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Re-painting the mainstream archive black: a close reading of the iconography on instagram by Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi and Lady Skollie

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Re-Painting the Mainstream Archive Black:

A Close Reading of the Iconography on Instagram by Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi and Lady Skollie

By

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

School of Literature, Language and Media Studies

SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY

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Abstract

This research project explores the work of four Black South African women artists, Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi and Lady Skollie, who have disrupted political, social and narrative structures within the traditional art and mainstream media industries as well as the larger society. Their artworks are read as feminist public artworks that have expanded and altered public spaces as well as posed a challenge to exclusionary and racially biased constructs of mainstream media and culture. This is an interdisciplinary study that straddles the lines of visual art and media studies. In conducting this research, direction is focused on the platform of Instagram as an interface for visual imagery and images. It is argued that the form that these artists and their visual works have taken has disrupted space and viewing on Instagram. This study is significant because Black women's bodies have been historically subjected to objectification, exclusion and silencing. It is therefore important to build a body of scholarly work that will become part of the greater decolonial project aimed at troubling pre-set constructs by reforming and taking control of visual images of Black women and their narratives. Furthermore, this research study, as written by a Black scholar is important in continuing to build the written archive by young Black women and building their own narrated experiences within mainstream public spaces. The array of literature in this study explores the extent to which Black women have been represented in visual culture. As the artist's works are read as feminist, due to their parallel nature of placing women at the forefront, Black feminisms were used to frame this study. This was also supported by theories of performativity and an exploration of alternative public art. The research was conducted through a Cyber Ethnography and Thematic Content Analysis and provided an outcome that visual works have taken on a new form on Instagram and extended art exchange and engagement practices. As a result of this relationship, visual artworks have altered this digital space and gained a life and identity of their own in addition to their presence in art galleries. Essentially, Instagram plays a large role and influence in reforming the Black visual mainstream archive.

Keywords: Visual Culture, Visual Art, Instagram, Decolonising Space, Activist Art, Feminism, Feminist Art.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

South Africa has a rich and distinctive political, social and cultural history that has greatly affected and is inscribed in the identity of Black people. History is an unabridged series of past events and occurrences that are connected to a person or a thing (Carr, 2018). South Africa comes from a past that has recognised, memorialised and lived up to white patriarchal structures and read the Black body only against white or European standards. This subsequently meant that if you were not a white man or a direct beneficiary of that privilege, you were deemed as inferior and not worthy of actively partaking in society. Black women experienced the greatest form of exclusion and marginalisation. They were not seen or regarded as active and important members of society, their voices were silenced or unheard and their bodies completely unseen, more especially within the confines of conventional media. It is important to understand that "[H]istory reflects the roles that men have played, women are often forgotten" and "if history is to be fulfilled, and women's contribution to the struggle acknowledged, the democracy we are building must not leave them aside on the margin" (Madlala, 1996). Black women have had a long history with marginalisation and their roles in history have not been portrayed as prominently as those of their male counterparts. More specifically, in mainstream media, Black women have been historically ostracised, represented under stereotypical characterisations, had their bodies objectified and have been stripped of their voices and the autonomy to tell their own stories. This sparked my interest in looking at how this has affected the way Black women's bodies are framed, seen and represented in the contemporary context, as well as how Black women are using this to reform and shape their own representation and constructions of identity.

Throughout this study, I have chosen to write the word Black in capital letters in accordance with Steve Biko's philosophy and movement, Black Consciousness. Black Consciousness is defined by Biko (1998: 360) as "the realisation by the Black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude". It is a philosophy that aims to educate, emancipate Black people from the effects of colonialism and teach them how to reclaim their power and autonomy. Also described as an Africana Philosophy, it is primarily concerned with raising issues about race and racism and is "the Black person's coming to consciousness of herself as Black" (More, 2014: 177). Mangena

(2008) also affirms that it is important to pay respect to and assign power to the term Black because it is encompassing of a wide range of not only people, but culture, language and identity as well. Using the term Black in this way assigns autonomy to Black people and more specifically gives those mentioned in this study the power that they deserve.

Additionally, the four main artists referenced in this study, Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi, Lady Skollie and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi, are also referred to as Black. This is not from a point of incomprehension of their individual identities and cultures, but from an understanding that being Black encompasses a mixture of identities and lineages. The South African Student's Association's (SASO) Second General Student Council Policy Manifesto (1971: 10) argues that:

> Black people are those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in South Africa and who identify themselves also as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations.

This is the definition that this research undertakes because it refers to those who have shared experiences of exploitation and abuse (Manganyi, 1973: 10). The reference to Black within Black Consciousness perspectives does not necessarily refer to skin colour. Manganyi (1973) asserts that it refers to "only what the skin actually signified in sociological and psychological terms [is] of importance" (Singh, 1978: 2-3). This view can also be read alongside Love and Jiggetts (2019) perspective that consciousness includes views about social justice stemming from the historical experience with colonialism. This viewpoint rejects individual categorisations of race but groups together people who have a united experiences of suffering under colonial oppression. Biko also referred to this idea as the "individed house" of Black Consciousness where it worked outside the confines of racial classifications by The Popular Registrations Act (1952 and amended to include Indians in 1962) (Hill, 2015: 2). This is why the term Black in this study is used as an inclusionary term for all people of colour who experienced historical injustices.

Arguably, Mary Sibande and Zanele Muholi have openly spoken about and identified themselves both personally and through their work as Black and shared their histories as Black women. In speaking about *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014), Muholi states that "I wanted to use my face so that people will always remember just how important our black faces are, when confronted by them". This signals her personal claim to her Black identity and shows other Black people how to proudly wear their Blackness, while those who are not, how to see us.

Sibande is also direct about using the character of Sophie and her protégé to highlight her own and her mother's histories as Black women in order to change the narrative about Black women bodies in South Africa. On the other hand, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi was born and raised in New York, but was also raised in Harare and Zimbabwe (Stevenson, 2020). As a mixed raced , she identifies as a Black womanand uses her work to share the complexities of this history (Thompson, 2020). Her diverse lineage makes it difficult to assign her a single identity. In Lady Skollie's work she often depicts and embraces images that draw on Khoi-San traits and markings. In her name and the specific use of the combination, 'Lady' and 'Skollie', I find she must reference coloured identity in her historical and ontological identity both as an artist and as a woman, and, as I read it in this work, as both. Hlalethwa (2019) writes about Lady Skollie's *Good & Evil* (2019), noting that the work alludes to a reimagination of people of 'so-called coloured descent' because their history was not "nipped in the bud". Being Black, especially in South Africa, comprises of multicultural experiences that derive from various experiences and histories. Inevitably, all women of colour, especially in a South African context, have a shared experience from colonial histories, which have affected their identities. It is for this reason that I refer to them all under the banner of 'Black' written with a capital B. Furthermore, as a proverbial tipping of the hat to Biko's Black Consciousness, I use the works by the Black women artists who I discuss, to invite this method, theoretical position and astute logic of identity and belonging, into the year 2021.

The mainstream media archive is filled with stereotypical, discriminatory and objectifying images of Black women's bodies. Cultural texts that claim to be representative and do exist in the forefront of this archive are told by patriarchal and Western and male systematic voices. It is therefore becoming more important in this society to critically probe this by reading visual texts by Black women and revolutionise these spaces. The manifestation of Black women's visual artwork into public spaces as well as multi-media and digital platforms requires further analysis. Black South African women have and are still fighting against the stereotypical depictions and Western standards used to define and control their bodies by openly articulating their subjectivities and narratives (Fleming, 1983). This study therefore aims to explore the different ways that Black women are doing this in the current context, particularly through looking at artists who are reconstructing women's narratives and position in society by cementing their rightful place within historical contexts, producing activist visual works and bridging the gap between art and audiences through social media interfaces. Social, in terms of showing how they are shifting the cultural codes and reshaping representation within the

mainstream media, and politically, by referencing how the women trouble the systematic patriarchal and racial bias, elitism as well as exclusionary practices of the traditional and visual art industries. The emergence of feminist visual texts has contributed to a 'liberatory imagination' that criticises the patriarchal and hierarchical representation and visualisation of women's bodies (Miller, 2007). As difficult as it has been, Black artists have continued to challenge these systems by establishing their own political voices through their work (Williamson, 2010).

This research project interrogates and closely reads the works of four Black South African women, Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi and Lady Skollie (real name Laura Windvogel) in seeking to understand how their artworks have disrupted racist and patriarchal narrative structures in visual culture by taking up space outside of the art gallery as well. It aims to study these works through a close reading and analysis of contemporary tropes that deal with black subjectivities, particularly on online platforms such as Instagram. The study hones in on the platform of Instagram because it prefaces imagery and images. When speaking about representation in a Black South African context, it is an ever-sought concept because it was one that was not afforded fairly to people of colour. It has therefore become an instrument used and recreated by Black women in the current period to reconstruct and narrate their own experiences, cultures and identities. This is done through a reading of works that highlight the erasure of Black women's footprint in mass media culture by controlling the types of images were shared about Black women. With the increase in the use of digital media technology and social media, more specifically Instagram, it has become even more important to critically assess the form in which contemporary works of art by Black women have taken on the platform. It is a social networking platform founded in October 2010 and currently has over one billion users globally (Dharmayanti, Darma, 2020). Arguably, of all the social media platforms, Instagram has the highest engagement rate, ultimately altering communication for art museums and galleries as well (Kang, Chen, Kang, 2019). The growing user rate of Instagram welcomed the increased visibility of contemporary artwork in photographic form on the platform, and became an integral part in the dissemination and consumption of the works in the public space. This is also seen through the works and Instagram pages representing *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014), *Faces and Phases* (2006), Lady Skollie and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi's live and Instagram exhibition. Instagram has allowed for direct engagement with the works and essentially eliminated the physical space as an interface between mass audiences and artwork.

Youth culture has also been predominantly influenced by this, not only to use social media as a tool to consume different products, but to also become a part of the production of content that is radical and self-affirming. As part of the realisation of a more woke culture, Instagram has become a substantial measure in the way that young Black women are disclosing their awareness and promoting narratives surrounding the Black women's experiences in South Africa. The visual works by Sibande, Muholi, Skollie and Nkosi are argued to be using subjectivity to break stereotypes and taboos surroundings Black women and how their stories are told.

1.2 Significance of the Study

In South Africa, there is a historical pattern of social and political exclusion of Black women (Van der Spuy, Clowes, 2007). This includes the silencing of their voices, invisibility of their bodies and misrepresentation within mass media and art historical constructs. Subsequently, this probed Black women artists and their artworks to evolve past these patriarchally and racially motivated constructs through decolonial and expansive visual projects. It is firstly important for this research study to form a part of this and continue to contribute to activist work that seeks to give memory to and reform racially construed representation of Black women. Secondly, there is a lack of adequate amounts of scholarly research that has extended the works of scholars such as Theo Van Leeuvan, Gunter Kress, Emilia Djonov and McLuhan, whose works were centred around bridging the gap between art and media research. Theo Van Leeuvan, Emilia Djonov and Kay L. O'Halloran have built research that used David Byrne's *Envisioning Emotional Epistemological Information*, an art work created with Microsoft's presentation software PowerPoint (which was read as a media form), as a case study for creative research on semiotics and semiotic technology (Van Leeuwen, Djonov, O'Halloran, 2013). Van Leeuwen and Gunter Kress have also combined visual images and semiotics to read into the effects of visual imagery and communication. Marshall McLuhan, as part of his effort to extend art as research, has extensively referred to the cultural environment as one that includes both media and art frameworks and extends his work into both the arts and humanities. This study makes an intervention in this existing scholarship by using contemporary perspectives and Black women activist work for research. As an interdisciplinary study, even though media studies and arts have been commonly referred to as separate disciplines, this research project is framed as a visual culture project, straddling the disciplinary lines of both aforementioned

disciplines. This is important because visual culture has evolved since the late 2000's and it was crucial to explore this and provide an empirical basis for identifying the ways Black women have used the realms of culture and new media to reform the controlling images of Black women in visual culture. Activist imagery has become more functional and activating in public spaces as well as by public participation and engagement. This activation is also largely influenced by the immediacy and mass accessibility of social media networks, particularly Instagram, and has broken down the barriers of the white cube by making art consumption a part of mainstream visual consumption culture. The exploration of this notion and the building of academic scholarship that investigates the hypervisibility of Blackness in alternative and white spaces is necessary. It is also important to document and develop written work by Black scholars to continue the assertion of Black women's voices in all spheres.

1.3 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research study are to:

1.3.1 Investigate and analyse how the artists and their respective artworks have evolved on Instagram, a platform which has global reach.

1.3.2 Analyse and demonstrate how Black women are reforming the mainstream visual archive and disrupting the controlling images of them in conventional spaces.

1.4 Research Question

1.4.1 How have South African Black women artists used their artworks to disrupt normative art viewing practices and experiences in South Africa through the platform of Instagram?

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Background to Study

This research is framed through a visual culture approach and is able to combine and examine visual imagery and identity formed within both the art and media studies disciplines. Visual culture is approached as an all-encompassing body of visual texts stemming from diverse disciplines. In this case, a combination of both media imagery and visual artwork forms the

basis of this visual culture project. Visual culture is mainly characterised by mass media images that produce meaning and a visual narration of life (Ballengee-Morris, Taylor, 2003). This also includes the visual arts, which has a reciprocal role with visual culture (Freedman, Stuhr, 2000). As such, the roles played by both imagery derived from or presented in the media and from the visual arts contribute to a mass visual and cultural framework. This amalgamation of different media frameworks, namely photography, visual art and social media is the founding basis of argument in this project. Social media is a fairly new tool of communication by using different technologies and digital formats. There are very different interpretations and definitions of the term *social media*. It is defined as the use of the internet "as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion" (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010: 61). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also describe it as an intrinsic result of the Web 2.0, which is a concept by O'Reilly (2007) that is used to describe emergent platforms that centralise user generated content and participation. It also implements "mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content" (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011: 241). These are digital channels that are used for the exchange of social communication. This is also tied to consideration that these communication channels built by social media are for the exchange of social relationships and information (LaRose, Connolly, Lee, Li and Hales, 2014).

With the various perspectives defining social media already outlined, it is important to understand its historical foundations. It is affirmed that social media is not necessarily a completely new concept because human beings have always had ways of transmitting messages regardless of distance (Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, Seymour, 2011). The only difference now is that over time, we have cultivated numerous technologies that have eased ways of communication between us (Carton, 2009) and a first example of this is the use of the telegraph in 1792 to convey messages between those far apart (Ritholz, 2010). There are also two sociologists who are considered as some of the forerunners of social networks during the late 1800s, Emile Durkheim and Ferdinance Tonnies. It is said that "Tonnies believed that social groups could exist because members shared values and beliefs or because shared conflict. His theory dealt with the social contract conceptions of society" while Durkheim infused sociological theory with empirical research (Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, Seymour, 2011: 80). Also prevalent during this period were radio and telephones, which were

considered as means of social communication (Rimskii, 2011). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also account for a much earlier establishment of what can also be considered social media with Bruce and Susan Abelson's 'weblog' that assembled online diary writers into a single group. Around 1979, there was also a worldwide discussion forum called Usenet created by Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis from Duke University, which permitted people on the internet to publicly post messages (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010). This subsequently led us to the development of social networking sites that became more popularly known and used such as MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004, which "coined the term 'Social Media' and contributed to the prominence it has today" (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010: 60).

For the purposes of this project, the focus is more on the social networking applications that were established after these ones and are focused on producing visual imagery. In 2007, a microblogging and social networking site was established, Tumblr. It has a short form blogging format characterised by posting photographs with Tumblelogs that are only a single paragraph long (Edwards, 2013). This was followed by other networking sites in 2010, Pinterest and Instagram. Pinterest is an image sharing and social networking site that "functions as a pinboard [and] lets users post images and videos from the internet, either while viewing a website or by using a URL, and add user-created photos, both of which are referred to as pinning" (Hansen, Nowlan, Winter, 2012: 2). It also became the quickest social media site to reach over ten million users in a span of a year (Gilbert, Bakhshi, Chang, Terveen, 2013). This slowly became a premise for visual artists to publicly share their work and have it widely seen and discovered on this visual network. This makes it an important social networking site to highlight in contributing to the newer digital formats that provided a global audience with immediate access to artists' works. For example, there are also still organisations such as The New York times, The Guardian, Artsy and several art institutions that still share their articles about visual artists and their work on Pinterest. As seen in the image below for instance, when searching for a specific artist like Nelson Makamu as used here, their works of art are immediately visible as well as collection of publications or art organisations that have written about his work.



https://za.pinterest.com/search/pins/?q=nelson%20makamu&rs=typed&term_meta[]=nelson%7Ctyped&term_meta[]=makamu%7Ctyped

Zhai, Kislyuk, Jing, Feng, Tzeng, Donahue, Du and Darrell (2017) assert that visual categories, namely visual art contributed towards 8.8% of engagement on the site, indicating that it became an important network for visual artists to connect their work with the public in a different format than formal exhibitions.

Instagram has also become an important preface for visual imagery. It is an image and video sharing social network application and has come to offer a foundation for innovative and modern forms of imagery (Tifentale, 2015). In South Africa, as of July 2021, there are 6.03 million Instagram users and 53.1% of these users are women (Statista, 2021). Amongst these are women are contemporary visual artists that use the application to art related content. Contemporary visual artists in South Africa jumped on the Instagram bandwagon quite early since its inception and still continue to increasingly use to engage with audiences and use it as an interface between their art or visual work and global audiences. For example, Sethembile Msezane is a South African visual artist and performer whose work has included standing in public spaces juxtaposed to statues. Her performances have been captured as photographs, shared on public platorms and now continues to live in these digital formats as well. One of her most popular performances was of *Chapungu, The Day Rhodes Fell* (2015) during the Rhodes Must Fall student protests, where she stood on a plinth behind the Rhodes statue in the embodiment of the Chapungu bird in the battle for decolonising South African universities and education. In doing this, as a Black "within a public memorialised space, and operated as a mechanism of reclaiming and re-remembering the narratives of Black women in South African and African histories" (Iziko Museums of South Africa, 2015). This photograph of her standing on this plinth was circulated across media and digital platforms, especially Instagram and became the standing image used to represent the student protests. Social media has ultimately penetrated everyone's lives and social networking applications define daily habits of communication and creative production (Van Dijck, 2013). Additionally, it is also important

to highlight that Instagram has played a role in the curation and sharing of visual contemporary works by Sibande, Nkosi, Muholi and Skollie. They were selected for analyses in this study because they have a large social presence and use Instagram as a central interface between their work and audiences in addition to other platforms. This is a large part of what sparked an interest in the exploration and study of this nature. Since this exhibition, visual artists and artworks have evolved onto platforms that allow them to accessibility to mass audiences. This has affected how these works shared and viewed on Instagram.

1.5.2 Characterising the Inception of Visual Culture in South Africa

Visual culture is defined as the feature of culture that is often communicated and expressed through visual imagery. Mirzeoff (1999: 2) asserts that visual culture is "concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology". It is also defined as all forms of visual production and communication that is encountered in everyday life, mostly consisting of images and objects seen on television, books, magazines, performance and others (Duncum, 2001). Visual culture studies identify the predominance of visual forms of media, communication, and information in the postmodern world. Images are considered as tools of communication that insight meaning and are used to inform. People in a society use or consume images for reasons relative to their own preferences or desires. In essence, "the way we think about the way we think in Western culture is guided by a visual paradigm" (Jenks, 1995: 1). This essentially suggests that human beings make use of images to formulate an understanding of the society that they are inherently involved in. Images are culturally embedded and construct meanings that inform people and ultimately determine their views of the world. South Africa has a long standing and diverse visual culture spectrum that is informed by representation, culture, gender and identity.

After Apartheid, this study affirms that there was more visibility of visual artwork by young Black women in South Africa. South African art has an extensive history of imagery and images that were produced by women within various communities, even though it was troubled by a heavy political history that made an effect on the visual arts (Arnold, 2017). Arnold (2017) further states the fact that art was publicly framed as an industry for Western patriarchy, while Black people were assumed and categorised to only make "crafts and three-dimensional objects such as pots and headrests, which Europeans assumed, were exclusively functional" (Arnold, 2017: 13). It created a further assumption that Black people are not artists and cannot produce

the same quality of work that can live in a public art gallery, unless it was for the pleasure of and exploitation by Europeans. The Western art that was presented in public art galleries across the twentieth century influenced South African white's "superiority of European civilisation" (Arnold, 2017: 13) and further contributed to the complete erasure or ignorance of the existence of Black South African art. This standpoint is largely critiqued because art was not framed or created only established by white people and art created by white people should not be the only creative work considered to be formal or a higher art. There should not be a hierarchy when assessing visual work because all creativities form part of visual and cultural bodies. For example, San Rock art, African sculptures and Egyptian murals have existed for many years and throughout the world, but their narratives have been violently suppressed to sustain civilisation myths of white supremacy. This is also art and has lived beyond exclusionary boundaries.

Throughout history until the present period, visual culture has been the most common creative tool used to exhibit and understand culture. Coombes (2003) describes post-Apartheid visual culture as indicative of various forms of visual and material culture which illustrates the tensions of colonisation, while still contributing to transformation. These are visual forms that consist of images, which have played a large role reshaping, capturing and remaking history. In visual culture, producers create work that "re-presents the past materially and creatively" as well as in "bringing the past materially into the present" (Rassool, 2000: 7). In essence, it can be determined that these emerging visual forms aim to create a new approach to viewing and understanding culture. The meaning of history is remade in conjunction with the reproduction of new identities and narratives.

Furthermore, the 1980's in South Africa started to gain more cultural power with the new relationship formed between history and visual culture (Richards, 1991; Cherry, 2004). For example, a 1987 conference of the South African Associations of Art Historians took place and focused on "re-writing the art and architectural history of South Africa" (Richards, 1991: 119) and resulted in the publication of books about South African visual culture. Richards (1991) further affirms that these were followed by other events that recognised Black artists such as the Festival Young Artist Awards in 1989 and 1990, that afforded Helen Mmakgoba Mmapula Sebidi and later Bonnie NtshaliTshali the recognition that they deserved. Other Black artists whose visual work contributed largely to modern South African texts are Gladys Mgudlandlu, Berni Searle, Tracey Rose and Irma Stern. Mgudlandlu is profoundly described as one of the most celebrated Black township artists and the only other artist to be mentioned in Steven

Sack's *From Country to Duty: The Development of an Urban Art* (Miles, 2002). Searle and Rose are feminist performance artists whose works employ issues about race and gender identity and to a great extent, challenge the patriarchy and Western culture (Pro'Sobopha MFA, 2005). Their works became a standard for young Black women to follow, in extending similar narratives and employing issues that affect Black people in their work. Contemporary art is a type of visual art that in this context, exists in the current period and employs a variety of affective, political and unconventional measures to create living art. Silva's (2006: 2) argues visual art to be:

> One of the fields where, according to Bourdieu, culture is used to reproduce the class structure. Like other items in the cultural repertoire, paintings, as major examples of visual art, imply social divisions in how they are engaged with by artists, critics and audiences.

It was an exclusive form of art that Black community members were excluded from (Sullivan, 2006). Even though there was a presence of Black artists, more especially Black women artists, they were still greatly excluded and not recognised in a broader spectrum as active visual artists in comparison to their white and some Black male counterparts completely erasing all visual creatives that have existed in South African history. Contemporary visual artists, however continue to challenge this through their distinctive work that has taken centre stage in all major art galleries, museums and public spaces globally. This is the additional shape and form that South African Black feminist contemporary artwork is currently taking.

The term contemporary indicates an array of methods of existing in time. It is also a term that is commonly used in multiple languages when speaking of the passing present (Smith, 2011). In relation to this, contemporary art is asserted to be "multiple, internally differentiating, category shifting, shape changing and unpredictable (that is, diverse) – like contemporary itself" (Smith, 2011: 176). This points to the notion that the art is produced in current times, by artists living in and existing in the present day. Their art is greatly diverse, but significant in the fact that it syndicates history in redefining and narrating current issues of identity, sexuality, race and gender, while utilising unique subjects and methods to challenge traditional limitations (Robertson, McDaniel, 2010; Danto, Goehr, 1997). In addition, the main element that defines contemporary art is its ability to address social and socio-political issues by breaking through historical and institutional boundaries and create change (Suleiman, 1986). Smith (2011) also reaffirms this notion by arguing that the product of this genre of art is in its ability to steer generational change and consequently drawing more audiences to active participation in the visual art scene. This genre of art is therefore aimed at recreating and

redefining history, as opposed to simply reproducing it. In combination to this, artists also use this as a founding basis for forming new identities and narrating the present while breaking through historical boundaries.

Contemporary feminist artworks form an essential part of South Africa's iconographic texts. Post democracy, South African women visual artists found themselves having to continue the representation and narration of the Black identity through the production of visual texts that live in alternative spaces as well. There was a battle with how these images should look, who has control over them and what the commanding narrative should be (Enwezor, 1997). In this context, their art was largely principled in challenging whiteness and decolonising the Apartheid narrative that controlled images of Black people and imposed white supremacy onto them. De Jong (2000: 127) argues that identity is composed of diverse aspects and is therefore "related to the experiences we had in the past and to the conventions constituting identity". Contemporary South African art therefore has a linkage to the past and to history in these new narrative and constructions of a contemporary Black identity. The identity that comes with being Black is therefore linked to and is largely embedded in history and contemporary images that live in this decolonising society are a reflection of that. Renowned art historian Gombrich (1982:112) also states that "The experience of likeness is a kind of perceptual fusion based on recognition, and here as always, past experience will colour the way we see a face". Black women's history and identity are inter-connected, and this essentially compels them to make use of images and symbols that correspond to those used to question their identity (De Jong, 2000). Ultimately, this modern iconography of art is embedded in identity construction, history as well as narrative structures that concern the marginalised.

1.5.3 The Representation of Black Women in the Mainstream Media

Communication forms an integral part of social exchange amongst people who consume and share a common culture of interests. People usually communicate through distinct signs, language or images and to a great extent, these often stand as sites of representation. It is important to not ignore Stuart Hall as one of the scholars whose work on representation became a great foundational basis for reference. His concept argues that representation is an important element to the study of culture because it links language and meaning to culture (Hall, 1997: 1). This is because language, images and signs, which are exchanged through communication, stand for or exemplify things (Hall, 1997). This means that representation is a key factor when conducting a study that is concerned with culture. Dyer (2013: 14) further distinguished this

concept as follows: “To represent also means to symbolise, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for”. When reading visual texts, it is vital to understand that there is symbolism and communicated or uncommunicated meaning within the images, sculptures or paintings. The symbols are what stand for or represent broader narratives of a subject matter. It is also understood that representation provides context on cultural texts, governs our experience of the world and is thus important to everyday life (2008). This framework of representation is also fundamental because it indicates that representation is a part of and should be consumed in everyday life.

Following this, the media is a considerable communication tool that has an impact on the representation of Black women’s bodies. The mainstream media play a huge role in coordinating how the general public conceive Black women in popular culture (Johnson, 2019), and these are both leading platforms and sites of construction for popular philosophies of Black hood (Emerson, 2002). In its initial stages, the media was presumably owned and controlled by Western ideals and practices, who subsequently only portrayed an iconography of Black women that pleased their personal desires and Western ideals. Johnson (2019) supports their argument based on Collins’ (1990) definitions of the interpretation of Black women in the media. Collins (1990) expounds on these controlled perceptions of Black women in the media through four different images: The Mammy, Matriarch, the Welfare Mother and the Jezebel. The Mammy, argued as the most powerful representations of Black women in mass media (Chen, Williams, Hendrickson, & Chen, 2012), is described as the loyal and submissive domestic servant which was used to rationalise the economic mistreatment of Black housekeepers (Collins, 1990). This was a view of Black women as servants of the white home and their behaviour was also stereotyped or described against this background. The second controlling image is that of the matriarch, where Black women were also depicted as domesticated family women with children and husbands, and responsibilities only concerned with cooking, cleaning and taking care of their children. The third controlling image is that of the welfare mother which “provides an ideological justification for efforts to harness Black women’s fertility to the needs of a changing political economy” (Collins, 1990: 7). It is labelled that the “fertility of women who are not white and middle class becomes dangerous to the values and beliefs of our country” (Johnson, 2019: 12). These women perceived as welfare mothers are therefore only seen as people who are only good at giving birth to an endless amount of babies, are unemployed and happy to be only be supported and provided for by the government. The last controlling image is that of the Jezebel, who is described as aggressively

sexual which stemmed from the white male elite perceptions and efforts to control Black women's sexuality and was used to justify the surge of sexual assault on Black women by white men (Davis 1981; Hooks, 1981; White, 1985).

Correspondingly, even in pop culture, which forms a strong part of mass media consumption, the representation of Black women has been nothing short of the stereotypical definitions framed by Western culture and white patriarchy. According to Emerson (2002: 120 & 123), music videos have played a big role in depicting standards of Black beauty and hood:

> First, these videos emphasise Black women's bodies. Second, they construct a one-dimensional Black hood. They are not multifaceted but are reduced to decorative eye candy. Black women performers are not allowed to be artists in their own right but must serve as objects of male desire.

The purpose of music videos is to become a visual representation of songs created by artists; however, this often comes with bland and one-sided portrayals of Black women's bodies. They play into patriarchal suggestions that these women are sexual symbols that fulfil the role of bringing pleasure to the men in the videos who often play the main characters. This also brings an assumption that this depiction is also meant to service the perceived majority male audience of the visual text. Black women's natural beauty has been rejected by the male dominated popular culture which judges them by their physical attributes and compares them to the standards of beauty constructed by Western and patriarchal ideals (Hobson, 2018). The presentations of their bodies in these videos, and largely in popular culture, enhances popular views of Black women's bodies as body parts that exist in isolation for the visual admiration by male audiences, essentially dehumanising them. By the women being placed in these videos as visual trophies and not established artists as their male counterparts, it creates an overall depiction that Black women's bodies are not agent and require sexual appeal in order to be recognised in popular culture and mainstream media. Gammage (2015: 4) also considers these portrayals as negative and damning:

> Damnation is here defined as the purposeful condemning of Black liness as inferior, inhumane, and ungodly. It entails a systematic monopolisation of Black women's images in an attempt to destroy and control the value placed on Black femininity.

This damnation of Black women and their bodies was through a systematic structure of patriarchy which stemmed from colonialism and European ideals (Gammage, 2015). In this definition, it is argued that the media has illustrated Black women's bodies as a negative site

of existence and associated it with subservience. An example of these phenomena is the exploitation of Sarah Baartman's body by white European men. Her story is described through a phenomenon known as Baartmanmania (Jackson, 2013). This became widely popular during the 19th century and is named after Sarah Baartman, a South African Khoi who was objectified by Europeans. Jackson (2013: 70) defines this concept as a 19th century phenomenon that is indicative of Black women's representation in early popular culture and media. In Jackson (2013: 71-72), Willis and Williams (2002: 60) explain the origins of the phenomenon in this way:

> Early Dutch settlers of South Africa dubbed South Black natives "Hottentots" and Bushmen. Baartman was given a sobriquet, the Black Venus, linking her to a Western icon of physical pulchritude and sexual desirability. Her notoriety as the Black Venus or Venus Noir was part of the attention-grabbing hype that was needed to lure spectators to an eight-month exhibit in which she was on display.

Western institutions objectified and used Baartman's body for capitalist purposes by putting her naked body on exhibit. She was stripped ownership of her own body and turned into a public sensation through the public and commercial distribution and consumption of her body. Her body was not only sexualised but turned into a commodity and object of desire for the pleasure of white patriarchy (Fields, 2006; Khubisa, 2020). This argument is further stimulated by Gammage's (2015) previously mentioned logic that the media has represented Black women's bodies based on the foundations embedded in Eurocentric ideals and patriarchy. Black women's bodies have thus been highly contested and questioned, and continue to be, when looking at the current invisibility of all body types in mass media. Before and after her death, Baartman was largely exalted in popular press through caricatures, and this has prompted Black women living in contemporary times to "rearticulate demeaning stereotypical narratives of Black women as means to redefine their identity and to respond to objectification of Black women's bodies in visual culture" (Jackson, 2013: 72). Ultimately, it further indicates how colonialism and the subjugation of Black people has heightened the hyper-sexualised characterisations of Black femininity and womanhood.

It is affirmed that "Black people have been understood from foreign worldviews that lack a culturally appropriate and historically accurate interpretation of Black humanity" (Gammage, 2015: 7). People who live outside of the African diaspora primarily see and consume content that shows Black women through media and popular culture, which is why it is important to form an authentic and diverse iconography of Black women. These images need to be created,

distributed and dominated by Black women themselves. Baartman is also a woman whose narrative closely resonates with many Black women. She is a substantial figure in tracing the early forms of representation of Black women's bodies, especially because she is "someone whom scores of contemporary scholars have used to discuss European colonialism and the exploitation of Black bodies" (Mitchell, 2013: 84). It would be greatly difficult to discuss the manner in which representation is being used as a tool to communicate meaning about Black bodies without having an understanding of how the gap was formed in the media to start with. It is greatly important to continue this conversation and engage her as a whole person and not as a body in separate parts in archives as other studies have. This also feeds into Hall's (1993) concept of a Black popular culture which he describes as an opposing space. He argues that Black popular culture has facilitated "the surfacing, inside the mixed and contradictory modes even of some mainstream popular culture, of elements of a discourse that is different — other forms of life, other traditions of representation" (Hall, 1993: 109). This has been seen in the current South African context where Black people are making themselves more visible by taking up public and contested spaces. They present themselves in diverse and authentic ways to them, and not only contesting stereotypical depictions and characterisations of their bodies, but to just contribute to the public visual documentation of Black women.

1.5.4 Reimagining Identity through Performativity

Butler first introduced the concept of gender performance in her 1988 essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,* which she developed further in her book *Gender Trouble*, published in 1990. Butler calls on Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a " (Butler, 1988: 519). She explains that when thinking of gender in this way, gender is not a stable identity, nor agency that permits certain actions but that it is "an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1988: 519). She goes on to say that it is instituted through the body, so that mundane things such as movement and positioning of the body help establish the gendered self. These mundane movements are performed in front of a social audience, by which she means the people that a person interacts with, and through these movements the audience and the actors themselves "come to believe and perform in the mode of belief". She goes against the belief that the gendered self comes before the acts by saying that instead the actions are not only what create the gendered self, but also create an illusion, an object of belief so that the actor believes their actions come from the identity, and not the other way around (Butler, 1988: 519-520).

In the effort to reconstruct popular frameworks that Black women have been framed under, young Black feminist activists use the act of performance in achieving this. In detail, this is the act of performing one's own gender, sexuality and sex as well as identity. It has become pivotal in the active Black consciousness and assertion movement to place and represent the Black body in different contexts into the public space and mainstream consumption space. Examples of these performances can be seen in Tracey Rose's *The Black Paintings: Dead White Man (2012)* and *Venus Baartman (2001)* as well as Berni Searle's *'Colour Me' Series (1998)*. They are visual artists whose works centre around the tropes of institutionalised cultural discourse, confronting politics of identity as well as racial and sexual themes. Searle represents her body in this series to create facilitation between the viewer and herself because "places herself on both sides of the representational boundary, precariously becoming both the viewer looking and the image seen" (Taggard, 2007: 14). Rose also "explores the multiple identities that are inherent in women identities that are often kept in check by patriarchy and conservative upbringings" (Malatjie, 2012: 58). This manner of performing gender and identity is a concept known as Objecthood. Mengesha (2017) deliberates with the performativity of Black women in their own bodies, by labelling it as performing objecthood. Also, in her review of McMillan's *Embodied Avatars*, she quotes McMillan's argument that Black women performing Objecthood is significant because the humanisation of Black women, who were historically materialised and marginalised, forms part of a process of inclusion that can lead to a certain degree of liberation (Mengesha, 2017). Additionally, "While not always ending in emancipation, performing objecthood offers a place of self-staging where becoming an art object recasts Black women artists' terms of engagement with audiences" (McMillan, 2015: 130). Performing as an object "becomes an adroit method of circumventing prescribed limitations on Black women in the public sphere while staging art and alterity in unforeseen places" (McMillan, 2015: 7). Black women who were historically excluded and objectified in the public sphere and mass media culture, are subverting these previous depictions by performing as objects and redefining their position in society.

