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The imaging of sexuality and violence in Nandipha Mntambo's photographic work The Rape of Europa (2009)

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2013-11-05
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The Imaging of Sexuality and Violence in Nandipha Mntambo's Photographic Work *The Rape of Europa* (2009)

Gina Van Zyl de Oliveira

2013

Declaration

I declare that this research is my own, unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts in Fine art at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree, part of degree or examination at this or any other university.

_____ _____ day of _____ 2013

Gina Van Zyl de Oliveira

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Introduction

I have always been keenly fond of dissecting and analyzing both visual and linguistic metaphors.

From a young age I (like many in this country) have had the misfortune (or fortune as I would later perceive it) of having several negative sexual experiences. This was (is) not uncommon in marginalised areas similar to the ones I grew up in. Alcoholism, drug addiction, broken homes, petty crime, physical and sexual violence were/are rife in my neighbourhood and served as material for many mealtime stories and gossip.

Intrigued by the myth as metaphor aspect central to Nandipha Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa* photographic print, I began thinking about the fantasy element in the imagery combined with the implication of sexual violence that is alluded to in the title. Though the title referred to a sexually violent narrative, it struck me that the image itself might not actually be about the physical act of sexual violence. If I was right and this was the case then what exactly was the image referencing? It was this question that prompted my investigation and research into the imaging of sexuality and violence in this particular work, and subsequently, in my own practice.

In this image, Mntambo photographs herself in a pose that references European (Spanish) artist Pablo Picasso's etching *Minotaur Kneeling Over Sleeping Girl* (1933). Mntambo's use of mock painterly effects, choice of subject matter and title are all allusions to paintings of the High Renaissance that make reference to ancient Greek mythology. Her use of these references acts as a metaphor for narratives of violence that link to historical and contemporary discourses around race and gender. Furthermore, the imaging of sexuality and violence in Mntambo's work links narratives of sex and violence to historical relationships of power and the construction of a post-colonial identity.

My initial engagement with texts, essays and exhibition catalogues that dealt with some of the themes evident in Mntambo's work disclosed some significant incongruences, notably the absence of theoretical works on contemporary Black

Women Artists, especially in South Africa. Although many articles outlining Mntambo's biographical history existed at the time (2010), I struggled to find any critical analysis of her work, particularly *The Rape of Europa*. Most of the articles focused on Mntambo's identity, on her cultural background, her gender, race and education, only briefly acknowledging her appropriation of the Greek mythological narrative. My research begins to address the absence of analysis of Mntambo's dialogue with mythology and art history, and the ambiguity that this dialogue presents.

The controversy surrounding *The Rape of Europa* reception by the (then) Minister of Arts and Culture in 2009, Lulama (Lulu) Xingwana, gave the work a certain notoriety which, in my opinion, should have highlighted some of the complexities and paradoxes in the work but only succeeded in pinpointing the shortcomings of the Minister's knowledge of contemporary and historical art and culture (Lipschitz 2012:550).

In an email interview with Mntambo, I was able to ascertain that she had cited the Picasso etching and made deliberate editing choices so as to reference the particular painting style of the mythological painting genre, which was at the height of its popularity during the Renaissance. This has since been elsewhere confirmed in an interview with Susan Ecclestone (2012:71). In this interview Mntambo makes a critical statement as regards to the reception of her work and her identity as an artist.

> I would like to exhibit my work without being boxed or labelled as anything but an artist. I think this is a complex concept for some critics and historians because it would force new dialogue and the formation of a 'language' that is not confined by the labels of the past (Mntambo in Ecclestone 2012:74).

I agreed with Mntambo that the omission of 'labels' and 'boxes' is a complex concept to deal with, particularly within Western pools of knowledge that have been founded on the basis of categorization. However, I felt that a complete abandonment of these categorizations was not possible (and a little idealistic, if not naïve). Ignoring historical discourses would in fact disregard the richness of the metaphors and 'texts'

employed in her work, rendering a reading of it as a nondescript re-hashing of another Greek myth. Perhaps more significantly, objects, whether purely aesthetic or functional, are never created outside of a cultural materialism, i.e. we are always influenced to some degree by our biology, experiences and surroundings, which in turn are dictated to us by existing structures of power. To ignore the socio-political is to disregard the context in which a work is made and therefore the entirety of its meaning or relevance.

Mntambo's reference to the formation of a 'language' that could be applied to a reading of her work is something I engage with in my research. From the quote, I take it that she wishes to resist the usual tropes of reading the work purely in terms of identity politics. Mntambo's layered references in this particular work, one which I later come to refer to as a type of 'text', forms the basis for my working towards an understanding of the photograph.

The focus of my investigation is restricted to a close reading of *The Rape of Europa* (2009). I use a number of frameworks to engage with the key issues in the research. These theoretical texts address the following broad ideas: constructed images in contemporary photography; Black identity in visual culture; and theory on the interrelations of gender, violence and power.

In my research I hypothesize that the rape narrative in Mntambo's work and her choice of references are metaphors for Eurocentric modes of violence. Racial discourses reinforced through constructs of the colonial project perpetuated violence done to Black peoples.

Theories of violence and power, with particular focus on the construction of subjective identities within a postcolonial context are therefore relevant for further interrogation of the project.

Theoretical discourses on these subjects were mainly written by non-South African academics. These included Michel Foucault's theories on the nature of power in society, bell hooks' essays on the representation of black bodies and the Black gaze, and Victor Burgin's writing on semiotics and the photograph.

I am interested in photography as a medium that employs intertextuality and allows for the photographic image to be *read* as a layered *text.* Within these texts I look at narratives of violence and power and their relationship to postcolonial identity and gender politics. The layering process that takes place in the making of work such as Mntambo's photograph can be seen as another iteration of the layered content.

A close reading of Foucault's work on power and pleasure, particularly *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* provides insight into my interest in the power relationships implied in Mntambo's work. The feminist interpretation on Foucault's work by Dean and Juliet MacCannell in their essay *Violence, Power and Pleasure* is useful in that it challenges Foucault's assertions of power as equally accessible to all. Other source material comprised of texts, articles, journals and essays from a wide range of sources, included in these was Mntambo's thesis *Locating Me in Order to See You* (2007).

Within this theoretical and structural framework I search for some insight into the significance of Mntambo's appropriation of the Picasso *Minotaur* print as well as her reworking of this popular Greek myth into photographic form.

In the first chapter *The Photograph: A Layered Text* I examine Victor Burgin's definition of the photograph as a type of text. I then outline how I intend to apply this definition of the photograph and semiotics to a reading of Mntambo's image in the chapters that follow. I link this research to a greater historical context by engaging briefly with the politics of photography in Africa. I then look at the significance and function of mythology in a reading of Mnatmbo's work, briefly discussing the cultural relevance of the bovine as a motif. In this chapter I also outline and briefly discuss the three main 'texts' Mntambo has referenced in *The Rape of Europa,* namely Picasso's *Minotaur Kneeling over Sleeping Girl* (1933) dry point, Classical Western Mythology and paintings of the High Renaissance.

In the second chapter, *The Rape Script: A Metaphor for Power, Gender and Political Violence* I explore Mntambo's choice of Greek narrative and its implications. I touch

on how the rape narrative has been used historically as metaphor for socio-political concerns as the background to how its use in a contemporary context imbues it with socio-cultural and historical significance. I also discuss how this narrative implies a gender politics, which engages with Western metaphors associated with the white female nude and the implications this has in the implicit metaphors associated with the imaging of black female nudes by the West. I then discuss how Mntambo's use of the rape metaphor in her own work alludes to the colonial condition and her identity as an African (Black) woman working within postcolonial discourses.

In the third chapter, *The Gaze as a Site of Active Resistance* I critically engage with Foucauldian and feminist theory in examining the relationship with violence to power, and to what degree this relationship is implied within the work under discussion. I then apply this theory to a discussion on Black feminist arguments centred around the Western gaze and how this gaze can be and is countered by a returned resistant gaze. I link this discussion to the relationship between violence and power and how the gaze can become a site of reclaiming power.

The final chapter of my thesis draw on above theories as an entry point into a critical discussion of my own art making process and work. This chapter links my practical process to my theoretical research. I look at a number of my own paintings and give a brief outline of the thought process behind the creation of these works. I also look at how the formal language and iconographic elements that I use begin to engage with the ways that I narrate some of my own experiences of violence.



The Rape of Europa (2009), Nandipha Mntambo, Photographic Digital Print, 100cm x100cm

Europa

Do majesty and love go well together
Or linger in one dwelling? Hardly. Jove
Put down his heavy sceptre: the great father,
Great ruler of the gods, whose right hand wields
Triple-forked lightning, and whose awful nod
Makes the world tremble, put aside his might,
His majesty, and took upon himself
The form of a bull, went lowing with the heifers
Over the tender grass, showy and handsome,
The color of snow, which never a foot has trodden,
Never a raindrop sullied.

***Metamorphoses,* Ovid** (II. 841-851)

Chapter One

The Photograph: A Layered Text

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* assimilates ancient Greek mythological narratives that are often filled with tragic love affairs and horrible betrayals; tales of Gods that shape shift and monsters that devour children and men alike. A fifteen book narrative Latin poem written by the Roman poet Ovid, *Metamorphoses* is considered a masterpiece of Latin literature and one of the most read classical works during the Middle Ages in Europe. The basic theme of the narrative, as suggested by the title, is change.[1] This theme is evident in the above quoted extract wherein the transformation or metamorphosis of the Greek God Zeus into a white bull is eloquently detailed. *Europa* is one of many tales in Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* that chronicles the sexual adventures of the father of the Greek gods, Zeus and the Phoenician princess Europa - one of several conquests.

The exact relationship between Europa and Zeus with its sexual undertones, metaphors and vivid use of visual imagery, is represented in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with a particularly sensual tone. Similar traits are evident in Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa* digital print.

In my exploration of Mntambo's work, the question that constantly comes to mind is why an artist – a Black woman artist – working in Southern Africa, (a context far removed in space and time), would wish to represent herself in such a narrative.

In Ovid's phrase where he refers to the bull's fur "the color of snow, which never a foot has trodden, never a raindrop sullied" I read all the Western virtues associated with whiteness and all the power associated with the Greek god Zeus – a combined white, male power. The relevance to Mntambo's work as a challenge to this paradigm becomes apparent.

[1] *Metamorhoses* is a derivative from the Greek word *metamorphoun,* which means to transform or change shape. In the series of books Ovid describes the beginnings of the earth as a formless mass. Gradually these changes them move to the world of the Gods and then into the world of humans, along the way deifying Julius Caeser and ending of metamorphosis.

Mntambo's The Rape of Europa

The two figures in Mntambo's image, both nude, occupy what appears to be a distinct narrative setting reminiscent of a stage set. The overall tone of the image is dark and moody. The use of lighting evokes the atmosphere of a forest. One figure lies on the ground, her arms spread out, her left leg slightly raised, a gesture of submission – or invitation. The figure above, with an exposed breast, kneels over the reclining female nude. Covered in animal fur, it sports a pair of horns with a bull mane. The work's mythological title identifies the figures as Zeus and Europa and references the scene of sexual violence that follows Zeus's (disguised as a white bull) abduction of Europa.

A closer examination of Mntambo's image requires an investigation and discussion of the plurality of texts employed within this photographic image. Mntambo's layered references are echoed in the form of the work – her photograph is not only staged, it is a digital composite photographic image. Her mode of working with photography enables her to blend fantasy and artifice with the real, and so play with the narratives that she refers to in a way that mobilises the content beyond the sum of its parts. The work thus begins to reflect on some of the prevailing socio-cultural power relations that perpetuate the modes of power implied in the narratives she is using.

In her thesis for the degree Master of Fine Arts MFA (UCT), Mntambo identifies several key concerns surrounding the production and reception of her work as a Black woman artist.

> What *code* was being applied to the understanding of my work? Were those assumptions fuelled by the fact that I am a Black woman artist working in this medium? Would the same conclusions be reached if I were making the same work but was not Black or Female? (Mntambo 2007:22)

This is a significant point and one which I had to continually ask myself in this research. What is the particularity about 'blackness' in the context of this image? Would I as a white woman have been so taken with the image if the bodies represented in it had been white? Truthfully speaking probably not. The Western art

historical canon is saturated with white female mythological nudes. Had Mntambo placed white bodies in her image it would merely have been filed in my memory under the familiar category of Western mythological iconography. Importantly this realization highlighted the last of Mntambo's questions. In what way would a reading of Mntambo's work be influenced by her race, gender and the relationship of these to existing socio-cultural codes and conventions and their implicit power structures?

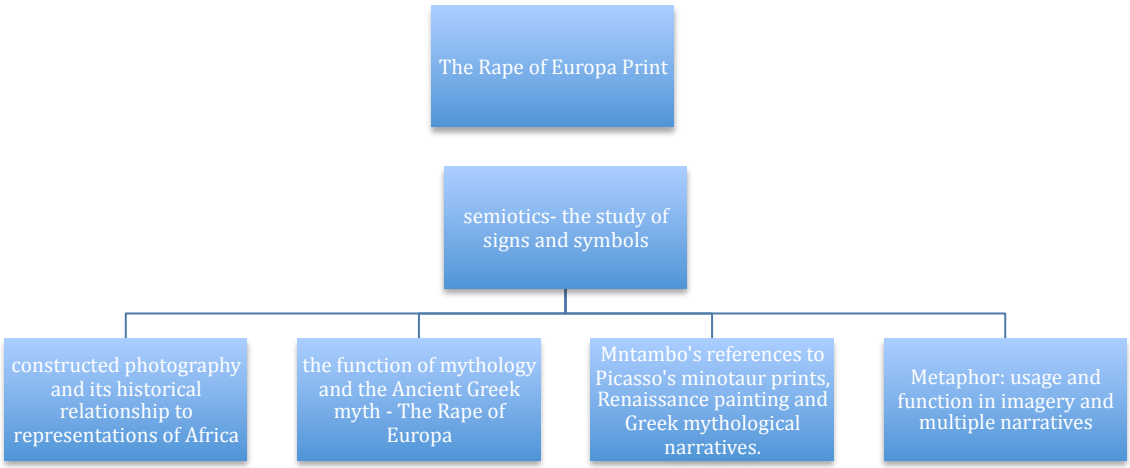
Identifying Iconography

Through the use of linguistic iconography Ovid describes the symbolic markers of Zeus' character.

> the great father,
> Great ruler of the gods, whose right hand wields
> Triple-forked lightning, and whose awful nod
> Makes the world tremble…

Zeus was widely recognized as the father of the Gods who had power over the skies and is often depicted holding a sceptre in his right hand. He also has control over thunder and lightning. The references in the poem to "triple-forked lightning", "father" and "ruler of the gods" clearly identify the god in question as Zeus. 'Jove' (Jupiter) the Roman equivalent of the Greek God Zeus is in fact mentioned earlier in the poem.

Using this as an example I began to contemplate a possible entry point into a reading of Mntambo's work. The visual clues and markers in the actual image can be linked to a wider set of narratives and contexts. Under the umbrella of semiotics – the study of signs and symbols – I was able to draw on multiple narratives and their implied discourses, both historical and contemporary. The following is a reproduction of an earlier hand sketched spider diagram illustrating my thought process of a potential analysis of Mntambo's print.



During the early stages of my research I interviewed Mntambo by email. Through this correspondence I was able to ascertain that Mntambo had indeed used the Picasso *Minotaur* print as her main point of reference and that the painterly formal elements were a deliberate reference to a particular period in European painting to which the title alludes.[2] This information has proved invaluable as it forms the basis of my argument. Key to a reading of Mntambo's print was the fact that it is a digital photographic image that is layered and constructed in a way that can be likened to the layering and merging of images that is possible in painting.

From my experience with the medium of digital photography I propose that the image was constructed in the following way: Firstly a stage was set in a photographic studio physically laying out the scene using props such as plants and sand. Then a photograph of Mntambo was taken, posing in the position of Europa. The process was then repeated, this time with Mntambo posing in the position of the Minotaur. The two images could then be merged using a postproduction programme such as Adobe Photoshop. Using the same or a similar programme, colour saturation, lighting and certain textures could then be adjusted. Digital imaging software has tools that enable one to edit and seamlessly merge images like the textures of the bull fur and the horns onto the image of Mntambo's body/skin. This digital process explicitly makes a synthetic photograph, where a number of parts are constructed and layered together to

[2] Mntambo, N. 2011,email correspondence. 6 May, Johannesburg. See Appendix

make up the image, rather than an analytic photographic image where a photograph is constructed at the point when the photograph is taken.[3]

In this chapter I use a semiotic framework to engage with the photograph as a text that can be read. I discuss the significant intertextuality and layering of visual references, narratives and forms in Mntambo's photograph. This includes an in depth look at Mntambo's references to Picasso, Renaissance painting, Greek mythology and some of the cultural links and discourses that this use of referenced symbolism begins to imply.

