, a variety of other terms have been used by the authors to describe an approach which seeks to integrate creative practice and theoretical reflection towards the production of new knowledge.

Leaving aside the question of an agreed terminology, the 2022 conference papers that are published in these proceeding can be grouped into six thematics, revealing that artistic research in Africa is producing new knowledge and stimulating a rethinking of both research and pedagogy and holds significant value and relevance:

- **Cultural Expression:** Africa is a continent with rich and diverse artistic traditions and cultural heritages of which many have been marginalised through the impact of colonialism. In this context, artistic research provides a platform for African artists and scholars to explore and express their unique perspectives, narratives, and artistic practices. It helps to amplify the voices and stories of African artists, challenging dominant narratives and stereotypes. Striking examples of this thematic in the conference papers were Tosin Kooshima Tume's analysis of the concept of "danceturgy" and its role in the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) in Nigeria; while Raezeen Wentworth's paper, "I Am Coloured": The Memoir as a Decolonial Methodology", explores the shift from a "definitive" to a "descriptive" approach in the context of the coloured identity narrative in South Africa. Also in this thematic, Kim Gurney describes her encounter with the Nafasi Academy for Contemporary Art, Expression, and Inclusion in Tanzania. Gurney argues that the Academy, launched in 2020, is an example of a new generation of African cultural institution which functions like a work of art through its innovations in terms of curriculum and pedagogy.

- **Decolonizing Knowledge and pedagogy:** Artistic research plays a crucial role in decolonizing knowledge production and challenging Eurocentric perspectives. By embracing diverse artistic methodologies, African artists and researchers are actively reclaiming and reshaping narratives, knowledge systems, and cultural practices that have been marginalized or suppressed during the colonial period in a process that the South American scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos' describes as "epistemicide" (2015). Presenting a leading example of this thematic, David Andrew, from the Fine Arts department at the University of the Witwatersrand, outlines the development and evolution of the "un/chrono/logical timeline" of histories of arts education initiated by the Another Roadmap Africa Cluster (ARAC) Histories of Arts Education Research Project. Drawing inspiration from the legendary Medu Art Ensemble, the anti-apartheid cultural collective that operated from Gaborone in Botswana during the 1970s and '80s, the ARAC research framework employs intergenerational collaboration, dialogue, decentralisation, and a focus on language and ideology in order to advance a decolonial artistic pedagogy in Africa. Fritha Langerman, an artist-curator and printmaker at the Michaelis School of Fine Arts, University of Cape Town, shares her experiences with three exhibitions she designed to challenge traditional display

methods. By disrupting linear progression, introducing complex interconnections, and emphasizing sensory experiences, the exhibitions aimed to create alternative models of display that reflect the entangled and web-like nature of speciation. Her goal is to move beyond colonial narratives and imagine new ways of representing and understanding the natural world within museum spaces. In the field of contemporary dance pedagogy, Kristina Johnstone, from the University of Pretoria, presents an artistic research project that challenges representationalism in South African contemporary dance. The author argues against the use of discursive methodologies that reinforce colonial scripts and instead proposes an alternative approach based on embodied practices. Bailey Snyman, another South African choreographer and contemporary dance academic from the University of Pretoria, documents the intuitive and implicit choreographic processes behind his creation of "L.I.F.E.: A History of Distance," a dance-based physical theatre performance. His paper highlights the importance of understanding choreography as an embodied arts practice and emphasises the interplay between explicit and tacit knowledge in the choreographer's creative process. In the field of architectural pedagogy, Sandra Felix, from the School of Architecture and Planning at Wits University, reported on the application of practice-based design research (PbDR) methods in transforming the design practice of architecture students. Her paper explores how reflection and diffraction, two PbDR methods, can be used to shape students' design practice and challenge institutional biases in architectural pedogogy.

- **Social and Political Engagement:** Artistic research in Africa often addresses pressing social, political, and environmental issues. Artists use their creative practices to critically examine and raise awareness about topics such as identity, gender, migration, social justice, environmental sustainability, and post-colonial realities. This form of engagement has the potential to inspire dialogue, foster social change, and contribute to the development of African societies. Wits University architect and academic Brigitta Stone-Johnson in her paper explores the relationship between human actions, particularly in the context of extractive industries and colonial attitudes, and their impact on climate change. She emphasizes the need to reframe the relationship between humans and the living world through embodied creative practices that engage with materials and the body to challenge extractive narratives and foster a more holistic understanding of matter and its agency. The drama therapists and activists, Welma de Beer and Lucy Draper-Clarke, from Drama for Life at Wits University, presented their "Mas'phefumle" project, which explores healing arts practices and pedagogy as a response to trauma in South Africa. The authors propose that artistic research has the capacity to transform and advance arts-based pedagogies in the South Africa, by offering impactful healing practices that can help communities during challenging times and regulate individuals after traumatic incidents. The curriculum they have developed, called Healing Arts Pedagogy and Practices (HAPPy), aims to establish culturally sensitive activities that promote resilience and create safe learning environments. Another example of social and political engagement was reported by the artist, Joe Turpin, a South African currently studying at the Pratt Institute in New York, who has been uncovering the history of the Nazi Holocaust in Senegal though a combination of artistic and historical research. Turpin describes his residency in Dakar, Senegal, where he created artworks in response to the history of anti-Semitic laws and the Sébikhotane concentration camp, established by the Vichy French Colonial Regime in West Africa. His artworks aim to inform audiences about