Throughout centuries, the body has been the controlled, abused and probed entities of society. This brings to the fore the significance of creative artist's use of their own bodies to communicate their work. Gqola (2005: 27) explains Berni Searle's use of her own body in her artwork as "challenging the dynamics of power and highlighting her agency, corporeality, as well as the ways in which she has been written on, coloured by processes which she evokes from the past". This affirms the use of the body as an essential tool in their performativity in

addressing, re-presenting and renegotiating the issues surrounding culture, history, memory, gender and identity. In her Colour Me series, Searle further uses spices to colour or cover her body which indicate both "rupture and continuation, gesturing to the processing of bodies, identities and cultures in the process of creolisation which attaches to diasporisation" (Gqola, 2005: 128). By using the women body as a subject in the performances of their work, these artists are re-emphasising the women body as a symbol of their own agency and as a sight of representation. They therefore not only address these topics but use the most contested piece of humanity to do so, while still placing themselves within spaces of contestation.

Contemporary artists also make use of the body, in relation to photographic imagery, and their own bodies in order to create momentous performances of expression. Essentially, Whitaker (2005: 28) asserts that "identity is acted out through the body as canvas, the body as an expressive medium". By putting to use their unlimited rights of expression in this manner, they "re-enact unconditional primary love" which essentially signifies that the "body performs an unsatisfied need to be loved for what one is and for what one wants to be" (Vergine, 2000: 7). Moreover, Boucher (2006: 137) affirms that "Performativity in this analysis involves the performance of multifaceted identities that are based on the individual's disruption of cultural rules and that are enacted through the individual's own determination and will". This highlights the notion that performances of the body are essential in forming debate about what different bodies experience and in confronting toxic societal conventions, stereotypes and other methods of control of the body.

1.5.5 Forming Black Digital Subjectivities on Instagram

The greatest features of the consumption of cultural material are through images as a form of constructing social identity and belonging to a mass culture. This can also be distinguished through an effort called visuality which is defined as a "central construct of critical thinking in visual culture, assembles social constructions of images that are often invisible to understand the performativity of visual culture in constructing our social worlds (Knochel, 2013: 14). This suggests that the concept of visuality is significant to the analyses of the discourses and forms of social culture are created by visual images. Visual images that are used as forms of representation are used to construct social identities, which is the reason visual art forms are widely consumed. They are embedded in social culture and multiple facets of social meaning. In essence, visuality is important because it "reference[s] the construction of vision as a social, cultural and political phenomenon" (Mirzoeff, 2006: 16). The initiation of social media has

changed the way people interact with one another and share their individual experiences. It has become a popular phenomenon for individuals to adopt the act of using social media as a platform for sharing different aspects of their lives, their societies as well as document various elements that narrate the society. Social media platforms "continuously assemble identities, cultural practices and social spaces in relation to one another" (Carah, 2014: 137 in Charteris, Gregory, Masters, 2016: 1). This essentially suggests that social media is a space for the production of cultural influences that determine how women develop their identities.

In formulating an understanding around the concept of subjectivity, this research seeks to outline how curators, visual artists and ordinary social media users are portraying visual artwork and sharing it on social media platforms. Essentially, it is argued that social network users "upload and circulate a plethora of photographs, which constitute a 'global Web museum' (Irvine 2012: 242) – or to be more precise – a Web archive" (Philipps, Zerr, Herder, 2017: 383). This suggests that contemporary visual artists do not only use traditional platforms such as art galleries and museums to exhibit their work, but also use social media and online platforms to portray their work. Recent times have seen how artists and curators creatively package visual artwork online and on social media in order to extend the impact of their work. Philipps, Zerr and Herder (2017) also affirm that photography has become a widely used practise in capturing different forms of art, and this essentially gives new opportunities to study the common definition of art amongst social network users. This further indicates that the practise of photography is significant in the manner in which visual artwork is represented on social media. Original art pieces are capturing on camera and shared in a different form on social media but creates a significant format.

A significant function that has been widely used for the consumption and circulation of art is Instagram. It is the most common platform that makes use of visual images to translate meaning and communicate culture. Suess (2014: 9) argues the following:

> Conversely at an individual level, Hubard (2014) considers our interaction with an art object may be a way of internally revealing multiple layered meanings. The aesthetic experience forms a continuing narrative, defining an ongoing polysemic identity of the work.

This statement is important because it strengthens the notion that new media, more especially social media networks like Instagram, have altered the rigid structures and traditional regimes of art fraternities. Traditionally, in relation to the exhibition of artists and the distribution of artwork, the art world has been one that is not flexible in considering social media as a part of

their daily operations. Art traditionalists and its institutions have been accused of holding on to the niche audiences and not widening the social community of art audiences because of its non-diversity of social and cultural content (Stuhr, 2003). It is thus suggested that it has taken a long time for art organisations to recognise the significance of and the greater impact that new media forms have and will still have in the visual art sphere. This presentation of contemporary artwork on social media through photographs has become a prevalent way in which visual artists show their work on more commercialised and popular platforms and disrupt these spaces as well. It gives both artists represented by galleries as well as those that are not, a chance to have their work additionally exhibited on a public platform that possibly has an immediate global reach. It therefore opens up, removes and destabilises the exclusionary traits that traditional art organisations have towards certain artists, more specifically, Black women.

With the increased demand for on-demand content by social consumers worldwide, more people are inclined to discover and engage with visual work on social media. As a result, "museums have been forced to look again to their audiences; to implicate them in the practices and processes of history 'making', to engage, consult, collaborate and, crucially, listen" (Kidd, 2011: 65). In essence, art galleries across the globe have gradually created their own representation online by establishing social media pages and having designated individuals manage these online divisions. Crane (1987), in his dissection of the early New York artworld, confirms that mass media contributed principally to the development and visibility of contemporary art to the broader public and also assisted in the commercial popularity of this art. In South Africa, some of the biggest art galleries and contemporary artists have normalised the posting of distinct artwork mainly on Instagram and Pinterest. This has also proven to be a necessity during the global COVID-19 pandemic, with artists having to cater to socially distancing and isolated audiences. Examples of these traditional art organisations that have changed and adapted to digital platforms are the Goodman Gallery, Stevenson Gallery as well as Fine Art Joburg who all have ongoing social media presence and interaction with users and consumers of their art. They also each have distinct practices that they have integrated into their common operations that include strategic planning towards posting art content on Instagram. Lastly, these galleries also formed part of the galleries have altered traditional art exhibiting due to the COVID-19 pandemic by hosting virtual online tours, hosting a series of video interviews with exhibiting artists as well as hosting virtual exhibitions on Instagram.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

1.6.1 Building a Democratised Representation Through Third Wave and African Feminism

Within both the general media practices and societal practices, Black women have been subjects of exclusion and misrepresentation. In countering the misconstrued narratives about Black women in the popular media, they have committed to a new state of consciousness by challenging and renegotiating the pre-defined notions of femininity, beauty and gender. This notion is heavily influenced by the third wave of feminism, that started in the early 1990's, which is one where women seek to question and redefine predefined notions of hood, sexuality, gender, beauty, femininity and masculinity. In Farrimond's (2013:240) review of Shelley Budgeon's conceptualisation of the third wave of feminism, she describes it as "a reflexive, reflective form of feminism, informed by post-structuralist refusals of essentialism and foundationalism". In more explicit terms, the third wave "helps young women articulate a feminism that responds to the political, economic, technological and cultural circumstances that are unique to the current era" (Kinser, 2004: 124). This is a more relevant and still sought-after type of feminism, especially when reading contemporary art forms. This feminist stance is largely embedded in the concept of individualism and bargaining the liberalisation of the black women body in all its shape and form. It is also one in which black women, are still using to negotiate and claim their existence and place in history, society and most especially the media.

In this plight to leverage the systemic misrepresented depictions of black women in African histories, the arts and the visual media, it is increasingly evident for contemporary artists to adopt the ideals of the third wave. This has been paired with the creation of their own subjectivities, including online identities, that portray new and more authentic constructions of identity, gender, sex and sexuality and hood. This is considered as a third wave feminist activism. This often occurs along making use of new age technologies and digital media forms that deliver bite sized visual imagery that educates and re-constructs the definition of the black women. In extending this notion, Cuboniks (2015) asserts that new digital forms need to be strategically used to restructure the world. This is why contemporary art has taken a new amount of significance in the society that we live in; it is a way that black women can construct new texts that are true to their history and narrative. It is also the form of art that has altered older and more traditional and restrictive traits of the art world by using a traditional art medium yet publish it in unconventional and public spaces. In their study, Matich, Ashman and Parsons

(2019: 345) uncovered that "The overwhelming view appears to be that online spaces and platforms afford space for feminists to educate, organise and galvanise more easily than ever before, seeing a return to collective feminist activism". Most contemporary art, especially feminist art, redefines not only past but present culture, which is why it is important for it to live on accessible public spaces and platforms.

One of the other important elements of third wave feminism, especially for Black South African women is that it encourages them to learn about and be aware of their black identity and understand what it stands for as well as how this ultimately shapes their hood as Black women in the broader society. This raising of consciousness is a strategy used by feminists to (un)silence women's experiences and is an integral part of developing feminist awareness today (Sowards, Renegar, 2004). One method used by contemporary feminists such as Muholi and Sibande is a concept known as hypervisibility. Their artwork is aimed at contextualising the black women in political history and altering the definition of the black skin and body. This is done by increasing the visibility of marginalised groups through feminist activism to construct social change, most especially in popular and mainstream media. These practices of consciousness raising are also considered to be the main foundations for social activism and movements (Chesbro, Cragan, McCullough, 1973; Gring-Pemble, 1998). Ultimately, this encourages black women to be more assertive and aware of their blackness and sense of hood and femininity.

There are various definitions of feminism, and one of the most powerful definitions is one by Bidisha (2013) mentioned in Khan (2018: 110):

> Feminism is coloured the red of women's rage, women's despair, women's power, women's brilliance and women's emancipation, which pulses with never-ending faith that freedom and justice are only ever a heartbeat away.

This highlights the notion that feminism is an advocacy of the rights that women should possess. It is driven by the pain and experiences that women have gone through and therefore feel the need for the change in society that does not marginalise women or place them in society as inferior beings. Ntombela (2013: 49) also defined this notion as "conceived as a movement of mobilising women's agency and subjectivity in order to overturn patriarchal oppression". This is a necessary component in the assertion of black women and in instilling a spirit of consciousness within them. This makes it even more necessary and vital for black women to re-present themselves in society, especially through multiple creative forms. It is argued that

art is a platform that links different world views that include central and violent exclusionary discourses (Khan, 2018). It is indicated that art is a significant platform that allows for the circulation of different perspectives and views to be shared and expressed, while also defining itself as a great source of representation.

A significant theory to this entire notion is Standpoint Feminist Theory. This theory is argued to be a "critical social theory maintained as having as its starting-point: the lived experience of real women and their lived contexts" (Naidoo, 2010: 25). It is a theory that stems from the beliefs that the experiences of women ought to be documented in all aspects and from their own perspectives. This is a significant theory because it is aimed at highlighting and affirming that women's oppression does indeed exist and should adequately be recognised Hirschman (1998). An increasing number of Black women are also making use of this social theory to make sure that their voices are heard. Also affirms that black women have been and are continually using this theory and different platforms as a medium of getting the voices of Black women heard.

Black feminisms are tremendously important in the development of a change in the society. It is equally important for the history and experiences of Black women to be written by Black women themselves from their own point of views and perspectives to make it valid. It is also imperative to participate in Black feminisms because they explore the various ways in which we can write about black women in manners that counter the knowledge systems informed and made by colonialists (Matsipa, 2014). In the same breath, Ntombela (2013: 66) argues that "adopting the philosophy of black feminism is necessary in order to understand the socio-political circumstances that affected black women specifically". Ultimately, this puts emphasis on the role that these Black feminist scholars also play in re-constructing the narratives surrounding Black women and highlighting the work of feminist artists in recognising the power of the Black women's body and essentially largely contributing to how Black women are re-writing history.

In the post-colonial period, women are increasingly becoming active in getting their own voices heard across all platforms. In recent times, a greatly impactful form of feminism has been influenced by the advancements on technology, the internet and social media. This can be referred to as Fourth-wave feminism or contemporary feminism. Munro (2013:22) defines contemporary feminism as a concept that is "characterised by its diversity of purpose, but the reliance on the internet is constant". It is suggested that contemporary feminism is a movement

that is majorly founded on and driven forward by the internet. It is also argued that this kind of feminism driven by the internet has formulated a culture in which the notions of sexism and misogyny can be defied (Munro, 2013:23). The most important element is that this kind of feminism is also driven largely by purpose; these women make use of the internet to drive a strong message forward and actively advocate for issues relating to or surrounding women.

Another imperative aspect of contemporary feminism is that it has become a platform for black women to create their own conversations from personal perspectives that narrate their lived realities. Okolosie (2014: 90) asserts that contemporary feminism, for black feminists, is as follows:

> The concept has become the primary tool through which we articulate our understanding of how social inequalities are created and sustained, a key concern being that such an analysis should become normative practice for the wider movement rather than a niche concern of a minority constituency. To that end, social media, particularly Twitter and the feminist blogosphere, has revolutionised and, to some extent, democratised our movement, allowing women who once would have been assigned to the margins of debate a platform from which to speak.

This suggests that Black feminists have used this movement as an important tool for their own articulation of their social and political injustices. This is becoming a reality because "feminist activism is visible on the streets once again, and commentary and agendas are progressing in mainstream media in ways that have not been seen for decades" (MacKay, 2015: 332). Essentially, the concept of hypervisibility is being used by women to break the common stereotypes and create new and more substantial representations of black women. The contemporary feminist movement has opened up a great platform for black women to speak about their own realities and become a part of social debates that will place women in significant historical spaces.

1.6.2 Affect Theory

In understanding visual aesthetics, it is important to gain a high level of comprehension for affect because it will assist in investigating and understanding different audience perceptions and responses to artwork. It is asserted that affect is a concept that is commonly used to describe the experience of feeling or emotion. The main theory used in defining and understanding this concept is Tomkin's Affect theory. He states that it is the "primary innate

biological motivating mechanism, more urgent than drive deprivation and pleasure, and more urgent than even physical pain" (Tomkin, 1984: 163). It is a natural form of response that is required in order to stimulate human beings into certain types of actions. It is also urgent in a sense that it is an immediate reaction or response that one gets to a specific source or object and cannot initially be controlled. He argues that these innate affects have distinct facial expressions (Tomkins, 1984) which highlights the view that affects are critical reactions that people experience, formed by the perception of a particular subject or object. This state of mind is stimulated internally and can also be characterised by multiple roles.

In Tomkin's theorisation of affect, he asserts that it is characterised by numerous roles. The first important role is Startle, which "appears to be activated by a critical rate of increase in the density of neural firing" (Tomkins, 1984: 170). This indicates that when a person experiences a wave of shock into their body or is disconcerted, they naturally and immediately formulate a counter response. This thereafter causes the individual to remove their attention from one thing or person to another (Tomkins, 1984). This is an indication that the process of affect is in progress. Affect is largely by a specific stimulus which forces the individual to experience a particular reaction, emotion or response to it. For instance, in regards to visual arts, this is seen through the work of Zanele Muholi, in some of her work, she uses her darkened naked body as a form of expression, which initially shocks observers, but gradually draws their interest to the pieces. In light of this, Tomkins (1984: 17) highlights that whether an individual is interrupted, they will respond with numerous feelings such as "interest, joy, disgust, anger or shame" and this is dependent upon the way in which their attention was stimulated as well as their interpretation to it. This thus highlights that audience only react to art if it has somehow startled them and forced them into interest or other reactions.

Furthermore, interest is also a significant role in determining affect. Importantly, "interest is also a necessary condition for the formation of the perceptual world" (Tomkins, 1984: 172). Interest is a substantial factor in defining how specific subjects or objects enforce emotional stimulation and movement in the public. For example, people would not generally be moved by specific piece of art if they were not firstly, interested in the visual arts and the role in plays in the society, and secondly, not captured by the visual piece and interested in dissecting its meaning or significance. Adding to this, Best (2007: 509) affirms that "interest is the basis for cognition; without interest, the work of thought has no propeller; the inner world of thought needs the propulsion of interest". Individuals who are affected by something, are mostly driven by a sense of interest, which results in the internalisation and promotion of the messages

conveyed by artists and their work. Once an individual's attention has been captured by being moved or affected by something, they are able to then formulate a perception of something in great detail through their interest in the subject matter. By a person having interest in something, it ultimately preserves or asserts their long-term involvement and effort in the subject matter.

Finally, the last role of affect that will be analysed in relation to this research is Contempt and Disgust. Two of the important feelings that also indicate an individual's affect towards something are contempt and disgust. They are argued to also be innate defence responses (Tomkins, 1984). This suggests that they are natural reactions that individuals receive in attempts to defend themselves against something. Tomkins (1984: 181) further affirms that:

> Contempt and disgust appear to be changing more in status from drive-reducing acts to acts that also have a more general motivating and signal function, both to the individual who emits it and to the one who sees it

It is suggested that feelings of contempt and disgust do not only decrease an individual's drive to perform an action or positively react to something, but may also motivate them to rejecting something and using several motivating features to force others to rejects the object. An example of this could be individuals that were against Zanele Muholi's work because she used real lesbians as her subjects in her work; they not only developed a dislike in her work, but also made their negative opinion public by actively protesting against her work. This therefore indicates that once an individual is stimulated by contempt and disgust, they have a negative response and signal others towards the same reaction or response. By people getting affected by something, it also drives them towards social exchange, to promote solidarity on certain issues (Lawler, 2001).

Ultimately, people are often stimulated by several factors that enhance their natural reactions or responses towards something or a specific subject matter. In order for a person to be moved by an experience or affected by something, they have natural feelings or emotions towards it that determining their response. It is important to conceptualise affect in understanding the different mechanisms used by artists to move people and to understand how and why people react the way they do to certain images or pieces of art.

1.6.3 The Progression of Public Art and Visual Culture in South Africa

Public art is a form of art and media that is planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain, most commonly outside and accessible to all. It is formally defined "making traverses to diverse places, social contexts and subjectivities" (Zebracki, 2020: 3) and "a family of conditions including the object's origin, history, location and social purpose" (Ridley and Neill, 2013: 407). This art form is one that is solely meant for the purposes of expanding and living in public spaces, and simultaneously entrenching social purpose into the society. It is not only consumed within the confines of the white walls, but distinguished settings and speaks to dissimilar social frameworks. This format of art has therefore complicated how the public, and niche art audiences have become accustomed to seeing and consuming visual artwork. One of the characteristics of public art, as affirmed by Hein (2007: 408), is the following:

> Public art became vernacular, having to do not with the spirit that magnifies as it collectivises, but with ordinary, unmythicised people in ordinary places and with the ordinary events of their mundane lives.

Public artworks create a wider footprint of representation and presence of the ordinary individuals in the wider constructs of social and visual cultures. They are important to the continuing decolonisation of elitist, patriarchal and racially biased practices within visual culture, because they advocate for the mass accessibility of cultural and visual texts. Visual cultures in South Africa are also being foregrounded by visual expressions of new public histories, a more focused importance to consciousness and progression towards a broader, diverse and inclusive culture (Coombes, 2003). This is highlighted by the change in audience behaviour because they are not considered as a passive spectator, but a more actively involved in the composition of the art (Hein, 2007). Audiences have more actively involved in understanding and contributing to the meaning and construction of art pieces, directly and indirectly. An example of this would be the range of *Fees Must Fall* student protests that occurred in South Africa in 2017. For example, the protests and their purpose inspired visual content from many artists including the photographer and visual curator Cole Ndelu, who created an image that represented the repression of students and their protests. This popular image was titled the *Pride of the Panther* (2017) and became a significant piece of art that represented the occurrence of that period. This is a stark indication that Ndelu's visual piece is both considered a significant piece of visual artwork, but was also publicly accessible and a portrayal of the South Black public, which further complicates the narrative of visual art. This

has also arguably resulted in the "burgeoning interest now among private museums and publicly funded art institutions to portray self-designated public art" (Hein, 2007: 410).

Another element that foregrounds visual culture and contemporary visual images is the performing of identity and Blackness with the body. The human body is the most crucial piece of humanity and has become part of the most important and popularly used forms of expression. Throughout centuries, the body has been the controlled, abused and probed entities of society. This brings to the fore the significance of creative artist's use of their own bodies to communicate their work. For example, in *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014), Zanele Muholi takes on the character of not only the maker, but the subject as well, by using her body to depict the different identities performed in the self-portraits (Khoza, 2021). Gqola (2005: 27) explains Berni Searle's use of her own body in her artwork as "challenging the dynamics of power and highlighting her agency, corporeality, as well as the ways in which she has been written on, coloured by processes which she evokes from the past". This affirms the use of the body as an essential tool in and is subject to addressing, re-presenting and renegotiating the issues surrounding culture, history, memory, gender and identity. In her *Colour Me* series, Searle further uses spices to colour or cover her body which indicate both "rupture and continuation, gesturing to the processing of bodies, identities and cultures in the process of creolisation which attaches to diasporisation" (Gqola, 2005: 128). By using the women body as a subject in their work, these artists are re-emphasising the women body as a symbol of their own agency and as a sight of representation. They therefore not only address these topics but use the most contested piece of humanity to do so, while still placing themselves within spaces of contestation.

The human body is the most crucial piece of humanity and has become part of the most important and popularly used forms of expression. Throughout centuries, the body has been the most controlled, abused and probed entities of society. It has arguably been used to "judge, influence and portray humanity, creating a classification system to which certain validations are required for participation" (McCleary, 2018). As a result, this has enabled the use of the body as a concept of representation: as a form of protest, to make political statements, to narrate socio-cultural issues in society as well as to advance beauty in the natural form. Visual artists have also made use of their bodies as subject matters in their work and performances. This is explored through the concepts of performance art and body performance in photographic imagery. Performance art is considered to be a form of art is characterised by a performance being presented to an audience within a visual art context. Formally, it is defined as "a form of

arts practice that involves a person or persons undertaking an action or actions within a particular timeframe in a particular space or location for an audience" (Coogan, 2011: 4), and also by the presence of a performer, a performer's action and an audience (Wichmann, 2013). This type of art is characterised by various elements, the first one being the body. In their performances, artists powerfully assert their bodies as forms and content which insists on the primacy of human subjects over objects (Stiles and Selz, 2014). Stiles and Selz (2014: 679) further argues that:

> Emphasising the body as art, these artists amplified the role of process over product and shifted from representational objects to presentational modes of action that extended the formal boundaries of painting and sculpture into real time and movement in space.

This indicates that the body is an essential tool in and is subject to addressing, representing and renegotiating the issues surrounding culture, society, identity, race and ethnicity. The artist is able to perform the natural or authentic self while rebelling against societal conventions (Whitaker, 2005). They therefore not only address these topics but use the most contested piece of humanity to do so, while still placing themselves within spaces of contestation.

Contemporary artists also make use of the body, in relation to photographic imagery, and their own bodies in order to create momentous performances of expression. Essentially, Whitaker (2005: 28) asserts that "identity is acted out through the body as canvas, the body as an expressive medium". By putting to use their unlimited rights of expression in this manner, they "re-enact unconditional primary love" which essentially signifies that the "body performs an unsatisfied need to be loved for what one is and for what one wants to be" (Vergine, 2000: 7). This highlights the notion that performances of the body are essential in forming debate about what different bodies experience and in confronting toxic societal conventions, stereotypes and other methods of control of the body. An example of an artists who was a pioneer in body performing is Carolee Schneemann who was an American visual experimental artist. She is known for her multimedia works on the body, narrative, sexuality and gender. One of her most substantial pieces were her performances titled *Eye Body* (1963) and *Interior Scroll* (1975) where she performs nude and fundamentally addressing the women sexuality, sexual hierarchies in societal traditions and the sexual liberation of women, amongst others. In these performances, she uses her body as an instrument of representation.

Another important factor in exploring the body and performance, is women's performance art. Its main feature is to deconstruct the conventions and traditional expectations of society. It is argued that "women's performance art operates to unmask this function of ‘', responding to

the weight of representation by creating an acute awareness of all that signifies , or femininity" (Forte, 1988: 218). This creates the opportunity and space for women to represent themselves and be the main voice that speaks to the public in relation to the definition of women identity, sexuality and gender issues. Performance art also has an imperative and distinctive aspect which is live art or live performance; it depicts instability, a loss of fixed representation, the viewer is taken into a disrupted placing of themselves in the world (Whitaker, 2005). This gives performance the ability to foster interaction and active participation of the audience, by placing themselves as art within the space of the observer or its audiences.

1.7 Research Methods

1.7.1 Research Design

A research method is a technique implored by a researcher to obtain results for their study. It is accurate and substantial evidence that assists in validating the arguments of the study and answering the research questions. It is asserted by Kerlinger (1986: 279) that "a research design is a plan structure and strategy of investigation so conceived as to obtain answers to research questions or problems" (Ngwenya, 2014: 60). This is therefore a qualitative research study because it focused on examining and interpreting cultural and visual texts for its communicated meaning. A research design is considered as the structure that holds the research study together (Akhtar, 2016). It is further defined as "the plan, structure and strategy and investigation concaved so as to obtain ensured to search question and control variance" (Ram, 2010: 121) and "a master plan specifying the methods and procedure for collecting and analysing the needed information" (Zikmund, 1988: 41). The design that was best suited for and used for this research study was exploratory. This is because the research did not prove or explain a specific phenomenon but rather explored new perceptions into a pre-existing phenomenon, that being the exploration of feminist contemporary art in re-shaping media culture. Furthermore, it is argued that the purpose of exploratory research is to achieve new insights into a certain concept (Akhtar, 2016), so with this, this study has shown how the contemporary artworks by black feminists and activists forms part of both contemporary and mass media culture. Ultimately, this research has been qualitative in nature, which "involves collecting and working with text, images, or sounds" (Guest, Namey, Mitchell, 2013:3) and is important in studies focused on societal behaviours and phenomena as well as inquiring into reasoning for human behaviour. In essence, it was also qualitative because it focused on exploring visual texts, that being images obtained from Instagram as well as Instagram exhibitions.

1.7.2 Research Methods

For this research study, the main research methods employed were Purposive Sampling, Cyber Ethnography and Thematic Content Analysis of visual images. Purposive Sampling was used to choose the artists Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi, Lady Skollie and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi and artworks which were relevant to the research question about contemporary art on Instagram. Patton explains this concept as "a technique used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources" (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, 2015: 2). This popular technique is also known as judgment sampling, which is often used when researchers are required to select data according to specific and pre-selected criteria. Instagram was also used as a primary source for collecting photographs of the works and to investigate the form in which the works took on the platform. It is important to note that this is an interdisciplinary study that straddles different areas and required firstly, that the images be seen in two different ways, in person and an Instagram live and IGTV video. Secondly, this impacted how the works were read. Most of the images were photographed artworks taken from Instagram and were read as photographed artwork. In conjunction, this indicates that they were not read with a technical art lens but through the medium of photography and moving imagery. Visual material from exhibitions that took place from the years 2006 to 2017 and from Instagram between the years 2013 and 2020 formulated the photographic collection needed for this study:

> Mary Sibande: Visual materials were mainly sourced from public exhibitions of *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2010) as part of the Joburg Art City Project (2010) and *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013) as part of the Nirox Sculpture Park public exhibition program. A New York digital billboard from 2018 and nine photographs of artworks from Instagram were also collected as sources.
>
> Zanele Muholi: Seven photographed artworks of from *Faces and Phases* (2006) and five from *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) were collected and used as visual sources to support this research. Instagram pages relating to both the artist and this work were sourced.
>
> Lady Skollie: A total of six photographs of artwork were used from Skollie's *Lust Politics* (2017) and *Pussy Prints* (2015). A photographic collection from her personal Instagram page and #Lustpolitics and #Ladyskollie were also used for reference.

Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi: Seven photographs of artwork from *Gymnasium* (2019 and 2020) were taken from Nkosi's Instagram page. This includes a video of her 2020 Instagram exhibition with Stevenson Gallery. Her work was also analysed through the hashtag #Thenjiwenikinkosi.

The methods of data analysis used by the researcher were a combination of different methods: Cyber Ethnography as well as Thematic Content Analysis. A combined method was necessary in the works were collected from and read as images from Instagram, and thereafter required thematic collation for the further analysis of its content. Cyber ethnography is a research method that has emerged within the past decade for research focusing on the internet only and communication within cyber spaces (Akturan, Karadeniz, Yılmaz, Gül, İnelmen, Yılmaz, 2009) and is defined by Kozinets (1998: 366) as "a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications". It allows for the exploration of communication between human beings within virtual spaces with the researcher being able to analyse the interaction between involved parties (Browne, 2004). Through this method, the exchanges between the Instagram pages of the artists and artworks used in the study and users are recorded and used for analysis.

In this study, I lean on the social media element strongly which is why I needed to use this method. While this lends itself to towards employing Cyber Ethnography, I have not used it to a great extent that required a more elaborate engagement with these accounts. I focused more on using it to explore presence and form of artists and their works on Instagram through a search of pages and hashtags. I also used this to identify and observe content within these pages before using a Thematic Content Analysis for elaborately examining content. The main benefits of using this research method were that I was able to see and understand the depths of this digital interface between artists, artworks and Instagram users, as well as obtain deeper understanding of the underlying social behaviours between them (Ward, 1999). Throughout this process, I was also able to define my own parameters for the study because it was not determined by responses received by interviews for instance. I was also able to keep re-accessing the pages on Instagram and saving it for myself as I was using it (Browne, 2004). It is highly adaptable to a wide range of circumstances because of its layered qualitative content and findings that are without specified limits (Kozinets, 2002). In contrast, this method also has its limitations. Cyber ethnographic research "is not so "closed" and therefore no definitive answer for the research question is produced" and there are large amounts of data to be

interpreted and categorised (Akturan, Karadeniz, Yılmaz, Gül, İnelmen, Yılmaz, 2009). What also makes it difficult to interpret this kind of data is its subjectivity, lack of ways to adequately measure it to reality and difficulty in determining representative tropes surrounding the 'virtual community' (Fox, Roberts, 1999).

An additional method used was a thematic content analysis which is a combined method of a Thematic Analysis and a Content Analysis. A thematic analysis is a method used to describe data and further break it down into different themes and dominant categories. It is described as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data. Even though thematic analysis techniques have been existing since the early twentieth century, philosopher of science Gerald Holton has been credited as one of the founders of this method in his work on *themata* in scientific thought (Holton, 1975). It is said that it has also been used alongside references to content analysis for its qualitative uses (Baxter, 1991). It was initially a difficult method to understand because elaborate research techniques around this method only started being established in the 1990s, such as Aronson (1994)'s article (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, Braun, 2017). As a result, Braun and Clarke (2006) determined it to be complex, minimally acknowledged and not adequately defined, but still broadly used. The second part of this combined method is a Content Analysis. Mayring (2000: 2) states that "Qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification". The purpose of this method is also to analytically examine the communication patterns of media texts in a methodical manner (Neuendorf, Kumar, 2015). It is also an appropriate qualitative method to use for the analysis of written, visual or verbal communication messages (Cole, 1988). In this study, it has been used to analyse both visual and written texts.

From Braun and Clarke's (2006: 6) thematic guide to "organise and describe data set in rich detail", this method has been used to organise the collected images from Instagram into the following themes and sub-categories: Black digital subjectivities, active participatory engagement from audiences through hashtags, the division of images from the years 2013 to 2020, the counting of the number of posts from each page in each respective year as well as the most liked photographs. These were put together in the form of tables, figures and photographic collection in the Appendix. The benefits of using this combined method are; that the techniques and tools from these methods bridge the gap between qualitative and quantitative methods and that Thematic Analysis is theoretically flexible with very limited

confines and methods of analysis – giving myself as the researcher some reign to interpret and thematise the data in a way that is fit for the purposes of my desired outcome (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, Braun, 2017). This kind of flexibility is also an advantage because it widens potential for "experiential or critical orientation" (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, Braun, 2017) as seen in Braun and Clarke (2006). The main weakness to a thematic analysis is that it is not theoretically compared to other research techniques and as a researcher, the data is interpreted according to your own understanding and essentially widens the gap of subjectivity (Gibson, 2006). Qualitative content analysis is advantageous for its non-linear format that provides researchers with techniques to code and analyse complex information and data (Polit, Beck, 2004). I was able analyse the dense data from Instagram through both qualitative and quantitative techniques and report it in an uncomplicated format. The sheer quantity of the iconography collected and referenced is quite daunting as well and at certain times overwhelming (Elo, Kyngäs, 2008).

1.8 Thesis Outline

This research study divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter which introduces the subject topic, problem statement, research aims, objectives and research question this project is pursuing. This introduction includes a significance of study, a review of literature on representation, performativity, black subjectivities on Instagram and a background to study, a theoretical framework on African Feminism and Third Wave Feminism, Affect and public art and visual culture in South Africa, as well as a stipulation of the research methods used to achieve the desired outcome. The research design was a qualitative exploratory study and methods included a cyber ethnography, purposive sampling as well as a thematic content analysis.

Chapter 2 is the first of the analysis chapters which serves as an overarch of the analyses and discussions to follow. The collected visual texts as well as posting behaviour and engagement patterns from the Instagram audience were presented here. A critical reading and analysis of the form in which the artists and works have taken on Instagram is also included here which also describes the relationship between Instagram, artists and artworks.

Chapter 3 is the second analysis chapter and consists of a detailed close reading of the works of Mary Sibande and Lady Skollie. Their work is analysed through the framework of public art because their works and characters in them expand and are activated by public spaces. Another framework used is feminism because the works predominantly create and portray women subjects while addressing issues relating to the controlling and marginalisation of Black

women's bodies, sexuality and sex, consent and violence as well as constructions of identity in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Chapter 4 is the third and last analysis chapter, which consists of a critical reading of Zanele Muholi and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi's works. It is critically read and analysed through the framework of performativity and altering the gaze because both their work focuses on disrupting the gaze and constructing a post-colonial Black identity. Their work is also discussed through the lens of disrupting space, straddling the contrasts between black and white and the creation of public dialogues that place diverse Black women's bodies in unimagined spaces.

Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the research study. This focuses on collating the essential elements of the research and using this to make final remarks and statements about the major arguments. This also stipulates the extent at which this study explored the research topic and its contribution to both the academic and broader society.

Chapter 2: Creating an Alternative Visual Archive Through the Dissemination of Artwork on Instagram

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to dig deep into the Instagram platform, a platform that allows for the re-interpretation of visual works, to derive visual material pertaining to artists and their visual works on the platform. These are presented as research findings and are collections of and subsequent representations of the assembled data by a researcher for a specific study, which is meant to heighten understanding of phenomena (Byrne, 2001). This section also serves as the founding basis for building the discussion regarding the way artists present and represent themselves as well as the format in which the artworks have taken on the social platform and evidently, in other public spaces. Subsequently, this will be the overarching chapter that illustrates the relationship between artists, artworks and Instagram. These findings were developed by a thorough ethnography of Instagram which consisted of looking for Instagram pages and hashtags that were representative of artists or visual works, and a further in-depth look at how artists and their works are depicted and subsequently altering that space.