Semiotics and the Photograph

The Politics of Photography: The Photograph in Africa

In *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images* Terry Barrett states that"(p)hotographs no matter how objective or scientific, are the constructions of individuals with beliefs and biases, and we need to consider them as such. To describe subject, form, medium, and style is to consider photographs as pictures made by individuals and not to mistake them for anything more or less" (Barrett 2000: 35). This concept of photographs as products of a particular point of view permeates postmodern photographic discourse.

The role of photography in Africa has been a decisive one. In the words of Okwui Enwezor and Octavio Zaya,[4] "(n)o medium has been more instrumental in creating a great deal of the visual fictions of the African continent than photography" (Enwezor and Zaya 1996:20). However, both concede that the greatest irony of Africa's relationship with photography is that it must rely on the very signs, symbols and conventions of photography that have been used to promote negative perceptions of Africa and its inhabitants to forge new representations, new identities and new

[3] The notion of the analytic photograph is developed by Stephen shore in *The Nature of Photographs* (2007: 37-96)

[4] In *Colonial Imaginary, Tropes of Disruption: History, Culture and Representation in the works of African Photographers,* in *In/Sight: African Photographers 1940 to the Present* (1996) exh. cat. ed. Clare Bell ,Guggenheim Museum, New York

narratives that do not undermine the diverse nature and complexity of Africa's cultures and peoples.

> Yet ironically, in attempting to defuse the power of these historicist fictions, we must rely upon photography and its vast array of sign, which also stand at the juncture of this refutation. (ibid :20)

In *Photography and Africa* (2010), Erin Haney asserts that the "study of photography in Africa remains a political question" (Haney 2010:10). When looking at contemporary photography produced in Africa one cannot get away from the uses of "photographs of Africa" in the past. Most of what we know of early photography in Africa is through the visualizations of colonial archives. These took a range of forms from postcards to anthropometric studies, which were compiled by scientists and commercial photographers. These photographs exist in private collections and museums today. Haney notes that "their larger effect points not only to photography as a means of creating taxonomies of Africans, but also as a way to consolidate visions of imperial order" (ibid:90).

> The dissemination of postcards, photographs of staged tableaux, landscape, portraits and personal mementos are things of a massive image circulation, considering these dynamics requires the viewer to reflect on the local political conditions, economic opportunities and restraints under which photographers have operated. (Haney 2010:10)

Through an exploration of some of these images and the contexts in which they were produced I will engage with some of the questions that exist around photographic discourse and their links to themes and narratives within the *The Rape of Europa* print. I agree with Enwezor and Zaya when they concede the following:

> […] it is practically impossible to examine African art and history of any period without taking into account Western anthropology's complicity in constructing and framing a natural history of critical intransigencies and visual codes, as well as the specific means through which the west has apprehended, consumed, and interpreted the African continent as a site of both scientific inquiry and popular entertainment (Enwezor and Zaya, 1996:17).

However, I am compelled to side with Haney's argument that contemporary photography is subtler and much more complex (Haney 2010:9). Binaries merge

giving way to multiple narratives and contexts. Photographs and their manipulations are the result of a steady flow of movement between cultures, races, space and politics made possible in our modern world of instant image making and messaging. Images can be sent across continents in seconds. Instant information technologies allow for the flow of a diverse range of discussions between images to take place across the world instantaneously. This means that an artist can borrow from numerous contexts and sources, from a multitude of diverse narratives, to bend and shape to his/her owned desired effect in the creation of a single image.

The eclectic nature of the photographic print as a meta-text has been put to use by Africans from its earliest introductions into Africa. The ability of the camera to document the daily lives of Africans and their true circumstances has enabled Africans to narrate their own stories outside of European stereotypical imagery and in the face of adversity and discouragement (Haney 2010: 9). Mntambo's choice of the photographic print as a medium is significant because of this historical use of photography for narrating the stories of Africans and documenting or constructing modes of resistance.

The Rape of Europa print evokes the all too familiar binaries which Western thinking has subscribed to: nature/culture; animal/human; black/white; female/male; savage/civilized. The image does so through a complex interplay of narratives and symbols and is, in its own right, a multifaceted type of *text* that begins to create a new visual language that exists both alongside and independent of these stereotypical binaries. Although these historical binaries should not be ignored when contextualising the Mntambo image, I would argue that solely ascribing these categorizations to this image inadvertently exposes the viewer to the dangers of reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes of non-Western modes of production as 'primitive'. I would rather argue for the reading of the work as an interesting interplay of texts, one in which each text needs to be looked at in relation to the entire image, a weave of stories like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that, combined with other references in the image, creates a tapestry of information that links discourse of the past to the present.

Photographs as Texts

In his essay *Looking at Photographs,* Victor Burgin defines the photograph as "a place of work, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys and is deployed by what codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense" (Burgin 2003:130-137). This definition of the photograph as a constructed and dynamic space allows for an interpretation of the photograph as a place where existing socio-cultural codes can and are employed as a means to convey meaning. Burgin continues by defining the photograph as a series of complex and overlapping texts, integral to photographic discourse with pervasive roots that extend to all traditional western art practices as well as historic socio-cultural disciplines and discourses.

> […] photographs are texts inscribed in terms of what we may call 'photographic discourse', but this discourse, like any other, engages discourses beyond itself, the 'photographic text' like any other, is the site of a complex intertextuality, on an overlapping series of previous texts 'taken for granted' at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture (Victor Burgin 2003:131).

Burgin's approach to the photograph as a type of *text* that is based on a wide range of discourses and can be *read* using these threads of discourse to make meaning provides a useful working method for the reading of Mntambo's photographic print *The Rape of Europa (2009)*. Burgin's argument that the photograph is a site of a complex layering of codes and texts and his suggestion that photographs should be read both within this set of "heterogeneous complex of codes," and individually, have grounded my approach towards a critical discussion of Mntambo's work.

> Work in semiotics showed that there is no single 'language' of photography (as opposed to technical apparatus) upon which all photographs depend […] there is rather a heterogeneous complex of codes upon which photography may draw. Each photograph signifies on the basis of a plurality of these codes, the number and type of which varies from one image to another. (ibid:131)

Mntambo has photographed herself in a pose that references European Spanish artist Pablo Picasso's etching *Minotaur Kneeling Over Sleeping Girl* (1933). The stance of the two figures, direction in which they are facing, the compositions of the figures and

the reference to the Minotaur mythical figure evident in Picasso's etching are paralleled in the *Rape Of Europa* print. Mntambo's use of mock painterly effects, choice of subject matter and title are all allusions to paintings of the High Renaissance. These works all make reference to Ancient Greek mythology. Significantly this allows for Burgin's photograph as "the site of a complex intertextuality" and an "overlapping" of "previous texts" that were historically "taken for granted" to play out in a complex way in Mntambo's image (Burgin 2003:131).

Text one: Picasso's *Minotaur Kneeling Over Sleeping Girl* (1933)

While the formal elements of Mntambo´s *The Rape of Europa* allude to a well developed genre of mythological paintings prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeeth century in Mntambo's strong use of framing, lighting and mock digital painterly techniques conventionally used within this genre, the composition is a direct citation of Picasso's 1933 dry point. Similarities between the two images in the two-figure compositions include the dominating figure of the Minotaur, the dramatic use of light and dark, the Minotaur crouching over a reclining female nude and the prevailing feeling of menace.

In her dissertation "Picasso's Minotaur Images: 1927-28," Marilyn Brobst discusses the Dionysian role of the Minotaur in the series of prints that make up *The Vollard Suite*. Ambroise Vollard, a well-known and respected art collector and publisher in the early twentieth century, compiled a portfolio between 1930-1937 consisting of 100 Picasso prints of various subjects, which were published by Vollard in 1939. This portfolio was subsequently referred to as *The Vollard Suite.* The figure of the Minotaur and its connection to the Greek god Dionysus came to dominate the subject matter of many of these prints. "To the Greeks, Dionysus was pre-eminently a wine god, a bull god, and a god of women." (Kerényi, C. in Brobst 1987: 7) His "sexual passion (was) intrinsic to his nature, and he was called a bull-god because of his generative and destructive powers." (Walter F. Otto in Brobst 1956:166).

In sharp contrast the Minotaur was widely accepted as a monster in Ancient Greek mythology. Half man half bull, the Minotaur was the son of Pasiphaë who had fallen in love and copulated with a beautiful white bull. The Minotaur, being of unnatural

parentage, was born with an insatiable hunger, a beast who fed on human flesh. The Minotaur was later confined to a Labyrinth and slain by Theseus. The Minotaur is commonly represented in Classical art with the body of a man and the head and tail of the bull. André Masson was largely-responsible for the resurgence of the Minotaur in the early twentieth century (Ries 2012), and he and Georges Bataille suggested the *Le Minotaure* and *Labyrinthe* as titles for Albert Skira's publications.[5] It was Picasso who illustrated the first cover of *Le Minotaure* which was published from 1933 to 1939 (Ries 2012). It was only in the early- to mid-twentieth century with the adoption of the Minotaur as a symbol of metamorphosis by the surrealists (including Picasso) that the Minotaur began to take on new significance as symbol of creative hybridity. The fusion of animal and man becomes as a metaphor for the surrealist process of juxtaposing images and objects that did not rationally belong together. In a journal extract on *Picasso and the Myth of the Minotaur*, Martin Ries discusses some of the surrealists influenced by the Minotaur myth.

> The Minotaur myth emerged in the arts: Matisse illustrated Henry de Montherland's *Pasiphaë*: *Chant de Minos*; Max Ernst's *Labyrinth* and his *Wheel of the Sun* both allude to this myth, while his *Spanish Physician* shows a woman flirtatiously dropping her handkerchief before a minotaur-like figure; Giorgio de Chirico made many versions of sleeping *The Soothsayer's Recompense* surrounded by labyrinthine colonnades, arches, and facades; and Victor Brauner depicted a wide-awake Ariadne on conveyance that Ernst Trova could have built for his Falling Man; while Masson continued his variations on the Pasiphaë-Labyrinth-Minotaur idea often greatly influenced by Picasso (Ries 2012).

Bovine as Motif

Picasso and Mntambo are not the first to use the bull/cow as a symbolic motif. Traces of bovine iconography and worship date back as far as the Stone Age and can be found throughout European, African and Oriental religions and mythologies.[6]

[5] Albert Skira (1904-1973) was a well known Swiss publisher. *Minotaure* was a journal based magazine that printed art and literary reviews.

[6] Places of known bull worship include Egypt; the bull was worshiped as Apis, the embodiment of Ptah and later Osiris; in India, Nandi the bull is the principal follower (gana) of Shiva, in Mesopotamia the lunar Bull of Heaven with its horns representing the crescent moon. Many Paleolithic European cave paintings such as those found at Lascaux and Livernon in France, show depictions of Aurochs (a large wild Eurasian ox that was the ancestor of domestic cattle). Other regions also known for bull worship include Eastern Anatolia, Minoa, Cyprus, Levant, Crete (myth of the minotaur and Theseus), Hellas (associated with Dionysus, figure), and Gaul.

Significantly, the symbol of the bull is intricately linked to Spanish national identity as it has, along with bullfighting (a predominantly male sport), become synonymous with Spanish cultural practice and a totem of Spanish identity. The Dionysus /Minotaur subject in Picasso's print can thus not only be seen as a symbol of virility, masculinity and destruction but, more importantly, as a symbol of Spanish, and consequently, European male identity.

The Bovine as motif of male identity is no stranger to Mntambo. It has been used extensively and significantly in Mntambo's earlier work. In her dissertation *Locating Me in Order to See You* (2007), Mntambo discusses the importance and symbolism of her use of cow hide as a material in her artistic practice. Some of her previous works include clothing/moulds of her body made from a combination of cowhide, cow's hooves, resin and polyester mesh. These include works such as *Emabufto* (2009), an installation of twenty four white cowhide figure moulds hanging on waxed cord; *Nandikeshvara* (2009), a single white cowhide body mould/dress hung above a floating base of cow hooves and *Refuge* (2009), an installation of cowhide moulds of the back halves of three kneeling figures placed against the wall. The merging of her skin with that of the bovine in her digital print can therefore be seen as an extension of this process. In *Locating Me in Order to See You* (2007), Mntambo comments on her choice of unusual material:

> My engagement with material and the possibilities that cow hide presents with regards to art production and how it relates to my straddling between Western and Nguni cultural practices is with the aim to disrupt perceptions and preconceptions of identity (Mntambo 2007:32).

Mntambo's referencing of Picasso's Minotaur print sets up a dialogue between these two works. This conversation on allegory allows for Eurocentric and African pools of knowledge and modes of production to intertwine and merge. Inevitably this raises questions around traditional Eurocentric modes of power and their influence on the western canon of art history.

In many ways Picasso is an icon of the Western art history canon. Famed for having 'discovered' African art and adopting some of its formal elements in his work, Picasso is possibly the most acclaimed European artist of his time. Mntambo's deliberate reference to the Picasso print and physical embodiment of its subjects alludes to her acknowledgement of the Picasso Minotaur/ Dionysus traits within herself and her role as both an active and passive agent in the formation of her own identity. She is simultaneously passive Europa, destructive/creative Minotaur, and powerful Dionysus /Zeus. Just as the photograph is a layered text, Mntambo presents her identity within the photograph as the sum of a complex set of relationships to power both internally and externally.

Text Two: Classical Western Mythology

Myth, Metamorphosis and Identity

The *Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology* describes mythology as having two primary functions. The first is to answer existential questions like: *Who made the world?* The second is to justify existing social systems and account for the traditional rites and customs of a particular culture. [7] Mythology's ability to reflect reality is commented on below:

> one constant rule of mythology is that whatever happens among the Gods above reflects on earth. […] In West Africa, whenever the Queen mother or King, appointed a new functionary at court, the same happened in Heaven by royal decree (Guirand 1959:7).

Perhaps the same could be said about the arts. Socio-cultural or political changes that happen in reality are inevitably reflected in the art produced at the time and,

[7] The English anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) defined mythology as the imagination based on a combination of environment and experience. He argued that when one begins to study the myths of old what first appears to be the most miraculous fiction, on closer inspection is actually the result of "an education that had led up to each train of thought, a store of inherited materials from out of which each province of the poet's land has been shaped, and built over, and peopled." (Tylor 1929: 273) Thus defining mythology as a series of narratives founded upon an amalgamation of actual experiences and antecedent narratives in existence. He continues by arguing that it is in the nature of our thoughts to combine, to develop and derive rather than to create. (ibid: 274) Thus, no myth is ever wholly new as it is always created from the stories and experiences that have preceded it. By this hypothesis all myths are multi-narrative texts and need to be approached as such taking into account the current context of its creation and the narratives, which have come before it.

furthermore, in the way that mythology functions within the arts. Brobst argues that by merging the Dionysian and Minotaur subjects, Picasso created a character that had not previously existed. She concludes that the merging and metamorphosis of mythological characters is a part of a long tradition of myth making.

> As Picasso's subject, it is the Minotaur's unique Dionysian character and his distinctive form which distinguish him as individual. In bringing about the transformation of the two mythological figures, Picasso created an entirely new mythological being that had not existed before. Such a transformation is entirely in keeping with the long tradition of myth making: a state of metamorphosis takes place; the characters change roles and forms, and frequently their myths are interwoven with the myths of other mythological figures (Brobst 1987: 52).

Consequently Mntambo's appropriation of the popular Greek narrative and the merging of its characters – Minotaur/Zeus and Europa– with her own image also distinguish the characters in her work as individuals. Mntambo's portrayal of both the characters in her work allude to the assertion of her own capacity for myth-making, her own individuality, and thus her identity in a particular genre (i.e. mythological oil painting) that is often exclusively assumed to be linked to a European cultural heritage.

This representation of mythological metamorphosis is not unlike Burgin's *subjective becoming.* Identity, like the characters in these myths, is not fixed. The subject is in a constant state of flux, continuously acting on and acted upon by other subjectivities. These forces exerted by subjects on subjects according to Burgin, are what create the social human being, "a *self* positioned in a network of relations to *others*" (Burgin 2003:132).

> The subject, therefore is not a fixed, innate, entity assured in classic semiotics but is itself a function of textual operations, an unending process of *becoming* – such a version of the subject in the same movement in which it rejects any absolute discontinuity between speaker and codes, also evicts the familiar figure of the *artist* as autonomous *ego*, transcending his or her own history and unconscious. (Burgin 2003:132)

Burgin negates the Western stereotype of artist as a fixed subject, author and *autonomous ego*. The figure of the artist can be occupied by a multitude of subjective

identities each acting on, and acted upon, by internal and external subjective forces and their relationship to one another.