this little-known history and attempt to develop a symbolism that speaks to a Sengalese audience. Michelle Stewart, in her paper, revisits the tradition of the Death Mask using the new material of digital clay. She reports on a creative project that involves 3D digital sculptures inspired by forensic facial photographs of unclaimed deceased persons in government morgues as well as posthumous photographs of own mother-in-law. While her work is situated within the discourse of art theory and history, rather than forensic art, it also has a strong social engagement through a partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross's Missing and Deceased Migrant Project and explores the humanitarian implications of migrant deaths in South Africa.

- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Artistic research encourages collaboration between artists, researchers, scholars, and practitioners from various disciplines, including visual arts, performing arts, literature, music, film, and more. This interdisciplinary approach fosters innovative and holistic perspectives, allowing for new insights and possibilities for knowledge creation and dissemination. A striking example of this interdisciplinary approach was Anita Szentesi's report, entitled "It Depends on the Lens", describing her use of film for experiential teaching in architectural design at the Wits School of Architecture and Planning. She outlines a creative research project with students that combines architecture and film to promote inclusive and collaborative design environments in architectural pedagogy. The technique, called 'character-led design', explores the complex relationships among people, culture, identity, and architecture through the lens of filmic narratives. By emphasizing the lived experiences of imagined characters in the design process, the research aims to create socially responsible and culturally sensitive designs to influence the architectural profession and contribute to decolonial education. Another radically interdisciplinary endeavour was presented by University of Johannesburg artist and academic, Leora Farber, in her paper, "The Scientific Lab as Studio/the Studio as Scientific Lab". She describes her praxis involving hands-on experimentation with living and non-living materials in scientific labs, resulting in artistic outcomes. Her paper highlights the increasing collaborations between artists and scientists, leading to the establishment of bioart labs and art-science programs. Another interdisciplinary intervention in the field of architectural pedogogy is described by Dirk Bahmann. He proposes that by fabricating sculptural artifacts, architecture students in the Wits School of Architecture and Planning learn how to articulate and make apparent the atmospheric qualities of constructed spaces. He argues that to be able to imagine or recognise atmosphere is a crucial skill for architects since atmosphere determines how people respond to space. The methodology is designed, through iterative cycles of making and critical reflection, to make students increasingly aware of atmosphere and to develop their ability to create and articulate certain feeling tones within spaces. This artistic praxis relies upon a nonlinear, bodily knowing that seeks to challenge the dominance of ocularcentric practice in the discipline of architecture. Also in the field of architectural orientations and collaborations, Stefan Winter, from the Film University Babelsberg in Germany and a Visiting Professor at the School of Architecture and Planning, Wits University, presents a paper which explores the evolving relationship between artistic research, architecture, and urban design in the context of shifting paradigms in the understanding of architecture and urban development. A notable aspect of his approach is that is is informed by the historical precedents of artistic avant-garde movements, such as *dérive*

and *psychogeography*, which Winter examines and discusses in the contemporary context of architectural practice. The potential of artistic research to contribute to sustainability in ecological, economic, and societal dimensions is explored through various examples. Overall, the paper argues for the transformative power of artistic research in shaping future city spaces.

- **Knowledge Preservation and Innovation:** African artistic research contributes to the preservation and revitalization of traditional artistic practices, cultural heritage, and indigenous knowledge systems. It also encourages experimentation, innovation, and the fusion of traditional and contemporary artistic techniques and forms. This dynamic approach creates opportunities for the evolution and reimagining of African artistic expressions. An outstanding example of both knowledge preservation and innovation was presented by Jayne Batzofin, the digital archivist at the Centre for Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies, University of the Cape Town. In a paper entitled "Archiving as Artistic Practice", Batzofin describes the development of an online showcase repository for the ReTAGS (Reimagining Tragedy from Africa and the Global South) practice-as-research artistic productions, and the methodology behind documenting and digitally archiving their processes. The paper reflects on the author's involvement as the digital archivist for the ReTAGS research and the choices made and implemented on the online showcase repository. What emerge from Batzfin's paper are the possibilities of understanding the archive as a means of artistic engagement in its own right. Wits Music Lecturer, Kgmotso Moshugi, reports on a research project that culminated in a concert honoring South African musician and activist Bra Abbey Cindi. The project involved reissuing Cindi's album, forming a band of young musicians to perform his music, and creating a vocal group called No Limits to reinterpret Cindi's earlier South African choral works. His paper proposes the use of music to explore the past, present, and future, linking generations and addressing social issues by reimagining and thus preserving historical musical works. In his paper, on "Fragmented Scribbles", Smangaliso Ngwenya, a PhD candidate from Wits, explores artistic creation and embodied practice-led research in the context of creating an ensemble screendance titled "Fragmented Scribbles." His research prioritizes the whole being as a site of artistic exploration, using the technique of 'Passing Through' as a pedagogical method. From the University of Zululand, Lindelwa Pepu, writing from an African feminist perspective, re-imagines the role of female players in the making and restoring of the traditional *Uhadi* musical bow. Pepu argues that the proper understanding of the *Uhadi* bow as a musical instrument, often mislabelled and lacking contextual information in ethnographic museum collections, can only be restored through engagement with living female *uhadi* players, restoring their contribution to reviving and preserving the instrument's cultural significance. On a more theoretically informed engagement, Dominique Lämmli, from the Zurich University of the Arts in Switzerland, introduces the concept of 'Art in Action Research' (AiAR) as an alternative paradigm for art practitioners working in sociocultural settings. AiAR aims to accommodate diverse notions of art, theories, and knowledge bases, integrating tacit knowledge into research frameworks. The paradigm is grounded in the issues emerging from the work environment, focusing on real-life challenges to co-create a liveable future. Finally, Hedwig Barry, an independent artist and art teacher based in Johannesburg, in dialogue with David Andrew, reflects on the intertwining of artistic research and pedagogies within the context of a collaborative project conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Their