2.2 The Re-presentation of Artists and Visual Artworks on Instagram

Instagram is evidently a platform synonymous with the sharing of social photographic images by its users. In light of this, this research has discovered that Instagram is an additional space for more visual artists and artworks to be present and live in. The main medium of imagery of the platform is photography, which is defined as a medium of image production (Azoulay, 2010). However, due to the nature of Instagram, its role in the realm of visual culture and how it has come to be consumed, this research argues that the photographs produced on the platform are not just plain images, but cultural texts. Cultural texts are objects, actions and behaviours that reveal deeper, cultural meanings and these could be images as well (Engaging Communities, 2018) and Assmann (1995: 234) views it as “a literary text that is part of a social group’s cultural memory”. The main criteria focused on during this research process was Instagram pages that represented Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi, Lady Skollie and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi. Moreover, this included a close investigation of the posting behaviour and engagement, excluding commenting, from approximately 2016 to 2020. This is because Instagram was still a new application and some artists only started developing pages after the year 2016.

Additionally, the past five years have been crucial because the art experience on social media has seen a great shift and impact on participation and engagement on all fronts (Kang, Chen, and Kang, 2019). The art community, including institutions such as art galleries and museums, are more embracive towards Instagram and have adapted it into their work. The art community has garnered a larger interest in the platform and found ways to take advantage of its several uses (Budge, 2017). The main reason for this is that it allows for artists and curators to increase their reach within the audience, have them engage with the works more as well as strengthen the overall relationship between the art community and its audiences (Barron, Leask, 2017). This has formulated the progression and evolution of both Instagram as a curator of an alternative visual culture, and the art community to produce artwork for the mass audience. For example, the first way that this relationship is seen to play out is through the presentation of artist and artworks in their own Instagram pages or accounts, which are essentially hubs of photographs and videos by single users and allows other Instagram users to identify with them through the visual diary created by their accounts (Antonelli, 2020). In relation to the artists and works being investigated in this study, there are seven accounts that were found which are argued to be representing the artists and some of the works, as shown in the table below. The table shows the Instagram accounts found and indicates the number of times each account has posted from 2016 to 2020 and serves to comparatively highlight posting behaviour and its progression through recent years. The second table also shows the number of followers that each of these accounts have. An extension of the content from Instagram is also included in Appendices.

TALLY OF INSTAGRAM POSTS					
YEARS	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**
PAGES					
@facesandphases	33	218	84	148	4
@ladyskollie	426	294	91	77	39
@marysibande	0	0	29	17	22
@muholiprod	0	0	0	0	193
@somnyamangonyama	11	91	82	93	7
@thenjiwenkosi	0	0	0	21	12
@muholizanele	699	825	514	860	147

*Table 1: Instagram Post Tally *data as at 25/01/21*

TOTAL INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS	
@Somnyamangonyama	6316
@Facesandphases	1383

@ladyskollie	25 200
@marysibande	14 900
@thenjiwenkosi	13 100
@muholiprod	15 200
@muholizanele	125 000

*Table 2: Instagram Followers *as at 25/01/21*

A collection of photographs that have been posted on these individual pages on Instagram has been collected and put together in the form of an Appendix. Each appendix represents the works of different artists and is presented as visual photographs screenshotted from Instagram. They each aim to provide an extensive look at how each page has transitioned and a visual explanation of the types of images shown on the pages. Mary Sibande's work and pages are presented in Appendix A, Zanele Muholi on Appendix B, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi on Appendix C and Lady Skollie on Appendix D. These appendices have different sub-sections that show different breakdowns ranging from Instagram page timeline collages to art pictures with the most likes, amongst others.

Appendix A:

This depicts some of the works of Mary Sibande as seen on Instagram. Section 1 contains a timeline collage of her Instagram page from 2016 to 2020. This was important to show because it illustrates the behavioural tactics of this page, the type of images shared with the audience as well as how she progressed the page from showing a mixture of unrelated pictures with low quality, to mostly of those showing her work in its highest quality. Section 2 has her most liked photographs from each year which was also important to show because most of Sibande's highest liked images, even though it is on her personal page, are those of her artwork, either from *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2010) or *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013). This highlights the fact that her artworks are garnering more attention and engagement from different and bigger audiences who come across her work on the platform. Section 3 shows an extract of the types of images that have been shared under the hashtag *#marysibande*, which also mostly consists of her own work and the audience's personal encounters with her work, and not just her.

Appendix B:

This appendix is a presentation of the various works of Zanele Muholi that will mostly be included or referenced in the discussions to follow. Sections 1 and 3 are collections of the *Faces and Phases* and *Somnayama Ngonyama* Instagram posts respectively, shown through timeline collages from 2016 to 2020. Both of these pages live under their own profiles and are engaged with outside of Muholi as an interface between the user and the work. This is one of the best ways that both of these works have defied traditional art practices. Their meaning has become extended in a multimedia framework and can be argued to have contributed to the disruption and reimagination of a more inclusive, more Black and more representative visual culture. Section 2 is only a highlight reel of some of the stand-out images from *Faces and Phases (2006)* and some of these images include the different dialogues and workshops Muholi has curated to heighten the visibility of queer bodies across the world as well as the exhibitions that the work will or has been seen in. This has also become an extension of the series itself because Muholi uses the page to show different queer bodies in their everyday spaces. Section 4 highlights a visual look-book of the @zanelemuholi Instagram page.

Appendix C:

This shows the work of Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi that has been selected and used for this study. Nkosi's page only has posts from 2019 to 2020, which some are shown in 1. It also depicts the *Gymnasium* (2020) Instagram exhibition and how many times she was tagged in 2019 compared to 2020. It is important to see and reference this exhibition because it was one of the first that South Africa had as a result of the COVID-19 national lockdown. It was presented in a video format, but an image of the video on the page is shown. The second section presents the page's most liked photographs with an indication of how many likes were received by each photograph. What was pertinent here is that Nkosi's page illustrates a great footprint of the different works from *Gymnasium* (2020), and still shows how the artworks gain more engagement and a liking with Instagram audiences.

Appendix D:

This demonstrates the work of Lady Skollie on her Instagram page and how her posting behaviour has ranged from 2016 to 2020. Even her presence on Instagram is not as high as Muholi's, Skollie is one of the artists whose works have been activated by public engagement. Her work is peculiar but has still gained a large audience who resonate with it. It is shown how she posts frequently with a range of images from both her personal life and her visual works.

The second section of this appendix shows her most liked images which are largely from her own artwork or one where she is actively seen next to or is engaging with her work.

Sibande, Muholi, Skollie and Nkosi have personal Instagram pages, named after them: *@marysibande*, *@muholizanele*, *@ladyskollie* and *@thenjiwenkosi*. These seem to be stemming from the artists themselves because their posts are often captioned in and they communicate with their followers or Instagram audience in the first person. Thereafter, the only other artist whose works also live through an Instagram page are *Faces and Phases* (2006) as *@facesandphases*, *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) as *@somnyamangonyama* and *Muholi Productions* as *@muholiprod*. Muholi productions is a project and entity that only had an Instagram presence since March 2020, is named as curated by Zanele Muholi with a purpose to redefine the visual archive (Muholi Productions, 2020). It is affirmed that Muholi has a larger footprint on Instagram because they are represented through multiple Instagram accounts and both of their *@muholizanele* and *@muholiprod* accounts are within the top three accounts with the largest following. Also, they have been more active with their personal account in terms of posting and creating content over the five-year period. This makes them a leading figure in using multimedia platforms to create an alternative visual archive. Moreover, it is evident that *@ladyskollie*, *@facesandphases* and *@somnyamangonyama* are also more active and have more posted images within the pages. As seen in Appendix two and three, most of the images represented on these pages are that of respective artwork and exhibitions surrounding them, meaning that there is an actual living archive of the works that mass audiences can engage with at any given time.

Another important alternative format that the works and artists live on Instagram is through hashtags. Hashtags have become a way of sharing images or disseminating information as well as formulating a central diary for reference of the spoken subject topic. This is also how the works of Sibande, Muholi, Nkosi and Skollie are being engaged, stored and shared on Instagram as shown in the images, taken as screenshots from Instagram below:

1. Zanele Muholi, *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) and *Faces and Phases* (2006) archives live under the hashtags #facesandphases, #somnyamangonyama, #zanelemuholi



Faces and Phases hashtag: https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/facesandphases/?hl=en



https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/somnyamangonyama/?hl=en



https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/zanelemuholi/?hl=en

2. The *Lust Politics* (2017) and Lady Skollie archives live through #lustpolitics and #ladyskollie:

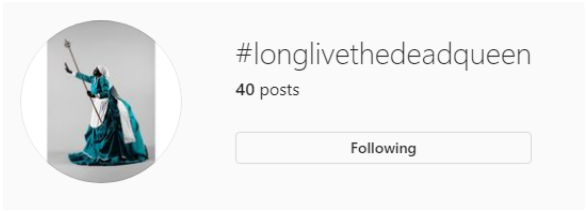


https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/lustpolitics/?hl=en



https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/ladyskollie/?hl=en

3. Mary Sibande, *Long Live The Dead Queen* (2010) and *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013) live through the following hashtags:



https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/longlivethedeadqueen/?hl=en



https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/thepurpleshallgovern/?hl=en



https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/marysibande/?hl=en

4. Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi lives under the #thenjiwenikinkosi hashtag:



https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/thenjiwenikinkosi/?hl=en

These hashtags are curated and used by Instagram users who engage with the artists and their visual works on Instagram and share them through the hashtag, essentially contributing to the central visual archive of their work on the platform. In their study focusing on the use of hashtags on Twitter, a social media platform, Highfield and Leaver (2015) affirms that hashtags were used for finding relevant posts pertaining to a specific topic and when a hashtag is used

in a post, the user is connecting their post to that of other people relating to the same subject or theme. Therefore, the use of hashtags in this instance by Instagram users, is a way for the users to locate the works and artists within a place. They are also making an active decision to participate and become a part of the larger conversations taking place regarding the visual works and artists concerned. People have used the hashtags below to engage with the artwork and they have therefore become one of the biggest living and most accessible online archives. Most important to note is that, even though the hashtags with the artist have large engagements and posts under them, most of the images shared or posted by users under those hashtags are of their artwork or related to it in some way. This highlights the fact that these works have built identities and lives of their own outside of the gallery and even outside of the artists.

2.3 Communicating and Changing Art Experiences on Instagram

From Sibande's first year of Instagram presence, it is already clear that this page was developed in order for her following to obtain a glance into both her personal and professional life as an artist. Users are taken through a select few photographs that depict her own work as well as her love for other people's artwork such as Lawrence *Lemaoana's Fondation LV* exhibition, The *Allegory of 99 Wolves* by Cia Quango and works by Juan Munoz. Majority of the pictures posted are of her art series *Long Live the Dead Queen (2010)* and how it has travelled through time and space ever since. Immediately, the viewers are introduced to Sophie, the main character and alter ego of Sibande in this series, at an exhibition at the Stamps School of Art & Design, an outside billboard at both the Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art and MAC VAL – Val de Marne Contemporary Art Musuem in Paris as well as another street billboard at Porte de Choisy (Public Transport Station) in Paris. Instantly, this introduces Sibande to Instagram users as an international artist whose work is easily accessible and lives in public spaces (Henderson, 2018). Sibande's visibility and representation of Sophie on a multimedia platform is important in defying exclusionary and racially biased structures that silenced and controlled images of Black women in the public framework. She essentially reimagines the archive by placing a Black women's body who has grown into realising her own worth and realised her own dreams. Also, the European way of life that is largely considered as the only way of life in South Africa and has stayed unopposed and still paints Black people as a struggling and poor community. Sibande thus uses this narrative of Sophie that was developed through coloniality to frame a positive narrative surrounding her, Black domestic workers and Black women at large.

From 2014 to 2016, Sibande is gradually seen to share more images of the nameless character Sophie has transitioned into in *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013) where she shows viewers a different perspective of how her work *Let Slip the Dogs of War* (2015) that also lives in The Nirox Sculpture Park and moves across international galleries as well. This is how she invites her viewers into an intimate presentation of how her work lives within the walls of different art galleries. As a viewer, you are able to connect with the work through the photographs, gain an understanding of how it looks in an art space and to a certain extent, become enticed to become a part of the culture she is trying to create or even to visit the gallery itself. It is also important to highlight that even though it is a public space, the Nirox Sculpture Park is still situated at an isolated space, is privately owned and used for commercial purpose. It is also situated in a very central area that can be easily accessible to the masses. It is also a similar case with the Norval Foundation Sculpture Garden in Cape Town. It is only accessible with a paid fee and has membership and non-membership options: non-members have to purchase an access card of R120 to gain access to the museum (Norval Foundation, 2021). This is still argued to be an exclusionary practice because the space is only accessible to people who can afford to pay to enter, and an additional public such as Instagram becomes imperative in this regard. According to Fleming (2014), Instagram expands access to art lovers minus the intimidation of being in a space that you are not used to being in and of purchasing art that is on display.

Many ordinary people feel a kind of imposter syndrome at galleries. In South Africa, many Black people were not allowed into places such as this and this led to art galleries being frequented by largely white bodies who formed of a niche group that excluded Black people. Now, with more Black women artists, there is a different experience emerging from it. Ordinary Black women have started to see people who resemble and connect to them take over these white spaces, whilw also altering their racist structures by making the works more accessible to them. This has essentially contributed to more ordinary people embracing these art experiences. Perkes of AAW Art Project Management also asserts that through Sophie's presence in the city and this project, South Africa has an existing "democratic exhibition where people who don't hang out in galleries can enjoy her work" (Brand South Africa, 2010). This initial presentation of her work on public canvasses is inviting to audiences that are also not part of the art gallery goers to become a part of the community as well. It is also asserted that posting art on free social networks in this manner allows for one to reach different audiences that could be visitors of galleries for reasons other than it being a recreational pastime, but could turn to real ongoing visitors or supporters of the art institution itself and build a long-

term bond with them (Straughan, 2019). Post 2018 to the present, there was a great shift in the work and images posted on Sibande's page. Throughout these past three years, Sibande has presented her art on this platform through high quality images and videos that give viewers a full virtual art experience of her work. This professional look at Sophie gives viewers a democratised look and experience of the work while also giving the Instagram viewer the opportunity to see the different spaces that Sophie occupies.

Another artist whose Instagram usership has decolonised how experiences are made is Zanele Muholi's @somnyamangonyama. *Somnyama Ngonyama* is a visual project that includes one hundred self-portraits by Muholi, where they "use their body as a canvas to confront the deeply personal politics of race and representation in the visual archive" and "employ the conventions of classical painting, fashion photography, and the familiar tropes of ethnographic imagery to rearticulate contemporary identity politics" (Cooper Gallery, 2020). It has seen a significant amount of success with the publication of the series into a book in 2017 and a tremendous record of awards, the most recent being the Kraszna-Krausz Foundation best photography book award in 2019 (Bambalele, 2019). This page was first created in November 2016 and has since been dedicated to mostly providing a virtual gallery of some of the portraits in the series/project. From 2016 to 2020, there has been consistency in the content posted by Muholi on this page, which includes a balance of artwork, personal posts and other work related to the project. What is most unique about the layout and overall purpose of this page is that it is the actual series in a virtual platform. Muholi presents the photographs from *Somnyama Ngonyama* in a way that give access to the viewer to participate in their narrative by either liking the image, commenting on it and sharing it. In this way, the work never stops and can be engaged with in any given moment. What is more interesting with their work is that they have a more demanding Instagram presence, as also seen in larger followings and engagements in Table 1 and Table 2. Those who engage and follow them doing so for the sole purposes of engaging with the artwork in a social context and not necessarily the artist on their own. An important factor about the structure of all their pages page is that it is well-balanced in actually showing how the purpose and meaning of the work could be manifested into real life. This is done through @somnyamangonyama taking viewers through an array of not only artwork, but real art exhibitions across the world where *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) has occupied spaces, collaborative talks extending the narrative of the Black African as well as different publications and alternative identities that the work has lived in. In fact, this depiction presents

to the viewer, what *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) is in real life format and thus forces them to be a part of this process, transformation and democratisation of the Black 's narrative.

This is also extended through the *@Facesandphases* Instagram page, where the photo series *Faces and Phases* (2006) is seen living in real life format and extended beyond the basic physical canvas. This page was started in 2015 and immediately, one obtains the experience that it is a visual dialogue that shows the everyday lives of the Black lesbians in South Africa. The page is titled as Faces but can be read in two ways: firstly, it is taken from the title of the photo series, but secondly, it is a direct representation of the different faces of the lesbian community in South Africa to show their existence and that they too, are real people and ordinary citizens. They use hypervisibility as a method of countering the invisibility of these Black queer bodies in mainstream media. Shakhsari (2012), in their contexualisation of the hyper visible Iranian queer bodies, asserts that being hyper visible is moving from being abject to the representable subject. Throughout the page, from 2016 to 2020, they have consistently portrayed Black queer women in the township, partaking in international collaborative talks and shows as well as how they live in their everyday lives such as weddings, which is still largely considered as ground-breaking work. The most profound factor about the structure of this page is that it fully encompasses the identity of both Muholi and their work as visual activists that challenge the audience to question and form part of the reimagination of the Black women identity. One of the important factors that form a central part of these pages is that Muholi makes use of long form content such as videos to educate the viewers and followers about individual projects. In some parts, they document every part and process of the art making process as a way to be inclusive, and in other parts, they show themselves at exhibitions and talk events and takes followers through explanations of the artworks. This provides an insider look for the viewer to become a part of the process.

Wuri and Tambunan (2018) state that Instagram has interesting conversational features as well, such as liking, commenting, direct messaging and tagging, which makes it a virtual discussion forum as well. The creation of a strong presence, demand and visual archive on Instagram was also an important move by Muholi because the controversy and critique around their work was geared towards silencing the narrative of the queer community, but the availability of the work is a direct defiance of those unfair critiques and of exclusionary social conventions to the queer community. Significantly, Makhubu (2012) states that Muholi makes of visibility to normalise seeing Black homosexual bodies and in effect, break the amount of abuse towards these individuals. The most important characteristic of the page is that it no longer only posts the

portraits from the photo series, but has also importantly created a platform for ongoing open engagement with the queer community and other members of society about highlighting the issues faced by the Black queers and the never-ending discrimination against Black queer women in South Africa. For example, Muholi posts videos where women they give Black lesbian women the platform to speak about their individual stories, document how they navigate their lives in the current South African context, as well as share different forms of hate still being experienced by these women.

This brings about a different angle that has been made possible through the multimedia platform of Instagram. It is first important to highlight that the representation of *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) and *Faces and Phases* (2006) as their own separate entities or subjects outside of Muholi and the art gallery as intermediaries symbolises a disruption of what Muholi argues to be the colonised eye. The colonised eye is one that reads and sees Black bodies through a white lens and background and only publicly makes visible what is pleasing to their eye and privileged/racially discriminatory mind-set. It essentially foregrounds the importance of the participation of young people in this movement of social awareness and social activism through posting and actively extending Black feminist artists' contestation for hypervisibility. For example, it is seen that *@Facesandphases*, as seen in Appendix B – section 2, is not necessarily a page that is dedicated to being a digital gallery of the artwork only, but fully embodies the broader meaning of the project, which was meant to place lesbian bodies back into society and normalise their being and existence. The art series has become an active dialogue that alters a mainstream popular culture platform into one that documents and narrates the lives of LGBTQIA+ women, which is important because "the mainstream archive and the women's canon lack visual, oral, and textual materials that include black lesbians and the role they have played in our communities" (Muholi, 2012: 113). *@Facesandphases* is re-creating the mainstream archive with its affirming yet deconstructing representation of lesbian bodies within the digital media sphere, while allowing everyday citizens to engage with and form part of the conversation.

What is also important about the construction of the page @Facesandphases and what it is currently living as in its current format, is that is not only forcing society to see women of all kinds, but to continuously reject the popular depiction in the media of women as weak victims of violence. Imma affirms that:

> What is significantly different in Muholi's representations, largely disseminated through digital media circuits, yet in contrast to visual and discursive texts framed through popular media online, is an active visual disavowal of the iconography of crisis.

The accessibility and non-classist nature of the way the subjects and art are presented on this platform, makes it more permeable to audiences engage, understand, recreate and form a part of it as opposed to only raising awareness around their existence. Framing the art as an ongoing discursive text through Instagram is what Minie (2007) describes as feminist media activism which attempts to monitor and subvert the stereotypical characterisation of women in the media under a western male gaze. The involvement of young Black women with this platform becomes even more meaningful because they were excluded from European centred elitist traditional art. Essentially, both the current form that *Somnyama Ngonyama* and *Faces and Phases* live in on Instagram is crucial in not only deconstructing exclusionary issues regarding the art world, but also challenging the mainstream media while doing so. The problem with mainstream media is that it is synonymous for showing and depicting the same kind of women who look like and conform to western standards and ideals on a daily basis and reporting on those who embrace their Africanism and Blackness as an anomaly. This feminist and activist approach is also effective because "In addition to influencing how journalists, scholars, and consumers of media read and think about gender, feminism has also influenced the images, narratives, and genre forms produced in the media culture industry" (Watkins, Emerson, 2000: 152).

Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi is also an artist who has a profound presence on Instagram, which can be attributed to her artwork. Her page was started in 2017, which from observation, is more skewed towards producing and sharing artwork. She has had a total of 64 Instagram posts in the three years, but boasts a following of 13 400. This page is quite interactive because she engages with followers who speak to and of her work. The structure of this page is also one that mimics a visual gallery because it displays most of her work from her project *Gymnasium* (2020). The audience became introduced to this through the sharing of her paintings of Black bodies in the space of a gymnasium. This was then followed by her first solo show between March and April 2020 with Stevenson gallery. Here she exhibited the series virtually on Instagram due to COVID-19 restrictions in South Africa at the time. It was the first gallery opening experience of its kind through Stevenson gallery. The choice to do this on Instagram was a result of the restrictions imposed on galleries during level five lockdown, where they were forced to close their doors to the public. This virtual exhibition on Instagram contributed

largely to her popularity and people's resonance with her work – it was accessible during a time period where traditionally, art could not be accessed or seen.

In Lady Skollie's case, her Instagram page *@ladyskollie* is balanced between the nuances of sexual autonomy and provocation, both common tropes in her work. Her liberal and outspoken personality forms a part of how her work is engaged with by her followers. Her Instagram page has been in use since 2015 and has gradually grown since then. What is unique about her page is that she focuses not only on sharing her personal narrative as an individual but focuses on sharing her artwork in a multitude of formats. From 2016, audiences have been able to experience her work from art canvasses to magazine covers, billboards, murals and even as clothing as seen in Appendix D, section 3. This immediately allows the audience into the work without the barrier of the imposter syndrome for those who are not art gallery visitors. She has no solid structure on her page, which embodies the meaning of her work as disruptive. On this page, as seen in Appendix D, section 2, the still photographs that have received the most likes in each year have been those of her actual artwork. She makes her artwork relatable by forcing people to see it as more than artwork that should stand on a wall.

2.4 What This Relationship Means

Post 2010, the dynamic of image sharing was turned on its head by the social media application Instagram. The relationship between contemporary artworks and social media had already been created by Pinterest, a photo sharing social media application, which was established earlier in 2010 as well. This formed the initial culture of sharing traditional artwork on digital and online media platforms in order to reach the broader masses. Pinterest is considered to be an application that re-birthed the century-old high art form of collage and visual imagination (Phillips, Miller, McQuarrie, 2013) and Instagram a creator of art for the masses which provided a basis for new forms of imagery (Tifentale, 2015). This immediately formulated a necessary bridge between the visual art world and its niche audience, with the rest of the public. This is how these digital social networking platforms started altering the process of contemporary image making and the integration of art representation in mass media culture. An example is derived from exchanges between street art, graffiti and Instagram MacDowall, de Souza, 2018). After the evolution of digital technologies and new media platforms, which defied the previous experience of street art in physical urban locations, Instagram redefined the aesthetics, consumptions and practices of street art and graffiti (MacDowall, de Souza, 2018).

Street art and graffiti artists embraced the use of Instagram for documenting their art and sharing photographs of their work, which also played an influence in how audiences also experience the art and the spaces that they are in. Instagram has thus largely contributed to the evolving nature of art consumption and overall experience.

Contemporary art is a form of art that embraces more changes and alternative methods to representing the narratives of the present community and larger society. This is why it is considered to be the art form that has influenced the evolving nature of art sharing and experience. One principal theorist and practitioner of art gallery education Burnham (1994: 523) indicated that an aesthetic experience is accomplished through "an evolving visual experience". In continuation, Seuss (2018: 109) affirms that "this is where Instagram may be positioned; in constructing an aesthetic experience, not in isolation from other factors such as gallery didactics, marketing, layout or co-visitors, but working in movement with them". Essentially, sharing and providing an experience of contemporary art on Instagram is to deconstruct the traditional ways of viewing and seeing artwork. The audience are able to engage with art and attain the experience of art viewing without a mediatory body, which is an extension of the experience that the individual has. Instagram also broadens this aesthetic experience by setting it on a 'meta-representational structure' that amalgamates visual image with language, innovation, relations, technology and location (Consoli, 2014; Hjorth, Pink, 2014). This combination has therefore developed and contributed to the progression of art experiences through various contexts of temporality.

This progression of the integrated art experience on Instagram has also been met with the alterations in the way individuals present themselves online. A presentation of self can be described as the manner in which an individual characterises themselves to others. Goffman (1956) in Miller (1995: 1-2), in his exploration of the relationship between electronic communication and the presentation of self, suggests that people interact in a "cosy conspiracy" that makes them appear as if they know what they are talking about and have pleasant and exceptionable presence. He further states that "in this sense, our 'selves' are presented for the purpose of interacting with others" (Miller, 1995: 2). Individuals represent themselves in ways they feel will be acceptable to society or a specific community. In the new media forms social networking, and in particular Instagram, people are prone to representing themselves through social identities that will allow them to successfully interact and engage with others. Baumeister and Hutton (1987: 72) meticulously define self-presentation as "behaviour that attempts to convey some information about oneself or some image of oneself to other people.

It denotes a class of motivations in human behaviour". It is argued that young people post images, links and textual information on social media to present an online self and it is essentially involved in the extension of an online identity (Herring, Kapidzic, 2015). This has become an important source of identity in the broader society for young people as they embrace the culture of being 'woke'.

The culture of being woke is one that has taken over popular culture in effort to project a sense of awareness about societal ailments relating to the injustice of Black people. It is 'a battle cry' aimed at Black communities to regain their awareness and consciousness about the physical violence against their bodies and identity (Cherry-McDaniel, 2017). It also spiralled into hashtag or social movement that had initially stemmed from individuals creating awareness about the Black Lives Matter movement, but has now become a part of social culture especially amongst young communities. One way that this is done is through personal social activism and a narration of the sickening realities faced by Black bodies across the board. Vis, Faulkner, Noble and Guy (2020: 250) assert that "the aesthetics of protest relates to the ways participants in social movements make their causes visible through acts of protest that are also efforts to gain forms of mediated visibility (Butler 2012: 129-131; Cottle 2006; McAdam 2000; Johnson 2007; Berger 2010). On Instagram, which has a largely youthful audience, these acts of protest are usually conducted through photographs, videos and hashtagging, specifically in the sharing of art experiences as well. The visibility of Black feminist and activist contemporary art forms on this platform has given life to not only more access to art, but an opportunity for younger audiences to participate in the Woke Culture. However, it is seen that these youthful audiences are mostly using this notion as a way to be perceived as 'woke' or aware by the larger society.

In exploring how woke activism plays into this, this paper employs Cherry-McDaniel's (2017) theorisation of being 'Woke' and exploring how this concept works in the experience and solicitation of Black feminist visual texts. Cherry-McDaniel argues that adopting agency in one's identity within this society is important because it forms the basis of comprehension and dispositioning for ways their identities will be engaged by others as they venture into making positive changes (Cherry-McDaniel, 2017). It is important for readers of Black visual texts to develop agency of their Black identities to have the ability to foster long-lasting change. When the artworks living on both Instagram and other media are engaged with by the public, especially people of colour, it helps in teaching them about embracing their identities and 'peculiarities' in their gender identification. By observing and reading these Black feminist visual texts on open platforms, they are able to understand what it means for one to have agency

and autonomy over their Black identity, and it will help them in planning and the execution of taking up and reconstructing space. This is also similar to the self-representations of Black activists in the #RhodesMustFall movement/protest who shaped understandings and approaches of defiance through their autonomy and sense of belonging (Matandela, 2017). These women shifted cultural codes by re-writing and placing themselves into history through the process of assertively sharing their narratives and essentially contributing to what Stephens (2012) and Henry (2019) call memory making. In this case, by making decolonial visual art accessible to the masses through a public engagement platform, these women artists are essentially reimaging history and contributing to a production of history that has women written in it. Women who wrote themselves into history as subjects and objects of it. Muholi, Sibande, Nkosi and Skollie's public art is a cultural and political process that serves as a reflection of power and meaning making (Guenther, 2012).

Furthermore, when looking at the consumption of the portraits in *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) and artwork in *Lust Politics* (2017) on Instagram, which both present bold statements and activist content, people share their posts by tagging the artist or art page for recognition, as opposed to participating in follow-up conversations and dialogue. Klein (2015) recommends that artists dedicate at least 80% of their posts to their artwork or art related topics on their social media networks in order to raise cognizance of them as artists and most importantly, their work. This is further proven by the fact that Skollie started posting images of her artwork on her page tagged under the hashtag *#Ladyskollie,* which other users who had interest in her work started using as well in reference to not only interactions with her, but when sharing images of her art as well. An example of these are the posts shown in Appendix A - section 3 and Appendix C - section 3, where these individuals have posted pictures of themselves at the spoken exhibitions either positioned next to the artwork or in front of it. This positioning of individuals in one selfie or portrait shot with an artwork is a projection of mindfulness from the photographed subject to the viewer. It allows the viewer of the image to see one's body as forming a part of the art and one then becomes one with or immersed into the symbolism of the art. This type of posing is also considered an act of performance (Pierroux, 2014), where Tarmy (2018) argues that art galleries and museums have ceased being spaces of pure art experience, but rather spaces of performing the self-having art experiences. A new advent of art experience, permitted by digital media, is one of participating in the selfie culture in order to later share on social media. Young people, especially Black people, are more concerned with being seen in the presence of conscious artwork, especially within the space of an art gallery.

This immediately brings about a perception that they are aware of and fully and actively participating in the efforts to dismantle injustices against people of colour, when that is not exactly the case. They are merely performing this 'participation' through a selfie culture on Instagram.

2.5 The Impact of Activist Art on Youth Culture Online

Black feminist and activist contemporary works of art on Instagram have brought about a new sense of engagement amongst users who have a desire to belong to a community of conscious and assertive individuals. This stems from the characteristic of the sharing culture that is a central element to Instagram culture. Social networking sites come with a culture of sharing of similar interests, forming relations, conversations, and exchanges that can lean towards the formation of online communities with group specific modes of communication (Serafinelli, 2017). This sense of community that people derive from being a part of social networking groups through the sharing of the same experiences is what gives them a sense of belonging and extends the lifespan of a sharing culture. This is argued by this paper to be the establishing grounds for a participatory culture within youth online communities that share an interest in the production of an evolving contemporary image. A first look at this would be what can be referred to as participatory hashtag practices. In relation to Muholi, Sibande, Nkosi and Skollie, hashtags are seen as an important element that Instagram users use to connect with the artwork, the artists and the community of art lovers. They engage with the work by narrating their experiences through the hashtags *#somnyamangonyama*, *#thepurpleshallgovern*, *#longlivethedeadqueen*, *#facesandphases* and *#lustpolitics* in the hopes of forming part of the community who share the same interest and affinity towards the specific works of art. This is how they essentially actively formulate an active part of a participatory hashtag culture. According to Kim, Lee, Oh, Park and Suh (2016), Instagram users are more prone to reply to participation calls when a project is motivated by matters that relate to them personally and prompts them to act in a way that will garner change or some form of transformation. This allows people to have more personal interactions with the work for an extended period. Furthermore, through Lawler (2001: 322)'s theory of affect through social exchange, they argue that "contingent on the exchange structure, emotions or feelings from exchange influence how actors perceive and feel about their shared activity, their relation, and/or their common group affiliations". In relation to the exchange of art through the *#lustpolitics* hashtag, Skollie's art has created a community of its own through the social exchange of their experiences at the

exhibitions. This prompted feelings of excitement within users and thus enforced a sense of social action and activism on the platform.

Therefore, the use of the above-mentioned hashtags is a direct response to a call to action about creating a hypervisible community of Black conscious dialogue and visual imagery. The idea of forming part of an assertive and consciously aware online community on Instagram resonates with them to a great extent. Instagram has thus played a great role in creating these groups that essentially reconstruct the mainstream archive by loading it with images of marginalised and silenced bodies and narratives. The visibility of this form of contemporary work takes on an even greater meaning on a public social networking platform such as Instagram. It has become a platform that uses the small screen to shift cultural codes. Through this, on Instagram hashtags are used to categorise content, allow users to search for specific sets of images and overall, create a sense of community when users click the hashtag link or search for it (Alexander, Hahner, 2017). In extending this, an example of this is Muholi's series *Sonmyama Ngonyama*, on Muholi's personal page, it is a dominant feature because she occasionally posts pictures of the work and this brings exposure to the different formats that the art series comes in such as a physically published book and various magazine features. The most predominant manner in which this art series has manifested is in its own Instagram page, *@somnyamangonyama* where there are 275 posts of the different self-portraits in the series as well as photos taken at exhibitions. This is a vital, active and deliberate stance that Muholi has taken, to give her artwork its own identity outside of not only the art institution, but in society. The work is able to gain its own voice and speak for itself in a mainstream digital media platform that is consumed on a global level. Also, *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) extends the notion of not simply creating visibility about Black women and the Black gay/lesbian community, but as Gqola (2011) argues, engaging with the systems that have exploited these women's hypervisibility as a way to infringe upon them. It is also stated that this forms as a way in which "women and people of colour who have been systematically excluded from the artistic realm—can serve as a catalyst for social change, challenging popular stereotypes and preconceptions (Vivienne and Burgess 2012: 363). It is a direct and alternative way of creating other ways of writing about Black women and contributing to the social change and transformation. Lastly, *@somnyamangonyama* and these contemporary artists are standing up against the systematic exclusionary character of the artistic fields.

This active participation with contemporary artworks living on Instagram also forms a part of what can be considered a construction of a more inclusive culture. This idea is explored using

Jenkin's (1992: xxiii) model of Participatory Culture, where they ask "how do we create a popular culture that accepts, even embraces broader forms of participation, and how do we use its resources and practices to insure greater diversity in what ideas get expressed and exchanged". This informs the argument that there is a dire need for a more inclusive culture to alternative forms of expression and relations. The public need to interject themselves more into mass media in order to produce more representational content and to dilute whiteness so inherently instilled in the mass media. The open dialogues by Black LGBT+ women and other Instagram users shared through #facesandphases is an embodiment of this broader form of participation and the diversification and reconstruction of a contemporary public culture. This digital interaction makes *Faces and Phases* an ongoing decolonial project, and subsequently deepens its sphere of meaning, especially in the current context. It has given birth to personal dialogues by a previously invisible community that can be shared on a permanent basis and platform. It is important because the current young Black community is drawn to using their digital platforms in extending narratives of consciousness in the South African community. This digital participation has deepened and democratised artistic exchange with audiences and has altered the role of the audience, and this online art experience also allows artworks to be adapted in a highly interactive process (Deuze, 2006). Audiences form part of the community of people who bring about awareness as well as social and political change, from what they have observed and learnt from the art. Moreover, audiences are now becoming active figures of everyday activism and creating visibility for representations of people that are usually excluded from the mainstream media and art world. This is critical because a participatory culture is one where members have their contributions matter, and individuals feel to some degree a social connection to one another (Delwiche, Henderson, 2012), which heightens the perspective that contemporary art is an integral part of cultural consumption.