Although every culture in the world has its mythologies, discourse on mythology as a genre is not without its racism. As is evident in the following quote by Tylor, mythologies within the West were subject to racial hierarchies and categorized according to cultural importance. Greco-Roman myths were the standard by which all others were judged and many (predominantly non-Western mythologies) were found as inferior or lacking in cultural refinement and complexity. In his studies on the development of mythologies in primitive[8] cultures Tylor writes:

> For myself, I am disposed to think (differing here in some measure from Professor Max Müller's view of the subject) that the mythology of the lower races rests especially on a basis of real and sensible analogy, and that the great expansion of verbal metaphor into myth belongs to more advance periods of civilization (Tylor 1929: 299).

Although Tylor mentions contemporaries who would disagree with this statement, given the date of the publication of this text article (1929) it is quite clear that racist attitudes towards non-Europeans extended into the study of non-European mythologies which were ubiquitous during the early part of the twenty first century. The remnants of these hierarchies are echoed in the preference for Greco-Roman myths as subject matter for action adventure films today.[9]

Examples of the appropriation of Greco-Roman mythology by African women in literature are chronicled by Tracey L. Walters in *African American Literature and the Classicist Tradition: Black Women Writers from Wheatley to Morrison* (2007). Walters describes how authors such as Toni Morrison, Gwendolyn Brooks and Rita

[8] The term *primitive* was used by Tylor in the title of his book *Primitive Culture* and is used throughout the book as a category ascribed to non-European customs and culture. I am aware that the term non-European exists within the problematic Western paradigm of constructing the *other.*

[9] These include titles such as *Hercules (various from 1958-2005), Wrath of the Titans (2012) (includes figures such as Medusa, Perseus and Zeus), Mighty Aphrodite (1995)* to name but a few. This clearly demonstrates that the West still views these narratives as culturally relevant. Nevertheless while there are numerous varieties of myths that exist and can be found in a wide range of diverse cultures in the world today (which are equally compelling and complex), Western cinema and its audiences belligerently remain in favour of rehashing these archaic subjects despite the obvious wealth of mythological narratives available.

Dove have adapted the Persephone and Demeter myth in their writing. Significantly, the myth of Persephone and Demeter centres around the rape of Persephone. Walters (ibid:13) explains the popular choice of Greco-Roman narrative is in its potential for expounding on important gender tropes found in Black women's writing. She argues (ibid:14) that the adaptation of the Persephone and Demeter myth by these African American authors "highlight issues of Black female sexuality, Black female oppression, and the struggle to define a Black female identity."

By employing similar visual codes used by acclaimed artists and genres within the art historical canon, Mntambo represents herself as agent and her presence as artist, author and authority within a Western cultural practice that has historically excluded artists on the premise of race and gender. Mntambo's morphing of this classical Greek myth could thus be argued as a metaphor for subjective identity. Mntambo's choice to occupy the roles of both victim (Europa) and perpetrator (Zeus/Minotaur) comment on her reclaiming of a subjective power by identifying with the very powers that have shaped her identity as a Black female artist, that is, the Western art historical canon.

Text Three: Painting the World Through the Eyes of the High Renaissance

Greek Mythological Subjects and the High Renaissance

Perhaps Mntambo's most obvious allusion to paintings of the Renaissance period is her choice of title. Her title is also a title shared with one of the most famous oil paintings of the High Renaissance. Titian's *The Rape of Europa* is one of a series of mythological subjects painted by Titian between 1550 and 1560's for Philip II of Spain to decorate the walls of the palace in Madrid. Based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* it is generally recognized as one of the finest examples of Venetian painting of the sixteenth century. Although Mntambo's composition and style do not directly cite Titians work, her choice to digitally manipulate the image in a particular painterly style, her strong use of lighting and framing techniques as well as her choice of title make direct reference to his painting.

Mntambo's references[10] by implication suggest that she has drawn on codes and conventions derived from the genre of painting. Thus a reading of her work based on these conventions is possible. In fact, Mntambo has appropriated several formal properties of traditional, western, mythological oil painting, in her photographic print. These include the strong use of chiaroscuro, the preference for mythological subjects as content, and the use of one-point perspective consistent with High Renaissance painting. Mntambo's work can be therefore be *read* as a mythological photograph.

Paintings of mythological subjects have a long and prosperous history in the Western art canon. During the Renaissance, paintings of Greek mythological subjects were considered High Art. Ries comments on this fixation with Greek culture by the West:

> In all history no culture has so passionately adored another culture as the West has idolized Ancient Greece, not because Greek culture is filled with "mere truths" but because the Greeks, like Picasso, confronted by the chaos of history and the unconscious, moved toward a deepened awareness of life and a cultivation of that awareness. (Ries 2012)

In *Ways of Seeing,* John Berger (1972:129) outlines some of the implications of owning a mythological oil painting during this period. He argues that people who owned works of art, particularly those of mythological subjects, were endowed with a cultural authority, dignity and wisdom. An oil painting hanging on one's walls became a symbol of belonging to a superior cultural heritage. To own an oil painting was, in essence, a reminder of what it meant to be a cultivated European.

This belief in the authority associated with oil painting as a medium and style of this era continued into the twentieth century. In a study of Titian's *The Rape of Europa* by Arthur Pope in the 1960s, Pope describes Titian's painting as "one of the world's greatest masterpieces" and repeatedly refers to Titian as a "master" (Pope 1960: 13).

> […]It is the complete relationship of touches that endows the slightest sketch by a master with so much meaning and beauty and distinguishes it from the work of the lesser artist […]. This so opposed to the

[10] Picasso's 1933 etching and paintings of the High Renaissance. Some paintings of the High Renaissance of similar subjects and titles include:*The Rape of the Sabine Women*, Nicolas Poussin 1636-1637; Titian's *The Rape of Europa (1550-1560), The Rape of Proserpina* (1595) Joseph the Elder Heintz are but

> mannered monotony of touch so apt to be seen in the work of common place artists […]. With Titian it is the sheer quality of orderly relationships which produces the richness of effect. It is his masterly control which gives his work such a definite classic quality (Ibid : 35-41).

To whom does Pope refer when speaking of those *lesser* artists who work in such "mannered monotony"? Clearly those who have not had the innate sublime skill (or fortune) to be endowed with such "slights of hand" or "masterly control" that produce such a "definite classic quality". Indeed the vagueness of the terms accredited to Titian's artistic ability seem to have quite a lot to do with the label attached to him as "master" rather than any significant difference in the choice of subject matter or painterly style of those "common" artists, his contemporaries.

In *Gendered Visions,* Freida High W. Tesfagiorgis states that "a Black feminist critique would resist the basic assumptions in the canon of art history that identify artist as 'great' or inspired 'geniuses' and their art as 'masterpieces', an idea highly influenced by the Florentine culture and derived from the ideals of ancient Greek models." She instead insists that a questioning of the canon "would recognize that the current exclusionary art world practices are based on the judgements derived from Eurocentric art historical knowledge …" (Tesfagiorgis 1997:85).

It is in light of this statement that Mntambo's choice of subject matter is particularly pertinent. This reference to the idea of a 'genius' and to other 'masterpieces' as well as the adaptation of Greek mythological subjects is in keeping with Tesfagiorgis's classification of a Black Feminist critique. Through her assimilation and manipulation of these subjects, Mntambo offers a resistance and critique to Eurocentric art historical discourse.

Summary

Mntambo's appropriation and reworking of the popular Greek myth, citation of the Picasso print and reference to Renaissance oil painting can be *read* as a visual manifestation and comment on the above mentioned concerns. Mntambo's act of agency, placing herself within the image and therefore within the popular Greek

myth, via a narrative of violence, in essence reclaims her subjective modes of power and is a way of critiquing the socio-cultural status quo. That is, Mntambo's roles as Minotaur/Zeus and Europa are an embodiment of both active and passive subjects in the Greek mythological narrative and the image itself, allowing her to both comment on and challenge the prescribed active and passive roles of hero/beast (man) and victim (woman) in Western culture whilst asserting her position and legitimacy as a Black female artist working within and against the Western Art historical canon.

> In such a context, in which the African subject can be transformed into an actor playing his or her own role and staking his or her claim on society, the photographer is not the brilliant artist living as a recluse, but the mediator, the stage director, the iconographer (Pivin 2010:17).

I would argue that Mntambo is such a person. A detailed discussion and analysis of her work requires a closer look at the manner in which she has stage directed *The Rape Of Europa* image, the iconography she has employed and the manner in which the work attempts to mediate between the multiple contexts and narratives that Mntambo the artist inhabits.

Chapter One Images



Minotaur Kneeling Over Sleeping Girl (1933), Picasso, dry point, $11^{5}/_{8}$ x $14^{3}/_{8}$



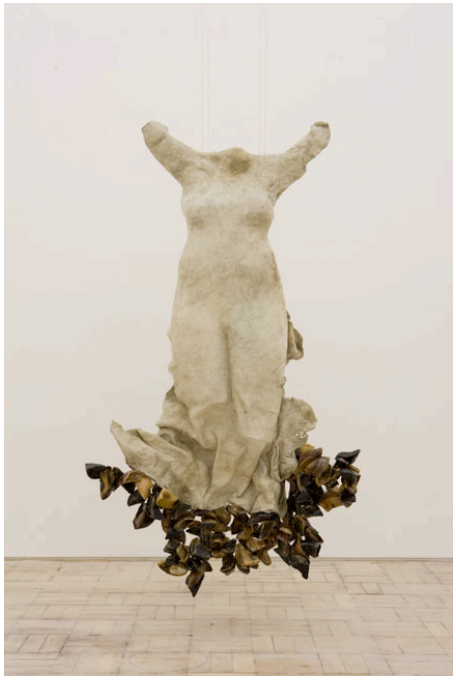
The Rape of Europa (1550-60), Titian, Oil on Canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York



Emabufto (2009), Mntambo
Cowhide, Resin, Polyester Mesh



Refuge (2009), Mntambo
Cowhide, Resin, Polyester Mesh



***Nandikeshvara* (2009), Mntambo,**
Cowhide, Cow Hooves, Resin

Europa

The great muscles
Bulged on the neck, the dewlaps hung to the chest,
The horns were small, but every bit as perfect
As if a sculptor made them, and as shining
As any jewel,

***Metamorphoses,* Ovid** (II. 851- 855)

Chapter Two

The Rape Script

Several years ago I had the good fortune of being able to stay a few days in Florence. Standing in the Piazza della Signoria, I recall gazing up at what to me appeared to be possibly one of the most beautiful statutes I had ever seen. Three nude figures gracefully intertwined with one another; a man crouched between the legs of another man standing up right clutching the figure of a woman whose arms were outstretched. The spiralling muscular limbs of the figures and their smooth white surfaces seemed to gleam in the sun. I took a photograph and immediately saved the image as my mobile wallpaper. Eight months later, sitting in the Wartenweiler Library at Wits, I came across the image of my statue once more. The caption underneath read 'Giambologna, *Rape of the Sabine Women (*1574-83)'. I was somewhat disconcerted by the effect the image had had on me in relation to the supposed sexually violent narrative that the statue was purported to be depicting. The dissonance I felt between my affinity for the statue and my reaction to discovering its narrative led me to question the underlying function of such a representation. I felt strongly that the image of these intertwined, smooth, gleaming white figures in no way reflected my own experiences of sexual violence, or the experiences of those close to me. I concluded that the sculpture could not in fact be about the sexual act of rape itself but more about the opportunity to represent naked bodies to some other ends. The statue, I concluded, must be a type of symbol – a metaphor. I believed it to be partially about its creator and his skill, but I also believed it to be an iconic representation of the ideals of beauty and of the human form. It was only much later that I began to link this representation to the ideals of Roman society.

The rape narrative employed in the *The Rape of Europa* print by Mntambo was not unlike that in Giambologna's *The Rape of the Sabine Women.* Both were rooted in Western iconic fiction: 'The Rape of the Sabine Women' is a Roman legend and the 'Rape of Europa' is a Greek mythological narrative. Neither representation, whether sculptural or photographic, seemed concerned with explicit scenes of sexual violence and both mythical narratives had been used for numerous oil paintings during the

Renaissance. I concluded that the use of metaphor, intrinsic in understanding any narrative, and, more importantly, the metaphor of *rape* was the binding motif between the two works.

The Rape Script: A Metaphor for Power, Gender and Political Violence

In this chapter I explore the conversation between Mntambo's work and other historical works that use similar narratives. I discuss how the metaphor of rape alludes to the colonial condition and evokes the misappropriation and consumption of black bodies by Western culture.

If we consider that Europe is a derivative of the name Europa, who features in several popular narratives as more than one character within Ancient Greek Mythology, then I propose that *Europa* in the title of Mntambo's image is an allusion to the continent of Europe. Mntambo's portrayal of Europa in the image thus suggests a possible synthesized pun between the title and the image.

The Rape of Europa in historical terms refers to the story of the rape of Europa by Zeus. What we see in the image is a woman posed as a victim of the Minotaur/Zeus, who is represented by another image of the same woman. When we examine the title what we read, if we suspend the narrative of the Classical Greek myth, is a reference to Europe (Europa). What we see – a woman's body, a Black woman's body – can be read as a metaphor for the African continent.

Metaphor

Metaphor is most commonly understood as a figure of speech in which a word or a phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. Metaphor is a type of comparison. Mieke Bal describes this comparison as "the substitution of one term by another" which establishes a similarity between the two (Bal 1994: 14). This implied similarity is meant to create connections between the two terms which, in some way, enlighten the reader to specific qualities of the objects or actions described. Metaphors are also used in visual language.

Burgin argues that *reading* a photographic image by definition inextricably binds the specifications of language to the visual elements of the image. This allows for linguistic definitions and terms such as metaphor and allegory to be applied to the work. In order to truly understand the metaphors of an image - which can be read as a text - one must fully grasp the metaphors and implications of the text that accompany it.

> […] 'language of photography' is never free from the determinations of language itself. We rarely see a photograph *in use,* which does not have a caption or title, it is more usual to encounter photographs attached to long texts or with a copy superimposed over them. Even a photograph which has no actual writing on or around it, is traversed by language when it is "read" by a viewer (Burgin 2003:131).

Mntambo's work in many ways consists of a multitude of visual metaphors and allegories that need to be deciphered. We can begin doing this by looking at the title and its relationship to the composition and content of the image.

In *Criticizing Photographs* (2000)*,* Terry Barrett remarks on the relationship between verbal and visual metaphors:

> Verbal metaphors have two levels of meaning: the literal and the implied. Visual metaphors also have levels of meaning: what is shown (described) and what is implied (Ibid:38).

When a photographic image is accompanied by text, verbal and visual metaphors and their respective levels of meaning come together to form a complex unit that is doubly removed from its literal origin. In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger convincingly asserts that text used in combination with an image can and is used to formulate an argument (Berger 1972:14). In Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa*, the juxtaposition of text (title) and image are used to pose an argument against Eurocentric modes of power with particular emphasis on race and gender.

The Rape Script

In *Images of Rape: The Heroic Tradition and its Alternatives* (1999), Diane Wolfthal, investigates representations of rape in Western art from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries. Wolfthal reflects on the use of rape narratives within the Western canon of

art history as motif and metaphor for the attitudes and behaviour expected and accepted by both men and women. Using a range of visual documentation including picture bibles, law treatises, justice paintings, war prints and manuscripts, Wolfthal chronicles the complex socio-cultural and political perspectives on sexual violence that existed in medieval times in Europe and continue to influence attitudes towards rape today.

The term *heroic rape* was coined by Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will* and was used to describe assailants as Greek or Roman God or hero (1975:313-42). Wolfthal argues that these heroic rape narratives were not so much about the physical act of rape itself, that the narratives were not concerned with the overt depiction of violence or sexual intercourse, but instead came to represent a metaphoric rape. In ancient Rome, the definition of *raptus*, from which the modern word *rape* derives, was the *carrying off by force* and was considered a crime of property and included thefts of all kinds (Wolfthal 1999:9).

The rape of a woman in ancient Rome was seen as a crime against the husband, father or guardian as opposed to the woman in question. In the eyes of the law, women were considered the property of men.

In the context of art and literature, rape as a metaphor for violence has been loosely used as a symbolic 'abduction' or 'seizure' of that which is both abstract and real.[11] Wolfthal continues by arguing that heroic rape "served to visualize the ideal traits that were expected of a new wife: chastity, submissiveness to husband, sacrifice for family and country, and woman's role as peacemaker within the family" (ibid:12).