paper explores the concepts of proximities, grids and flows, confrontations, and time as entry points into the space of artistic research. They emphasize the importance of untethering and foraging, challenging established boundaries and embracing discomfort as a catalyst for creative growth.

- **Global Dialogue and Representation:** Artistic research in Africa facilitates cross-cultural exchanges and global dialogue. It provides a platform for African artists and researchers to participate in international artistic and academic communities, showcasing their work, sharing their perspectives, and contributing to a more inclusive and diverse global artistic discourse. A strong example of this global engagement was Mwenya B. Kabwe's paper on the Priority Mail Process Lab: a month-long virtual residency program called into existence during the Covid-19 pandemic. The lab aimed to facilitate an exchange of objects, ideas, and insights between Francophone and Anglophone African women artists. The paper explores the artistic research practice behind the lab, focusing on the themes of migration, mobility, and the role of African women. Using artistic research to facilitate engagement between practitioners in South Africa and Brazil, Brett Pyper from Wits together with Renan Ribeiro Moutinho and other colleagues from institutions in Brazil reported on their exploration of "sound praxis", a decolonial approach in South African universities inspired by the work of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire. Their paper highlights the collaboration between Brazilian and South African activists, educators, and researchers, as they seek to apply sound praxis in their respective contexts and explore the potential for transformative pedagogy and artistic practice.

Overall, these papers from the second ARA Conference in 2022 demonstrate that artistic research in Africa serves as a vital tool for cultural empowerment, knowledge production, social engagement, and the representation of African voices and perspectives within the global artistic and intellectual landscape. In these papers, artistic research has demonstrated the potential to challenge existing paradigms, foster innovation, and to contribute to the ongoing transformation of African societies and artistic practices.

At the same time, the 2022 Conference has gone some way towards clarifying the various terminologies currently employed in this diverse field of research. A notable addition in the 2022 Conference line up were academic teachers of architectural design. These teachers are using different forms of artistic practice as enabling techniques for expanding architectural pedagogy. This is clearly an example of "practice-based" research because the goal is not to produce artistic works but to advance the understanding of their students towards a more socially conscious or de-colonised architectural practice.[4] By contrast, the understanding of "artistic research" has been advanced by presenters such as Tanja Sakota, from the department of Film and TV at Wits University. At the ARA2022 conference Sakota presented the results of her exploration of memory and autoethnography that took place through the making of her film "Shattered Reflection". In her conference paper she reflected on the complex pressures of her identity as the South African offspring of refugees from Eastern Europe and the influence that this has had on her approach to the research processes which involved accessing memory without archives, and using film to uncover depict memories that were often fragmented or even invisible in her parents' lost homes in Europe. In her 2023 book, *Uncovering Memory: Filming in South Africa, Germany, Poland and Bosnia/Hertzogovina*, she reflected on her research process and concluded that "the moment we recognise the presence of the filmmaker . . we create a distinction between practice-based research and artistic research"(295). This suggests an understanding of artistic research in which the emphasis is not simply on the status

of the artworks (objects or performances) that are at the heart of the process, but also the subjectivity and positioning of the maker/researcher. This understanding of artistic research may be most productive in terms of understanding the potential of this research modality in an African cultural context.

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Notes

1 The full proceedings of the first ARA Conference are available, as an Open Access publication, at https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29248

2 As the organisers of the 2022 Conference we had actually hoped that the online format would facilitate alternative forms of presentation; but this turned out not to be the case.

3 Policy on the Evaluation of Creative Outputs and Innovations produced by South African Public Higher Education Institutions

4 A related development has been the adoption of artistic practices by urban planners and policy analysts. See the ARA podcast with Avril Joffe, the previous head of the department of Cultural Policy and Management in the Wits School of Arts.