More importantly, becoming a part of this art community on Instagram has become a crucial part of youth culture in both South African and global contexts. The presence of Black art on Instagram has grown into an integral element of youth culture that grants participators the chance to be a part of and engage within a conscious community. Young people, especially Black youth find importance in being an active part of this activist culture as a means to reproduce a new contemporary image and contribute to what is called a participatory archive. The concept of a participatory archive was made known by Eveleigh, Huvela, and Theimer (Eveleigh, 2012; Huvela, 2008; Theimer, 2011). According to Theimer (2014), a participatory archive is "An organization, site or collection in which people other than the archives

professionals contribute knowledge or resources resulting in increased appreciation and understanding of archival materials and archives, usually in an online environment". This is seen firstly in how users have engaged widely with art specific content from the pages of Skollie, Muholi, Nkosi and Sibande. Their most liked images from 2016 to 2020, have relatively been photographs of their artwork and not necessarily pictures of the artists themselves. Also, looking at artists like Sibande and Nkosi, who have not posted as many times as others, other users and members of their audience have actually created an archive through Instagram tagging, that shares an engagement with each specific artwork. There is a specific resonance that these audiences have with photographs of artwork on this platform. It is through Instagram that they are able to build these connections with works like *Gymnasium* (2020) and *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2010). For instance, museums and galleries like The Old Town Museum and Stevenson Gallery who have a focused digital curation on Instagram have also emphasised the importance of a new youthful audience reach and that they have been active in this process.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Instagram has become more crucial to the development and expansion of contemporary artwork into mass media culture. It has been used to produce new visual archives of artwork and images that counter the representation of and (un)silences Black women. There is an increased demand for more non-stereotypical illustrations of the Black lesbian community through hyper visible visual texts by Muholi. Furthermore, 'tagging' and hashtag culture has largely influenced/contributed to the production of a new mainstream archive and public culture. What is noteworthy about this is that it is disseminated by Instagram users and audiences of individual artworks. The works of Muholi, Sibande, Nkosi and Skollie have thus garnered attention and an identification of their own. Young people, especially in South Africa have found importance in engaging with some of these contemporary artworks as a way to be part of and participate in an activist and Woke culture. Instagram has therefore in this way, and through this engagement with Black feminist visual texts, influenced the popularity of Woke activism. The reading of contemporary Black feminist artworks and images are important in disrupting the colonised image and gaze.

Chapter 3: The Public Space Takeover - The Activation of Mary Sibande and Lady Skollie's Works by Public Engagement

3.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a close reading of works by Mary Sibande and Lady Skollie. These include some works taken from these series' *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2010), *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013), *Lust Politics* (2017) and *Pussy Prints* (2015). The central thematical lens that has been used to outline this analysis is public art, because their artwork has been largely informed by public interaction and essentially activated by public engagement. Public art is considered to be "an expanding practice that continues to incorporate every medium and discipline from painting to new media, sculpture to design, architecture to performance (Cartiere, Willis, 2008: 1). It essentially involves work that is created for the consumption of the public and display or distribution within the public space. Finkelpearl (2000) further distinguishes it as evolved beyond the typical monument and now it is more believable that public artists could possibly redesign the literal and figurative structures of the museum to change social dynamics. The characters and subjectivities that have been created in their work have developed identities of their own beyond artist and the white cube. This was initialised by the public spaces that individual artworks have lived in and are currently living in. The implications of the journeys of Queen Sophie, the Khoisan Kween and the South African women persona are also explored through Black and Coloured feminist scholarship.

3.2 The Queen in the City: Deliberating the Politics of Silence

In 2010, South Africans and the world were introduced to Sophie through the first of its kind takeover of the Johannesburg skyline. This was a project called Joburg Art City which commissioned 35 of Sibande's artwork to be placed across buildings in the city. The focused artworks for analysis in this sub-section are from the enlarged artworks into billboards, that were used in this project and displayed across the city. Something that really stood out regarding Sophie in the city is that a Black marginalized character, whose traits are defined by history as silent and invisible, suddenly occupied the Joburg skyline (Matsipa, 2014). Coombes (1997) speaks of the way Black women's lives, time and labour were exploited during Apartheid by their white employers and this has ultimately formed part of Black women's history. The isolation of Black domestic labour in the South African society is what Sibande has attempted to subvert in the placement of Sophie in the city. This character speaks for all Black bodies who have not been able to take control of their narrative in mass society and for

those who has been treated as or spoken of as objects throughout history. South African history has not only oppressed Black women, but it has also oppressed them as workers and most importantly isolated domestic workers from society (Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie, Unterhalter, 2010). Sophie's takeover of the skyline in the central business district is a reclamation of her ancestors, grandmothers and other women family members who came before us. As Sophie is a cast of Sibande herself, the artist leans into personal vulnerability, both historically and beyond and reminds us of the second wave feminist adage – "the personal is political". Her character represents a claim over the new narrative to be formed about Black domestic workers and labour in South Africa.

The image and voice of the Black women in the public sphere has always been one that is surrounded by stereotypical definitions and misrepresentations. What first comes to light in Sophie's sculptures is the uniform that she is wearing, which is an indication of her occupation as a domestic worker. Under Apartheid, her uniform is one that politically signified servitude, and long-lasting economic instability or poverty, but the viewer sees this uniform transition into a Victorian style garment. The choice of using a Victorian style garment confronts the way that Apartheid, embodied in Western bodies and cultures, imposed on African people and African culture (Scheffer, Stevens, Du Preez, 2017) and subsequently labelled acts professional domesticity and servitude as Black women. Baderoon (2014: 173-175) highlights from the Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles that the term 'maid' was merged with that of 'Black women' and 'servant' in South African English, "inscribing servitude within the domestic sphere and underscoring the division of employer/employee along entrenched racial lines". It defined the mass positioning of Black women as servants of their white superior counterparts and undermined the role of a domestic worker as being a servant. In reshaping a post-colonial and post-Apartheid Black identity, this places Sophie as a subject in historical, colonial and contemporary narratives.

The first artwork to be analysed is *The Wait Seems to Go on Forever* (2008). This artwork was part of the first batch of the series *Long Live the Dead Queen*. This image portrays Sophie in her royal blue Victorian style gown that has puffed up bell sleeves. The dress is layered with material to give the aesthetic of an evening gown, even though it still looks like a maid's uniform. The collar of the dress is up and covers her ears, while she is clothed in her white headwrap and apron with what seems to be a big ribbon behind her back. Sophie's body position is slightly bent over towards a pole that has a sign of a blue bus stop, indicating that she is waiting for a bus. Another significant feature in this work is that of a red chandelier that

is positioned above Sophie's right shoulder. According to Scheffer, Stevens and Du Preez (2017: 9), "The artwork evokes the cumbersome commute which is part of the normal daily routine of domestic workers (who normally reside in townships far from their place of employment)". This provides the audience with a look into what Sophie's routine looks like as a Black working-class citizen in South Africa. The majority of township citizens are accustomed to taking public transport such as busses to their workplaces that are usually in urban areas or suburbs. The contrast presented here is that Sophie is more concentrated on her fantasy of a luxurious lifestyle that she truly desires, which is signified by the red chandelier positioned over her body, as opposed to being conscious of her reality. The bus stop signifies a phase of transition or change and the red chandelier, a desire for a wonderful life and lush things (Ntombela, 2013). The red colour of the chandelier is representative of the passion that Sophie has for her fantasies and while she is standing at the bus stop, she is symbolically waiting for her own life to change, which is what *The Wait Seems to Go on Forever* (2008). Furthermore, the position of this billboard at a busy intersection in the middle of Johannesburg where the average working-class citizen is most likely to be passing by, is ironic because its viewers are also people who are travelling through the city to their jobs and have the same ideals and fantasies as Sophie for a more luxurious life. This image of Sophie has therefore disrupted the flow and busy culture of the city by forcing city movers, as Brodie (2010) states, to take a moment to pause and look up at the billboards, while observing themselves and one another look at the art.

Sophie's fantasies are also extended in *The Reign* (2010). This billboard was also placed at a pivotal on the intersection of Johannesburg CBD and Braamfontein – where the Nelson Mandela Bridge begins. In this artwork, Sophie is still depicted in her royal blue Victorian style gown, only this time it is long sleeved. The bottom layer of the garment also has purple material, which is a visual symbol of Sophie's shift from one phase into another and replaces the blue which would dominate her previous dresses (Farber, 2017), with white linings. Sophie is positioned on top of a Black horse that is rearing (both front legs are raised), symbolically referred to as a dark horse. Sophie holds in the strings to reign in the horse, which is another commentary on Sophie's power and status. Khan (2015) argues that this sculpture is inspired by equestrian statues, which function as reminders to the public of who holds power. An example of this kind of statue is that of Jan Smuts, a former Prime Minister of South Africa, on his horse in front of the Union Buildings observing the land in front of him. What is subversive about this image is that a Black is sitting on this same position, but not only on the

horse, but she is also rearing it. The significance of Sophie rearing the horse in this instance according to equestrian urban legends, this position with the horse raising both of its front legs signifies that the rider has been killed in battle (Khan, 2015). Therefore, Sophie in *The Reign* (2010), resists death and continues to strongly occupy her seat as a queen (Khan, 2015). Sophie is depicted as in control of the horse that she is riding with her legs and thighs tightly wrapped onto the horse as she continues to reign in her royal seat. Additionally, Sophie takes her power back in *The Reign* (2010) because she is able to successfully wrestle with the dark horse and visually looks as if she is about to lead an army that is about to charge for battle (Foli, 2014: 3). We see Sibande using the narrative of colonial oppressors to subvert the Sophie's story and give her the power that she so much desires and deserves. What is also symbolic is the purple elements to Sophie's gown, which also symbolize royalty, but more importantly serve as a precedence to her transition from the dead queen to a who has autonomy and governs herself in *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013).

As part of her desire to transition into a of royalty, Sophie seems to plan for her own transition in *They Don't Make Them Like They Used To* (2008). This was not part of the Johannesburg Art City project, but was created into a digital billboard exhibited on a double screen in 41 West Street, Lincoln Square, Manhattan, New York as seen in the image below:



Figure 4: They don't Make Them Like They Used To – Digital Billboard (2018), Lincoln Square, NY. https://vimeo.com/246619528

In this image, Sophie is depicted sewing a blue jersey, which is the same colour as her attire, except that it has the Superman symbol in the centre. However, the Superman sign is upside down which could highlight that she is defying norms and standards of superiority stemming from patriarchy because men are always read as stereotypical superheroes. Foli (2012) also argues that Sophie can be seen as someone who is planning her own revolution and with the upside-down Superman symbol only indicates her defiance and contempt of servitude and the stereotypical superhero. This imagery with the Superman symbolism is also depicted in *Wish*

*You Were Here (*2009), where Sophie's dress is larger and pours onto the floor, and next to her she has lies a huge red ball of wool that unravels with a Superman sign from a white frame on the wall. There is great symbolism in this digital billboard because Lincoln Square in Manhattan in the United States has similarities to Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD), where hundreds of people pass by on a daily basis that are also moving in transit. Lincoln Square is at the intersection of Broadway and Columbus Avenue. Sophie's occupation of this largely contested public space subverts the systematic silencing and invisibility of Black domestic workers in public spaces. She is defiantly claiming presence and control of this space. Sophie is therefore destabilizing the colonial gaze and forcing people to look at her as she also claims her right to appear in this public space (Butler, 2015). It can also be said that these images are metaphorically shifting the Black marginalized women figure back to an urban space that has historically constricted and dismissed her (Matsipa, 2014). These magnificent installations across the walls of the city make Sophie hyper visible and bring an enlarged attention to her presence in the city.

As Sophie navigates her place in between her reality and fantasies, as well as the transition she is about to encounter, she also has a *Conversations with Madam CJ Wlker* (2009) and embraces her identity as *Sophie-Ntombikayise* (2009). Looking at the installations of *Conversation with Madam CJ Walker (2009)* and *Sophie-Ntombikayise (2009):* Sophie's garment has become more elaborate and starts to excessively fill the floor, highlighting a further notion of fantasy and that her dreams are becoming more elaborate and will soon come to fruition. In her *Conversation with Madam CJ Walker*, Sophie is portrayed wearing an elaborate blue ball gown that covers most of the floor while weaving a portrait of Madam CJ Walker on a framed canvas, who was a social activist and philanthropist that became the first African-American millionaire in the United States. The excess of material on Sophie's dress affirms the close reality of her dreams, and when she is in the city of dreams, her fantasies will soon come to light. In the second artwork titled *Sophie-Ntombikayise*, Sophie's gown is stuffed with tulle fabric at the bottom, and her dress is not only blue but turning into purple as well. This precedes Sophie's transition into a leader and ruler in *The Purple Shall Govern* (2013) and indicates to her that she is coming into being and gaining her assertion as a Black . The Mail & Guardian (2009) also affirms this by saying that Sophie's body posture with her hands in the air is a gesture signaling that "enough is enough". The use of her African name also strengthens this argument because she comes to accept her African identity and Blackness by embracing her African name and she becomes aware that she can be herself with the constraint of society and

colonialism. This ties greatly into Filomina Chioma Steady's (1981) adaptation to African feminism, where women autonomy, the consumption of Black feminist literature as well as the liberty of all African people is emphasized. The public display of Sophie's autonomy and journey to liberty is important in teaching Black people to unlearn old habits of suppressing their identity and allowing white supremacy and patriarchy to rule over their public identity. This public installation forces the act of introspection and highlights the necessary transition for Black people to have their own voices and take ownership of visual texts and imagery.

In her perception of the Johannesburg Art City project, Matsipa (2014: 77) mentioned the following:

> The defamiliarization of the domestic worker called the institutionalization of art, and its reified consumption, into question by addressing an undifferentiated group of consumers – as opposed to a segmented marketplace characterised by consumers organized into clearly defined groupings, and the 'private' sphere of the suburban home

As much as public art is also intended to be consumed by all sorts of people and take flight beyond the art galleries, the art world was largely characterised by its privatisation of exhibitions through the attraction of a distinct, elite and white-collar audience. This shaped the perception that visual art galleries belong in suburban neighbourhoods for suburban elites. Mikell (1995) states that after colonialism, African women have created their own feminist discourses in seek for change, and in this content, has been different ideas and strategies to create this transformation. Also, in Steady's (1981) perspective, African feminists are not antagonists and pose a challenge to patriarchal systems in society to make them conscious of certain aspects of Black women's subjugation which are separate from the generalized oppression of all African people. This further emphasizes that Sibande is creating a challenge to society by making them aware of the generalized oppression of Black domestic workers in South Africa and questioning systems of race and power along this line as well. In reference to her clothing in this image, Fingeroth (2004: 48) argues that "The element of the mask, in Sophie's case the Victorian clothing, not only partially conceals Sophie's identity, but also reveals aspects of her personality and gives her the courage to do things "with no repercussions". Sophie is able to assume all these different identities through the masks her various attires, also allowing her to interchange between being a master and a servant. She does this in order to liberate the narrative of the silenced Black women and assigning power and symbolism to their bodies. In looking beyond this meaning as well, through these multi-layered portrayals of identities, Sophie is able to re-attain dignity and respect to her name, this

essentially being the Black domestic worker (Foli, 2014). Another narrative is also that of riding horses, which has often been associated as a regal sport or social activity done by the white rich and elite.

It is said that The Joburg Art City 2020 Project was linked to the Joburg City Council's Renegration Program aim to bridge the gaps created by classism by taking exhibiting visual art in the public realm as opposed to private galleries (Singer, 2012). Public art also includes diverse approaches that make and site art outside of traditional art spaces which could include "the exhibition of sculpture outdoors", "community murals" as well as "performance art" (Miles, 2020: 1). Therefore, Sophie, unlike the domestic worker who was meant to blend in with the background, become silent and did not stand out, she is prominent. It is affirmed that "this is partially due to the theatricality of her staging – manifest in the stark iconicity of her silhouettes and dramatic forms of display" (Miller, Schmahmann, 2019). Even though she is not in a grand sculpture form, she is photographed and wrapped around some of the tallest buildings which forces her presence to be both seen and felt. The scale of her dresses also contributes to this pouring of Sophie across the city by giving the idea that her large blue dresses were splashed across the city and consequently turned it blue. Her enormous presence counters Homi K Bhabha's (1994) conception of the equivocal colonial gaze in which the colonized subject is only partially seen. Sophie is a queen and cannot be overlooked and ignored, she has asserted herself into the public domain and demanding center attention.

Furthermore, looking at Sophie in a photographic form as opposed to sculpture form is also significant. *Long Live the Dead Queen* (2010) lives in this form on Instagram and users interact with her through photographs taken both professionally by Sibande on her page as well those who share their exhibition and gallery experiences. The billboards spread across the Joburg skyline are also enlarged photographs. The photographer opens the space of the gaze through the frame of the image and as such has the control to reveal what she both wants to be seen and not, which serves as an act of presentation and limits (Raymond, 2017: 9). The twenty photographs and locations/positions were chosen by Sibande and it serves as an act of maintaining control of the gaze and returning it back to Sophie's oppressor. The photographs of Sophie force one to look at her as she is shown and she refuses to be seen as she was seen or (un)seen before. This can also be read in conjunction with Jones' theory of a different way of seeing and a rejection of embodied history and its ramifications on subjectivity. An example of this kind of photography is Alice Mann in her series *Domestic Bliss* (2014), who portrayed Black domestic workers in the homes of their white bosses in Cape Town. She showcases the

complex relationship between these Black domestic workers and their white bosses who come from a better socio-economic background due to Apartheid, while also (un)silencing their bodies and presence in that space. Photographs such as Sophie's that carry a feminist aesthetic alter the sensible and changes what society knows and understands about the world, "politics" and "knowledge of community" (Raymond, 2017: 7). Sophie being photographed in this way also makes her more accessible and forces her to be part of a society that so often excludes her.

3.3 Re-forming Interfaces Between Nature, Art and Audience

In her transformative journey, Sophie has also had the opportunity to live in nature at a public park. Since 2018, the Nirox Foundation has been in collaboration with several global galleries to exhibit art in the sculpture park in an effort to bridge the gap between art and life (Arthrob, 2018). Sibande was one of these selected artists and her sculpture, *Let Slip the Dogs of War (2015)* from the *Purple Shall Govern* (2013) series, has been displayed at the park since. Through its various social exhibitions such as the Winter Sculpture Fair and Arte Botanica, this park has become one that brings together people, nature and art. This is why it can be considered be a new and momentous interface between art, society and nature. Even though the nature of the park and events held there are attractions on their own, the presence of the sculptures at the park gives a greater attention to each individual sculpture as well as Lehane (2006: 18) also asserts:

> The sculpture park phenomenon marks a transition from sculpture being an enhancement to the garden to becoming the primary focus. The garden or park environment assumed a supportive role as sculpture advanced to the main attraction.

People are able to enjoy the nature of the park and social activities surroundings, but the sculpture of Sibande being a part of this phenomenon, becomes a central point of focus. In *Let Slip The Dogs of War* (2015), which also permanently lives at the Wanas Konst Sculpture Park in Sweden, Sophie is dressed in her purple floor length Victorian ball gown as she seemingly runs after red wild dogs that she has on a leash. The phrase 'let skip the dogs of war' is taken from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, where the initial image of hunting dogs being released from their leash to incite war. The colour purple is symbolic to Sibande's rerefence throughout this journey to power, affluence, and an acknowledgment of the dress's royal attribution. Notably, Sophie's hair is bare, and she is no longer wearing her old maid's uniform. This is an indication that she has broken away from her life of servitude and is embracing her own identity as a outside of that legacy, and she no longer carries the name Sophie (Corigall, 2015). Even though

she is seen wearing a loosely draped apron in *A Terrible Beauty is Born* (2013) and *Terrible Beauty* (2013), it does not define her new identity and are purely fragments of the past.

In this new identity, she no longer lives in photographic form but as a sculpture that people can actually feel and touch. Through the various phases of transforming into an unnamed purple figure, she is assertively the ethereal turned into real (Hofman, Frock, 2015). Sibande's new sculpture is one that speaks of the many forms of pain that Black South African's have endured. One such pain is that of the red dogs, red signifying danger and blood shed during Apartheid, which stand for the 'police dogs' that were used during Apartheid to objectify and bring harm to the Black nation by racist white people and the racist system. Sibande emphasizes how even though Sophie has morphed into a new person or identity, she still carries the pain and remnants of the past. The new character has also become free and no longer stuck in between her fantasies of a European life of luxury as also affirmed that "Without the legacy of servitude and oppression compelling the desire to attain the position of the European authority responsible for colonialism (or apartheid), she should be free." (Corigall, 2015: 161). Sophie's progeny's existence in the park is therefore symbolic in signifying the liberation of Black women in spaces that they were not seen previously. It aids in the democratisation of the art consumption spaces, where different and broader landscape and demographic of people who may not necessarily visit galleries, are able to view art and become immersed in it as well. As seen in the Appendix, people who attended the *Arte Botanica* were there for a social experience, and the process of art exhibition is deconstructed from a very traditional, formal and rigid elitist one. By the sculpture adopting this focus, people are able to engage with the work for a longer period, take images and weave into the sharing culture of Instagram, which gives it more visibility and extends its life in the public domain even further.

This notion further develops the idea that public domains such as Instagram and sculpture parks are spaces of cultural offering for the community. These types of public art are not only about creating awareness about the art but transforming the art into a deeper cultural offering for the society. Upon the affirmation that public art is meant to travel through and navigate varied spaces, social contexts and subjectivities (Zebracki, 2019); in the space that Sophie's progeny is in now, surrounded by nature, her character and identity is read in a different way. At the park, she stands confidently in the form of a statue upon entering the polished garden. In this permanent public space, people are able to view Sophie as a monumental historical figure representing and honoring her mother and grandmother's legacies, who were also domestic workers. Boikanyo (2018) also states that in South Africa, many public spaces are filled with

monuments, statues and other memorabilia, which memorialise the colonial history and legacy. This therefore gives honour to the character and identity of Sophie, who also becomes an honoured statuesque figure, as well as an important historical women figure who was not written in history. This public sculpture stands for the re-writing of marginalised black women into South African history.

A perfect example of this is feminist artist is Sethembile Msezane, who makes use of her own body as an art piece by presenting herself in historical spaces as a living sculpture. By placing herself in these historical spaces, she is resisting the preconceived notions that women are not present or important in history. She challenges this idea by highlighting the misrepresentation of black women in historical spaces. Space and time are essential features in her type of work, and by placing herself in 'unwanted' spaces, she directly confronts and challenges patriarchy in historical spaces. The most popular artwork that has become commonly consumed is titled Chapungu – The Return to Great Zimbabwe (2015). African feminist and critic Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie (1987) has a strong standpoint that African women need to stand strong in their assertion and should be self-defined. In this self-definition, black women should also write themselves into the creation of a society that rejects patriarchal and supremacist depictions of them, but one that puts "African women at the centre in affirming ways" (Gqola, 2008: 46). This largely speaks to black women reclaiming their agency in a society that silences them. Ultimately, Sophie's permanent extension of herself into public spaces allows is deconstruction of the notions of patriarchy and white supremacy, while also rebuilding and permanently entrenching her own name and of those who both preceded and will follow her into history and the broader society. Through this public series, Sibande permanently leaves a footprint of powerful black women.

3.4 Defying the Culture of Control and Taboo on Women's Bodies

Out of all the artists explored in this study, Lady Skollie is the one of the first who directly diverges from traditional art spaces to sharing her work mostly on social media, essentially establishing her own agency of communication engaging the topics of gender, intimacy, sex, sexuality, desire and consent. The roles of Skollie's activism in their visual works is also crucial in actively normalising the duality of sex, pleasure, gender roles and sexuality in South Africa. Lust Politics (2017) is Skollie's first and biggest series and solo exhibition, which is a series of "playfully sexual paintings, filled with bright colours, symbolic fruit, and all the joy and darkness of the erotic" (Artsy, 2017). She uses ink, watercolour and crayon to boldly express

the dichotomy of human sexuality. The paintings in *Lust Politics* (2017) use fruit such as bananas and papayas, depicting the artist's discontent with unrealistic sexual standards and the objectification of women's bodies. It is observed that the women vary in appearance, some are green, and others have body parts made of fruit. She has also used her outspoken personality to speak on controversial issues that affect Black women, most especially by directly defying taboo. Not only the taboos that restrict women from being expressive sexual beings or talking about desire and sex, but also the taboo of creating artwork that expands public spaces more than altering or living in art gallery spaces. Looking at *Pink Dick: Sometimes I Reluctantly Reflect on all the Times I Allowed my Pussy to Be Colonised* (2016), Skollie has used paint and crayon on Fabriano paper, to tell the story of intimacy and violence. In this artwork, Skollie illustrates bananas clustered together next to and on top of one another. Scattered across centre and edges of the yellow bananas, there lies images of plain pink and white bananas outwardly portraying penises. These bananas also lie on a white background. This image crosses the nature of sexuality and relationship with sex in contemporary South Africa, by intersecting it with the narrative of sexual violence between white colonisers and mixed race women during Apartheid. This artwork also responds to the current issues faced in this society about femininity, violence, abuse and intimacy (We are Africa, 2017). Most importantly, the images of the pink dicks also confront racial disparities South Africa and how systemic racial bias is still a huge issue even in contemporary South Africa. Skollie essentially says that intimacy "is always ideological, and traverses relationships that cannot be freed from gendered or racial inequalities or from the commodification of sexuality" (Frost, 2018: 222). More than twenty decades after Apartheid, South Africans still have to endure Apartheid and its everlasting effects (TL Magazine, 2018), and in this case, coloured women whose identity is constantly questioned and defined by an Apartheid narrative.

In extending this narrative, what becomes symbolic is how Skollie expands this racial topic by extending its life into public spaces. *Pink Dick: Sometimes I Reluctantly Reflect on all the Times I Allowed my Pussy to Be Colonised* (2016) has not only been exhibited in different art galleries across the world, but it has gained its own identity even in the public realm. It is pictured on social media as a centrepiece in her Johannesburg studio where visitors can take pictures while sitting on a couch. It has therefore become one of the images that are central defining pieces to her work and identity. Moreover, it has been pictured off the wall and on Skollie's body, where she turned it into a dress and *The Only Reason* (2015) from the same series was also a mural (pictured in Appendix D, Section 3). Through this narration visual, it

is affirmed that the sexual experiences of Black women are reclaimed and used as a tool of autonomy (CNN, 2017). What is also defined as a symbol of agency is the defiance of oppression by Black women in order to construct a self-owned and portrayed narrative (del Guadalupe Davidson, Gines, Marcano, 2010). More importantly, this work recognises that "love is a trope that binds people into relations of inequalities" (Bhana, 2013: 7). This artwork subverts the way that the story of sexual violence is told in mainstream culture by openly distributing it on public platforms and defying the culture of silence and taboo. It is a direct call out to men who sexually violate women and a painted picture of how Black women have experienced sexual violence and abuse, most especially in a racially bias country.

One of the most poignant pieces by Skollie is *Khoisan Kween Mother* (2017), which depicts a of colour, with five long arms in the air above her head, legs spread wide with a range of bananas hanging at her waist and her headwear references Khoisan wall carvings. The Khoisan Kween's body and skin is illustrated with black and light brown colours, with the black shapes reflecting that of a vagina. These stripes could however also reflect the stripes of a tiger, symbolising the queen's power. This is a representation of Skollie's Khoi heritage, but vitally, this painting is a representation of the way in which culture, heritage and religion influence women sexuality negatively at most times. It validates the sexual experience of men but not that of women: women are taught to not really like anything specific, sexual enjoyment always relates back to the darkness, the woefully wrong (Tyburn Gallery, 2017). Another distinct feature in this mural is that of the Khoisan Kween Mother's arms. Her arms which are held over her head give the effect of a halo, which in this instant signify her position as queen and the power of her majesty. This image forms part of the iconography from Khoisan rock paintings that Skollie pays homage to. Frost (2018) also asserts that an iconic image that came from Skollie's *Lust Politics* (2017) exhibition at Tyburn Gallery is one where she is squatting with her back towards the camera, while in between the legs of the *Khoisan Kween Mother* (2017). She argues that this is an imitation of Nicki Minaj's single *Anaconda* (2014), where Minaj squats, emphasising her bottom (Frost, 2018). Therefore, this imagery can be deemed as celebratory, retelling the story of Khoisan women such as Sarah Baartman who were objectified by the Western gaze.This further brings to the question the gaze of silencing by the regimes of visibility that have surrounded Black women's bodies.

Another stand out piece from this series is one titled *On the Subject of Consent: Don't worry about it; around here RED MEANS GO!* (2016). In this piece, Skollie sticks to using earthy tones such as different shades of green, white, nude pink as well as tones of red for contrast.

The artwork depicts a bushel of red apples lying on top of green leaves or trees. Some of these apples are sliced in half with pink labia illustrated at its centre. A standout feature is also the many different disembodied eyes that are surrounding the apples. This piece is aimed at speaking out o rape culture in South Africa and the understanding that men (or lack thereof) with consent. In Skollie's own words, here is an excerpt from Mohale's (2017) article:

> "[T]he strangest thing about consent in [South Africa] is that it hardly exists; culturally, women do not have the agency to say yes, no, or please. We kind of just take what we get regardless of our input. I mean that sexually, emotionally, intellectually; our consent doesn't really matter, so do what you want."

In this artwork, Skollie the pandemic of violence against women in South Africa and the lack of consent they are afforded for having vaginas instead of penises. The red apples signify the blood of the women who have been sexually violated and the green leaves and bed of green signifies a play on how natural it has become to condone a culture of rape in the society that we live in. Also, Skollie uses the apples as a reference to vaginas in order to stylize a representation of women's bodies and indicate the tenderness of a 's body. Frost suggests that the apples in this instance are associated with the "Western imagery of fruit of original sin eaten by Adam and Eve" and it represents women sexuality with the values transmitted by these myths (Frost, 2018: 224). In conjunction, this red colour is also a direct reference to the title and a play on the idea of yes and no when debating the subject of consent. The title suggests that *'Red Means Go'*, for which red would naturally reference danger, but in this case, Skollie makes it seems as if it is an indication of '*yes*'. Thus, in this country, when a says no, she actually means yes. Even though the title implies that the '*Subject of Consent'*, "the qualifying phrase after the colon is a reminder that consent is regularly ignored, or trivialized, as conveyed by the phrase "Don't worry about it." (Frost, 2018: 225). This is a critical topic to debate that this artwork brings to the fore because consent is a matter of public concern, and therefore should be discussed publicly. For example, in October to December 2020, South Africa saw a 6.6% increase in the murder rate (Masweneng, 2021), a Gender Links' 2010 study once reported that an estimated 25.3% of women in Gauteng had been raped by a man (Africa Check, 2020) and also estimated that about 40% of South African could have been raped in their lifetime (Africa Check, 2020). Skollie therefore brings this to the fore by highlighting the history of violence towards women in this country. This is also how it becomes even more essential for works like this to live in public spaces because it further deepens understanding

about the rape culture in the country and how the subject of consent needs to be further contested.

Public discourse in contemporary South Africa undermines the voice of women about subjects relating to consent, sexuality, intimacy and consent. This is why intimacy is repulsively underpinned by violence and control of men. Skollie also attempts to intervene through her painting of *Cut-Cut-Kill-Kill-Stab-Stab: A South African Love Story* (2016), which portrays the imagery of women sexuality. In this painting, a papaya cut in half, resting on a black background is placed in the centre of okapi knives. These knives are sitting around the papaya, with the sharp end towards it, seemingly as if someone is holding it up as a threat. It reports on the gaslighting of women's faces on women's faces when they are reporting crimes of sexual assault against them to the police (TL Magazine, 2018). The knives also have what is portrayed as greyish papaya juice stains that are driping off its sharp edges. The main colours that are used here are a dark red-organge, black and grey. At first glance, the image immediately gives off a feeling of darkness and violence, which translates to sexual violence. It also addresses how women often succumb to their partners or even strange sexual predators who violate and kill them. "The papaya of womxnhood is being pierced from every angle, seeping everything around it with sticky, congealed misery…bleeding and bleeding and bleeding, with nothing to stem the flow" (Mail & Guardian, 2016). The paw-paw is also shown as exposed and in order for a fruit's interior to be made visible, it needs to be cut, and this exposure is a suggestion of vulnerability because the pointed knives are indicative of potential harm (Frost, 2018). Frost (2018: 224) also states that "the title of the image further communicates an interplay between vulnerability, injury and intimacy". When the title of this painting is broken in half: the first part 'Cut-cut-kill-kill-stab-stab', suggests deep-seeted violence that occurs more than once, which is then followed by the phrase 'A South African Love Story'. This combined title then suggests that the South African Love Story is one characterised by danger and violence. Ultimately, "The exposed interior of the pawpaw is the focal point of the image reflecting the spectacle of sexual violence, while at the same time the vibrantly coloured metaphorical vagina preoccupies our gaze and saturates our attention" (Frost, 2018: 224).

Significantly, this painting was also consumed in photographic form as a cover of The Mail & Guardian's (M&G) *Abafazi Magazine* as pictured in Appendix D, section 3, which was a M&G Women's Month Supplement which included written pieces by women and a commemoration of the heroes behind the 1956 Women's March. Cut-cut-kill-kill-stab-stab: A South African Love Story (2016) as a magazine cover during a special women's month issue characterises

the work as a political piece that challenges and intervenes on the issues of violence faced by women in this country. In this way, this painting, alongside others such as *On the Subject of Consent: Don't worry about it; around here RED MEANS GO*! (2016) and *Vroeg Ryp, Vroeg Vrot* (2015), who have been consumed on public culture platforms such as magazines and billboards, have expanded public spaces and 'altered social dynamics' (Finkelpearl, 2000). Moreover, Skollie's presence outside the art world and her position as an influencer in South Africa reinforced by her Instagram presence has connected both her and her artwork closer to the public (Wade, 2019). She has argued that "We live in a fast-food world where everything is available at your fingertips – at the stroke of a key, the scroll of your fingers. Art must not get lost in the scrolling – it must make you stop and think. It is the challenge of art and technology. To stop and look. To recognise that magic of a painting." (Skollie, 2018). Her influence as an artist has also turned her work into pieces spoken of within brand and popular culture spaces. This allows people to have more personal interactions with the work for an extended period. Furthermore, through Lawler (2001: 322)'s theory of affect through social exchange, they argue that "contingent on the exchange structure, emotions or feelings from exchange influence how actors perceive and feel about their shared activity, their relation, and/or their common group affiliations". In relation to the exchange of art public interaction, Skollie's art has created a community of its own through the social exchange on different public spaces. This prompted feelings of excitement within audiences and thus enforced a sense of social action and activism towards the work.

3.5 Conclusion

The installation of Sophie's life size photographic images across the city of Johannesburg is both symbolic for the artist herself, as well as for Johannesburg. In South Africa, an exhibition of this scale, using the medium of the billboard in one of the country's largest cities, had never been afforded to a Black artist. So, the inclusion of Sibande's work, especially within her realm of meaning, was important for the progression of Black feminist art as well as the exclusive and non-representational mass media and art worlds. The position of a silenced Black women's in contested space, both on the city's skyline and in a public park where Black women's bodies were never seen before, was important in changing the cultural narrative and social dynamic. Furthermore, Sibande's character Sophie brings to life the long-imagined realities that Black women have been yearning for throughout history. The reality of not being part of the silenced community and have a superior narrative written alongside your name. In shifting the codes of taboo, intimacy, sexuality and sexual violence, Skollie has also established a basis of

expression through provocative visual work and a defiance of the culture of shame. She defies the culture that silences women who have succumbed to rape, abuse and violence in this country by communicating it through the imagery of fruits. Even though her work is quite overt, the use of fruit still depicts the fragility and vulnerability of women's bodies and their private parts. The biggest stand out, however is agency of communication both of these artists have used in the sharing or exhibiting of their artwork.