Rome itself and Western civilization as we know it today was – as the legend states – founded on this definition of raptus. According to the legend of *The Rape of the Sabines,* early Romans, unable to procure wives peacefully, invited the neighbouring Sabines to a festival as a ruse to violently capture the Sabine women at a signal from Romulus. The children of these women became the children of Rome, whose children then became the forefathers of Western modern civilization as we know it today. The

[11] Here I refer to the physical act of rape as opposed to its representations and metaphors

legend is considered essential to the founding of Roman family life. It stands as a symbol for the behaviour expected of its citizens: the ideal man should aggressively pursue his woman and the ideal woman should accept this aggression passively in return for the promise of having a family (bearing children). Giambologna's statue of *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (1583) stands today in the Piazza Della Signoria in Florence as a reminder and celebration to the founding members of the Great Roman Empire[12] (Wolfthal 1999:7).

Wolfthal argues that the underlying psychology of the "heroic" rape tradition is based on classical Greco-Roman ideals that were reinterpreted and referenced during the Renaissance. These are:

> […] that sexual relations are like the hunt; that marriage may be equated with rape; that when seduction fails, violence may be employed; that aggression against an unwilling partner enhances eroticism; that in the end the rape victim will be happy with her assailant (ibid :26).

Fundamentally, this example shows that even though the subject matter of these works is based on myths and legends, they have roots in real socio-cultural attitudes of the time and more importantly that these attitudes continue to permeate throughout Western cultures in very real ways to this day.

Works such as Giambologna's sculpture (1574-83) and Poussin's oil painting *Rape of the Sabine Woman* (1636-7), as well as Titian's *The Rape of Europa* (1550-60) are given as some examples of renowned artists of the Renaissance who subverted mythological and historical subjects by depicting sanitized versions of rape to both justify the erotic nature of the content and idealize the Gods and heroes of these narratives.

Typical of "heroic" rape imagery, the artist avoids any explicit depiction of sexual intercourse. Rather the artist reinforces ancient Roman attitudes by idealizing the rape. The painter, in search of an erotic subject, chose a "heroic" rape "myth" and

[12] Interestingly the western custom of carrying the bride over the threshold stems from this ancient legend of the Rape of the Sabines. More critically even today husbands are not generally prosecuted for rape (Wolfthal 1999:17).

then subverted its narrative so that the victim is constructed as a willing lover (Wolfthal 1999:20).

Wolfthal also asserts that narratives of violence were used to promote existing power relations. She quotes Marcus's definition of what rape narratives promote: "male violence against women" and what they suppress: "women's will, agency and capacity for violence" (ibid.1999:140). In the first chapter I mentioned that *The Larouse Encylcopedia of Mythology* affirms one of the functions of mythology as justifying existing social systems. If we consider that narratives of violence function in maintaining the socio-cultural status quo then we need to ask whom the 'rape narrative' serves, and towards what purpose.

Wolfthal maintains that "[t]he three primary functions of "heroic" rape imagery produced during the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries were to elucidate marital doctrine, to serve as erotic stimulation and assert the political authority of aristocratic patrons" (Wolfthal 1999:10).

Wolfthal, quoting Laura Mulvey, agrees that "the male viewer's identification with a divine heroic assailant, eroticized paintings of "heroic rape" imagery served to arouse feelings of both sexual excitement and omnipotent power" (ibid:23). It is perhaps this idea of classical European omnipotent power and male sexuality from which Picasso drew his inspiration for his series of Minotaur prints and against which Mntambo has irreverently rebelled.

<u>An Implied Gender Politics</u>

The title, *The Rape of Europa*, informs the viewer that Mntambo's mythological photographic print is of a sexually violent nature. The word *rape* is defined as " the crime committed by a man, of forcing another person to have sexual intercourse with him without their consent and against their will especially by the threat or use of violence against them."[13] This is implied visually through the placement of the two figures within the image – Mntambo's nude figure lying stretched out on the ground and the Mntambo/Minotaur/Zeus crouched menacingly over her. However, in her

[13] New Oxford American Dictionary, 3rd Edition. 2010. Oxford University Press Inc.

image, Mntambo's dual role Zeus and Europa – perpetrator and victim – subverts the ordinary definition of rape. A further visual disruption is the side profile of a breast that clearly belongs to the bull/Minotaur figure. This representation of the mythical perpetrator as obviously female destabilizes any stereotypes the viewer might have had regarding the gender of the traditionally male mythical figures. It also references a long history of gender-biased representations of the roles of men and women within the Western genre of oil painting. Mntambo's subversion of the classical Greek characters is a comment on the representation of traditional gender-power dynamics within the canon.

Stereotypical representations of women as submissive victims and men as god/hero perpetrators pervade Western art forms. It is this stereotype that (white)[14] Feminists have vehemently fought against, particularly in relation to the representation and symbolism of the female form, since the 1960s.

> Feminist art is, […] necessarily deconstructive in that it works to question the basis of existing aesthetic norms and values whilst also extending the possibilities of those codes and offering alternative and progressive representations of female identity (Nead 1997:62).

Mntambo's adaptation of the mythical characters and the reference in the title to sexual violence at once acknowledge and deny notions of acceptable violence towards women, violence that is overtly linked to the sexual virility, masculine identity and agency of men. In *The Heroic Tradition,* Wolfthal references Kramer's comment on gender stereotypes and the significance they have in reaffirming the roles of men as dominant masculine agent and women as passive and rape-able.

> In sex the man is familiarly supposed to "possess" the woman, a possession redoubled in the married man's proprietary right over his wife's body, and this act of possession is supposed to ground and ratify the structure of gender polarity (Kramer 1997:117).

Mntambo's metaphoric rape can thus be read as a symbolic possession of the self. Her identification with both perpetrator and victim both male and female, and negation of

[14] As suggested by Mc Nay (1992:37) body politics inscribed by gender is also dependant on other formations such as race, class and the system of commodity fetishism. Therefore a homogenous categorization of woman's body, as implied by the overarching term 'feminist' is problematic in relation to conceptions of the black body which cut across all these classifications.

the Western stereotype of assailant as male, is an assertion by her of the powers that define her own femininity and agency as a woman. Unlike the representations of Europas of old, Mntambo as Europa is at the mercy of no male god or hero. She constructs herself in the image that embodies all the strengths that are associated with notions of the masculine. She assumes the power associated with masculine identity, and by doing so creates yet another level of ambiguity in the image. On the one hand, she is asserting her sense of agency as if a man, on the other hand, by doing so she reinforces the idea that power rests within the masculine. Her appropriation of this power is a form of resistance that resonates with Feminist concerns around the ownership, display and representations of the female body.

The White Female Nude: A Metaphor for European Culture

> More than any other subject, the female nude connotes "art". The framed image of a female body, hung on the wall of an art gallery, is a short hand for art more generally; it is an icon of western culture, a symbol of civilization and accomplishment (Nead 1992:1).

The image of the female nude within the art historical canon is a highly charged and contentious subject. Lynda Nead refers to the representation of the female body within the confines of high art as a metaphor for the value and significance of art in general. (Nead 1992:2) Both Nead and Berger assert that the nude "is precisely the body in representation, the body produced by culture" (ibid:14). In essence the nude is the body produced by cultural materialism from which the codes and conventions used to represent it are determined. "To be naked is to be oneself,[…] to be nude is to be in disguise", veiled by the conventions of western patriarchal society (Berger 1972:48).

It is on this premise that Berger compares European oil paintings with photographs of images used in publicity and soft-porn. He is able to identify a similar range of poses, gestures and looks in both mediums. This significantly shows that regardless of medium or form, Western female 'nudes' utilize a similar collection of codes and conventions. What becomes clear in all the statements is that the image of the nude acts not only as a metaphor for art and western culture but a symbol of Western sexuality in general.

What is conspicuously left out in both Nead's and Berger's arguments is that *nudes* as a genre implies specifically the representation of *white* female bodies – a distinction that is assumed throughout most of these texts. The omission of race specification in regards to the representation of the female body highlights a larger race politics rooted in language. Nude – as the norm – refers to Western codes and conventions applied to representations of the white female body. Paradoxically, discourses surrounding the representations of nude African females refer to these nudes as Black bodies.[15] In that context, a distinction between naked, nude and body is seldom made.

I would add to Berger's hypothesis that while the term *nude* is symbolic of European culture, the term *body* is entrenched with metaphors of objectification and suggests a wider context of appropriation. Distinctions placed on the female form such as *body*, *naked* and *nude* are done so through languages of the West. Mntambo's appropriation of Western cultural narratives and iconography requires a reading of her work that engages this Western paradigm.

Perhaps the most obvious subversion of both the Greek myth and the Western archetypal nude is Mntambo's placement of herself within the image. On the one hand, Mntambo's assumption of this pose – this *position* – can be viewed simply as a contemporary take on, or reference to, art history. However, this would naturalise the Western canon even further. It is precisely Mntambo's subject position, as a Black woman, that creates the ambiguity in this image that makes the image so compelling.

Metaphor and the Black Body

In *Black Bodies, White Bodies,* Sander Gilman shows that black bodies and particularly Black women were subject to an insistent sexual pathologization (Gilman 2003: 137-147).

Gilman shows that Black women's bodies were reduced to signs of sexual abnormality with a particular obsession with the buttocks and genitalia. Black women

[15] Coco Fusco (2001), Sander L. Gilman (2003) , Lois Mc Nay (1992), are some examples of texts where this is found.

were conceived of by white society as heightened signs of sexual difference and were objects of a profound attraction and fear. From the middle of the sixteenth century four factors structure the English view of the African as slave: 1. In England blackness was equated with sin, the antithesis of 'whiteness', thus the African skin colour came to be seen in a negative way. 2. Africans were considered to be heathen and uncivilized. Colonialism and the slave trade were rationalized as a European civilizing mission. 3. Africans were viewed as savage beasts and it was even suggested that African females mated with apes. 4. The African was perceived as sexually potent. In an era when sexual passion was seen as a sign of inferiority and social backwardness, sexual potency had very negative connotations (Winthrop Jordan in Marshall 1996: 6-7). Scientific discourse along this pathology was used to validate European racial superiority and endorse the colonial project. The most famous example of this is the case of Sarah Baartman.

Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman, born in 1789 in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, was brought to England in 1810 aboard an English ship by a London surgeon. She was exhibited and made famous across Europe as a freak in sideshow attractions. Throughout Europe she was known as the Venus Hottentot. In 1814 Baartman was sold to a circus owner in France where she became a scientific specimen for anatomists and naturalists to study. She died in 1814 and was dissected by French anatomist Georges Cuvier. Her brain, skeleton and genitals were later placed on public display in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris until 1974. Twenty years later and under the presidency of Nelson Mandela, demands were made for the return of Baartman's remains to South Africa. They were returned in 2002, eight years after the initial request (Thompson 2008: 28-29).

The story of Saartjie Baartman is significant as it clearly demonstrates the Western fixation with the black female body as sign of sexual deviance and intellectual inferiority. The black body denigrated by the West becomes the foil to which the image of the European nude is to be compared and placed in sharp contrast. Just as the white female nude came to stand for European high culture and contained sexuality, black bodies came to represent unbridled sexuality and the uncultured. The image of Baartman embodied all these attributes.

> The antithesis of European sexual more and beauty is embodied in the black, and the essential black, the lowest rung on the great chain of being, is the Hottentot. The physical appearance of the Hottentot is, indeed, the central nineteenth century icon for sexual difference between the European and the Black […] (Gilman 2003: 139).

The return of Baartman's remains to South Africa a mere decade ago, nearly two centuries after her death, stands as proof that attitudes towards and beliefs surrounding the black female body prevail to this day. Both Gilman and Thompson show how parts of the black female anatomy, particularly the genitalia (a century after Baartman's death), came to represent not only Black women but Black sexuality as a whole. Under the guise of anthropometry or physiognomy, black womanhood and sexuality continued to be studied and defined according to her physical characteristics. This classification of individuals' intelligence and evolutionary status in accordance with these measurements continued throughout the nineteenth century (Thompson 2008:29).

When a specimen was to be presented for an anatomical museum more often than not the specimen was seen as a pathological summary of the entire individual. Thus the skeleton of a giant or a dwarf represented "giantism" or "dwarfism"; the head of a criminal represented the act of execution which labelled him "criminal". Sarah Bartman's genitalia and buttocks summarized her essence for the nineteenth century observer, or indeed twentieth century one as they were, until 2002, when they were returned to South Africa, still on display at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (Gilman 2003:140).

Black female bodies in art during the eighteenth to nineteenth century were also used to sexualize the society to which she belonged, and served as icons for deviant sexuality and disease. Gilman refers to examples of the black body being associated with concupiscence dating as far back as the Middle Ages and shows how the ubiquitous figure of the black servant in European art through its associations with deviant sexual behaviour heightened the sexual atmosphere of the environment it was in. Venereal disease such as syphilis affiliated with prostitution and sexual abnormality fuelled stereotypes of the black female body as the source of corruption and disease (Gilman 2008: 138-146).

> It is the similarity between the black and the prostitute – as bearers of the stigmata of sexual difference and thus pathology – which captured the late nineteenth century (Ibid:147).

An example of this is the maid in the French painter Édouard Manet's painting *Olympia* (1863). The Black servant in the background is used to point to the devious sexual nature of the image as the reclining nude is cast as the unlikely Olympia.[16]

> Black females do not merely represent the sexualized female, they also represent the female as the source of corruption and disease. It is the black female as the emblem of illness who haunts the background of Manet's *Olympia* (Gilman 2003:146).

Throughout Europe the black female body came to serve as an icon for Black sexuality in general as well as the embodiment of all the roles and metaphors associated with the 'not-white' body. "White is what woman is; not-white (and the stereotype not-white gathers in) is what she had better not be" (O'Grady 2003:174).

By inserting herself into a space usually occupied by white bodies – i.e. Greek mythology and the white nude in European culture – Mntambo alludes to the injustice and violence done to black bodies through misappropriation of its form via discourse (artistic, scientific, political) and representation as was commonly done in White culture. Thompson recalls the misappropriation of black bodies in her essay on *The African Female Body in the Cultural Imagination:*

> […] the widespread African artistic convention of physically exaggerating sexual body parts of the female figure as metaphors for human and agricultural fertility, maternity, and nurturance was repeatedly interpreted through the lens of dominant European theories about the pathological sexuality of black women. These sculptural representations fed into the Western cultural imagination, further conjuring up notions of the sexually conflated image of the African woman and aligning them with the ever-popular image of the black Venus (Thompson 2008:29).

This heightened sexualisation of black bodies, their negative associations with disease and concupiscence and misappropriation in order to further the colonial project are exactly what Mntambo's work is arguing against. Through her portrayal of the Zeus/Minotaur character, Mntambo actively aligns herself with some of the traits, the

[16] The image of the young nude is believed to be that of a well-known prostitute (Reff 1977:23-28)

strengths, and, significantly, the power associated with the gods of ancient Greek mythology.

> […] the female body occupied – and continues to occupy – a fundamental place in African art and society *not* as an object of sexual deviance or desire, as perceived in the West, but as a symbol of ideal female beauty; as an icon of nascent fertility and procreativity; as a representation of maternal and communal nurturance; and as a metaphoric embodiment of socially, politically, and religiously important powers (Thompson 2008: 30).

Rape as a Metaphor for Colonization

> [...] false images and myths of the supposed black woman's "ugliness" and her animal-like rabid sexuality are used to justify economic exploitation in the logic and metaphor of rape. (The women in Ngozi Onwurah's film *And Still I Rise*)[17]

Rape as metaphor for the abduction or seizure of property (bodies/ land/ possessions) and metaphor for the socio-cultural roles women were/are expected to fulfil, can also be read as a metaphor for the colonial condition. The notion of a metaphoric rape by Europe of Africa is in keeping with the definition of rape as the "abduction" or "seizure" of property (this includes people), which is not rightly theirs. Of greater noteworthiness is the systematic sexual violation of Black women during the slave trade, which has become symbolic of a white Western domination and its methods of establishing power.

> The sexual violation of Black women by 'white' men symbolized a wider system of 'white' male domination. Sexual exploitation under slavery was an institutionalized method of terrorism that aimed to demoralize and dehumanize slave women as well as slave men. (Angela Davis cited in Marshall 1996:10)

Contradictory to this, the image of the black body within African cultures has a long history of being a powerful and positive symbol for fertility, growth and religion. Thus the West's violent misappropriation of its form to justify European colonial

6. Ifi Amadiume, African Women's Body images in postcolonial discourse and resistance to Neo-crusaders (essay); (2008:59) *Black Womanhood: Images, Icons and Ideologies of the African Body*

thought is in itself a metaphoric rape of the black female nude – abduction of property without consent, deliberate non-consensual sexualisation of its form –Thompson describes how the misappropriation of black bodies was deliberately used to further colonial interests via contemporary discourse and degrading methods of representation.

> For Western nations interested in the exploitation of Africa and its human and natural resources, world expositions were especially useful in justifying colonization. In fact, exhibition organizers openly promoted notions of racial, economic, technological, artistic superiority over African cultures, infantilizing them as needy recipients of Western discipline, religion, civilization, and industry (Thompson 2008:27).

This relationship between the *rape* metaphor, the function of black bodies in European art and the colonial condition is mirrored in the relationship between the title and image of the Mntambo work.

Thus the pun is made complete. Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa* as a coupled visual and textual pun could well be *read* as the rape(ing) of Africa by Europe. This has obvious links to the symbolic function of black bodies in Western art, and rape as metaphoric abduction/seizure of property as previously discussed. But more importantly it links narratives of violence to the colonial condition and subsequently the formation of a postcolonial Black identity within the context of representation.

Exhibiting Africa: The Anthropological Diorama in the Last Century

So far I have discussed several historical accounts of the negative Western metaphors associated with the African female body. I have also discussed how Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa* begins to challenge these negative metaphors through her own appropriation of the rape script. What I haven't spoken about is the relevance of Mntambo's work to contemporary attitudes on the representation and display of black bodies. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked is whether or not the historical discourses I have touched on still permeate Western thought and modes of production today.

Perhaps one of the most persistent forms of denigration is the ubiquitous representation of black bodies as primitive and Africa and African cultures as homogenous and inferior to that of Western civilizations.[18] This is most pronounced in the production/reproduction and exhibition of Africa and Africans in the popular form of the anthropological diorama in museums of natural history.

The Diorama

In *The Rape of Europa* print, Mntambo uses stage lighting, a constructed set and framing techniques. All these implementations recall a popular Western form of cultural representation, reproduction and consumption – the diorama.

In his essay entitled *Small World: Dioramas in Contemporary Art*, Toby Kamps (2000:6) defines the diorama as generally referring to scale models or life size three dimensional depictions of real or imaginary scenes. In contemporary discourse the diorama is often used as a multi-purpose label for a variety of simulated environments "capable of conveying complex layers of information and combining scientific didacticism and freewheeling fantasy" (ibid:6).

> Whether fastidiously accurate or fantastically imaginary, dioramas have the singular ability to combine representation and material reality, fiction and fact, and art and science. (ibid:7)

This is key when reading Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa*. The image is a photograph of physical bodies[19] in actual space. In this staged scene, a fantasy is enacted and the myth of Europa remains frozen in time. The use of diorama-tic modes of production parallel those used by Western history museums. These displays, infamously associated with representations of reality, the factual and Western knowledge, have proved over time to be an idealized fiction and form of myth making of their own. As Kamps puts it, "art […] often gets the better of science in museum dioramas" (ibid:10).

[18] In the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History the Africa section only contained one diorama, a Zulu family, which was accompanied by a label that linked theories of environmentalism, race and evolution. (Arnoldi 1999: 706)

[19] Mntambo physically posed for both Europa and Minotaur/Zeus in a constructed set. The two images where later merged digitally.

Mntambo's image makes strong reference to this anthropological form of representation and practice, many of which have depicted Africans partially nude and in rural, grassland settings well into the twenty first century[20] relying heavily on metaphors surrounding nature versus culture to allude to the inferiority of African cultures. An infamous example of this is the controversy surrounding the Africa dioramas exhibited at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History over the past century.

The Anthropological Diorama: The Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History Africa Exhibit

In her essay *From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A century of exhibiting Africa at the Smithsonian's museum of Natural History (*1999:701-717), Mary Jo Arnoldi chronicles the dissentions surrounding the Africa exhibit. In it she states that the early (1915) dioramas were aimed at forging links between race and evolution. Stating that "the implied standard of comparison was always contemporary Western civilization and the "primitives" were carefully defined as developmentally inferior in every category" (ibid: 706), Arnoldi comments that one of the most frequently voiced critiques of the African dioramas at the Smithsonian were that it presented African societies as having experienced little history and no change: She continues by adding:

> (the displays) did not represent the diversity of social and personal experience in Africa where age, gender, education, and personal history all figure into how people experience and make sense of their worlds. Outdated and pejorative nomenclature for societies appeared in label texts and culturally loaded terms reinforced stereotypes of Africans as primitive, exotic, and savage and contributed to the misinterpretation of cultural practices (ibid: 716).

The second Africa exhibit, a part of the museum's renovation and update, was displayed from 1967-1992. Arnoldi notes (ibid:712) that little attempt was made to display objects in use everywhere in Africa during the mid-twentieth century. Diversity of African cultures was essentially ignored with an emphasis on "an Africa outside of time". Forty years after the first Africa exhibit the museum had failed to

[20] Scenes of rural Africa were conspicuously outdated with the actual experience of Africans during the time of the diorama's construction, (mid 1960's).

represent the expanse, complexity and modernity in contemporaneous African cultures and countries. This arguably continued to perpetuate historical "primitive" discourses and representations of Africa. Arnoldi surmises the following:

> While it was certainly the museum's intention to valorize African "traditional" cultures, the reification of an idealized "traditional" Africa, not surprisingly, reinvented a contemporary variation of the primitivism paradigm of the earlier ethnology displays (Ibid: 712).

The fact that the 1967 Africa exhibit remained up for another almost three decades and was taken down a mere twenty years ago, I think, shows that these historical notions of a primitive Africa are still a fundamental part of contemporary Western visualisations of African cultures and peoples today.

Summary

The viewer is at all times conscious of the fantasy element and nature of Mntambo's photograph. This is perhaps the point. That depictions and constructions of reality, no matter how realistically portrayed, are always to some degree an idealized view.

By galvanizing the rape script and its metaphors, Mntambo is able to comment on several issues relating to the roles of Black women in the context of historical and contemporary art. She does this by adapting and undermining existing codes and conventions relating to the female nude as a genre in the Western art canon. By subsuming Western metaphors of the white female nude and its associations to Western culture and *positive* sexuality, Mntambo negates the traditional function of the black body as the figure cast in sharp chiaroscuro to that of the white body. In doing so she asserts her legitimacy as a Black woman artist within the Western art canon whilst resisting historical violations of black bodies in representations. The work alludes to colonial discourse and its exploitation of the Black body to further colonial interests. Mntambo is able to affiliate herself with the positive connotations of her subjects. The rape narrative as metaphor in this work raises issues around violence/power in relation to both race and gender concerns. As prescribed by Caroline Ramazanóglu and Janet Holland in their essay *Women's Sexuality and Men's Appropriation of Desire* (1993):

> Feminist notions of heterosexual relations have tended to conceive power in terms of the possibility of women resisting men's sexual domination, and so empowering themselves (ibid :240).

Mntambo's reworking of the popular *Rape of Europa* narrative can be hypothesized as an imagined mode of violence that acts as a form of resistance to the "rape script." In the words of Sharon Marcus "the rape script promotes: male violence against women (whilst it) stultifies and excludes – women's will, agency and capacity for violence" (Marcus in Wofthal 1999:140) Mntambo's mirrored image of herself as both perpetrator and victim denies this violence against women and alternately exalts women's will, agency and capacity for violence.

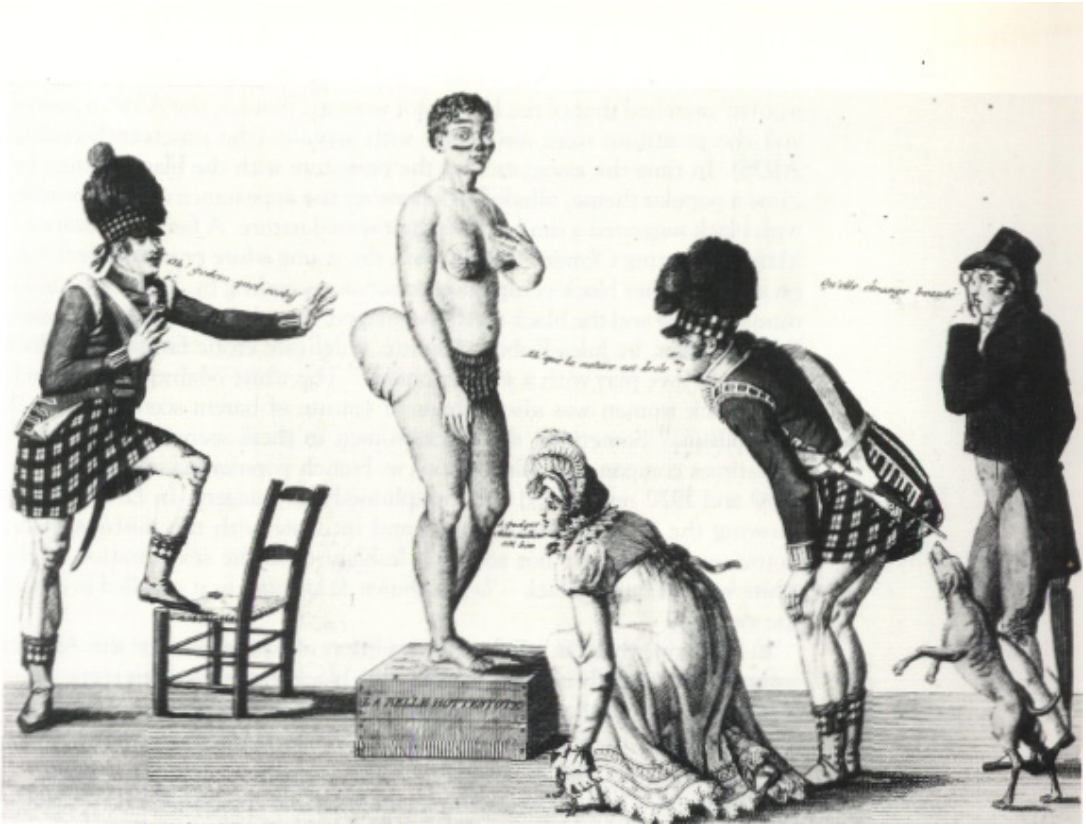
Chapter Two Images



Rape of The Sabine Women (1583), Giambologna, Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi



Rape of the Sabine Women (1636-7), Nicolas Poussin, Oil on Canvas, 206 x 159cm, Museé du Louvre, Paris France



Les Curieux en extase ou les cordons de souliers (La belle hottentote) 1815, engraving

An early nineteenth century French comic satirizing the public display of Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman's buttocks and genitals.

Europa

…and the eyes and forehead
Offered no threat, and the great gaze was peaceful.

***Metamorphoses,* Ovid** (II. 853- 856)

Chapter Three

The Gaze as a Site of Resistance

The physical act of gazing entails the steady and intent looking at something or someone often in either admiration or thought. Theoretically this act of gazing connotes a particular perspective, which epitomizes aspects of the relationship between those observed and those observing. This is often reflected in the way that the artist consciously or unconsciously directs attention to the subject/artwork. In Mntambo's *The Rape Of Europa* operations of the gaze manifest in three manners. The first two occur within the work itself. The Minotaur/Zeus gazes down upon Europa whilst she simultaneous returns the intense gaze upwards. The third form of the gaze occurs when the viewer, directed by the framing foliage in the work, is visually led into the image to gaze upon the unfolding scene.

In this chapter I will discuss how operations of the gaze have been implemented by Mntambo and become the apex at which all other metaphors, citations and allusions in the image will culminate. In her essay *One Way or Another,* Judith Wilson outlines the importance of discourses on the gaze when looking at black feminist and visual theory:

> So far black feminist and visual theory have intersected at two primary sites: the black female body and the gaze. Focusing on the former has made plain the futility of attempts to theorize the role of a radically unspecified female body in visual representation. Focusing on the latter has demonstrated the complex interplay of race and gender in processes of identity formation and, thus, the construction of race and gender-based power relations at the most intimate levels of consciousness. (Wilson 2003:23-24)

It is this *complex interplay of race and gender,* its relationship to *identity* and power, and the possibilities for acts of resistance that it presents in Mntambo's work that I wish to explore in this chapter.

By placing herself within the violent narrative of this image, Mntambo asserts her presence as a means of reclaiming and commenting on the relationship of power to

violence in historical and current contexts. The work raises questions regarding those who had or have power and calls attention to modes of violence through which this power can be resisted or inverted. More specifically, the work makes reference to the ways in which postcolonial black identity has been and is affected by the historical power/violence dynamic. I propose that when power structures are naturalised, they become forms of violence within themselves. These naturalised power structures are the places within which Mntambo's work finds its counterpoint.

The Gaze and Gender

Victor Burgin describes the signifying system of photography as being similar to that of classical painting "at once depict(ing) a scene *and the gaze of the spectator,* an object and a viewing subject" (Burgin 2003: 132). Clarke adds that "the image (….) not only allows for scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) to dominate, but does so in terms of a passive subject and an active eye with absolute power over what it sees, and upon which it looks as an invisible presence" (Clarke 1997:130). In *Ways of Seeing,* Berger (129) discloses the gaze as a tool used in art to maintain and reinforce existing gender based power structures. He argues that *the gaze of the spectator/owner* and therefore active eye was traditionally male and the passive subject/object was traditionally female in European art.

> In the art-form of the European nude the painters and spectator- owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women […] Women are depicted in a quite different way from men – not because the feminine is different from the masculine but because the "ideal" spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the women made to flatter him (Berger 1972 57-58).

Berger both critiques and comments on the Western male gaze and the objectification of the female body contending that "the art of any period tends to serve the ideological interest of the ruling class" (ibid:80). Berger's Marxist approach to the production, value and usage of art questions notions of art belonging to the elite and cultured. As already mentioned, he argues that the ownership of a work of art acted as "a reminder of what it mean(t) to be a cultivated European." The gaze is thus linked to notions of male European power, possession and ownership. This characteristic of the gaze as visually and metaphorically possessing and having power over that which it

gazes upon is a reiteration of gender-based power structures discussed in the previous chapters.

The 'rape script' and Berger's gaze are interrelated parts of the same whole. Berger's gaze and its relationship to the female nude by definition is a visual possessing of what the owner/spectator sets their gaze upon. However Berger's gaze also implies a larger conception of possession as he points out the systematic objectification of the female body and the commodification of the art object, in this instance his example of the oil painting. Those who then own/look upon these two – the image of female nude, or painting as object – are thus endowed with the power and authority that are associated with the ownership of property.

The rape script, although a sexual possessing, also carries with it larger implications of ownership and commodification. Thus we begin to see how the gaze is the very tool through which the rape script is able to function. While the gaze, which is assumed to be predominantly masculine as Berger has pointed out, functions to ratify the pleasure and fantasies of men for both sexual and proprietary power, the rape script concurrently details the expected roles of women and warns against the possible repercussions for its negation. What becomes clear is the use of the gaze to reinforce notions of the masculine, active, all-seeing, all-powerful eye, while the rape script and assumed absence of a female gaze is essentially directed at women and notions of the female passive body. In this regard the rape script, with all its metaphors, could not wholly function without the pre-determinates of the male gaze.

In *The Photograph* Graham Clarke backs up Berger's definition of the gaze. Clarke (123-130) refers to images of the body as embodying a larger context of politics and power. He refers to the public eye as being overwhelmingly male while the subject of a work remains sealed and immobile in the image subject to this male gaze. Like Berger, Clarke points to the relationship between the reader and the subject as a topic of much debate amongst scholars, many of whom argue for this relationship as a reaffirmation of the historical social differences between men and women. On the gaze and its relationship to power Clarke concedes the following:

> [The Gaze] implies power, but it also implies the voyeuristic and fetishistic: primary terms of reference in which a body is subjected to assumptions which have nothing to do with its individuality, its uniqueness in terms of the person, rather than the image being photographed (Clarke 1997: 133).

When the gaze allows scopophilia, it does so under the assumption that the white male is allowed to freely derive pleasure from looking at and, to some extent, dominating the white female body.[21] When theories on the gaze are applied to black female bodies within the rape script the function of the gaze is slightly altered. The black female body, no longer a symbol of sexual prowess or pleasure, connotes the political, cultural and physical superiority of the European male (and female) over those of colour.