Chapter 4: Subverting the Gaze and Exploring the Politics of Race, Identity and Representation in the works of Zanele Muholi and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is an exploration of the politics of identity and the destabilisation of the colonial and male gazes in the works of Zanele Muholi and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi, *Faces and Phases* (2006), *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014) and *Gymnasium* (2020). With the use of the frameworks of representation, Black feminist ideals and performativity, it is affirmed that these bodies of artwork are deconstructing the modes of definition for Black femininity and identity in the current South African context. Muholi's works are critically analysed as activist works of art that also act as agencies of communication through the public spaces that they have expanded. Their work especially *Faces and Phases* (2006) is read as an ongoing narrative and activist agent because it continues to live as platform for engagement and the hypervisibility of the lesbian community. In conjunction, both Muholi's and Nkosi's works explore the themes of collaboration and communication in their activism against regimes of silence towards Black women's bodies. It is also suggested that in their subversion of the gaze, they use the instrument and lens of performativity to embody the Black identity.

4.2 Confronting Race and Representation

In *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014), a 365-self-portrait project by Zanele Muholi, Muholi is seen to use the medium of photography to engage the politics of race and representation. They "playfully employ[s] the conventions of classical painting, fashion photography, and the familiar tropes of ethnographic imagery to rearticulate contemporary identity politics" (Cooper Gallery, 2020). Moreover, Willis, Pearson and Wake (2020: 2) assert that *Somnyama Ngonyama* is "working from an intersectional perspective that recognizes the interlocking oppressions – violence, homophobic hate crime, systemic racism and historical trauma that constitute the context within [Muholi is] is working". This project essentially depicts Muholi undertaking various personas and uses different props and backgrounds to bring the portrayed characters to life. They use these to confront and make statements about issues relating to race and the representation of Black bodies in South Africa. The most striking element of this series is that all of the portraits are taken in black and white, thus bringing attention to Muholi's darkened skin. In their artist statement, Muholi states that the exaggerated dark skin tone serves as a reclamation of Blackness which has been previously predominantly performed by whites. It is argued that "Muholi's ownership of the blackface disrupts the element of mockery creating

discomfort in the viewer as one is forced to see the pain and suffering of the black within a South African society" (Nkonyane, 2020: 49). This is a subversion of an old American practice by white entertainers who often darkened their skin or overstated their facial features in order to mimic Black people (Mabaso, Mistry, 2021: 110) and even alludes to a modern-day practice of racism and Black mimicry that white people in South Africa still do.

In Muholi's *Save Me* (2014) and *Blown* (2014), Muholi's skin tone is a very dark tone of Black that is exaggerated alongside the white contrasts of the background and white inflated gloves. They are sitting in front of what seems to be a white wall. In *Save Me* (2014), Muholi is portrayed in her naked body from the waist up, her visible breasts painted white at the nipples and white inflated surgical gloves forming a ring around her body mimicking what could be a ball gown skirt. Their eyes are closed, with their right arm, supported by the left arm, raised into a fist. In *Blown* (2014), Muholi's head is slightly tilted up, eyes facing directly towards the camera and mouth covered by white rubber gloved hands. On their head also rests a few inflated gloves in the shape of a crown. In these portraits, it is argued that Muholi is alluding to language, more specifically the English language, which for majority of previous colonial second language speakers, is "a silencing apparatus" because generally, people who cannot speak it fluently in the country are mocked and considered illiterate and essentially excluded from skilled work (Mabaso, Mistry, 2021: 112). English is a language that was brought and introduced to South Africa through the colonisation of the surrounding Southern African countries and is a first language to some of the Indian and white population and a second language to the Black population (Chisanga, Kamwangam Alu, 1997). The position of the Muholi's white gloves covering their mouth is a challenge to this notion of silencing of the Black people by white colonialists. It is also a direct way of questioning the notion of language in South Africa and how it is constantly used as a tool to ridicule Black people and to others who speak it fluently, regarded as an elite achievement that earns them the right to be positioned in white elite spaces. The raised arm gesture in Save Me indicates liberation and release, but also disavowal and vulnerability further suggesting that the blinding and silencing is what surrounds Black subjectivity (Mabaso, Mistry, 2021). Even though Save Me was not published, it is still an important image in the troubling of the culture of silencing in South Africa.

Additionally, Muholi creates this representation of themselves to question the standards of beauty that have been characterised by white standards. In *Ntozakhe II, Parktown, Johanensburg.* here, Muholi has created and is wearing several scouring pads on their head depicted as an Afro hairstyle, that are in a round shape around their head. These are generally

used to scrub pots and remove stubborn stains around the home. However, the reference to scouring pads could also be a reference to the way Black people mock one another by referring to course hair as one that resembles a scouring pad. An example of this comparison of coarse hair to scouring pads is through a Brazilian artist Tricicia, who made a song called *Look At My Hair* (English translation) and in this song, one character makes fun of a Black 's hair and compares it to scouring pads (Alubafi, Ramphalile, Rankoana, 2018). Furthermore, Alubafi, Ramphalile and Rankoana (2018: 4) affirm that:

> This diasporic snapshot of racial politics is entrenched in how hair is seen as a more-than-physiological consequence, and how hair is constructed, reproduced and perceived, this is in many ways reverberated within the South African contexts.

Muholi's direct reference to this is a subversion of this negative connotation and comparison of coarse Black hair. Prior to Apartheid and arguably till this day, hair in South Africa has been structured around race, has been socially constructed and is essentially as visible as skin colour (Mercer, 1987; Joyner, 1988; Erasmus, 1997). They also wear the scouring as what seems to be a crown, which is a sign of autonomy as they embrace the hair as a crown and symbol of regality. The crown shape of the scouring pads also imitates the spikes on Lady Liberty's crown. Muholi is also wearing a dark dress made form silk that also seems to imitate Lady Liberty's dress. The subject's posture, eyes that are lifted towards the sky and regally extended neck conjure grandeur (Artwork Archive, 2016). Castro (2020: 220 defines this portrait as follows:

> It is based on the Statue of Liberty, representing the idea of freedom – the freedom all women should have – as well as pride: pride in who we are as black, women-bodied beings. But what kind of freedom are we talking about? What is the color of the Statue of Liberty? What race is the figure monumentalized as Lady Liberty? I was thinking of black women who were civil and human rights activists and criminalized for their activism, and how today so many women are prisoners in their own lives, neither free in their domestic situations nor in society at large – especially women of color.

Muholi brings attention and reference to the freedom that Black women have in South Africa. Black women are still bound by daily historical discriminations and exclusion, issues relating to colourism, whiteness and their Black identity. Women are still statistically unequal to men, for example, 113 countries across the globe still do not have laws to ensure equal pay for equal work among men and women (Pan Macmillan, 2020). This brings the following questions to light: do women really have the freedom especially compared to men? Have Black women been granted the freedom to fully express themselves and embrace their identities?. *Ntozakhe II, Parktown, Johannesburg* also represents a visual interpretation of assertion in relation to pride in Blackness and Black femininity. Their hair also visually translates to an afro and a

halo around her head which is synonymous to Alubafi, Ramphalile, and Rankoana's (2018)'s argument that contemporary South African women use hair as a tool to reinvent and repossess their identities. It is an active standpoint of reclaiming the majestic position of Black women as well as their freedom of pride, Blackness, assertion, femininity and beauty.

Muholi also uses the returned gaze to oppose cultural practices that have become accepted as normal, and to claim her identity and presence within a domestic environment where she is expected to be present, yet invisible. In *Bester I, Mayotte, Mayotte* (2015), Muholi has ironically adorned the women body with domestic items that may be found in every household and purposefully used them in such a way that the first impression of the work is of a beautiful portrait, together with the strong comment on the blackface performance as her dark face is exaggerated, and her eyes and lips painted white. However, when one looks at the portrait more closely, the everyday mundane objects are recognised, and the beauty of the representation shifts to a realisation of the painful and overpowering reality of the black women's subservient situation. The items used in this image are modern objects that have been appropriated into traditional dress or costume, which represents the influence of colonialism and modern domestic expectations on traditional Nguni practices. Tamar Garb (2018:17) alludes to how the life of the domestic worker is laden with pain, thus the use of the clothes pegs as earrings worn by Bester although she cleans, cares and resides with other peoples' children, she is never a member of that family nor is she a member of her own, owing to her frequent absence. Muholi's *Bester I, Mayotte* (2015) explores the notions of "deep-seated White prejudices" through reference to the blackface minstrelsy highlighted by Khan (2014). Muholi's ownership of the blackface disrupts the element of mockery creating discomfort in the viewer as one is forced to see the pain and suffering of the black within a South African society. I further read *Bester I, Mayotte* as loaded with suggestions of the African who is self-reliant, industrious and creative as she takes mundane domestic objects that are given to her as a means of occupation and suppression and subverts them to empower herself. On the other hand, Garb (2018:17) suggests that the clothes-pegs refer to "the pain that the body endures while subjected to rules and constraints of domestic labour". Muholi uses the notion of the ideal and exposes elements of pain and concealment: thus, the clothes and pegs metaphorically represent domestic duties and responsibilities, yet they also depict pain – particularly those on Muholi's ears - as it is uncomfortable to have a peg clipped onto ones' body for any length of time. This conflates the 's duties with her identity: thus she, in turn, becomes "clothes-pegged". I argue that the portrait

similarly addresses notions of the objectified domestic black and the influence of western power and the colonial gaze on the African .

In this series, Muholi also embarks on a journey to undermine the way that Black bodies are looked at or seen, especially from a gaze that looks at Black bodies as inferior and is ashamed of its Blackness. They make a direct stance to take control of this gaze and force viewers to see her Black body. The first way in which she does this is by using the medium of photography to oppose the normative and controlling images of Black bodies. Photography, described as way of looking at the world through visual imagery (Newhall, 1982), was headed by the likes of Davis Octavius Hill who made use of his portrait photographs "for his fresco of the first general synod of the Scottish Church in 1843" (Benjamin, 2010: 6). From the start, this medium has largely focused on capturing moments that reflect on the society. In *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2014), Muholi uses this tool to turn the camera on the socio-political issues, essentially forcing society to take notice of them and reflect to a certain extent. In South Africa, especially after the 1970's, photography became a significant tool used by journalists and activists in order to document and show the political unrest and forced segregation in the country. An example of this kind of photography or what can be called photojournalism is Sam Nzima who took the iconic picture of an injured Hector Peterson being carried by his sister during the 1976 youth uprising (Hayes, 2007). This image gave outsiders a visual documentation of not only Peterson's death, but the overall state of Soweto at the time. This indicates that photography is a powerful and political tool. Furthermore, it also became a strong political tool in negating the harmful representations of Black people that were propagated by white people. It is also asserted that photography in South Africa was introduced and controlled by the white man and this resulted in the controlled images of Black people. Muholi therefore subverts this Eurocentric history by representing and picturing marginalised groups that have been ignored, ostracised and obliterated by history.

4.3 Muholi's Shifting of the Gendered Gaze Through Photographs

The first noticeable impact from this project is Muholi's use of real subjects and the significance of the use of their real locations as well as the 'unglamourised' aesthetic of some of the portraits. In Muholi's own words, 'Faces' expresses the person, and 'Phases' signify the transition from one stage of sexuality or gender expression and experience to one another" (Stevenson, 2016). This project placed a special focus on the ongoing narrative surrounding lesbian lives that either silenced them or constantly framed them as objects of rape. Media

discourses have outlined Black lesbian women as victims of sexual violence and homophobic outrage stemming from the notion that homosexuality is unAfrican or unnatural (Lake, 2017). Muholi subverts this by using her visual texts as a tool to show that Black lesbian women do exist outside of stereotypical narrative conveyed in the mainstream media. Looking at *Nokuthula Dhladhla, Berea, Johannesburg* (2007) and *Skye Chirape, Brighton, United Kingdom* (2010), two Black lesbian women are seen in uniforms that would usually be seen in male bodies. Nokuthula is wearing Black and white Catholic priest's cassock that has a clerical collar. They are looking straight into the camera, with their arms almost crossed towards one another by her lower abdomen area. This image is a contestation of the gender norms that re-created by society, that are only benefitting to or represent heterosexuals. This depiction deconstructs the popular notion that individuals with non-heteronormative identities should have a separate identity in the public sphere outside of their queer identities. Skye Chirape is dressed in a uniform that reflects one of a military or army member, which challenges the norms of conventional gender practices. There is a great importance in a Black women's body being placed in a position that she was never seen to occupy, a suit that was inherently created for a male body. Through the portrayal of this imagery, Muholi is "restoring representation, creating 'images of people like me for reference point for prosterity' (Interview Muholi), rebuilding a legacy of queer identity in the 'new' South Africa" (Garnsey, 2019). In these photographs, the images are headshots (from the waist up), which is a closer camera of the subjects behind the camera, essentially allowing the viewer to lean in more onto the subject. The women themselves are the subjects of focus, both on and off the lens, but importantly depicted in their natural environments and as their natural and authentic selves as well. This unglamourised aesthetic, as I choose to call to it, presents the subjects as human beings and also places them in a non-superficial space and background, which subsequently forces the viewer to read them against a natural and real South African background. As a viewer, you begin to realise that you are not only looking at a subject of a project on queer visibility, but another person who is just as present in the same society that you live in. They are bringing visibility to the fact that queer bodies are just as human as everyone else, their existence in the South African society cannot be erased because they are part of it even in their ordinary lives and also form a significant part of the collective of Black women who are defying misguided representations and definitions of gender roles and the silencing of Black women in both history and contemporary society through roles.

In this series, Muholi is also not only (re)presenting the gay community but the politics of the township space as well. South African townships have been commonly framed with static images of violence, uncleanliness and non-acceptance of homosexuality to violent hate crimes. These images have also framed the public perception that gay and lesbian people should not or do not exist in these spaces, which is what *Faces and Phases* has attempted to defy. The placement of the subjects in the township space in these portraits is an enactment of a "remapping of the township, as queer residents of Soweto, Umlazi, Gugulethu, Khayelitsha and so on, are recorded as living and belonging (and not only being violated or dying) there." (Imma, 2017: 230). For example, *Thandi 'Mancane' Selepe, Alexandra, Johannesburg* (2008) and *Nikiwe Bobotyana, Gugulethu, Cape Town* (2008) are both from one of the popular townships in the country that have also written gay women's bodies as victims. Even with the most progressive legislation regarding homosexuality, South African Black townships still experience the most crimes against members of the LGBTIQ community (Wilson, 2017). With the same stance and angle towards the camera, both Thandi and Nikiwe were photographed in South African townships. Their posture and eyes looking directly at the camera lens is a depiction of confidence and assertion, the victim identity constructed by society is immediately stripped off of them. From their outward appearance, it can be assumed that they identify as Butch lesbians, which is argued to be a representation of women masculinity. Muholi's unambiguous placement of their subjects in this native space enhances a sense of discomfort, but most importantly engages in an assimilation of Black queer subjectivities by ascribing faces with places in this visual documentation. Naemeka (1998) and Lewis (2005) assert that "African feminism(s) is instead, and ought to be, a pluralism and heterogeneity that 'captures the fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural imperatives, historical forces, and localised realities" (Naidu, 2013: 159). The rooting of these women in the township is therefore an active revisualisation of queer bodies in native South African communities and the portraits serve as affective and formal punctuation through the everyday realities.

Another important element to these photographs is the visibility of their names. In this manner of presenting her subjects, Muholi radically re-humanises the lives of Black lesbian and transgender individuals. Looking at the following portraits for example: *Ayanda Zulu, South Beach* (2013), *Simphiwe Foster Hlatshwayo, Katlehong, Johannesburg* (2013) and *Slindo Msweli, Durban* (2015), it is an ironic way of taking ownership of the conversation and destabilising the violence against the LGBTQIA+ community, in this portrayal, the subjects are further presented as fearless and in control of their narrative, without further portraying

them as victims. Furthermore, the visibility of the women's names essentially cements their existence and place in each area stipulated in the descriptions and in the broader South African community. Widespread newspapers have labelled Black South African lesbians as victims of suffering, thus further disseminating, and deepening their victimisation (Morrissey, 2013). When dominant representations perpetuate lesbian and transgender discrimination and crime in this manner, these individuals become stereotyped as passive and helpless to their perpetrators (Van Dijk, 2009). This personal depiction of Muholi's participants is considered as a subversion of the mass media's representation of lesbian lives as one signifying victimhood. By analysing their physical features, the women here can be considered to be confidently performing a more masculine form of femininity, which still verifies them as women. Ayanda is dressed in a casual bucket hat, short hair, a simple T-shirt and beach shorts, which speak to the background setting of the beach as well. The irony here is that women typically wear dresses and more revealing swimming costumes when visiting the beach, but by visualising Ayanda in this way, she is validifying her sense of femininity as a homosexual even in settings that define what a stereotypical should look like. In relation to Simphiwe and Slindo who are pictured in more simple settings, they also have the same physical features as the previous subjects, but the portraits are giving off a more regal and more assertive attitude. As Crenshaw (1993) has argued in her theorisation of feminism, Black women are increasingly becoming more confident in their individual and Black identities and are more assertive in defining their own cultural codes. The code that Muholi is shifting here is that Black lesbian and transgender identities should not be seen as a defiant, hopeless and non-existent gender and sexuality, but as assertive Black women who are just as part of society as everyone else and should have their experiences represented in mass culture.

More significantly, this paper takes the stance that Muholi challenges the code of silencing queer Black women through what it prefers to call Affective Visualisation (Zics, 2011). This concept is an idea explaining how boldly Muholi has positioned the bodies of queer Black women in South Africa in the public domain and is (un)silencing them through the use of affective elements. It is asserted that Muholi does this by adopting elements of Black feminism and Ahmed's (2016) definition of feminism and playing on feeling and emotion to get the message across. Ahmed (2016) argues that feminism possibly starts as an uneasy feeling, but it strongly requires that one makes connection with that feeling in order to have the ability to understand the essence of feminist practice and how to convey it. In explaining the use of Affect in this instance, it is necessary to deploy Tomkins' (1984: 170) definition of Affect through

what he calls the 'Role of the Specific Affects'. He asserts that the first role of Affect is to Startle, an activated stimulation which induces surprise or interest (Tomkins, 1984). He further states that the response to startle is when an individual turns their attention from one thing to another. It is brief and passes over from startle to interest & excitement. The second role is described as Contempt, Disgust and Shame, which are "innate defensive responses" (181). On the @Facesandphases Instagram page, Muholi uses the concept of collaboration and communication (as seen in Appendix B) as a tool to construct ongoing dialogue about lesbian identities. These two roles defined by Tomkins (1984) are crucial to Muholi's project because her creation of hypervisibility for lesbian and transgender lives in this activist visual format startled the conventional codes of practice that have been wrongfully normalised by the homophobic parties in the South African society. By creating an element of shock that turned into interest, the faces and narratives of these women were highlighted, and the society was forced to see them. Bissonauth (2014) in their interpretation of Muholi's Affective Appeal states that "Muholi's photography generates an intimate encounter between photographer and photographed in a way that moves her audiences to actively see those depicted". In essence, as much as this caused an expected shock in society, which also resulted in responses of contempt, disgust and shame, the subjects still became the main topic of focus and discussion. This means that Muholi still received the desired outcome, by actively turning the eye on these women's faces and experiences. An example of some critique that Muholi has received was at a 2009 *Innovative Women* exhibition in Johannesburg, where then Minister of Arts and Culture Lulu Xingwana departed from the exhibition in disgust and shame, describing some of the works as "immoral, offensive and going against nation-building" (Mlambo, 2016:14). This drives the argument that Muholi invoked feelings of disgust, shame and contempt because her work instilled a sense of discomfort and a fear of change and disruption to social norms and cultural codes.

Another important element that has been observed from this project series is that Muholi not only focuses on creating visibility and reshaping popular notions created concerning queer lives, but that she critically acts in a way of altering and returning the spectator's gaze. Poulain's writes:

> Borrowing Nicholas Mirzoeff's conceptualisation of "visuality" as an arrangement of the sphere of appearance inherent in the project of colonial modernity, it suggests that "Faces and Phases" promotes a counter-visual distribution of space in which participants claim not only "the right to appear" but also, in Mirzoeff's phrase, "the right to look."

From this perspective, the women who are photographed in Muholi's series are participants who are validating and reclaiming their own stance and place in mass society. It is a direct and activist stance to stand in front of the lens and be seen. In viewing Muholi's series as decolonial work, Butler (2015: 24-25) in 'Gender Politics and the Right to Appear' also attempted to express the outcome of excluded bodies standing together in a given public space:

> When bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other forms of public space (including virtual ones) they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and inserts the body in the midst of the political field and demands more livable economic, social and political conditions no longer afflicted by precarity.

The assembling of these bodies in a public space for a single purpose, most especially gender non-conforming individuals who defy norms and expectations enforced by a homophobic and patriarchal society, is a performative act. It is an act of defiance and assertion in a space where their bodies are not expected to be seen and are made invisible. By creating hypervisibility of lesbian bodies in mass culture and space, Butler (2015) claims that these disenfranchised bodies affirm their 'right to appear' and the right to be documented. This motion of affect also weakens and dislocates the male gaze by altering the way lesbian bodies and women masculinity is publicly perceived, and reverses the gaze, by giving queer bodies the right to allow the rest of society to see them as they please.

4.4 Embodying the Black Identity through Performativity

In *Somnyama Ngonyama*, what has become prevalent and symbolic is Muholi's use of her bare body to perform multiple identities. In each portrait, this research argues that they are creating different representations of Blackness and the Black South African identity through their embodiment of each narrative. This will be unpacked through Sweetser's (2001) defined concept of performativity, stating that performativity is defined by not only transforming structure into representation, but space and temporality into representation. In analysing Muholi's portraits, they make use of both basic items, their body as well as the space surrounding her, to complete the narrative she is trying to present. In portraits such as *Aphiwe, Arles France* (2016), *Julile I, Parktown, Johannesburg* (2016) and *Bona II, Charlottesville, Virginia* (2015), Muholi, as the subject depicts her body against white backgrounds which essentially contrast one another. This brings attention to the relationship between Black women's bodies, patriarchy and white standards forced upon them. Black women have always been subjected to the controlling of their bodies through the eyes of European influence, but Muholi uses these Black and white contrasts as symbol of autonomy over the Black women identity and Black women's bodies.

Somnyama Ngonyama also serves to challenge the oppressive standards of beauty that commonly ignore Black people. In *Ntozanbantu, VI and II, Parktown Johannesburg (2016),* Muholi is pictured in blonde hair that is styled into a big rolled bun around her head, imitating an outlandish royal hairstyle, and two ponytails coming down her neck and covering her breasts. In *Ntozabantu II,* her hair is also tied into a knot and wrapped around her neck. She is also wearing a large tiara/crown on her head. This depiction is directed at questioning the standards of beauty that have been enforced onto Black women. It is believed that the main reason for this stems from racist structures of the past and is one of the characteristics of coloniality. As a consequence, Whiteness became one and the same with what was considered elegant, honourable, and attractive while "Blackness" was synonymous what was inferior and ugly (Chukwuma, 1990). Within this context, Hill (2002) also states that "racial phenotypes were indicators of social standing and moral character and became powerful symbols of beauty, merit, and prestige. Academics who are well versed in race research also affirm that colourism has been one of the main reasons that people of colour have had internal divisions and experienced inequality amongst each other (Hall, 2005). Hall (1986: 26) also defines internalised racism as "the 'subjection' of the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideology which imprison and define them". All of these above-mentioned factors have contributed largely to the manner in which Black women have defined themselves and defined Black beauty in relation to white standards.

Systemic racism is one of the biggest oppressions ever experienced by people of colour because they are still only beginning to rectify it many years post colonisation. Darker skinned Black women with naturally coily hair were racially discriminated against and probed to alter their physique in accordance with white patriarchal standards. This is the notion that is being challenged in the *Ntozabantu* portraits. The blonde hair tied into a knot around Muholi's neck questions Black women's conformity to Eurocentric beauty that Black women are blindly embodying. It also illustrates this to a large extent as a suffocation to the individual because when something is held against one's neck means that it is a forced ideal or concept. They are therefore challenging the system of Apartheid that used hair as a defining factor for age, social position and status, as well as its notions of altering Black hair and African culture. An example of this are the European colonizers who took African people to the Americas to enslave them. The first thing they did in effort to control and dehumanise Black people and strip them of their African culture and spirit was to shave their heads upon arrival to the Americas (Morrow, 1973). Even in current contexts, "Good hair" is considered to be closest to that of white

people's hair: "long, straight, silky, bouncy, manageable, healthy, and shiny; while "bad" hair is "short, matted, kinky, nappy, coarse, brittle and wooly" (Chapman, 2007: 28). These racist outlooks have shaped what is now known as Colourism. The significance of the *Ntozabantu* portraits defy these unnatural expectations and discriminations that attempt to strip Black women of their identity and African spirit. As Muholi looks directly into the camera lens, they deconstruct this by forcing viewers to reflect and question the white standards Black women use to define their identity with. They also enforce this by increasing the dark contrast on the skin of the subject which makes the hair look even more unnatural on her. It rather forces you to look at the beauty of their skin tone and see the royalty reflected in it.

4.5 Destabilising the Male Gaze and Altering ways of Seeing Young Black Women on Instagram with Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi's *Gymnasium* (2020)

The most important exhibition to come out of lockdown in South Africa, for the purposes of this study, is Nkosi's *Gymnasium* (2020) at Stevenson Gallery. The first element that made this exhibition unique is that it was virtually exhibited on Instagram, outside of the Stevenson Gallery website. Even though it was not a complete anomaly, it was already a triumphant move because the art world has been one synonymous with stringent guidelines on maintaining exhibitions and regulations on their traditional forms of exhibiting art. With this, *Gymnasium* (2020) has therefore broken the boundaries between the online and offline worlds of art. The importance of this is that the purpose of art in society is to generate thinking in various levels. It is also meant to produce thinking by breaking outside the norms of society as it is known, and artists who are "Challenging norms help push back imposed rules and customs that are antithetical to freedom" (Cockell, 2015: 380). In essence, it is important in society for artists to pursue other ways of deliberately escalating the freedom of society and the individual in the extremity of space that often drives society to conform to institutional regimes and systems.

Nkosi further informs and encourages this form of thinking in some of her paintings in *Gymnasium* (2020) that speak about the duality of space as well as the complementing relationship between the Black body and space. Campbell (2020) asserts that "Her paintings are an exploration of space and draw clear distinct lines between the people that occupy it, to the things it represents". In the paintings *Spring Floor IV* (2020) and *Spring Floor V* (2020), Nkosi illustrates the specially prepared exercise surface that gymnasts typically perform on in order to make it bouncy, provide soft landings and prevent injuries. Her use of soft and subtle

shades of pink, red, grey and Black, alongside the use of lines and geometry give it more life and meaning. These colours, which can be described as flat and meek in this instance, bring a sense of elegance to the both the literal and metaphorical space. With this eloquent form in the art exhibited on Instagram, Nkosi was able to disrupt the conventional and traditional modes of art consumption and exchange, directly forcing it into popular culture and mass media culture. This integration immediately altered the fast-paced scrolling culture of the social networking space by taking viewers on a timeless, meditative exploration of art that is embodied with layered forms of meaning and representation, especially relevant for the day and time that the society finds itself in. The gymnasium is a stage where dramas are enacted under a gaze of intense scrutiny. It is affirmed by The Africa Center (2020) that "Gymnasts become actors, producing layered narratives of far-reaching metaphorical and political significance". She essentially brought the conversation about Black bodies in white spaces, history and architectural space into a more engaging, open and accessible platform that will both ignite these meaningful conversations, while still focusing the attention on the elegant pieces themselves.

In this same context, the revival and continued illustration of artwork online is a way of further breaking down the old systems and regimes of the artworld that were exclusionary and restricted to the ordinary Black artist. In Cochrane's conceptualisation of the fourth wave of feminism, they interpret that groups that raise consciousness should not be hierarchical in effort for all voices to be heard on an equal level. This makes Instagram a purposeful platform to have used for Nkosi exhibition, because it further breaks down the boundaries of access and even opens up the space for marginalised voices to be heard, and not only heard of the stereotyped elite voices. It is indicative of a forced turning point in the operations of the art institution in South Africa to be a more democratised space. 'Democratised' meaning that on social media, the audience gets to see and experience art and its exhibitions from the artist's own voices and perspectives as well as the commissioning of Black women artists by art galleries and museums. It is crucial for this to be addressed because it has been at a slower pace than the white and male counterparts, will ironically be re-addressed by providing all artists with equal, public and accessible platforms regardless of the institutions they have endorsing their work. Significantly, this liberation of marginalised voices in mainstream media and Black artists, contributes to the positive constructions of feminisms that liberate all voices of Black women. An example of this is Steady's (1981) definition of African feminisms which is mainly concerned with the autonomy and co-operation of womens.

Moreover, when looking at the Spring Floor series of paintings in her exhibition, Nkosi depicts the bare floor of the gymnasium as a subject on its own. She did this by picturing the gymnasium surface on its own in each respective painting, using the same colour scheme. In *Spring Floor IV* (2020) and *Spring Floor V* (2020), what is illustrated is seemingly the corner edges of the performance surfaces and we are given a close look at how the two seemingly separate surfaces are brought together through the clever use of line work, geometry and the areas painted in Black are what connects the two spaces together in the middle. In subverting the modes of discrimination and privilege, this is an indirect reference to the notion of intersectionality, where the negotiations of the politicisation and representation of the Black body are met in a considerably upper-class white space. Nkosi has, in this manner, cleverly used colour to illuminate this space, which makes the viewer have an appreciation of its architecture. In the same breath, she has also creatively created affect by this same use of colour manipulation. Shinners (2020) also says that both these paintings have a calming sense and cleanliness with "Matte colours, crisp edges, minimalist composition. They remind me of how my brain feels after meditation: not a blank slate, but thoughts cleared of fuzz". The simple and subtle use of colour makes one have an appreciation for the beauty of the bare performance surface as one keeps getting hypnotically drawn in by the movement of the lines and surprisingly, the sharp corners. However, the more one maintains their attention on this image, the emptier the space starts to feel.

In looking at these illustrated spaces, more specifically *Spring Floor VI* (2020), the emptiness of the space suggests that the space cannot exist and be beautiful without the presence of bodies and its performances. Campbell (2020) affirms this notion in stating that:

> This simple transformation also involved learning about the connection between a space and the people who work within it, one does not exist without the other. This relationship also involves how people can redefine a space simply by being in it. Being brown or Black in a typically white space is a statement on its own, for gymnastics and in life being the minority often means living in a space that was not made for you or does not welcome you.

The transformation being referred to here is one suggesting that there is a connection that exist between a space and the people in it, and the position of human bodies within these spaces is what illuminates the space. In this case, Nkosi's placement of Black bodies in the empty gymnasium allows one to see how the space exists without the Black performers and begin to understand the meaningful position that these bodies hold when standing in the arena. It is said that Black sportswomen's bodies are often popularly read against a Westernised ideal and

background ‘possessed’ by their white counterparts and these same Black sportswomen are always silenced due to their race and gender identities (Green, 1981). Importantly, Nkosi’s placement of these Black bodies in a predominantly white space subverts the culture of silencing in women’s sports, the erasure of the Black sportswomen in history as well as the idea that Black women should only be read against a white background. An example of a Black African who has assertively taken up her position as champion in her sports field is Neku Atawodi. She is one of the finest polo sports women who has won multiple championships and has international sports career that spans for over a decade, in the Polo sport, which is largely white dominated. The game of Polo has been popularly described for the longest time as a “sport of kings”, which “remains a narrative of history defined as an origin that primarily involves, horsemanship, team spirit, sportsmanship, trust and respect” (Independent Online, 2018). This makes Atawodi’s success as a Black even more symbolic, because she had to perform her sport under a harsh microscope and watchful eye, yet still managed to redefine this space for Black women athletes. These empty spaces therefore become redefined by these Black performing bodies and they act of Black feminist agency and assertion is achieved (Gqola, 2008). The different shades of brown skin in these paintings becomes even more luminous against the soft pastel colours used. This is also an affectively creative, subtle but still direct way to highlight the brown skin colour and reveal its tenderness, brightness and beauty as it lays on the soft pinks, yellows and whites.

In further extending the importance of Black women redefining the spaces and taking up positions that they were not typically imagined to be in, Nkosi’s placed these women’s narratives on a mainstream platform and became the subject of conversation and Black definition across the world through the #Instagrammed exhibition. Viewers not only began to understand the history and politicisation of Black bodies in these spaces, but to also read the art in a different social space and settings in order to ensure that it is not only read as another art piece but one that becomes part of important social culture. In conversation with Lerato Bereng (2020), Associate Director at Stevenson Gallery, she states that it is important to:

> Really [look] at social media platforms as a space for contemporary art and where art can be seen in a different way, and given the limitations with travel and distance, social media has brought everything to a person’s palm. It started to be clear that Instagram was at the forefront, more so than all the other existent platforms for art viewing because it has an immediacy, a kind of ..it was garnering a sense of seriousness a lot of platforms hadn’t yet had.

In this case, it can be considered that Instagram was an important interface for her Black feminist artworks to be shared because it provided audiences with the opportunity to see the work artworks in an unconventional and diverse lens. Looking at this from Gaidzanwa's (2013) African feminist standpoint, it was substantial for Nkosi as a Black , to portray the experiences of Black women on Instagram through her artwork in her own perspective, and to do this by interjecting and subverting the mainstream definitions of Black women formed by society. During this day and time, living within a pandemic, Instagram offered a sense of immediacy for artists and galleries when releasing new art or reaching and interacting with their audiences.

It is also affirmed that Instagram has become substantial in garnering wider audiences and engagement for Black feminist artists. Due to the restrictions in travel and the imposed social distancing measures, the visual content creatively produced on Instagram by galleries and artists have given provision to the increased accessibility of art. For example, due to the fact that artists like Sibande and Muholi have become worldly artists due to their multiple participations in international exhibitions, they have gained a significant number of international followers and audiences. With this in mind, some of these people can no longer travel to the country to view some of this art and have to rely on Instagram. What makes this social platform symbolic is that it has also opened the door for art that is live and interactive from any location. A great example of this an opening night for *Gymnasium* (2020) celebratory toast that was hosted on the 25th of April, the first night of lockdown, by Stevenson Gallery over the Zoom application and it was also broadcasted on Instagram live (Bereng, 2020). This provided followers with the unique opportunity to still be part of the launch of the exhibition, while still getting the chance to engage with the artist and the gallery in live time. In this regard, Instagram has still afforded these art lovers with the chance to still view art in a unique way and in the comfort of their own homes. It has become easier for them to see it and experience it through the voiced videos and through images of art in the galleries, the get to see where the art lives in the physical space. It is also affirmed that "Through the innovations of social media, viewing art becomes a more intimate experience, breaking down barriers of class, conventionality, and location to create a space in which art can be appreciated by anybody with access to the internet" (Rampages, 2020: 2). It is therefore apparent that with the increased desire of entertainment from the isolated audiences, artist and galleries can exhibit art online and begin normalising art consumption and exchange as a social activity.