An example of this, as cited in Wolfthal's *Heroic Tradition* (1999:191), is the seventeenth century oil painting by Christian Van Couwenbergh entitled *Rape Scene* (1632). The painting consists of what appears to be a contemporary seventeenth century bedchamber. A nude white male sits on the edge on the bed laughing while a nude black woman attempting to get off his lap is held steadfast by his grip. There are two other men in the room, one standing behind the bed fully dressed in contemporary seventeenth century attire while the other semi-clad man points at the two figures on the bed as he looks out of the frame directly at the spectator, smiling. Bawdy imagery was common in the early seventeenth century and Couwenbergh in particular specialized in crude erotic works. In a contemporary context the image still remains quite shocking.[2] The contemporary costumes and setting make it clear that scenes such as this actually happened in seventeenth century Holland, which at the time fully participated in the slave trade. Perhaps the most disturbing feature of the work is the use of the framing figure who "looks" at the audience (smiling) as he points at the unfolding scene, quite clearly inviting his audience (the viewers) to partake in his

[21] The white body, as discussed in chapter two, can be associated with European culture and sexuality.
[2] Couwebbergh's painting now hung in Strasbourg at the Museé des Beaux-Arts has undergone several name changes through the ages, an indication of the contentious nature of the subject matter. The earliest indication of a title appears in 1972 when it was first published, *The Rape of the Negress* then later referred to by Victor Beyer as *Abduction of the Black Woman.* It was even suggested that the image was of the "*washing of a moor."* Incidentally in 2010 the title given to the image on the World Wide Web, *Three Young White Men and a Black Woman,* perhaps the most disturbing title given as yet as it clearly absolves any responsibility and guilt of the men in the image and whom they represent. (Wolfthal 1999: 189-190)

amusement in the unfolding rape of the Black woman attempting to flee in the image. This direct acknowledgement of the spectator's gaze and use of framing technique make an accomplice of the audience who are "seen" and invited to take pleasure in the events depicted. Wolfthal infers that the function of the gaze/rape script combination in this instance is to reinforce "[...] political realities of European power over Africa, [the painting] perform(ed) the cultural work of Dutch Imperialism" (ibid: 194).

In *Gendered Visions,* Olu Oguibe (1997:68) cites an infamous example of the commodification and misrepresentation of African women. Oguibe exposes paintings by European artists, such as Delacroix, whose depictions of harems and North African women were based on European projections of desire and fantasy and not fact. Oguibe reasons that the deliberate sexualisation of Arab women was an attempt to represent and reinforce ideas of Africans as belonging to a lower cultural rung.

> As entirely a sexual entity, the Arab woman in colonial representation is not only an object of colonial desire but representative of a less civilized culture marked by the prevalence of unrestrained sensuality and baseness (ibid:68).

Oguibe then highlights how the advent of photography spawned an entire industry of colonial images based on the prerequisites of its oil painting predecessor. He continues by discussing how the postcard became the main medium through which Arab women were made visible to the ordinary European male. Oguibe asserts that as in painting, North African women had very little say or power of the sexualisation of their bodies and vending of these images. And so the European male gaze was the practice through which North African female bodies were commodified.

> In all this [photography/postcards], as in painting, the women of North Africa were not in the least in consideration, the sole focus of the distant gaze being on their marketed and consumed bodies. […] In effect, not only were they taken advantage of through the forceful trading of their bodies that the colonial licence made possible, their true plights were equally erased in order to satisfy requirements of the romantic colonial imagination (Oguibe 1997: 68).

In light of these examples the gaze takes on an even more ominous, and clearly violent function. It becomes the tool with which to demonstrate the political

domination and power of one culture and race over another. The degradation, humiliation and helplessness that rape brings to its victims, and the masculine power it reinforces within its perpetrators, is visibly represented in the image, leaving no doubts of the artist's intent, consciously or unconsciously. The sexually violent narrative and its links to actual events at the time are a part of a larger set of power structures that have employed gender-based codes and conventions to endorse contemporary ideologies of the European male as representative of the peak of an imagined hierarchical cultural order.

In order to discuss the constructs of power and its relationship to violence and the gaze I will make reference to French philosopher Michel Foucault's postulations on the relationship between power, body and sexuality.

Foucault, Sexuality and Power

In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, Foucault provides a useful synopsis in a collection of lectures and interviews with various scholars outlining his major works (*Discipline and Punishment; The Order of Things; Archeology of Knowledge* and so on). Of particular significance are Foucault's discussions on the dissemination of knowledge and its relationship to the dynamic of power as transmitted via discourse, his discussions on sexuality and the body as socially constructed by and through power structures, and the transmission of power as surveillance as described in his analogy of Bentham's Panopticon. Foucault's work, particularly on power, sexuality and the body, is pertinent for discussion on the gaze.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault presents a theory on the constructed nature of sexuality. Foucault reasons that sexuality is not an innate or natural quality of the body but rather the result of a series of historical forces of power acted upon the body. He argues that sex, far from being the culmination of natural bodily desires, is in fact a cultural construct, whose production is targeted at the regulation and control of sexuality.

> We must not make the mistake of thinking that sex is an autonomous agency which secondarily produces manifold effects of sexuality over the entire length of its surface of contact with power. On the contrary, sex is the most speculative, most ideal most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures (Foucault 1978a:155).

Feminists seeking to explain how women's experience is diminished and controlled by predetermined ideas and images of female sexuality have used Foucault's links between discourses on sex to historical relationships of power as a basis for their arguments. In *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (1992), Lois McNay poses the feminist debate on how sexuality should be examined in terms of the codes and conventions that have been invested in it and how these conventions are read as truths within contemporaneous pools of knowledge created through hierarchical frameworks of power.

> For as we have seen, it is the body that is the principal target of the power/knowledge relations transmitted through discourse. From this perspective, the question of sexuality cannot be addressed in terms of an ideology of gender nor in terms of the colonization of the body's natural forces. Rather, the question of sexuality and the body must be looked at in terms of how the body is invested with certain properties and inserted to regimes of truth via the operations of power knowledge. (ibid:28)

We can thus conclude that narratives of sex and images of bodies to some degree always reflect on the power structures and, subsequently, the pools of knowledge at work when they were produced. Mntambo's work is arguably then a visual manifestation of these modes of power, which have simultaneously acted upon and against (both internally and externally) one another in the formation of her identity.

Foucault on the Body, Power and Knowledge

In his essays on the nature of power, Foucault describes individual identity as the product of a multitude of forces that are simultaneously acted on and in the body.

> [...] it's my hypothesis that the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity

> and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces (Foucault 1980:73).

This hypothesis has a significant impact on the reading of the Mntambo's image. If identity is the result of power acted in and on the body, then the artist's identity can be said to be defined to some extent by historical power structures. For "(p)ower, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body" (Foucault 1980:56). This counterattack in the same body is represented by the twinning figure of Mntambo, who is simultaneously Minotaur/Zeus and Europa. The work not only comments on external forces, but suggests internal struggles within the artist's identity. In a recent interview with Susan Ecclestone, Mntambo concedes the following about the *Rape of Europa* print:

> The work I created was about self-reflection: looking at myself and the 'beast' within me and confronting all the aspects of myself that I don't necessarily agree with or like. Being in a situation where I cannot, and on some level do not want to escape these 'bad' elements because they are a part of me (Ecclestone 2012).

What are these 'bad' elements that Mntambo refers to? In the image we see the Minotaur/Zeus physically dominating Europa as he/she crouches over her in a sexually intimidating manner – the external forces acted upon the body. This is coupled by the mirrored image of Mntambo as both perpetrator (Minotaur/Zeus) and victim (Europa) – the body acting on itself. Through the application of its metaphors the Mntambo image comes to suggest a tension between hegemonic power structures and their effect on the black female social body.

Foucault further argues that the power that dictates the actions and also the formation of the social body is in fact responsible for the production of knowledge surrounding it. Consequently without certain forces of power in play, particular pools of knowledge would not exist.

> Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it. If it has been possible to constitute a knowledge of the body, this has been by way of an ensemble of military and educational disciplines. It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible (Foucault 1980: 59).

Assuming that the opposite is true, we can deduce that those who do not control power and therefore knowledge are subject to the motives and biases of those who do.

An example of this relationship between knowledge production and power structures is one described by Erin Haney (2010:97) in her book *Photography and Africa*. Haney discusses the power dynamic between the photographer, those who are in the photograph and that which is left out. She references a tinted postcard titled *Harvesting Rubber in the Forest*[3] by an unknown photographer, which is of particular interest. The image depicts two male figures wrapped in cloth from the waist down. The figure in the foreground rests on his haunches as he appears to be collecting sap, using the knife visible in his right hand. The second figure is seen standing in the background reaching for a small pot hanging from a branch. Neither figure is facing the camera. The left arm of the foreground figure sags at his side, while both figures seem demure, passive and docile. The image in effect portrays what appears to be a peaceful rural scene of two men gathering sap. What the image doesn't show are the physical demands rubber harvesting places on the body or the manner in which people were compelled to harvest it. Haney notes (2010:97) that rubber harvesting was intensely difficult and painful. Gatherers had to smear their bodies with the sap from rubber vines, let it dry and then rip it off their skin. In fact the process was so arduous that people had to be forced to do it.

> An example of what is done was told [by an officer]…to arrive in canoes at a village, the inhabitants of which invariably bolted on their arrival; the soldiers were then landed, and commenced looting, taking all the chickens, grain etc, out of the houses; after this they attacked the natives until able to seize their women; these women were kept as hostages until the chief of the district brought in the required number of kilograms of rubber. The rubber having been brought, the women were sold back to their owners for a couple of goats a piece, and so he continued from village to village until the requisite amount of rubber had been collected (Haney 2010:99).

The particularly peaceful scene depicted on the postcard of the two men attending their harvesting pots hanging from vines betrays an unsettling omission by the photographer of the extreme coercive violence enforced to produce the sap and,

[3] Lusambo, Congo Free State, c.1895

consequently, the image. When considering that the postcard had been used as a source of ethnographic information, in essence showing what two African men harvesting rubber entailed to the Western world, one begins to agree with Foucault's argument that power and not (as in this case) necessarily truth produces knowledge.

Sarah Baartman and the sap harvesters are good examples of how pools of knowledge were/are created for economic, political and cultural exploitation, i.e. for the colonial project. The most significant consequence of this is the inability (through lack of access to power structures) of those who do not control economic/political/social structures of power to counter these processes of production and pools of knowledge. A closer look at the Mntambo image and its citation of the Picasso print reveal the extent to which the power/violence dynamic permeates not only the aforementioned issues on race and economic politics but also issues surrounding gender and notions of the artist's identity in the Western canon.

Foucauldian theory on power begins to open up a possible reading of *The Rape of Europa* as a comment on the ambiguity of the artist's power. He suggests that power is accessible to all as each individual to some extent has a certain power that operates through their body. He argues that individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application (Foucault 1980:98). Thus power is exercised both on and through the individual.

> In reality, power in its exercise goes much farther, passes through much finer channels, and is much more ambiguous, since each individual has at his disposal a certain power, and for that very reason can also act as the vehicle for transmitting a wider power.
> (Foucault 1980:72)

Thus a key element to gaining and sustaining power is agency, an agency that is visually reflected in the work by the dual roles Mntambo embodies. She is both heroine and beast, but more than that she is *both* - gazing down and up at a version of herself. The idea that the body is produced through power and is a cultural rather than natural entity significantly opens up the possibilities for the feminist reader/artist to actively manipulate and reshape gender biases in their work. Symbolically and visually, the external forces applied to her body are applied by Mntambo herself

therefore the claim to her body and her identity is her own. Consequently Mntambo's adaptation of the Greek myth and her situating herself in the image can be read as an identification with and reclaiming of the power structures that have moulded her identity as an artist.

Feminism, Power, Violence and Foucault

In her essay, McNay highlights some of the shortcomings in Foucault's hypothesis of the social body. She refers to Foucauldian bodies as passive entities devoid of agency and lacking rounded subjectivity.

> For the emphasis that Foucault places on the effects of power upon the body results in a reduction of social agents to passive bodies and does not explain how individuals may act in an autonomous fashion (McNay 1992: 3).

McNay also calls attention to one of the major drawbacks of the Foucauldian asexual body in what she describes as gender blindness. This characteristic of the Foucauldian body holds crucial ramifications in realizing the many factors that constitute the social body. McNay argues that the body is of fundamental importance in feminist critique because it is upon the biological difference between the male and female body that the premise of gender bias is formulated and legitimized (McNay 1992:17). McNay further criticizes the Foucauldian body as homogenous and Foucault's hypothesis as disregarding other structures in place that would cut across any clear distinction of the differences between male and female bodies.

> Whilst the body is worked upon by gender constructions, it is also inscribed by other formations: class, race, the system of commodity fetishism. These formations may, to varying degrees, be internally gendered but they also work across gender distinctions, breaking down the absolute polarity between the male and female body. Thus, to use an obvious example, conceptions of the black body cut across and problematize in a fundamental manner any homogeneous category of woman's body (McNay 1992: 37).

McNay's argument against a homogenous category for the female body not only highlights some of the loopholes in Foucault's theory on the social body but also any feminist theory that seeks to unite the experience of all women as homogenous. As

clearly stated by McNay, power constructs worked upon the female body would be vastly different for Black women than White women. Black women have historically been socially, economically and politically marginalised. In contrast, Mntambo's references to multiple modes of production (painting, installation, photography, printmaking) combined with the intertextuality of narratives, denies a homogenous reading of her work as strictly feminist. *The Rape of Europa* is an acknowledgment of multiple discourses.

Dean and Juliet MacCannells' essay *Violence, Power and Pleasure: A Revisionist Reading of Foucault from the Victim Perspective*, is of particular importance as it expressly demonstrates the relationship between violence/power and its effects on women's experience of it. Like Foucault, the MacCannells link discourses on sex and the body to historical relationships of power. However, the MacCannells fervently oppose Foucault's attempts to show that power is devoid of force and available to all even though it is held by just a few.

> […] power is exercised by free subjects only over free subjects and only in so far as they are free (Foucault cited in MacCannells 1993:204).

Contesting Foucault's benign power, the MacCannells (204-205) argue that Foucault's supposition that power is 'neutral' and equally accessible to all does not hold true 'theoretically' or 'empirically' for women. Instead they argue that,

> […] power is not neutral, diffuse and freely available but fiercely protected by those who hold it and their agents […] that threats and the actual use of force and violence remain essential to the exercise of power. [...] hiding violence behind the pretence of 'neutrality' requires substantial concrete historical, institutional, mythic and psychic supports, aggressively promoted throughout the culture and economy. (ibid: 204)

The MacCannells insist that neutrality, rather than being a characteristic of power, acts as a mode of power and is the main technique used by the powerful to cover or justify their use of violence (ibid 204). Through these narratives, they contend that once the 'truth' of the powerful is contested, the 'truth' must and can only be defended and sustained through violent means.

> Wheresoever power is found, violence is sure to be. Wheresoever resistance to power is encountered, force will be applied. Threats or actual application of direct legal or administrative violence back up all power. (ibid.)

It would appear that this 'force applied' in maintaining power is a major discrepancy within Foucault's equally disseminated utopian power. In reality this 'force' is not always benign. In real life victims and perpetrators do exist. This utopian absence of gender begs the question as to whether or not Foucault's power is truly and equally accessible to all.

In their essay Ramazanóglu and Holland describe the importance for feminist readings of gender identification in the social body. They highlight that it is upon heterosexual relationships of domination and women's ability to identify and resist this domination that women are able to regain elements of power. This is alluded to in the visual tropes utilized in Mntambo's reworking of the familiar rape script. In the image Europa lies spread out on the ground naked, vulnerable, unmoving and passive. Above her is the Minotaur, clothed in fur, advancing, active and physically dominating the reclining Europa. The omission of a purely masculine body in the work subverts traditional Western masculine positions of domination and agency. This subtle subversion is both an act of empowerment and recognition of disempowerment.

Through their investigations into the real experiences of women and exploration of Foucauldian theory on power and its relationship to the body and constructs of sexuality, the MacCannells were able to conclude the following:

> […] that the redefinition of sexual and other identities remains subject to ancient power relations and violence even, or especially, in our postmodern-epoch; that if some appear to escape tyranny based on their categorisation it is because they have been allowed to escape only to serve power by masking its effectiveness; that power is not neutral, diffuse and freely available but fiercely protected by those who hold it and their agents; and finally that threats and the actual use of force and violence remain essential to the exercise of power (ibid : 205).

In previous chapters I have suggested that those who escape this tyranny are predominantly white, European and male. While some might argue that Mntambo's

direct citation of the Picasso print is just another attempt to trace the great dichotomy between the experiences of the white European male and black African female I would argue that Mntambo's work does not highlight the polarity that exists between the two but the similarities of the working processes of these artists, a type of camaraderie. Rather than conventionally outlining the physical and contextual differences, Mntambo critically opens up a manner of conversation between the two, which allows for the validation of both Mntambo and Picasso as artists. By citing his work Mntambo employs existing power structures at once acknowledging and re-affirming Picasso's authority as artist as well as her own. She claims a corresponding status, positioning herself as equivalent authority and artist. Paradoxically, by citing this status that is legitimised by pre-existing power structures, Mntambo endorses the very powers she is critiquing.

Power and the Gaze: Internalising the Gaze

If force and the threat of violence are central to upholding all dominations of power then the gaze, power and violence are inextricably linked.

In a conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, Foucault discusses Bentham's Panopticon, a circular prison with cells arranged around a central wall, from which all prisoners could at all times be observed (Foucault 1980:152). In it he identifies visibility as the key feature to surveillance. According to Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon organizes visibility entirely around a dominating overseeing gaze. Foucault describes this visibility as radiating a rigorous and meticulous power.

> There is no need of arms, physical violence, material constraint. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. (ibid:155)

This internalizing of the gaze and its relationship to power and control can be discerned in Berger's hypothesis of women surveying their own femininity as men do (Berger 2008: 41,57). The mirrored image of Mntambo gazing upon herself suggests an internalization of the gaze. Mntambo, in the guise of European culture through its

popular narratives, codes and conventions, gazes upon and judges herself, thus identifying with the very powers which have dictated her actions and visibility as a Black woman.

The MacCannells concede that, "Individuals, rendered powerless by the gaze must identify with the very power shaping their lives if they are to seem to re-gain any power or authority for themselves" (MacCannells 1993: 211).

It has been on these grounds that feminists have sought to redefine the parameters surrounding the access of power and its relationship to identity through images of the body. Feminists have done this by using images of the female body to make visible a range of female identities.[4] Visibility and the control of that visibility through operations of the gaze have been key components in addressing gender and race based power relations, which had previously ignored the capacity for women's agency. Images of women (by the West) have historically been produced as a reflection of men's desire and used to reinforce gender roles. It is through the operations and the application of the gaze as a tool that these structures are implemented and the socio-cultural status quo achieved (MacCannells 1993: 211). Thus, the gaze comes to embody all the requirements of power, and violence.

The MacCannells describe the gaze and its relationship to the power/violence dynamic as having two forms, *instrumental* and *identificatory*. Both are potentially two-way, with the figure of authority gazing upon the victim and the victim looking back (MacCannells 1993:214). The locked gazes of the Minotaur/Zeus and Europa subjects in the Mntambo image visually represent this acknowledgement between victim and authority/perpetrator.

In response to this, the MacCannells describe Foucault's power as "constitutive" and "diffuse" (210). They argue that "replacing the sovereign by *the gaze* renders individual empowerment and self-definition historically there for the taking," thus postulating that individual power can be regained. They continue:

[4] Examples of some South African female artists whose work focuses on notions of identity and frequently incorporate images of the female body in their work include Tracey Rose, Berni Searle and Zanele Muholi.

> We need only follow the same historical lines of force, ridding ourselves of the last vestiges of gender, ethnic and class-based subjectivity, eventually constituting ourselves, each and every one of us in our own individuality and specificity (ibid : 210-211).

It therefore stands to reason that the very gaze whose aim it is to dominate and control through the making of its object visible or invisible can be countered by a similar returned gaze that defies that very power.

The Gaze as a form of Active Resistance

South Africa has a long tradition of resistance photography. The defiance Campaign (1952), the Treason Trial (1958) and the Soweto Riots (1976) were all caught on camera by both recorded and unrecorded photographers. These photographs were pivotal in the documenting of important political events. Haney (2010:104) points out that documentary or 'struggle' photography in South Africa did not follow a single cohesive movement but comprised a wide set of practices working against "a particularly confined and propagandized society." Significantly, many photographs brought attention to the daily struggles of living under the Apartheid regime with depictions of daily life away from the frontline. For many audiences abroad this brought into sharp focus both the humanity of Black South Africans and the inhumane conditions under which they were forced to live.

> With is traditions spanning five decades, photographers changed tactics and approaches, constantly updating what 'resistance' meant throughout the struggle against apartheid. Their images were conceived as participatory objects, forms of agency capable of penetrating barriers erected within South African society itself and communicating the need for international intervention beyond the country's borders. These extensive political projects entailed their own kaleidoscopic set of narratives (Haney 2010:91).

Documentary 'struggle' photography in South Africa made visible to the world what Apartheid and racist regimes internationally wished to remain concealed, i.e. the violence necessary to continue upholding oppressive and racially segregated belief systems. Visibility, the opportunity to control how one is portrayed, how one is *seen,*

opened up numerous possibilities for the many African photographers who wished to create and control visions of themselves, their lifestyles and cultures.

Through the conventions of portraiture African photographers from the late nineteenth century were able to engage with the imaging of an African self (Enwezor 2006: 21-26). These portraits were centred on the African subject, focusing on the subject's singularity and African values of beauty. They were often performative, self-reflective and conceptual, engaging with positions of an African imaginary. These photographs were unlike colonial images which had, up to this point, portrayed the African subject as an exotic specimen.

In his essay *A Useful Dream: Photography as a metaphor of Freedom and Self-Esteem,* Simon Njami articulately discusses this dynamic in African photography:

> Mastering your own image means bringing into the world voices and colours that elude globalisation and the uniformisation, it means refusing to be just the fruit of the other's gaze. It means assuling, in a kind of silent contradiction, your own vision of yourself, following your cultural codes and aesthetics (Njami 2010:12).

In essence the camera became the tool through which the photographer could exert his/her agency and visibility, the means through which this agency was visualized and made concrete.

In her essay *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,* bell hooks identifies a form of the gaze as a site of resistance to "violent" representations of Blacks in film, providing a brief history of the development of this gaze within African American Communities. hooks argues that the punishment of enslaved black people for "looking" informed future African relationships towards the gaze.

> That all attempts to repress our/black peoples' right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an 'oppositional gaze' (hooks 2003:94).

She further argues that "(t)he gaze has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally. Subordinates in relations of power learn experientially that

there is a critical gaze, one that "looks" to document, one that is oppositional. In resistance struggle, the power of the dominated to assert agency by claiming and cultivating "awareness" politicizes "looking" relations– one learns to look a certain way in order to resist"(ibid 2003:95). hooks continues by suggesting that conventional representations of black women have done violence to the image through their "stereotypically degrading" and "dehumanizing" representations. She infers that before racial integration black spectators (particularly of film) derived visual pleasure through the contestation and confrontation of these images (ibid. 95-97).

In Mntambo's image the gaze as resistance is heightened through framing techniques that lead the viewer to gaze into the scene. We are able to watch as the two figures appear to be engaged in an intense gaze that seems to suggest a struggle between submission, domination and resistance between these two. This resistance, and its relationship to looking, seeing and being seen, is in many ways an oppositional gaze to which bell hooks refers. It is an act of looking that is defiant. To cast one's eyes down is to acknowledge the authority of another. To gaze directly into the eyes of the other is to directly question and challenge their authority. Notably in the Picasso print, the woman's ability to resist through this oppositional gaze is denied. The girl's eyes are closed and the dominant frame of the Minotaur leaves little room for the viewer to voyeuristically view the unfolding scene.

The resistance to negative images of Black women, perpetuated in contemporary British culture, is further elucidated by Annecka Marshall in her essay *From Sexual Denigration to Self-Respect: Resisting Images of Black Female Sexuality* (1996). In it Marshall explores the effects and actual opinions of Black woman on the prevalent myths of the Black female as sensuous, animalistic, prostitute, breeder or Sapphire. (ibid:11). Through a series of interviews, Marshall ascertains that many Black women aware of the negative stereotypes linked to their sexuality consciously create positive definitions of the self as a means of counteracting these oppressive myths and controlling images (ibid 21-33). Marshall concedes that Black women, herself included, do not define themselves in terms of racist and sexual images but instead struggle to deconstruct and so reject them (ibid 27).

> We defy the ways in which definitions of Black womanhood have been determined by 'white' people and by Black men and argue that Black women's sense of self, our aspirations and conduct, have been restricted by external definitions of Black female sexuality. We assert that when Black women claim our sexuality as our own for no-one else to pass judgement on; this consciousness can lead to sexual autonomy (Marshall 1996:29).

By creating alternate positive subject identities, Marshall's woman consciously *see* themselves as both defying and contradicting popular myths and stereotypes of Black women's sexuality. Marshall emphasizes that most Black women recognise the fallaciousness of images of Black womanhood and have overwhelmingly rejected them. Marshall concludes that possibilities for change depend on the incorporation of Black woman into systems of power and cites Black women artists, writers and film-makers who challenge stereotypes and celebrate Black power (Ibid: 27).

> Thereby we change our identities as victims of oppression so that we actively resist subordination. By challenging such images Black women are empowered to define and to be ourselves (Marshall 1996: 27).

I would argue that through the application and interruption of the dominant western male gaze and the galvanizing of the rape script and its metaphors Mntambo has done exactly that.

Summary

> Far from being a secondary concern in bringing about social change, challenging controlling images and replacing them with a Black woman's standpoint [**or viewpoint**] is an essential component in resisting systems of race, gender and class oppression. (Collins P.H, cited in Marshall 1990:104)

The use of the gaze in art has many functions. At once the tool with which the rape script is able to operate with its ties to predominantly 'white' masculine domination, power and violence, the gaze is also the weapon used by Black women to return and resist these configurations. To see and be seen is the ultimate verification of one's existence. However, to have control over how one is seen is truly to have autonomy over one's identity.

In this chapter I have discussed how Foucault's theories on sexuality, the body, knowledge and power have influenced feminist thought on possible resistance and acts of agency within Foucault's social body.

> Let us as ask (instead of why) how things work at the level of ongoing subjugation, at the level of those continuous and un-interrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours (Foucault 1980:97).

I have shown how violence, or the threat of violence, is essential in maintaining modes of power. This inextricably links structures of power and violence to the gaze. It is upon Feminist developments of Foucauldian theory on the body, sexuality and the relationship between violence and power that the Mntambo's work is able to resist historical forms of domination and claim authority within a contemporary global art context.

Mntambo's use of visual metaphors and citations makes herself 'visible' within the Western art canon. By employing operations of the gaze she is able to simultaneously acknowledge and resist the reinforcement of Western historical violations of the Black body, thus asserting herself as a powerful Black woman and an artist of agency within Western historical power structures.

Chapter Three Images



Rape Scene (1632), Christian Van Couwenbergh, Strasbourg, Musée des Beaux-Arts



Harvesting Rubber in the Forest (Lusambo) (Congo Free State) 1895, photograph used for tinted photograph.

**There are moods in which one feels the impulse
to enter a tacit protest against too gross an appetite
for pure aesthetics in this starving and sinning world.
One turns half away, musingly, from certain beautiful
useless things.**

Henry James (1843-1916) author of *The Portrait of a Lady*

Chapter 4

A Tacit Protest: The Room Series

Throughout this research I have expressed a great interest in the possibilities of a singular image to narrate multiple stories or texts, as I have referred to them. In this chapter I look at how a combination of my interest in violent narratives embedded in fantasy and my experiences and exposure to violence have driven my artistic concerns.

As mentioned in the introduction, my experience of violence has profoundly affected my work. I have been drawn towards moments and experiences in my life that have heightened/culminated in forms of violence which have shaped my opinion of people and situations in very particular ways. This, combined with my affinity for violent narratives, particularly those steeped in fantasy, is what first drew me to Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa* print.

As a child I was captivated by comic book characters, such as Batman and the X-men. These characters embodied everything I wanted to be. They were strong, beautiful, wealthy, and led exciting double lives filled with adventure. More importantly these characters exhibited traits that reflected the burgeoning of an emotional complexity within myself and mirrored my anxieties about my own experiences and place in the world. I was able to relate to these characters on a fundamental level: they reflected parts of my own personality and said something about my understanding of my own identity.

Through envisaging myself as these characters and playing out their narratives as if my own I was able to vicariously satiate a personal need for agency, adventure and power through imagined acts of violence without the danger of experiencing any of its repercussions such as actual physical injury, incarceration or, worse still, death.

Mntambo's image parallels this process. The imaging of herself within the ancient Greek myth recalled my own fantasies of *becoming* the fictional characters I so

admired as a child. In so doing she is (as I was) able to assimilate their power, strength and agency by portraying herself as those characters.

The Relationship Between Mntambo's Work and My Own

The relationships between the theoretical and practical components of my work are both thematic and methodological. The thematic concerns are located in the engagement with violence and power in relation to women. These broad concerns are manifest in the detail of overlapping texts and references, in their narratives and in the disruption of the singular gaze. The intertextuality and layering are thematic, but they also function on a material level, i.e. in the layering of the paint.

Mntambo's photographic image is not only staged, but is composited using image based computer software for manipulating photographs. Like painting, Photo-shopping images, as Mntambo has done, requires an intense working of multiple layers, often including toolbar options such as paint, brush, erase, cut and paste. Layering as process is an important link between Mntambo's work and my own.

As I have already discussed in the first chapter, photographs themselves draw from a wide range of existing codes and texts found throughout the visual arts. In many ways Mntambo's rendition of *The Rape Of Europa* in digital form echoes the painterly forms of Renaissance painting. Mntambo's referencing of paintings of the High Renaissance and the Picasso print, by implication, suggests that she has drawn on codes and conventions derived from the genre of painting. Thus a reading of her work based on these conventions is possible.

Some of my own reference material includes illuminations from *Bible Moraliseé* (a medieval pictorial adaptation of the Christian Bible), Western mythical narratives and the Western oil painting tradition. The illuminations in the *Bible Moraliseé* were of interest in that they juxtaposed biblical scenes with theological and allegorical interpretative images. I also extensively investigated and examined the imaging of European bodies in Western art, particularly in paintings of the Renaissance.

Although much of the painterly and formal style of Renaissance painting has not been adopted in my work, the use of narrative, allegory and overall sense of encompassing drama found in large scale Renaissance paintings is what I tried to capture in my work. Compositional elements in my work make reference to twentieth century Western painters such a Philip Guston (U.S.A) and Francis Bacon (U.K.) as well as non-Western artists such as Frida Khalo (Mexico). The engagement with iconography, colour, perspective and corporeal quality of paint in these artists' paintings influenced and directed my own painting process.

The Imaging of Violence

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I suggest that paintings that explicitly portray scenes of sexual violence are not necessarily about the particular act of violence being portrayed. In my research I have discussed how images of rape have historically been used to reinforce and sustain the socio-cultural power structures at play. I have looked at how images of sexually violent narratives can be more suggestive of who the 'victims' and 'perpetrators' are and their expected roles in society.

The question I pose to myself in my practical body of work is this: If explicit representations of violence imply the power structures that allow for such an incident to occur, then how does one image sexual violence without reinforcing or perpetuating those very power structures?

My practical body of work consists of a series of paintings in which I attempt to engage with some of the themes associated with representations of violence, particularly sexual violence. My aim is to work with narratives of violence through the materiality of the painted surface and through iconographic imagery that does not overtly reference acts of violence in a linear narrative sequence. Instead, I aim to allude to violence through its absence in the painting. Having said this, I acknowledge the definition of violence as being broad enough to encompass the ways in which disjointed forms and iconographic elements can act in relation to each other in ways that might give rise to effects of violence. The violence is engendered through

the use of visual strategies, through the use of allegorical themes, metaphors and symbols.

These two areas of the work can be summed up as follows:

1. the process of painting and the exploration of paint – its form, and colour - as a medium
2. the engagement with disrupted narratives and allegory as they relate to the imaging of violence and sexuality.

Violence is most popularly depicted as random and chaotic. In my research I have shown that this is not the case. Violence is systematic and controlled. It works through existing power structures and is mirrored in the artworks subjected to this violence/power dynamic.

The psychology of violence, rather than the depiction of violence, was what I was interested in capturing. Through the use of texture, colour and composition I hoped to capture some of the characteristics I associated with violence – corporeal chaos in the midst of structures of control.

As a starting point I began looking at Francis Bacon's compositional style and the simplification of symbols and forms in Philip Guston's work and how these two artists had used paint and composition to relay violence. What I found most compelling about these two artists' works was the division of spatial planes into flat controlled surfaces and the reduction of colour in their works. I decided to adopt this formal approach in my own painting style.

While investigating the use of allegory in European painting I came across a reproduction of an illumination depicting Levites's Wife[22] Cycle in the Bible Moraliseé (1215-30).[23] The illumination chronicles a detailed account of Levite and his wife's quest for shelter and confrontation with the local men of Gibeah. The following is a shorthand version of the illumination's depicted sequence of events:

[22] Also referred to as Levite's concubine
[23] Levites's Wife cycle, Bible Moraliseé, ca. 1215-30. Vienna, Osterreichische National Bibliothek, cod 2554,fol.65v.