One of the other important factors regarding artists navigating bringing art content to isolated audiences is the breaking down of class through the use of Instagram. The visual art space is

often associated with a small class of individuals who are considered to be exclusive and the role of social media in this regard allows for these barriers to be broken down (Rampages, 2020). It is also asserted that due to the traditional art world's elitism, many ordinary citizens felt alienated and did not feel a sense of belonging when present in the gallery space, and social media has allowed for the art market to become more transparent and inclusive (Mutual Art, 2018). It is also believed that art in itself is not elitist, but class is created by the "gatekeepers operating like a kind of impenetrable, closed-shop cabal, whose assembled authority allows them to dictate not only the art we view and should be viewing, but also what our opinions on it should be" (Thorpe, 2014). In a South African context, the divide has taken on a more racial significance because according to the Art Times (2015) in Goldswain (2017: 2), "the lack of government funding, co-ordination and public interaction with these structures further dooms them to social irrelevance". Specifically, public art institutions in South Africa still only attract a select amount of people who prefer going to gallery spaces to view art. What then becomes apparent is that Instagram has further interrogated and broken down these limitations and elitist stereotypes because more people who would not typically visit art galleries still engage with it and view it in the same respect. Furthermore, this traditionally known white space is being challenged with the narrative of Black women by inviting an increased amount of Black women across the globe who are active on Instagram to form part of the everyday activism initiated by activist and some feminist artwork.

Lastly, it is argued that this exhibition not only shifts focus onto the essence of Black skin tone, but the clever use and balance of colour in these paintings enhances the tone of the Black women's skin. In the paintings *Team* (2020), *Trials* (2020) and *Champion* (2020) for example, Nkosi makes use of very subtle, pastel colours that are looked at against the brown colour of their skin. The athletes are dressed in pale pink and yellow attires, and their bodies are looked at against pastel grey and yellow backgrounds and subtle blue lines. Oostdijk (2010: 50 -51) argues that "color takes on more meaning than just skin color" and that colour enhances people's emotions, allowing them to see and feel things, which ultimately again subverts "the racist past when 'colored' was used as a term for Black people in a derogatory manner". Firstly, the use of these colours against the brown skin tone highlights the beauty of the Black skin, while also subverting the stereotypical representations of Black women by giving the brown skin colour a meaning that indicates delicacy in its purest form. This allows for the viewer to see the Black skin colour in a more positive shape and form. These subtle, yet bright and

enhancing colours indicate the hidden light that the Black women body brings in not only the art world, sports fraternity and mainstream media but in the larger society as well.

4.6 Framing the Oppositional Gaze

In the fraternity of women sports, Black women's skin colour and bodies have always taken precedence over their performances and achievements. Their bodies become subjects of judgement, but not only the judging of their performances, but by their performances within the colour of their skins. Cele (2020) further probes this notion in her review of *Gymnasium* (2020):

> Suddenly, it is not your prowess that is under scrutiny but your very body. Its Blackness. What does it mean to present oneself for evaluation? To continually be aware of the scorecard against which you are rated, the parameters of which are defined externally? What does it mean to be looked at?

These Black bodies become subjects of scrutiny, especially when they dominate these overly patriarchal and white dominated spaces because how dare they become successful, or even become more successful than their white counterparts in a white man's sport, space and world right? A perfect example of this is the level of scrutiny that Serena Williams, a tennis player and multi-champion, has received in her career, but most significantly, when she was widely labelled as a stereotypical angry Black at the 2018 US Open Finals by an Australian newspaper cartoon The Herald Sun, when she questioned the umpire of her match. In the caricature, her bodily features are exaggerated and illustrated in a manner that makes her look more masculine that she is, and she is stomping on her racket in rage. Another example is that of Caster Semenya, a world record breaking athlete and multi-champion runner. She is a who was highly successful against her competitors, but her reign only led to patriarchal, homophobic and racist institutions scrutinising her body and essentially threatening to end her career if she does not alter her own body, and because how dare another Black African women become successful across global competitions, even against the best white athletes? In bringing light to these issues and essentially emphasising the beauty and depth that Black women bodies bring to the physical space of the gymnasium and the fraternity of women sports in general, Nkosi brings a sense of agency and dominated ownership of the representation of Black women.

In the *Team* (2020) painting, Nkosi illustrates a group of Black gymnasts huddling together to seemingly congratulate one another. The athletes are hugging and applauding each other as

they are being filmed by three cameramen. This is a powerful illustration highlighting how Black athletes are subjects of scrutiny and always being observed by audiences even during intimate moments that they are sharing together. In her own words, Nkosi in WePresent (2020) described this scene as follows:

> For me, they're so vulnerable, and I hope that if people can see the way these three cameras are unabashedly intruding on this very tender moment, they might ask themselves how their own gaze might be felt.

The three men holding the camera also form part of the patriarchal gaze that Black women's bodies are always looked at, especially with the notion of intrusion. Also, in analysing the camera lenses, one begins to question gaze that these women are under because it raises an element of the third eye of 'Big Brother' especially because the identity and quantity of the people behind the camera lenses is unknown. When looking beyond the sport, this emphasises that the Black 's body is one that constantly remains under a microscopic light of an onlooking audience. An audience that is often faceless, but still is impactful enough to have an influence on how these Black bodies are viewed as objects in white spaces. In essence, the 'Instragrammed' exhibition is significant in forming part of the ongoing debate surrounding the development of feminist media, and as asserted by Geraghty (1996), in altering "the absence of a comprehensive feminist perspective on the full range of media genres and areas of representation" (Valdivia, 2003: 27). Nkosi is therefore shifting the preface in which Black women athletes' bodies are looked at. She does this by also activating Black women's agency and so as to invert patriarchal oppression (Ntombela, 2013), and this ownership and re-telling of the Black 's narrative in these spaces is an active feminist standpoint (Naidu, 2010) that she is taking to re-present and subvert the manner in which Black women bodies are looked at. Baig (2015: 71), also asserts this notion by quoting Baderoon, indicating that "The feminist technique of counter-claim regarding the very essence of the Black 's body which is closed down by the violent patriarchal gaze and voice may be seen as working through silence". In essence, this brings significance to Nkosi giving her work life on Instagram, where the art constructs an assertive Black women subjectivity within a social space of everyday activism.

In addition to this perception, in *Team* (2020), *Audience* (2020) and *Champion* (2020), the perception of the clustered group of faceless audiences watching the performers brings light to the fact that the athletes are not only performers but humans as well. This prompts the viewer to adjust their gaze on Black women athletes and re-look at them as human beings without focusing on their physical and socio-cultural attributes. In the video, Suspension (2020), she

presents a collection of different clips of Black professional gymnasts of all shades and skin tones before their performances. The close-up image on their faces allows the audience to get taken into the emotions that each athlete goes through moments before their performances. In her interpretation, Kgasane (2020) argues that:

> The crucial moments before and after a show are often unseen, and it is these moments that are perhaps more important than what the public sees: the preparation, the anxiety, and of course, the mental and physical ways in which the gymnast has to deal with the result.

It therefore becomes important for Nkosi to take us through the journey of the moments that viewers always miss when watching a match. It is also essential to place ourselves in the bodies of these gymnasts and gain an understanding of the level of anxiety that they have before and after their performances, and most especially with the weight of carrying the eyes of thousands of onlookers and judging viewers. Furthermore, *Gymnasium* is "shifting focus away from the fact of success or defeat, [and] spotlights the humanity engaged and set aside in the shift from human to performer, youth to labourer, person to demigod, and the reverse" (Juxtapoz, 2020). Through the presentation of this exhibition, people are able to see these women beyond their bodies and their skin colour, but as humans and young performers who are constantly subjected to unjustified public scrutiny from all ends. There is also a present way Nkosi communicates this suspension through the use of affect. To achieve this, *Suspension* (2020), manipulated the gaze by allowing the viewers by allowing each person's facial expressions and pre-match anxiety to be felt through the camera. By the viewer getting taken into these emotions invokes feelings of interest and suspension as well, but as soon as one expects the performance to begin, another performer's image appears. One is able to empathise with each person and begin to see them for who they are as opposed to focusing on their performance.

Amidst the COVID-19 outbreak that has affected most countries globally, social media has been filled with pandemic related news, updates, videos and infographics. There has been a huge spike in COVID-19 mentions across social media platforms with people using social media to talk about their anxieties and experiences with the pandemic as well as to share information and news (Molla, 2020). This indicates that all other issues affecting society outside of the pandemic were mitigated. Without undermining the relevance and importance of the crisis, it should still be crucial to voice social and socio-cultural issues in the country, because unprecedented times like these contribute largely to the further silencing of marginalised identities and bodies. It is thus important to highlight the Black artists who are shifting the gaze on Instagram, reimaging the Black aesthetic and how it is essential and

relevant especially in the current context. Examples of these are Robert Pruitt's, a Black male artist who draws imagery from science fiction, comic books, hip hop culture and images from social and political struggles, drawing *Black Astronaut* (2015), which was recreated after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, with the slogan *I Can't Breathe* on the imaged man's balaclava. This is a symbolic image, which brings light to the struggle of Black American men who are being murdered by policemen. This image is also important in the current context, because it disrupts the gaze on Instagram by un-silencing not only the dead body of Floyd, but all other innocent Black lives lost, and further creating visibility about the greater experience of Black people.

It is a perfect irony because *Gymnasium* (2020) is a series that is also aimed at disrupting, and the work is doing so by thriving on its own and living as its own narrative and body of meaning in mainstream society. Also, the exhibition came at a volatile time when audiences were seeking for an outlet to shift their focus on. This can also attribute to Hooks' theory of the oppositional gaze. An oppositional gaze is a concept that was coined by feminist theorist, activist and scholar Bell Hooks, and her viewpoint on this gaze instilling agency is the focus of argument. This virtual exhibition is creating an oppositional gaze through its active resistance to dominant and conventional ways of seeing and performing the Black body (Caldeira, Van Bauwel, De Ridder, 2018). hooks (2003: 94) argues that "even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency". Importantly, this body of work is important in disrupting the manner in which Black bodies are seen in white spaces, and vitally in spaces of sports performance. This, while also questioning and standing in front of all the critique, forms of racism, and scrutiny of success that Black women receive because of the colour of their skin.

A crucial factor that makes her work an iconic symbol in the time period that it lives in, is that the artwork is critically placed in the centre of the ongoing narrative about the importance of the existence of Black bodies. After the murder of George Floyd on the 25th of May 2020, the ongoing spate of attacks on Black people by police, and riots happening in the USA, Instagram was taken over by the social activism and protesting under the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, which intends to bring light to the racism towards Black bodies. Black Lives Matter is "an international human rights movement, originating from within the African-American community, which campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards Black people" (Black Lives Matter, 2013). The social protests created an ongoing narrative which exposed

racism in many forms, and this saw the digital South African community participate by reflecting on the murders and violence towards poor Black community citizens in South Africa by members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the South African Defence Force (SANDF). Harrisberg (2020) details that "South Africans joined calls on Tuesday for action against police brutality following the deaths of at least 10 Black people at the hands of law enforcement under a coronavirus lockdown". This was also uniquely done online through the #saytheirnames hashtag, where individuals, organisations and publications were encouraged to publicly mention the names of the victims and perpetrators of this violence. Ultimately, the *Gymnasium* (2020) exhibition is perfectly located in a time and online space where there is continuous debate and activism against the abjection of and racism towards Black bodies. In further affirming its place on social networks, it is stated that "social media is central to conversations about the self, about publicness, about consumerism, conspicuous consumption, visibility and resistance" (Spencer, Ligaga, Musila, 2018: 4). This allows it to intercept this narrative and become a part of creating the social change that the South African and global societies so desperately need. It also firmly illustrates how Black women bodies bring not only beauty, but significance and depth to this contested white space traditionally filled with systemic racism that is rooted inside the soul and psyche of the sports culture.

4.7 Performing the Black Identity

In all the works in *Gymnasium* (2020), especially the video work, one evident factor that prevails is the necessity of Black athletes to perform their own identities. The attention on the Black professional gymnasts in *Suspension* (2020), as well as their depiction in Team (2020) highlights how uncomfortable it is to see one's self as an intrusive of their bodies and into intimate moments during performances. Similarly, Kgasane (2020) states that:

> This footage shrinks the gaze that places the gymnast as a superhuman spectacle – we're reminded that gymnasts are people too, women of colour in this case, where the scrutiny is often heightened. Gymnasium invites us to shift our focus away from the isolated star, rather looking at the performer as an individual that is part of a network, a community.

In this shifted focus to the human being or individual as described above, we are prompted to review our outlook on the young women depicted in the paintings or images. With this, we begin to actively see what the skin they stand in represents in the present time that they are in and what community they are representing in their being, and not only in their performance.

The individual is no longer only standing in the Gymnasium to perform the sport, but she is also giving a performance of her hood and Black identity within this space. Therefore, the form of judgment received by the Black athletes makes them realise that their act of performance in the gymnasium is about breaking stereotypes, dispelling racism, and asserting their agency by standing forth proudly to perform in their Black skin.

The athletes' performances are argued to be harnessed by their assertion and agency as Black women and as Black women in a white space. Brown (2013) suggests that "performance is self-consciously manipulated to reveal the multiplicity of identity through traditional narrative techniques that depend on character development". This suggests that Nkosi is using the narrative of the Black gymnasts to build and tell the experience of Black women who are constantly pressured to be aware of their race and the historical position that comes with it. This also suggests that Black women are timeously in a position of presenting themselves up for evaluation through their individual choices of performativity, be it in sports or self-presentations on social media. In essence, "for Black women athletes, think Serena Williams, Caster Semenya, Simone Biles or French Figure Skater Surya Bonaly, it means accepting that rules take on expanded dimensions when you are good and Black" (Cele, 2020). It is thus brought to light that Black women in the sporting fraternity in general have bring themselves to be evaluated not only for their physical abilities but to have their personal lives stripped down in public and to also become subjects of suspicion. Being in a Black skin and achieving success has not been constructed as a societal norm, and *Gymnasium* has done exceptionally well in challenging these toxic traits of so-called 'white sports'. The presentation of Black women claiming and taking up this space in which they were not imagined in is assisted by Ogunyemi's (1996) ist perspective which deliberates Black women's writings as an alternative space, where hood is "produced [as] an exciting, fluid corpus that defies rigid categorisation".

Ultimately, *Gymnasium'*s exhibit on Instagram has illuminated this conversation and cemented Black women's defiance of unyielding and stereotypical classifications of their bodies. Ajayi (1997: 37) considers this as an elevation of a literary aesthetic that creates an ideal perception and identity of 'la femme noire'. In this instance, I choose to conceptualise/call this the re-imaging of the Black . This can be explained as a process where Black South African women are using their Instagram profiles to share their own unique identities and subjectivities through images of their authentic selves embracing the Black identity, creating different art and culture forms that tell their stories as well as participating in social activism concerning the Black community. These women essentially contribute to the hypervisibility of Blackness on

Instagram, a mainstream media platform, ultimately painting a more real and authentic identity of Black women. Looft (2017) considers this integration of the mainstream digital media and exclusive art world as everyday activism and this type of visibility as a catalyst for social change. In essence, *Gymnasium* is a series of work that lives on an open platform that allows for daily awareness of the discrimination against Black women, creates hypervisibility for the authentic presentation of the Black African and daily construction of social change around the perceptions of marginalised Black bodies and voices.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Zanele Muholi and Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi's works are important sources in the bid to redefine Black women's bodies. Black women's bodies have been countlessly subjected to controlling measures that only wanted their bodies to be seen only if conforming to white standards. Both artists use the art of performance to and the contrasting of colours to claim autonomy over Black bodies. In doing so, especially through the visibility of these works on a multimedia platform, they are contributing to a larger group of Black South African women who are becoming more assertive of their identity, not only in their personal capacity, but in public as well.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This dissertation, as an exploratory study, has taken on the approach of straddling the lines of visual media and art to fulfil its research outcomes. The use of Black South African women artists and their visual works are important in exploring the tropes around historical exclusion and marginalisation of Black women, representation of Black women and queer bodies in mainstream culture, the activist claim over controlling images as well as the exploration of identity and sexuality. Even though these are topics that have been studied and written about before, mainstream imagery still provides our bodies against Western standards of beauty and womanhood, which need to be questioned and challenged. This is also what the reimagination and rememorising of Sophie, the takeover of the colonial and patriarchal gaze by *Faces and Phases*, the placement of young Black women's bodies in spaces they were not imagined in such as a gymnasium as well as the normalisation of women's sexuality in *Lust Politics* have done. Sibande, Muholi, Nkosi and Skollie's works have demonstrated through their work and the characters created in their work that the Black 's body is always read against a white and patriarchal background or lens. In their portrayals, they have cleverly used this contrast between Black and white as a sign of autonomy and to recreate the identity of Black women's bodies. Even though all of these artists do not publicly identify as feminist, and do not publicly declare their works as feminist work, I read their works as such. This is because I consider them and their work to be activist and they mostly create work that is centred around women and their experiences.

The absence of representational attributes in modern imagery has been important to critique, especially through the instance of artwork. Many scholars have tried to bridge the gap between art and visual media research and this study serves as an extension of this work through a contemporary lens. When reference is made to visual culture or visual imagery, this is an incorporation of all forms of visual works, regardless of the formal discipline it may be said to belong to. If exclusionary practices are to be challenged, it is also important to understand and acknowledge the relationship that art and visual media has. Instagram, and other photo-sharing networking sites have become vital interfaces between visual works and the tropes they are centred around as well as public audiences in addition to pre-existing and conventional platforms such as art galleries. This use of social media for purposes of public access, immediacy and engagement between users and visual works further troubles the artwork

exchange dynamic concurrently with the decolonisation of space. Black women should no longer have to only be imagined in certain spaces but should be able to be and exist in any space without the boundary of their body and skin colour. It is necessary to challenge these unfound norms that continue to exclude marginalised bodies. Sibande, Nkosi, Muholi and Skollie have done this by highlighting the visibility and autonomy of Black women in South Africa by using contemporary visual work as a tool to communicate these injustices.

In addition, popular historical spaces are not inclusive of iconic or prominent young Black women figures and it is imperative to turn this preposterous notion on its head. Activist contemporary South African Black visual work has changed linear perceptions and ideals for art exchange, which remains to be widely explored in scholarly work. In addition, it is important to reiterate the fact that this is not a new concept as it is commonly framed in mainstream trajectories, Black women have always displayed a sense of awareness and self-affirmation, which has always been portrayed by early Black women visual artists. In contemporary representations of Black women in visual culture, there is still an emergence of the development of signs, symbols and images that represent the experiences and the identity of Black women that continue to question and alter exchanges between art and the larger society. Works of the aforementioned artists have also merged into the society, became sites of social meaning and representation and transcended beyond the limitations of walls and special confines.

I would like this study to form part of the body of work that highlights how the strong voices of Black women have come about in visual culture today, as well as in narrating both the individual and collective experience of Black women who were erased by history. The purpose is to encourage others to think beyond the constructs of the disciplines we learn in but understand how stereotypical narrations of Black women's bodies can be deconstructed and reconstructed. This study also hopes to become a basis for future visual study research projects that attempt to explore similar tropes. For studies that will follow this one, it is recommended that a more elaborate study on the changing facets and characteristics of the modern visual image is changing. It is also suggested that the continuous alterations to social media networking sites and algorithms may also affect how studies of this nature are completed in future. It is then important to keep this is mind and assess what may come next after these applications or what lies beyond them.

5.2 Limitations to the Study

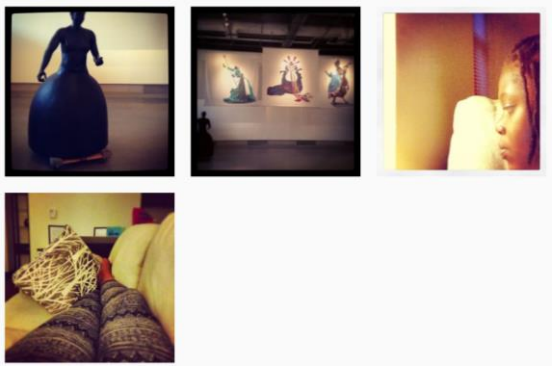
This study is significant to the collection of scholarly material about South African visual culture and how it is being altered by Black women through the decolonisation of space through digital prefaces. It provides essential acumens and cultural commentary from a distinct less examined yet necessary perspective. This presented as a challenge because the scholarship on this field of study has not been as widely extended as expected. This research is also key in provoking thoughts into the accessibility of visually representational work in South Africa and the role that social media can play in enhancing this.

The study explored and developed important and interesting new avenues in the intersectional area of traditional visual art and media scholarship. This made it difficult because it had to combine two separate disciplines in order to achieve its outcome. It is, however considered a strength, because both disciplines are making a symbolic impact in the re-writing of narratives relating to Black women in South Africa. A limitation to the study is the limited amount of women activist artists used. There was not a vast variety of artists or artwork used because this study required in-depth contextualisation and analysis of individual works, which could not have been adequately completed with too much data collected. It was also difficult to obtain a good range of academic work done on Lady Skollie's work, especially from a more traditional art perspective. Lastly, a difficult aspect about completing this research study is that there was not an overwhelming amount of pre-existing scholarship to work with, without disregarding the importance of each scholar used. There have only been a few studies combining these two disciplines in this way, which essentially made it challenging to put together a good source of scholarship to directly make reference to.

Appendix A

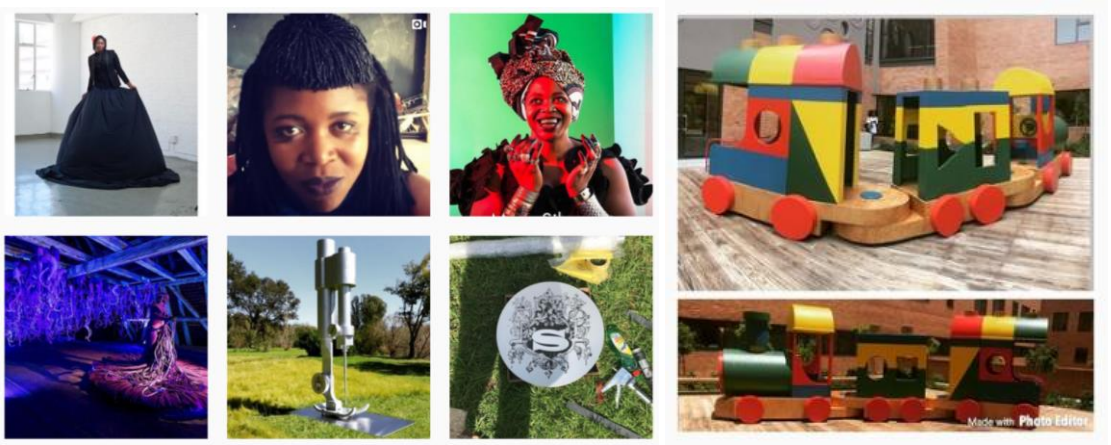
Section 1: Instagram Page @marysibande Timeline Collage

2013

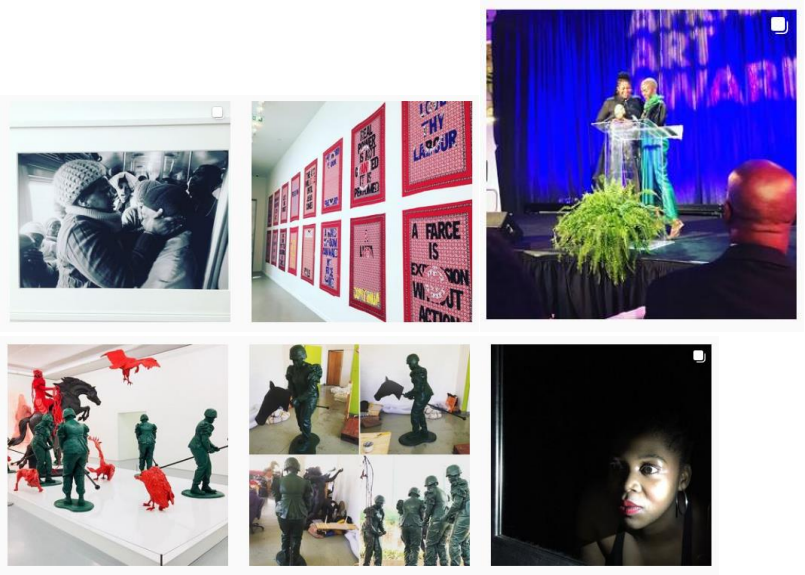




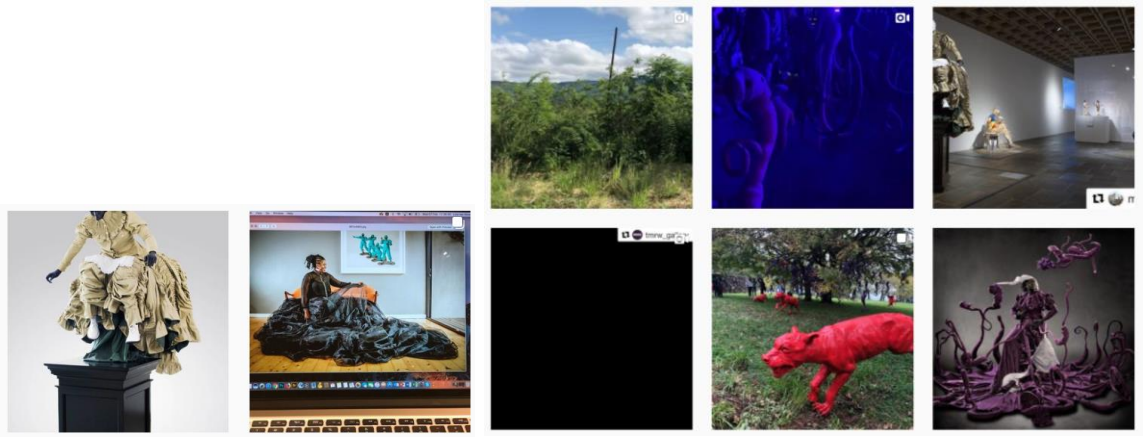
2016



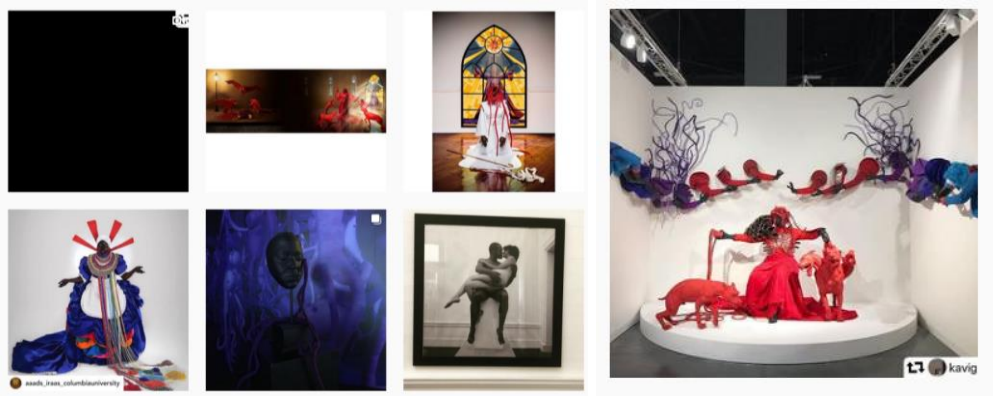
2017



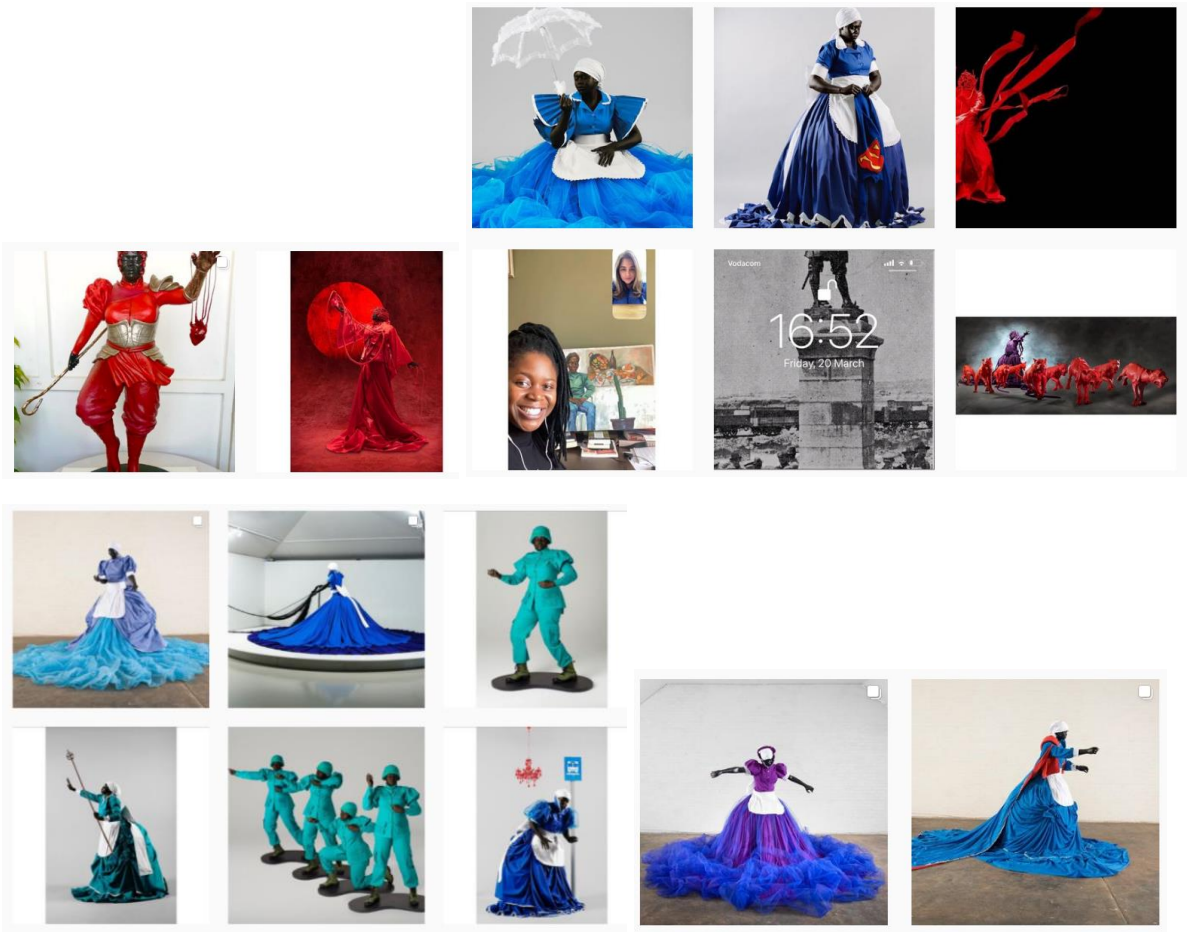
2018



2019



2020



Section 2: Most Liked Photograph

2016



https://www.instagram.com/p/BL57M88hVJyLgaDBLrMLb8dn_VuvmxpxpKetOw0/

2017



https://www.instagram.com/p/BZ1JrRNF3V46w6nfdRcnv76_rd006wYCxEVMxI0/

2018



https://www.instagram.com/p/BifUi2dhT08aVAnIpfSe-3a4TO1sdn2ZWBW_TA0/

2019

Section 3: Long Live the Dead Queen (2010) Joburg Art City Project Exhibition



'long live the dead queen' series by mary sibande on display in johannesburg



'long live the dead queen' series by mary sibande on display in johannesburg

https://www.designboom.com/art/mary-sibande/



'long live the dead queen' series by mary sibande on display in johannesburg



https://www.designboom.com/art/mary-sibande/



'long live the dead queen' series by mary sibande on display in johannesburg



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https://www.designboom.com/art/mary-sibande/



'long live the dead queen' series by mary sibande on display in johannesburg



https://www.designboom.com/art/mary-sibande/
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331021283_The_Dead_Queen%27s_Inauguration



https://mg.co.za/article/2010-07-09-look-up/



https://www.wideopenplatform.com/?client=mary-sibande

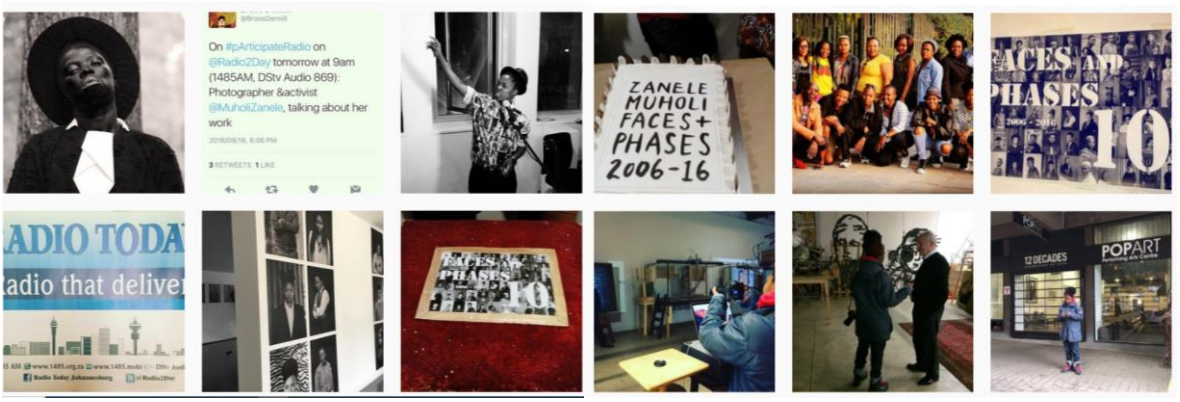


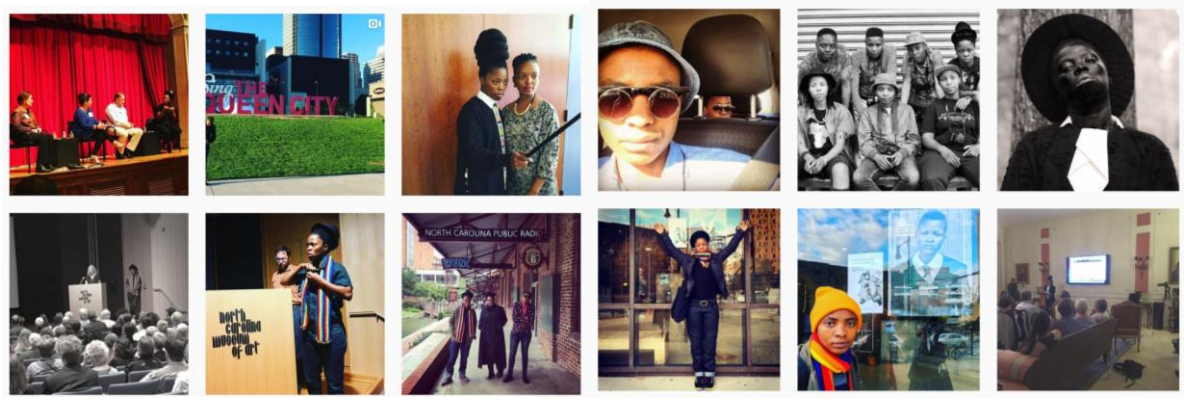
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Appendix B: Zanele Muholi

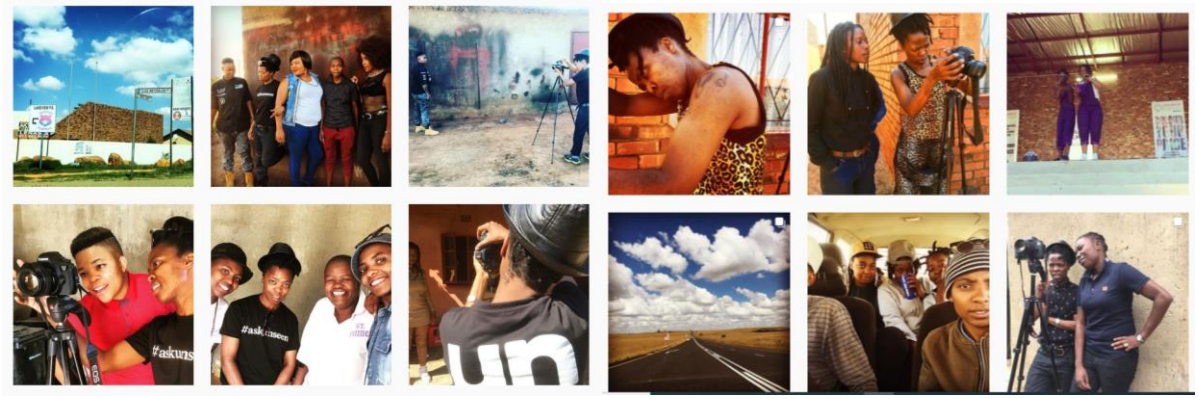
Section 1: Instagram Page (@facesandphases) Timeline Collage

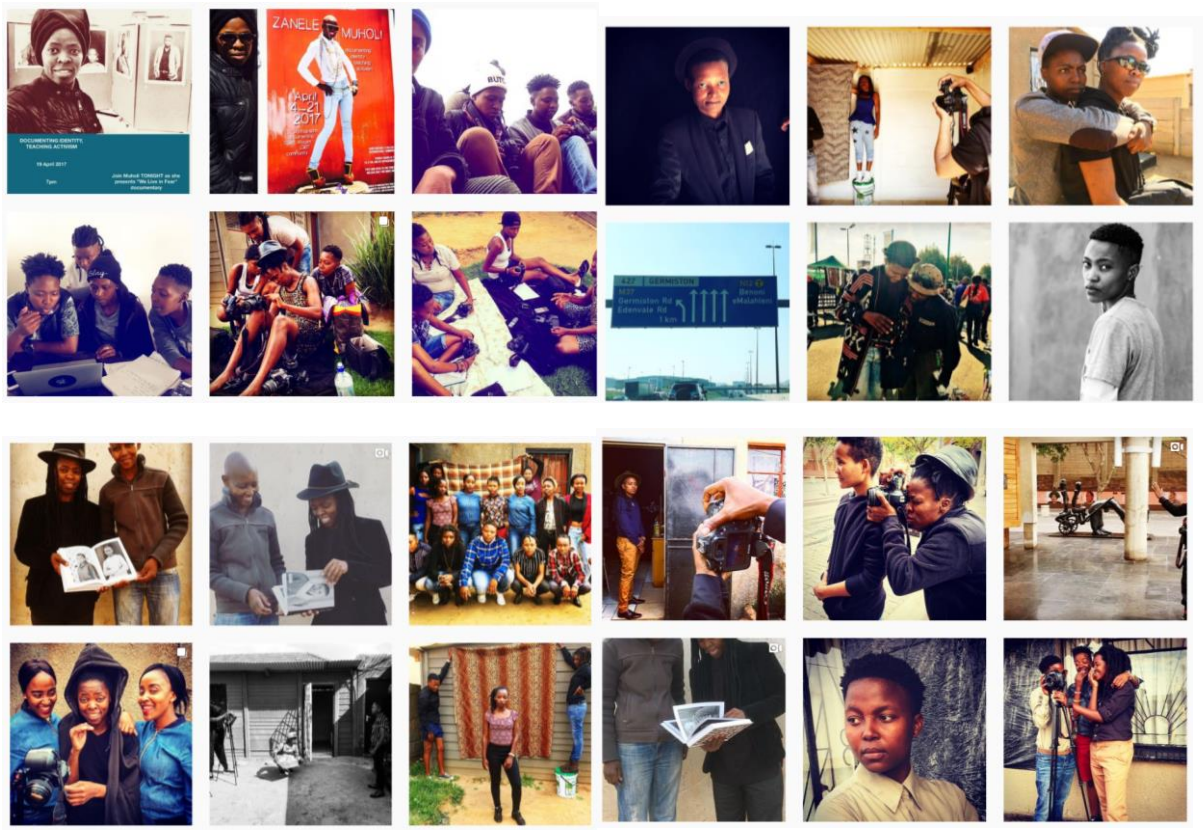
2016





2017





Section 2: Highlights/Stand-outs



When Faces Meet: Collaborative Talks

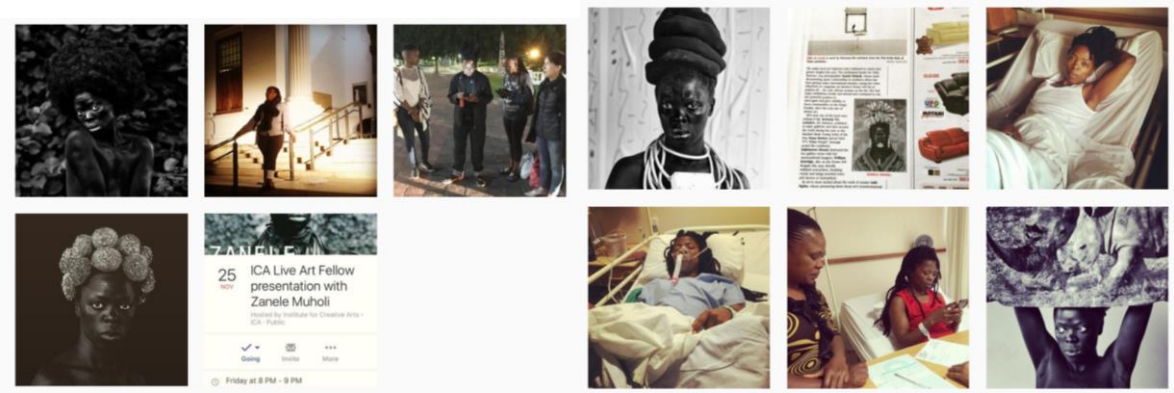

muholizanele
facesandphases • Follow
Cambria Hotel New York - Times Square
facesandphases #Repost @muholizanele (@get_repost)
#WhenFacesMeet 2017.10.08: Day 5. New York. @cambriahotels ... few minutes before checkout. #MuDi 2/30 #collabation with Thembela 'Terra' Dick @thembeladick1 #conversation #intimacy #betweenfriends @facesandphases participants #likelovers #closer #writingourownstory #feelings #neverforget #visualhistory of #SouthAfrica #fromjohannesburgtonewyork #photooftheday
173w
142 likes
OCTOBER 9, 2017
Add a comment...
Post


facesandphases • Follow
No Man's Art Gallery
facesandphases #meettheartist #BoitumeloNkopane who captured this image of #Neo Boitumelo Nkopane
Boitumelo Nkopane was born in 1987 in Springs, East of Johannesburg. In 1993 Boitumelo started her Primary education at Sechaba Primary School where her love for sports started.
In the year 2000 she went to Kenneth Masekela High School, were she completed her Matric in 2004. After matriculating she furthered her studies at Ekurhuleni East College (Springs Campus), studying Human Resources Management and completed her N4.
In 2008 she volunteered in her township as a Reservist in the South
97 likes
JULY 27, 2017
Add a comment...
Post



Section 3: Somnyama Ngonyama Instagram Page Timeline Collage

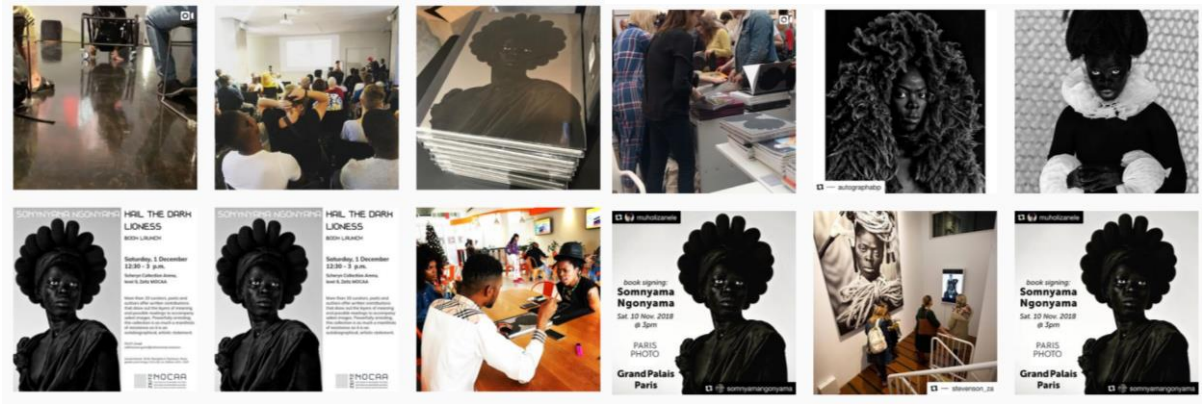
November 2016



December 2016 **https://www.instagram.com/somnyamangonyama/**


SOMNYAMA NGONYAMA
HAIL THE DARK LIONESS
muholizanele

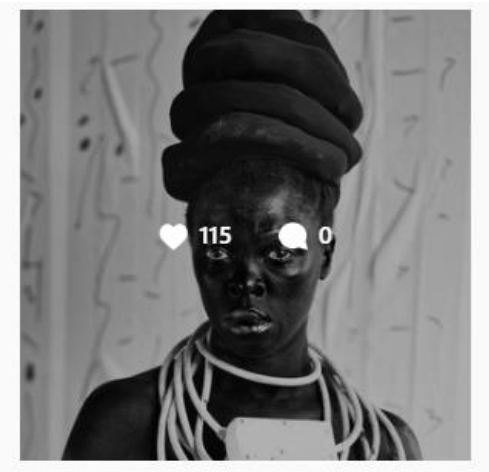

khonolasenatali
BEKONO LASE NATALI PRESENTS A CONVERSATION BETWEEN:


HAIL THE DARK LIONESS
HAIL THE DARK LIONESS
muholizanele
book signing:
Somnyama Ngonyama
Sat. 10 Nov. 2018
@ 3pm
PARIS PHOTO
Grand Palais Paris
muholizanele
book signing:
Somnyama Ngonyama
Sat. 10 Nov. 2018
@ 3pm
PARIS PHOTO
Grand Palais Paris


WOMEN'S MOBILE MUSEUM
Who Is Art?
new_art_exchange
mark_w_russell
new_art_exchange

Section 4: Somnyama Ngonyama Most Liked Images

2016



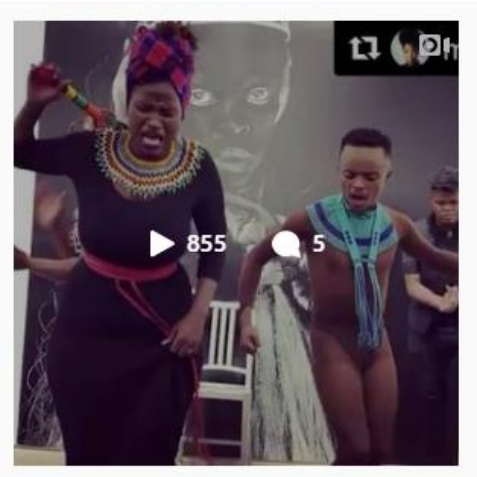
https://www.instagram.com/p/BOTsQg5DZmC/

2017



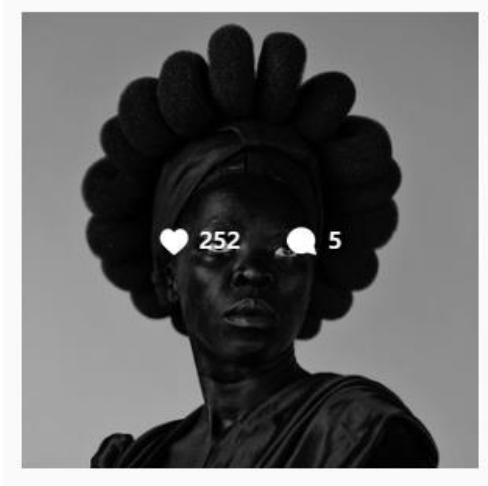
https://www.instagram.com/p/BbH0NmxB1oa/

2017 – When faces meet



https://www.instagram.com/somnyamangonyama/

2017



https://www.instagram.com/p/BYhwOq8B6I6/

Portrait Making





https://www.instagram.com/p/BWM1Snqh4tM/

Speaking to the work

“Portraying my anger, my pain. Speaking out, protesting and speaking out and challenging the viewer to question in order for us to have a constructive dialogue”

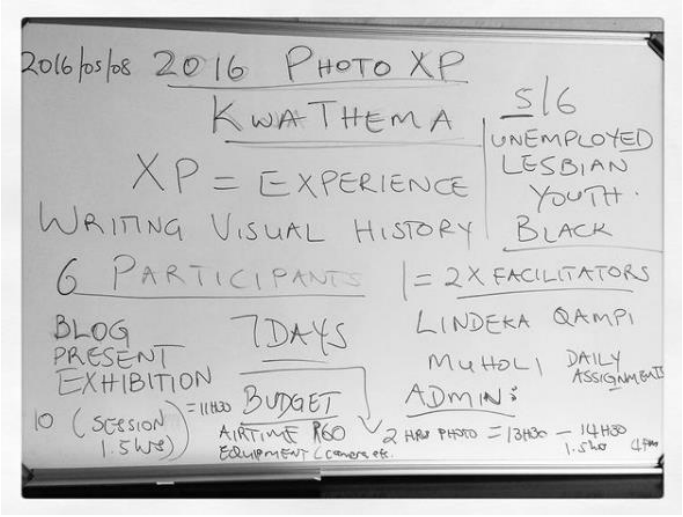


https://www.instagram.com/p/BWkiD7zh0l4/

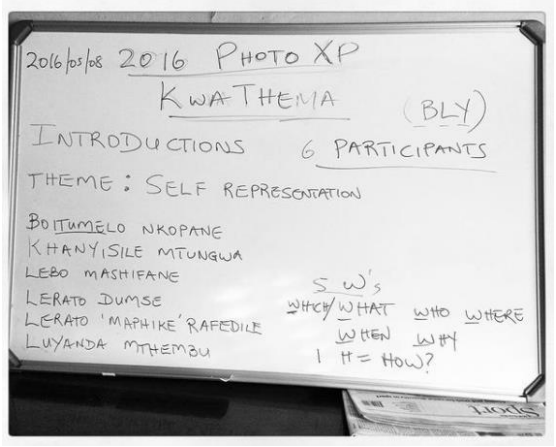
Section 4: @ZaneleMuholi Instagram Visual Book

2016





https://www.instagram.com/p/BFCJIJRApBL/ *https://www.instagram.com/p/BFLsqdBApDC/*





https://www.instagram.com/p/BFLr3cFgpBc/ *https://www.instagram.com/muholizanele/?hl=en*





https://www.instagram.com/muholizanele/?hl=en *https://www.instagram.com/p/BKttwxKBv4b/*


Art

'We are making history here'

Ancestors and ... steer Sebidi's ar...

https://www.instagram.com/p/BKtuBm9Bwvw/


ULMER KULTURSPIEGEL

Eine Lebensaufgabe

Die Südafrikanerin Zanele Muholi und ihre Fotografien in der vh

MAGDI ABOUL-KHEIR

Heute Eröffnung

https://www.instagram.com/p/BK2IRMyDyjM/


Muholi is Africa's most powerful female artist

GARRETH VAN NIEKERK

garreth.vanniekerk@citypress.co.za

Visual activist Zanele Muholi, who hails from Umlazi in KwaZulu-Natal, is officially the most powerful female artist in Africa, according to ArtReview magazine's annual Power 100 list of influencers in the contemporary art world.

Muholi, who made it on the list at position 95, joins big names such as Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor (at number 20) and South African artist William Kentridge at position 62. ArtReview describes Muholi as a "Johannesburg-based photographer, film maker and self-titled 'visual activist' at the forefront of both celebrating the existence of, and campaigning against the violence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities in her native South Africa and beyond".

The awards, now in their 15th year, work with 20 international judges to consider sales figures, exhibition numbers, media reports and social media influences, so that the impact of the globe's biggest art personalities can be determined. The list consists of predominantly white artists, but, as ArtReview notes, "art-world power changes hands slowly, like the art world itself" - adding that "Muholi is making sure her message is being heard".

month, Muholi spoke about the significance of her work Faces and Phases - a series of photographic portraits documenting mainly black lesbian and transgender individuals - 10 years after it first premiered.

"The point is to photograph people who take pride in who they are. This is political. I do not w... people to look clumsy or ugly, like the projections that were made of Africans by the colonisers. I w... people to look superneat. That self-loving projecti... is key. When I photograph someone for the series say: 'Please look good. We are all going through ... and challenges, but please do not project it now. There will be time for that."

Kentridge, who went up the ranks this year by places, is commended by the panel, who say: "... South African artist's intelligent multidisciplinary works - drawing, animation, books, tapestry, music, the dance, opera and a healthy dose of slie movie slapstick exploring philosoph... history, science and politics - continue ... in international demand."

Topping the list ... the second time is curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Known as t... "curator who neve... sleeps", Obrist is ... be the most powe... person in contem... art, with a nod fr... him on an exhibit... programme or on... infamous Instagra... enough to start ... times, end - an a...

https://www.instagram.com/p/BMFNmaSD3Bq/


Politics And Art Collide In Miami

MIAMI BEACH — Even the small talk was more solemn at this year's edition of Art Basel Miami Beach. On opening day of what is America's largest fair of contempo... rary art and Cham... pagne-steeped hedon... ism, the air kisses were shadowed by the chal... lenges the presidency of Donald J. Trump might pose to an art world that likes to imagine itself as a force for progress.

JASON FARAGO

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

At Wednesday's V.I.P. preview, more sedate than the running-of-the-bulls ambience of years past, gallerists and curators spoke in apocalyptic terms about America after Jan. 20, while the collectors — some lightly espoused social liber... alism and ecological commitments aside — were sanguine about the fate of the art market. If Mr. Trump's campaign pledges and his plutocratic cabinet choices are any guide, the rich who buy art here might soon pay even less tax than they do now. (The nominee for Treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, is the son of the art dealer Robert Mnuchin, whose gallery's booth was heavily traf... ficked.)

Art Basel, which closes Sunday, offers a chance to see works from around the world — most impor... tantly from Latin America, home to 31 of the 269 galleries exhibiting here. But several American gal... leries have rejigged their booths in response to the unexpected election of Nov. 8, or else are showing slightly older works that have taken on new, grimmer airs.

On the booth of the Los Angeles dealer Susanne Vielmetter, a large, stern portrait in pencil by Karl Haendel depicts Hillary Clinton, lips pursed and eyes gazing sky... ward, as one-half of a dipty... other half is solid, light-suc... black. Gladstone Gallery, N... York, is showing a painting... Elizabeth Peyton of Barack... dating to 2008. Then a yout... tor from Illinois, Mr. Obama... before a washy background... blue-and-gray stripes, but ... Peyton's adoring, soft-hazed... appears shatteringly sad ne... the promise so many saw h... annulled.

And for Gavin Brown's E...

A work by Zanele Muholi in the Stevenson booth at Art Base...

https://www.instagram.com/p/BNlZvxJDqsm/



https://www.instagram.com/p/BRI7Li0lfUy/



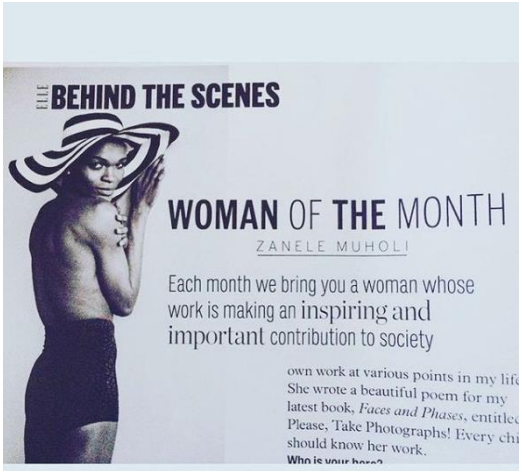
https://www.instagram.com/p/BS03qe5lh6d/


FEUILLETON KUNSTMARKT 21

Trauer und Bewunderung

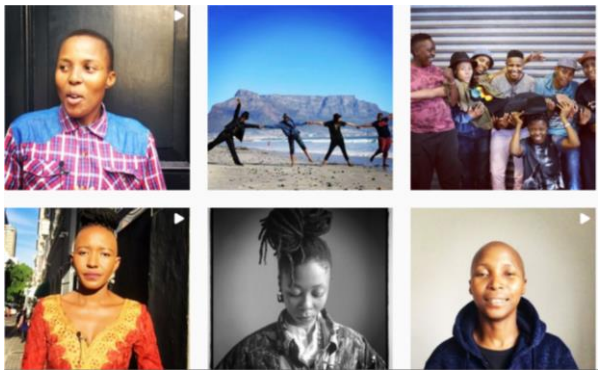
Am Berliner Gallery Weekend nehmen fast 50 Aussteller teil. Ein Thema ist der westlich-maskulin Blick auf den Anderen

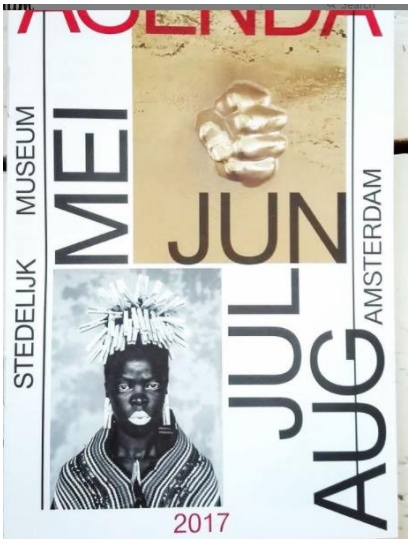
Eine echte Kunst



https://www.instagram.com/p/BTdkRtxluwb/

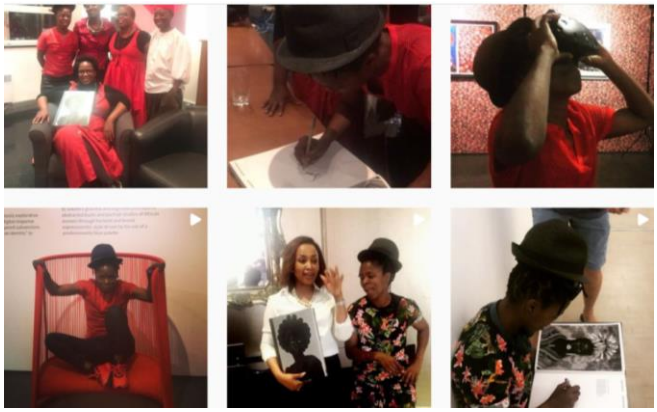
https://www.instagram.com/p/BUCVDqHFGjV/





https://www.instagram.com/muholizanele/?hl=en

https://www.instagram.com/p/BVefJyXlgSO/





https://www.instagram.com/muholizanele/?hl=en

https://www.instagram.com/p/BqhJmDUgc10/

Appendix C: Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi

Section 1: Gymnasium Instagram Exhibition

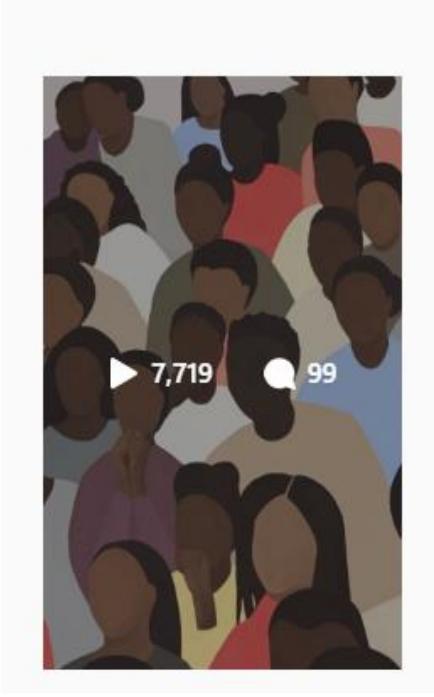
July 2019 – February 2020

Tags: 59

March 2020 – December 2020

Tags: 234



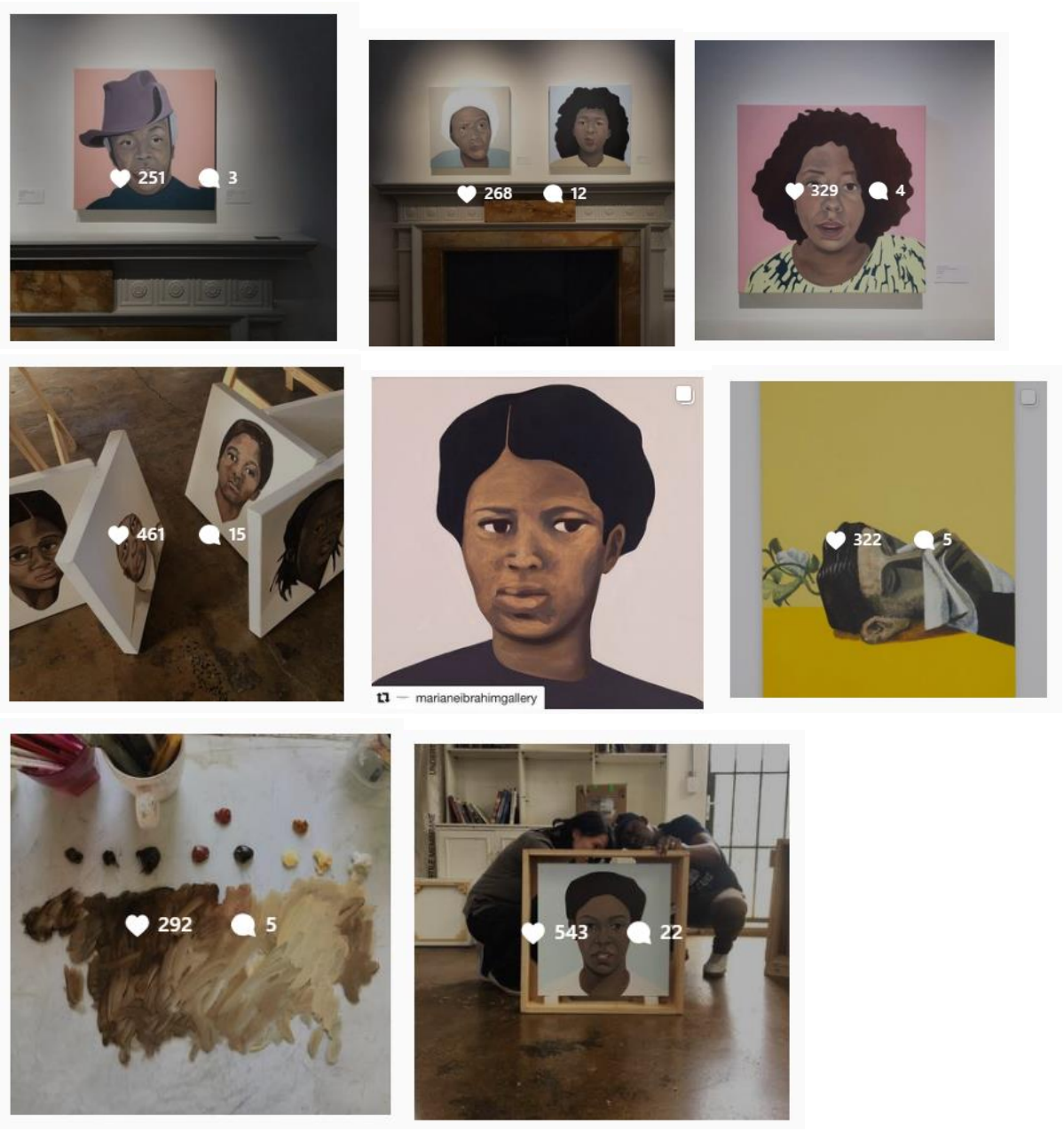




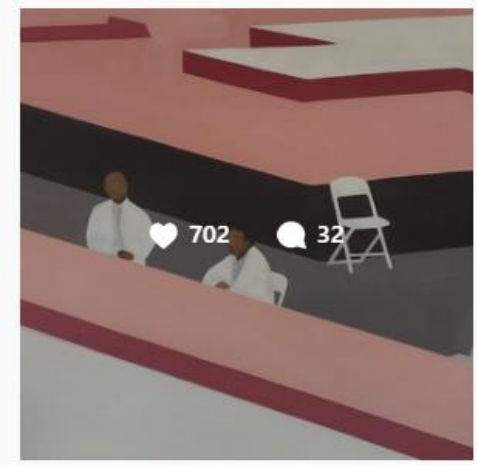


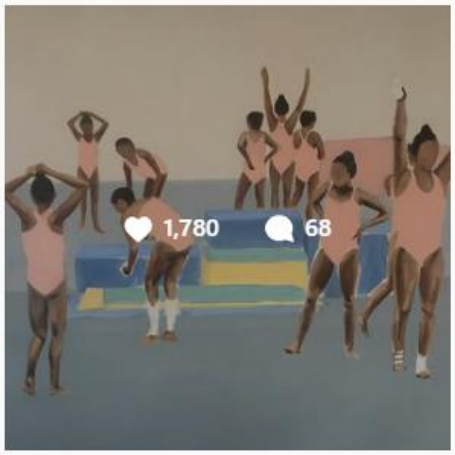


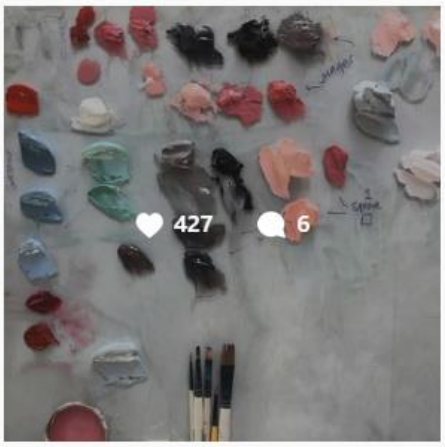
Section 2: Most Liked Images

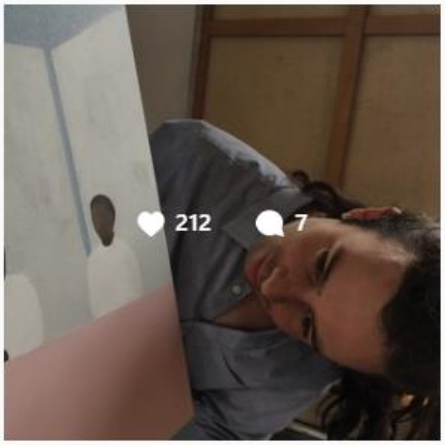

251 3
268 12
329 4
461 15
marianeibrahimgallery
322 5
292 5
543 22

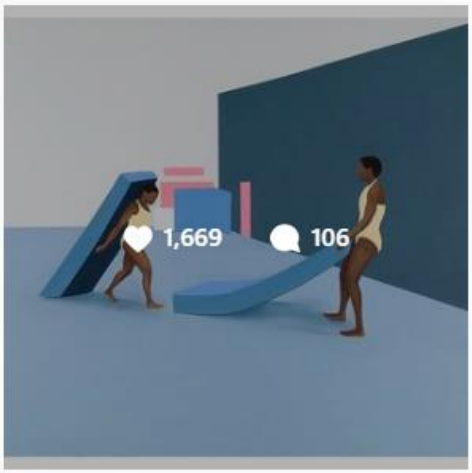
2019


702
32


1,780
68

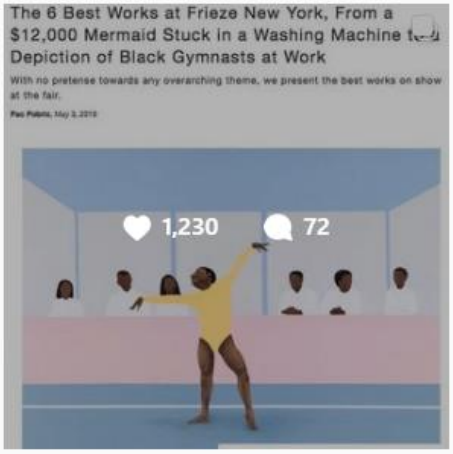

427
6


212
7


1,669
106

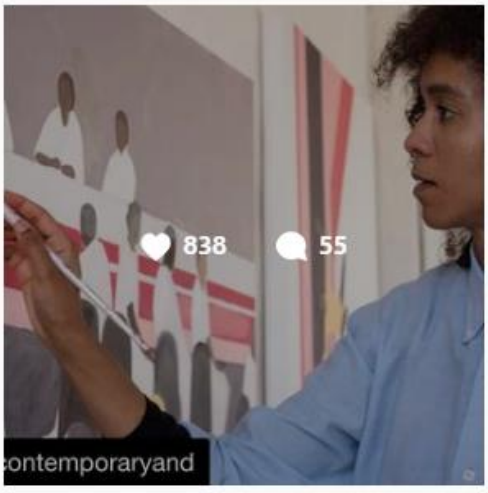

790
37
Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi
therealswizzz

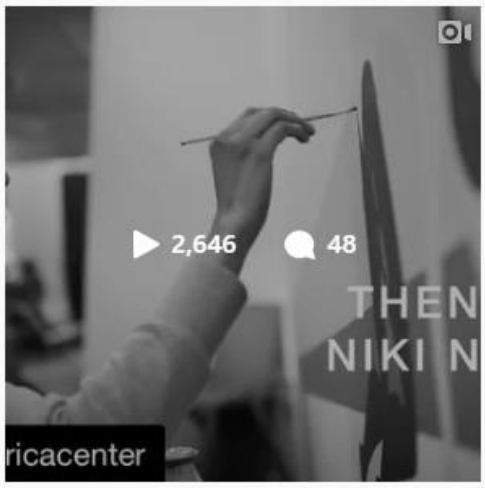

651
51
marianeibrahimgallery


The 6 Best Works at Frieze New York, From a $12,000 Mermaid Stuck in a Washing Machine to a Depiction of Black Gymnasts at Work
With no pretense towards any overarching theme, we present the best works on show at the fair.
1,230
72

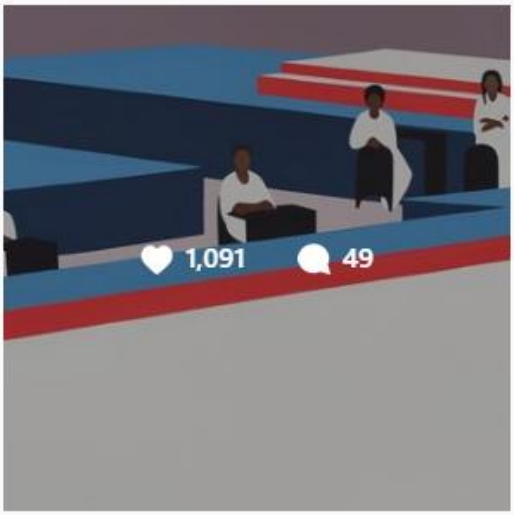

847
50


stevenson_za
453
42


838
55
ontemporaryand


2,646
48
THEN
NIKI N
ricacenter


1,254
31


1,091
49

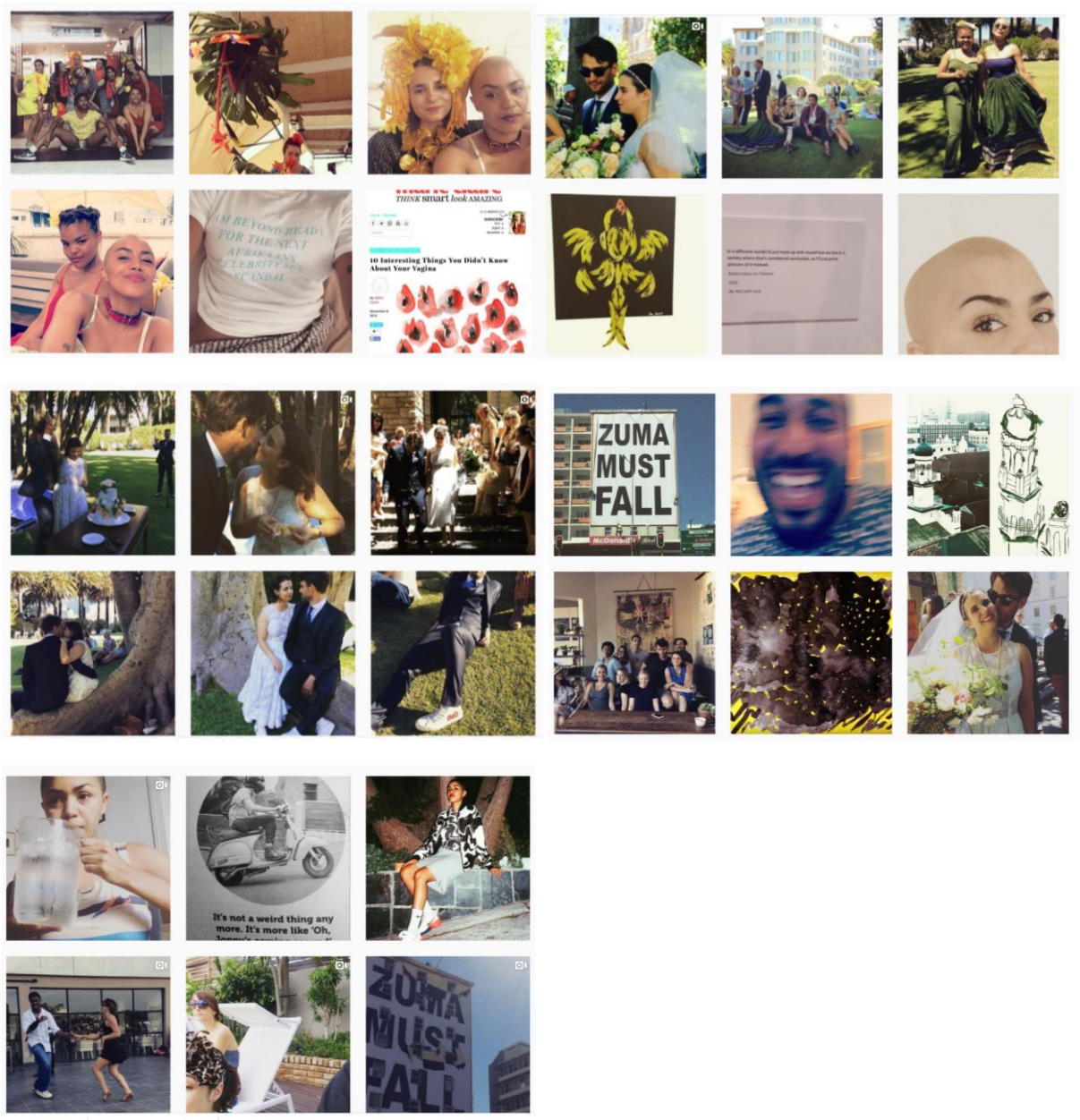

26 March -
30 April 2020
THENJIWE
NIKI NKOSI
GYMNASIUM
479
44


3,259
106

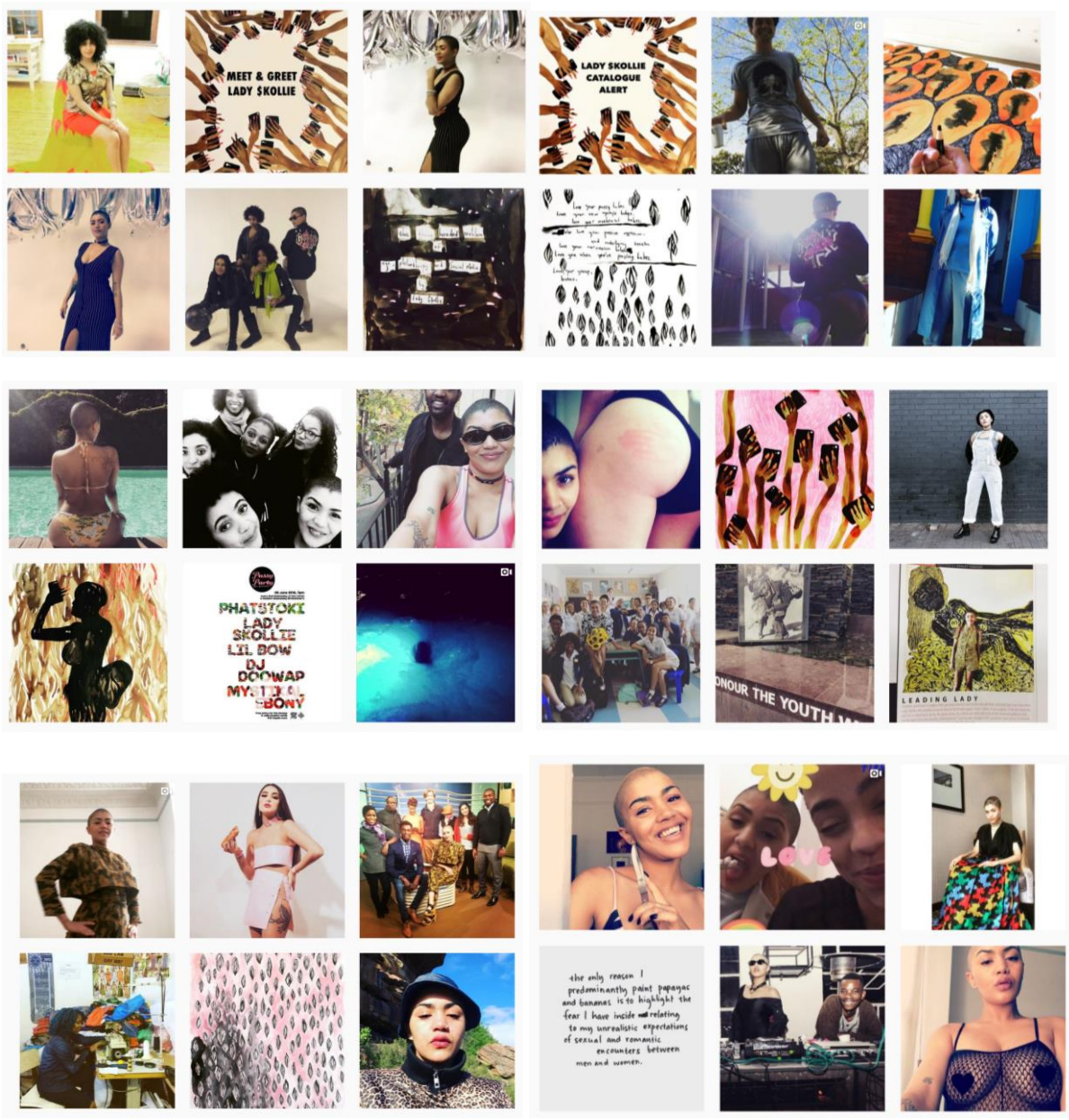
Appendix D: Lady Skollie (Laura Windvogel)

Section 1: Instagram Page Timeline (@ladyskollie)

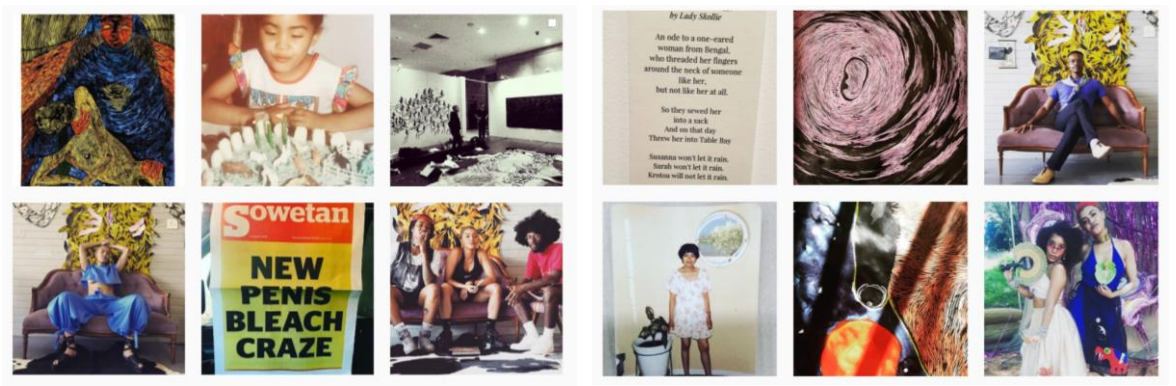
2016

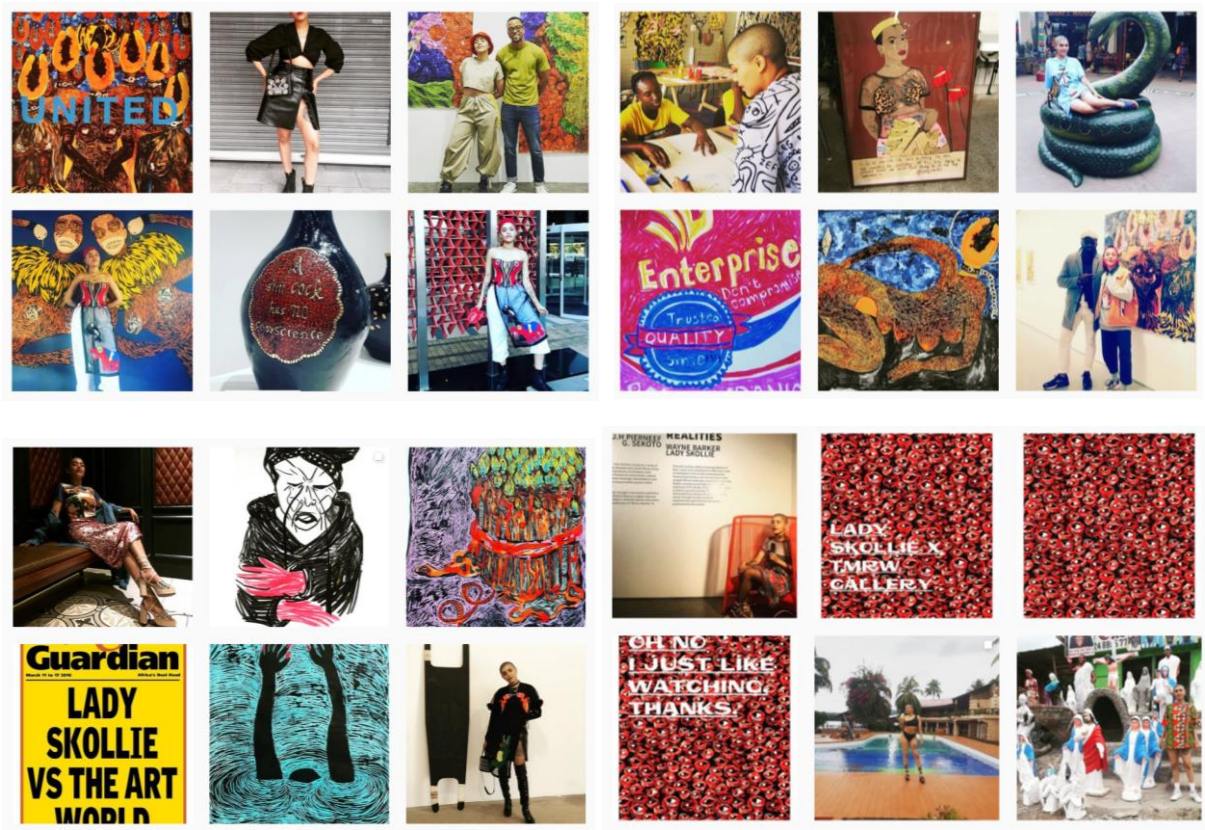


2017

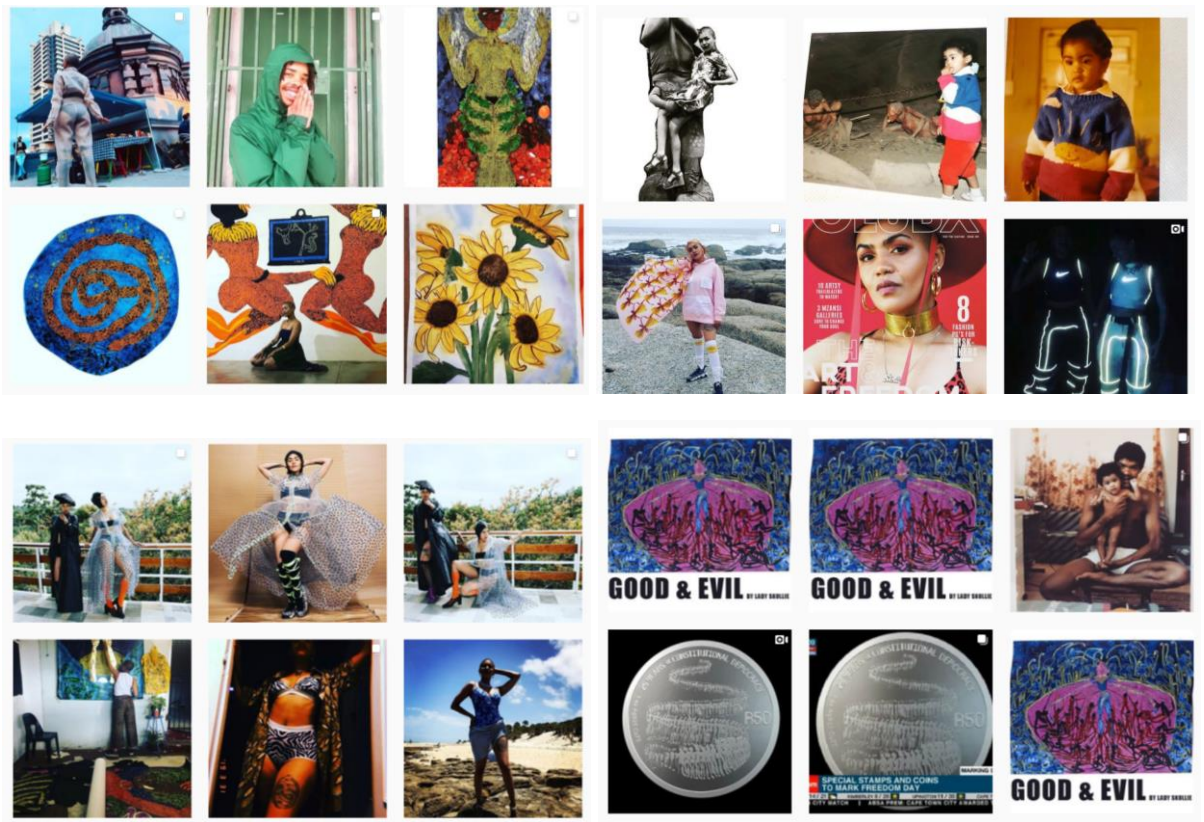

MEET & GREET
LADY $KOLLIE
LADY SKOLLIE
CATALOGUE
ALERT
PHATSTOKI
LADY
SKOLLIE
LIL BOW
DJ
DOOWAP
LEADING LADY
the only reason I
predominantly paint papayas
and bananas is to highlight the
fear I have inside relating
to my unrealistic expectations
of sexual and romantic
encounters between
men and women.

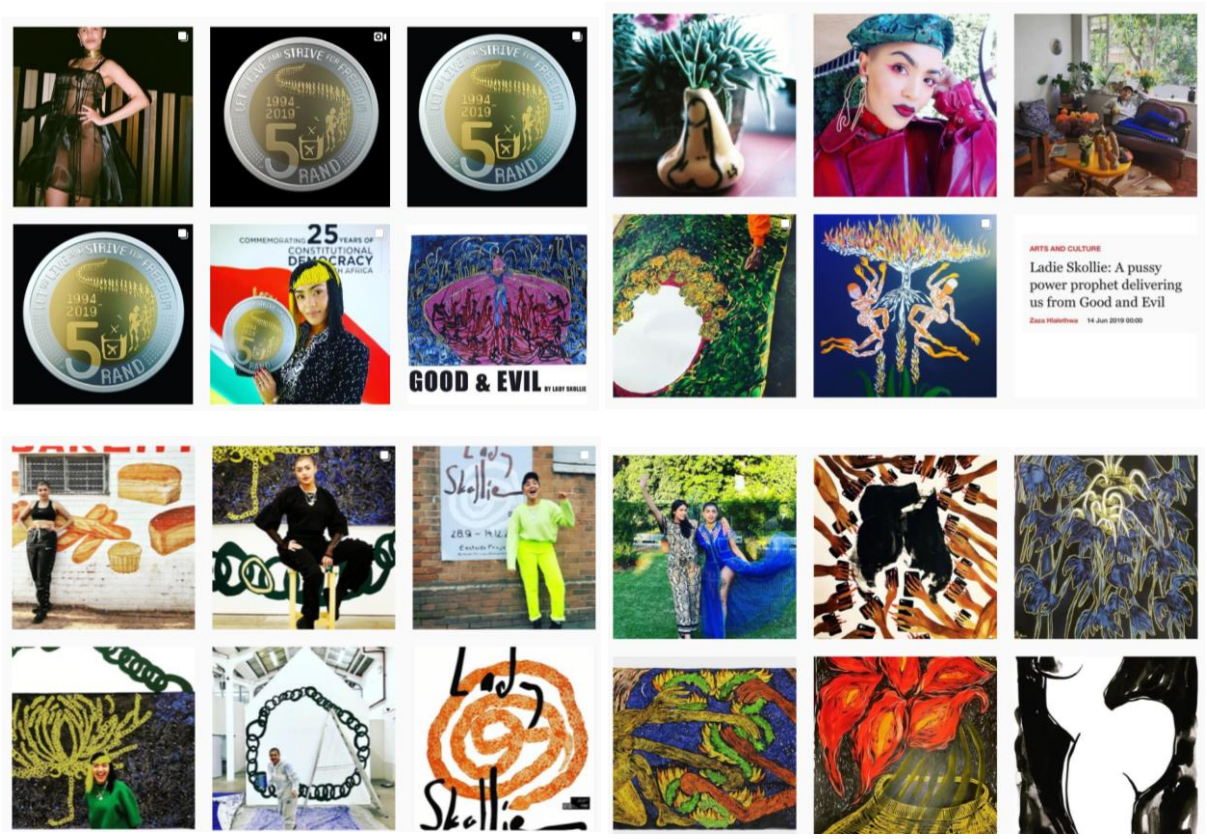
2018


by Lady Skollie
An ode to a one-eared
woman from Bengal,
who threaded her fingers
around the neck of someone
like her,
but not like her at all.
So they sewed her
into a sack
And on that day
Threw her into Table Bay
Susanna won't let it rain,
Sarah won't let it rain,
Kirstou will not let it rain.
Sowetan
NEW
PENIS
BLEACH
CRAZE

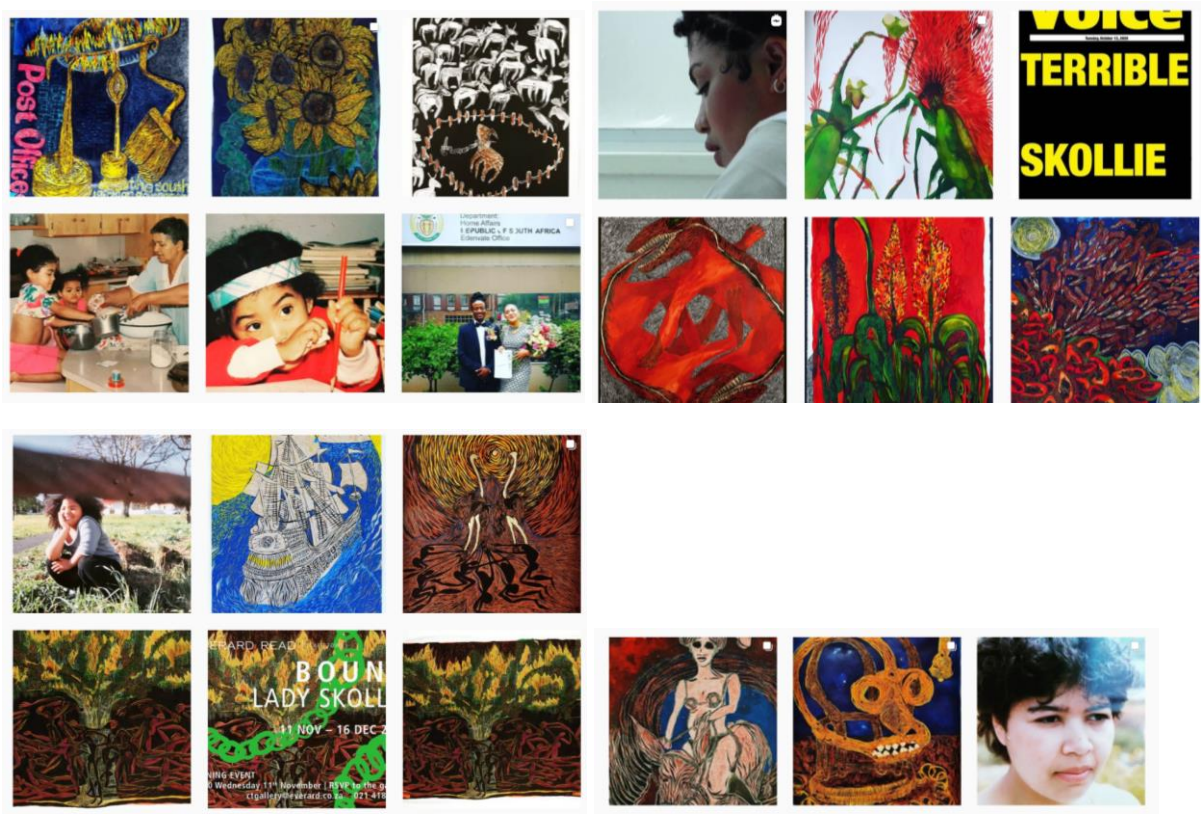

UNITED
Enterprise
Trusted
QUALITY
REALITIES
LADY SKOLLIE X TMRW GALLERY
Guardian
LADY SKOLLIE VS THE ART
OH NO I JUST LIKE WATCHING. THANKS.

2019


GOOD & EVIL
GOOD & EVIL
GOOD & EVIL


GOOD & EVIL
ARTS AND CULTURE
Ladie Skollie: A pussy power prophet delivering us from Good and Evil

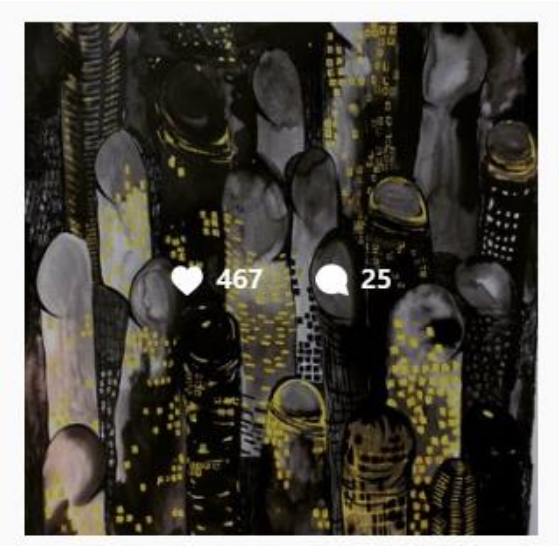
2020


TERRIBLE
SKOLLIE

Section 2: Most Liked Images

2016



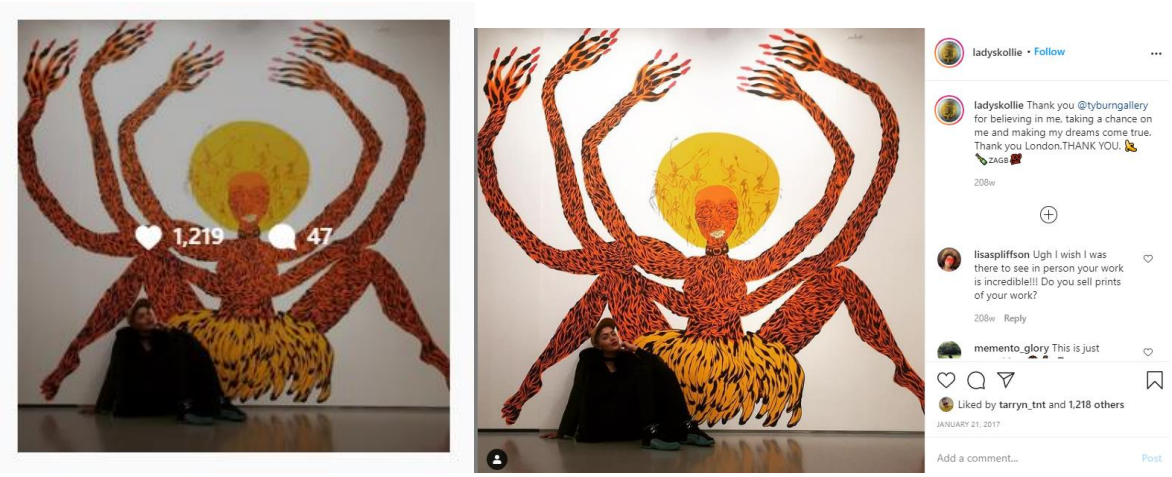


https://www.instagram.com/p/BMhdDHwjZ5B/



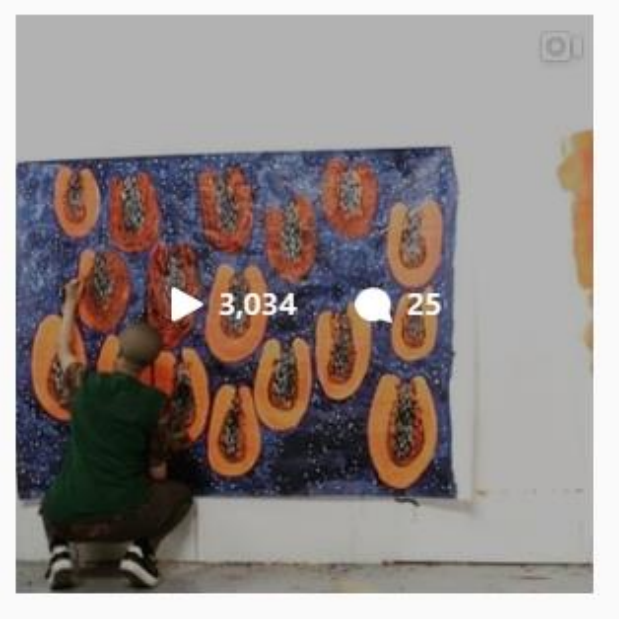
https://www.instagram.com/p/BGo1eAFjHsp/

2017



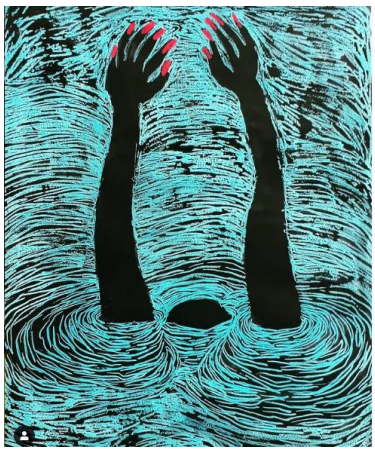
https://www.instagram.com/p/BPhmHCsDXB1/

2020



January 7, 2020 (Skollie painting lust politics. Post is right before the opening of the exhibition in London Tyburn Gallery.

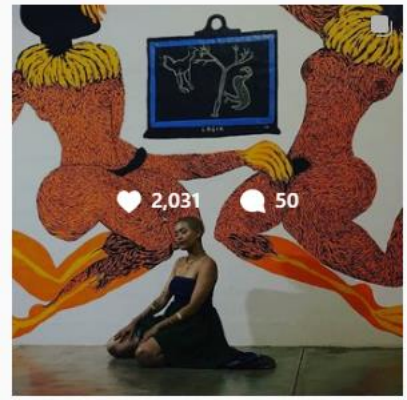
https://www.instagram.com/p/BO9NSJnDmTP/





https://www.instagram.com/ladyskollie/ https://www.instagram.com/ladyskollie/

2019





https://www.instagram.com/p/BsxJn_Rl9CN/

2020





https://www.instagram.com/p/CB3YZb0lKeD/

Section 3: Art Salience outside the Gallery





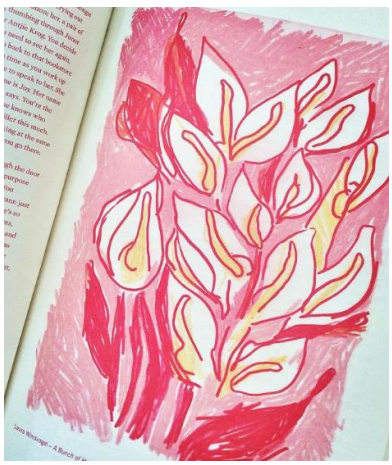
https://www.instagram.com/p/BNzF6UDD4Kz/ **Mural under the Mandela Bridge**

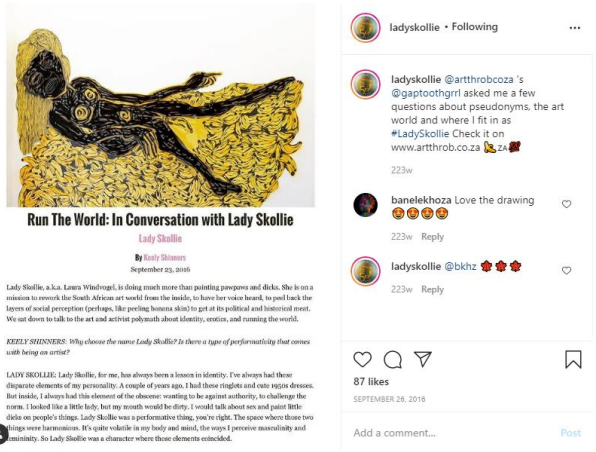




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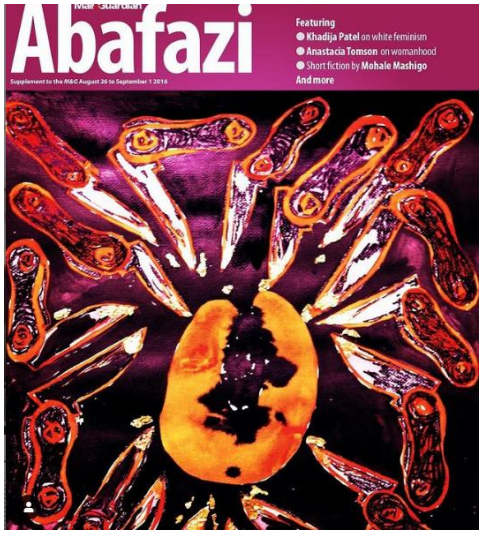
Pufrock Magazine Feature





https://www.instagram.com/p/BK0qkinADdX/ https://www.instagram.com/p/BK0R0VPAbww/





https://www.instagram.com/p/BKm_UNIgOoK/ https://www.instagram.com/p/BKjNvFuggXG/


Cut-cut, kill-kill, stab-stab: A South African love story

Lady Skollie

I am so angry about a lot of things. Most pertain to existing on this planet as a woman. My anger takes many forms, ironically online tirades, sometimes scathing comments wrapped in humour, sometimes garish watercolour drawings that depict genitals. I don't know how to translate all of this anger into action — trying to focus my energy into making the world a better place for women when it has never been a great world for us to begin with.

The beginning.

We are made from your rib, apparently. That was the beginning. The leftovers of half-eaten rib. Usually I throw my leftovers in the trash or I hand them over from a car window as if I am going to change a life. Like a messiah distributing stale food, demanding that you be grateful.

I AM SO GRATEFUL, GOD. PLEASE PROTECT US FURTHER.

Aren't you grateful to be alive? Aren't you grateful that you're okay? You haven't been defiled. I am so grateful. I tak-tok in pity when I hear of your terrible tale, secretly thanking another insensitive that it wasn't my sister, my mother, my wife.

There is this fantasy (nightmare) that I share with many other South African women. I am in a dark space, unfamiliar; a series of unfortunate events brought me here. There is a man (or men). I feel their energy and I know I have to get away. They approach me, and a deep calm takes over. I defeat them. My anger and my intuition carried me through.

Afterwards my friends and I celebrate, cheering to our victory over toxic masculinity.

Much merriment ensues. We are triumphant.

I don't have to tell you what would happen in reality. We all know one or more women that have experienced reality. Objects stuffed in places they shouldn't be, like confetti around a [illegible], broken[illegible] and [illegible] you been drinking?"

Being a woman in South Africa is playing the waiting game. With a rape and femicide rate five times higher than the global average, we are all waiting. While we wait we have lots to keep us busy — lighting another candle at another memorial. We are lighting candles into eternity.

I am so confused at this practice of lighting candles. I want to tip the candles over and burn everything. Burn the synthetic tulle used to make funerals look expensive and burn those chrysanthemum burial arrangements until they reach the foamy green square in the center.

I want everything to burn so that we can start again.

The papaya of womanhood is being pierced from every angle, seeping everything around it with sticky, congealed misery. The knives are being driven in, deep to the hilt. Ripe poisoned so that we can rot from the center. Bleeding and bleeding and bleeding with nothing to stem the flow.

Every eight hours in South Africa I say a prayer because another one was subjected to a game of cut-cut, kill-kill, succumbing to the hands that once tenderly stroked and tricked.

I am so angry and I don't know how to tell you without smashing things. I am so angry.

I understand that you also have struggles like fucking up your high heels on cobblestones and an arson that gave you that cold, but Patricia Chaves, we have bigger hotties than yours.

Battles that Binnolo Mafovuka, Gift Makon, Nonolo Nkosana, Lucia Naidu, Keeva Steenkamp, Jason Rohde, Duduzile Zozo, Motshidisi Melamu, Anni Dewani, Thembilihle Sokhele, Pinky Mosiane, Jayde Panayiotou and that lady that you know, that aunt of mine, the girl that went to university with me, your sister and all of us in the waiting room are eager to see the fruits of.

Please join me and get angry. Because begging never helped.

Art and artist: Artist Lady Skollie's striking Abafazi cover artwork depicts womanhood as a papaya surrounded by knives. Photo: Simiso

I am so angry and I don't know how to tell you without smashing things

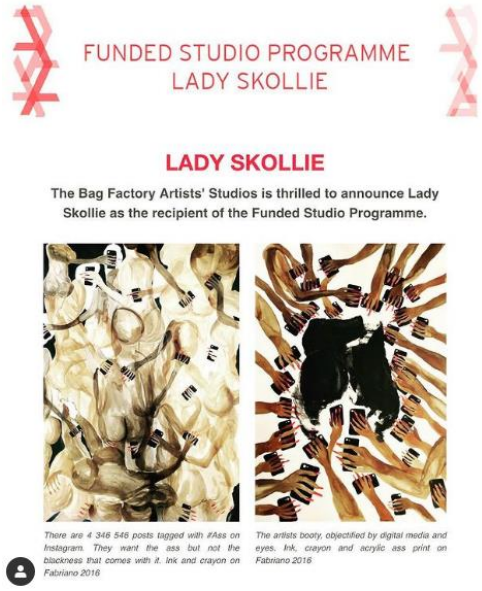


https://www.instagram.com/p/BKjNbr2AySr/ https://www.instagram.com/p/BKKxVwIgSg2/





https://www.instagram.com/p/BJ-JjxRAMQ0/ https://www.instagram.com/p/BJs7COugKRn/





https://www.instagram.com/ladyskollie/ https://www.instagram.com/p/BCptVkGjHse/





https://www.instagram.com/p/BQ14fUhh2e-/ https://www.instagram.com/p/BTRCCaPhhyq/





2017

https://www.instagram.com/p/BTZQ1f1hY9H/ https://www.instagram.com/p/BXDNpg0hq4z/





https://www.instagram.com/p/BoEt3_zHxWx/ https://www.instagram.com/p/BoYpBbmn5OL/

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