> The locals are seen arriving at the elderly man's door that has offered Levite and his wife shelter for the evening. The locals demand Levite be relinquished to them so they may engage in intimate (sexual) acts with him. The old man refusing to give up his guest offers up his daughter and Levite's wife instead. Finally Levite himself hands over his wife. The locals temporarily appeased spend the evening gang raping Levite's wife. In the morning Levite finds his wife sprawled on the threshold, her hands reaching for safety. Levite then asks her to get up. Receiving no response Levite places her on his donkey and rides home. At home Levite chops his [presumed dead] wife into twelve pieces and sends her body parts throughout the territory of Israel. Using the parts of his wife's body Levite is able to rally the tribes of Israel against the Benjamites. Israel, outraged that such an atrocity could occur within their own kind, then bands together to punish the Benjamites for Levite's wife rape and murder. A war ensues and the Benjamites are defeated. (The Bible, Judges 19:1-29)

The allegorical narrative of Levite's wife works to condemn the cruel treatment of women and foreworn of its consequences (in this case war) through the extreme violence detailed in its narrative. However not once is Levite's culpability addressed. The notion of national violence as a consequence of localized domestic transgressions appealed to my belief in violence as transferred through the acts of individuals and perpetuated in the home. I began creating a body of work using the metaphor of the home as a site of psychological violence. Each of the paintings in my body of work represent a room or space in a house, and embodies a particular memory, feeling or anxiety around violence that resided in my mind.

Intrigued by the use of dissected body parts as an allegory for the violence done to women as well as the tool employed to rally against this very violence, the body and its parts became symbolic agents of violence. Hands, feet and fragmented body parts feature heavily in my work. The fragmented body became a metaphor for the fragmented self and the duality in violence and pleasure that these body parts could impart. The hands, capable of creating, holding, healing and communicating are

equally capable of destroying, hurting and beating. Hands can be a sign of femininity when nails are painted red or masculinity when they have hair. Feet take us to our destinations or stop us in our tracks. Bare feet are vulnerable but can also inflict intense injury when used to kick or defend. Red and pink high heels and plug sockets (as opposed to the 'masculine' plug) are important markers of female sexuality in my work. Eyes I adopted as signifiers of visibility and voyeurism while bugs and teeth were my symbolic markers of the grotesque, things that bite – monsters.

While I have deployed several recurring motifs in my works it is important to note that the meaning of these symbols is subject to change according to the viewers' associations to the iconography used in the paintings. "[…] [A]lthough every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing" (Berger 1972:3).

An example of this is in the reception of *Water Closet*. Compositionally the painting needed something to break the monotony of the white toilet against the blue tiles. I decided to add a splash of red paint onto the toilet seat. This can easily be interpreted as a marker of menstrual blood and has been on several occasions. This was not a conscious intention. The red could represent a splatter of bodily fluid but not specifically from a woman's menstrual cycle, not necessarily a woman's blood either. It was meant as a marker of a wound, an attempt to suggest incidence of sexual violence.

My decision not to portray violence explicitly meant that I would have to apply the violence in the way I used paint, and in the structure of the composition. I used colour, texture and compositional divisions of planes on the canvas surface to create jarring scenes and dynamic compositions.

Painting: The Process of Image Making

Layering as process played an important part in the development of iconography in the works. When I began the series of paintings, I made a number of sketches of

several rooms from memory. In these I loosely placed figures and objects that I associated with the rooms. Each room would be allocated a specific thematic colour that I associated with that room's overall purpose. So for example, *Bathing, Submerged* and *Water Closet,* all of which were spaces I associated with water were, predominantly painted in a range of blues. In the process, many of these colours changed and began to include other colours, but the overall impression of a dominant colour would remain.

Due to the slow drying properties of oil paint, the number of layers required to complete one painting and the time constraints involved in completing a body of work, the first two layers of all my paintings were painted in acrylic washes. Paintings were worked on simultaneously allowing one layer to dry as another was put on a different canvas. This meant that changes continued to happen across the surfaces of several works simultaneously over long periods of time.

Each layer of paint/image influenced the layer after it. As shapes, colours and lines were wiped away or covered in paint, new shapes, colours and images began to emerge. Many of the initial layers were done in washes that were brushed on with quick strokes. Sometimes paint was dripped, thrown or even pooled onto the canvas to create those initial interesting marks. In all the paintings, washes underneath often determined what kinds of objects would be painted in following layers. For example, the wash beneath the right hand figure in *Leviathan* looked like a fire hydrant, and so I painted in a fire hydrant. Originally the image comprised two portraits trapped in circles. As the painting progressed, the circles metamorphosed into other body parts such as lips and protruding limbs. Brush strokes became hands, flicks of paint became insects, circles become a mirror and the inside of a mouth; variations on colour saturation across the surface became the line of a curtain. Steadily, the image no longer resembled the original drawing. In its place a complex play between chance, the imagination and images that emerged from my psyche were layered and juxtaposed densely upon one another.

When I began working on *Guarded Passage*, I had no particular image I wanted to show, only the general feeling of weight and oppression on the body. This gradually

changed as elements in the brushstrokes and washes led to the formation of distinct beastly figures. It was only once the first three layers of washes and glazes had been painted that the image of the tooth-horned multi-eyed beast appeared and along with it the addition of horns on the two left-hand side figures. Perhaps these were influenced by the intense research into the myth of the Minotaur and Greek mythology.

This process of layering and chance combined with deliberate image making ignited the emergence of a particular language that I could develop and use in later works. Hands, feet, shoes, teeth, and fragmented planes superimposed on identifiable domestic spaces became the iconography for the visual metaphors I would deploy in works that followed.

All the paintings were initially divided into two basic planes which constituted floor and wall. *Bathing* was the first in the series of works that began to clearly define the spatial context of an imagined domestic environment. These planes were painted in flat saturated colour. This in effect shrinks the viewer's field of vision. This lack of visual depth brought focus to the quality of the paint and washes applied to the surface.

There is an immediacy and visceral quality to paint and painting that allows for dramatic and often surprising surfaces textures. In *Guarded Passage* and *The Study: A Cabinet of Curiosities* glazes applied to textured surfaces such as the figures in the pit and the bust on the top shelf, respectively, draw the viewer's attention to the marks and images underneath and the surface quality of the paint. In contrast to the divided planes of the surface painted in flat saturated colour the objects and figures that inhabited these spaces were intensely painted with often thick layers of paint. Some of these were then washed over in oil glaze, the glaze collecting in the rough surfaces of the already applied creases of paint creating the illusion of translucency and shadowing.

In *Leviathan, Bathing* and *Memory: Neighbour Beating with Shoe* the paint was applied with equal intensity across the surface of the canvas. This further reduced the perspectival quality of the image. These first few paintings had marks that covered

every inch of the canvas, making it difficult for the viewer to isolate a specific focal point.

Guarded Passage, the last of the easel size paintings, marked a departure from the densely layered compositional elements in the previous works. I decided to move away from the density of imagery that covered every inch of the canvas towards a simplification of iconography allowing a reading of the work that would not visually overwhelm the viewer. This meant dividing spatial elements, figures, shapes and forms over a series of paintings instead of cramming everything into one work.

This decision precipitated the Room series which comprised six large paintings. *Submerged, The Study,* and *Pink Bed* are displayed as one larger work constituting four panels, the lines and planes in each painting spilling out onto the adjacent work. The four panels each represent one room in a home, the effect of which would be a panoramic view of the imagined interior spaces of a house. These three works thematically dealt with the imaging of sexual violence. *A Parody: Reclining Nude* and *Bending over Backwards* were the last two of the larger works. Moving away from sexual violence these two works were an engagement with research I had done on the violence/ power paradigm and its associations with representations of the female body and its links to my own identity as an artist and woman. *Water Closet* was an extension of the earlier *Bathing* painting.

The juxtaposition of smooth and flat surface planes with more textured and raised painterly brush marks was a deliberate attempt to play with tensions within the materiality of the surface. This tension was further heightened by the distortion of space and perspective most notable in *Bathing, Submerged* and *A Parody: Reclining Nude.*

Dance of Laocoön was the last painting in the series of paintings to be completed. Embedded in the three figures are the outlines of El Greco's figures referenced from his oil painting *Laocoön* (1610). El Greco's dramatic rendition of this mythical narrative with his ominous rolling clouds and stretched out contorted figures drew me to the image. *Laocoön* (1610) is based on the Greco-Roman mythological deaths of a Trojan priest of Poseidon and his sons, Antiphantes and Thymbraeus. Laocoön and

his sons were strangled by a sea serpent as punishment for attempting to warn his countrymen about the Trojan Horse.

Dance of Laocoön is a break away from my earlier work. The spatial divides, reminiscent of Bacon's interiors, are divided into two circular parts - wall and floor with three figures dominating the foreground. Outlined in the washes on the back wall are objects referenced in previous paintings. Embedded in the female figures are the outlines of El Greco's *Laocoön*'s male nudes.

This last painting is an ode to the works that had influenced my process and research. The combination of the mythical death narrative and the inclusion of iconography from previous paintings was the symbolic end to the production of this particular series of works.

Apollo was the result of experimentation into working with types of plaster and plaster finishes inspired by the fresco works I had been looking at in my research into Renaissance painting iconography. The figure in *Apollo* is based on a statue I had photographed in Rome. The height and angle at which the photograph was taken in combination with the proximity and the quality of my camera resulted in a foreshortening of the statues foot and distortion of the remainder of the figure. At the time I had been looking at representations of mythical gods in Western art as well as representations of the body. The photograph appealed to me, as it seemed to encompass Western ideals of power, latent sexuality and the human figure. It seemed fitting to transform into *Apollo,* the Greek god of art, music poetry and knowledge.

The perspective of the original photographic image was kept, emphasizing the foreshortening of the statue from below. Once the image was complete I disrupted it by superimposing another figure of a mockingly effeminate version of the statue, adding high heels, a bra and painting the toenails red. This was done in oil paint, sketchily drawn on with a brush. I then added a few other contemporary symbols, the fan, a CCTV camera and tiny figures at the statutes feet, one even pushing a pram.

Preparing Venetian stucco proved time consuming, costly and laborious. This resulted in the production of only three works in the medium (*Apollo, El Fauno* and *Bare*). First a keycoat had to be applied to the board to allow the plaster to adhere to its surface. Then a thin layer of Venetian stucco had to be applied relatively quickly due to its fast drying time. This then needed several hours to cure. The plaster layer then had to be sanded and smoothed down. This process had to be repeated twice more before the surface was ready to work on. The smooth plaster surface worked wonderfully with the first layer of acrylic washes however the plaster did not hold water based colours very well and so I was only able to apply three washes before the colour turned muddy and came off the surface. Oil paint held much better but its extensive drying time along with its textural and voluminous properties made it difficult to seal the plaster. I decided to work first in acrylic paint then paint the last layer in oils. Once the oils had dried I sanded back the surface and image once again revealing the shapes of the plastered surface. The entire image was then sealed with a thin layer of cobra wax. Once the wax had sealed the entire surface was polished with a soft cloth.

After the oil paint had sufficient time to dry I sanded most of it off exposing the original layers and paint underneath creating a dialogue between the original image of the Roman statue and the one I had so effeminately defaced.

<u>The Painted Line Between Horror and Humour</u>

A recent visitor to my studio described my paintings as ‘soul snatchers’. At the time I found this quite amusing. It occurred to me that what she saw in the iconography of the painting was horror rather than the intended dark humour.

Ironically all the paintings began on a serious note, each with a particular idea or image I had in mind pertaining to either an unsettling event I had experienced or read about. Through the process of layering and the chance forms that took shape when paint was splattered and wiped off or onto the canvas, visual jests began to emerge.

My intention was never to frighten, chastise or teach. Rather, it was to reflect on the

ironies of the relationships we have with images of violence and actual acts of violence. I consider the mocking tone in many of my works as a type of criticism on the narrative of violence that a particular work represents.

The works are colourful and comic at first glance, with humorous elements such as bobbing breasts in a bath (*Submerged)*, false teeth in a jar (*The Study: A Cabinet of Curiosities)*, and a toe sticking out of a striped sock (*Memory: Neighbour Beating with Shoe).* The relationship between the iconography and form of the work is where the violence lies. The violence is in the metaphors, allegories and symbols that are visible but not always tangible, ubiquitous but elusive.

This uneasy relationship is strongly accented in *Pink Bed* and *The Study: A Cabinet of Curiosities*. In these works humour is used as a tool to disrupt narrative and iconography. In *Pink Bed* the lonely outlined figure of a hollow man with only a knife and fork to defend himself appears to be falling off a little girl's bed as the shadow of a beastly figure threatens to engulf him. Originally the painting was to be predominantly in red, the bed white and the floors in washes of peach: an adult's room. But as I started to paint, the colours transformed into those associated with young girl's room - the bed became pink, the wooden floors turned into fleshy peach carpets and the walls got covered in a magenta peacock design wallpaper.

The idea for *The Study: A Cabinet of Curiosities* came while researching the history of museum ethnographic exhibitions particularly in relation to African cultures. The term 'cabinet' historically described a room rather than a piece of furniture. A cabinet of curiosities in Renaissance Europe was a room filled with objects of varying categories which included religious and historical relics, works of art, antiquities, as well as objects belonging to geology, ethnography, archaeology and natural history. Historically these cabinets contained numerous medical and anthropological specimens collected by rich patrons and museums as a marker of collective knowledge and power.

I decided I would paint my own cabinet of curiosities. The dual definition of *study* as both a room and act of learning linked with what I was doing at the time (research)

and the iconography I was employing in my work. The term *cabinet* also held special significance because of its archaic definition - room- as well as its contemporary definition as a piece of furniture used to enclose, safeguard and display objects of cultural value.

On the first shelf of my cabinet of curiosities I painted three heads. The first had three profiles and was painted to accentuate the fleshiness of the face. The second was the interior of the head. Here I painted multiple skull profiles. The third was painted as a shadowy outline with teeth barely visible. On the second shelf I placed a bottled protruding smiling mouth and a bottle of 'eyes' reminiscent of medical specimens found in many biology museums. All the objects placed on the shelf are a collection or store of the symbols I had used in other works - a lexicon of imagery.

On the entrance wall I placed two sets of hands, the larger pair of hands on either side of the smaller set of hands that refer to adult and child. The relationship between the two sets of hands and the objects in the cabinet of curiosities are visually paralleled. The irony is in this relationship and the manner in which the objects are painted. The hands, cartoon like, are painted in soft pinks and whites while the objects on the shelves have a far more fleshy quality and are cast in shadow.

The objects appear comic and absurd in comparison to what the positioning of the hands on the walls implies - an adult pinning a child to the wall.

Personal Narratives of Violence

Preferring not to use photographs as references, the images created in my paintings are based on what the memory/iconic representations of what these rooms and spaces look like. In it are the projections of experiences I have had in similar spaces in the past.

While the following narratives do not have to be known to read the paintings, I hope that by describing them some light will be shed on the use of iconography, symbolism and satire I have used in my paintings.

The idea for the works *Bathing, Submerged* and *Water Closet* came whilst taking a bath at home. The steam created by the hot water had begun to fog up the dark blue tiles on the walls. The combination of condensation and tile design produced strange figures and shapes on the surface of the tiles. Reflected in the tiles amongst these strange shapes was the hazy figure of my own body in the bath. The moment was reminiscent of one of my favourite Frida Khalo works*, What I saw in the Water* (1938). In the bath water Khalo sees the reflections of pivotal moments in her life. In the painting Khalo's toes stick out of the bath water and are reflected back into it. Other scenes in the water include the portrait of her parents, two women lying on bed (many believe this to be a reference to her bisexuality), a skyscraper emerging from a volcano, traditional Mexican dresses, a shell shot full of holes, flowers and fruits.

Like Khalo I saw my life reflected in the tiles. In the hazy sheen of the dew covered tiles I saw the deformed shapes of monsters amongst which my reflection languidly lay. This evoked a stronger image in my mind. Me at the age of nine, my mother away on holiday and I under my neighbour's care, sitting in their bath watching the handle repeatedly being turned as my neighbour's grandfather tried to get in and me, sitting in bath water, naked, still and silent, grateful that I had had the foresight to lock the door.

Bathrooms (for me at least) are not the private spaces reserved for private thoughts but are spaces of imagined privacy and taboo. As adults we have the unquestionable authority to allow or disallow persons into our private spaces. This does not hold true for children.

The following is a true account of a personal narrative which I have referenced in the works *Leviathan, Guarded Passage* and *Memory: Neighbour Beating with Shoe.*

> Up until the age of five I lived with my mother in a single bedroom flat in a building of apartments inhabited by predominantly Portuguese immigrants. Portuguese families that I knew at the time were fiercely patriarchal, with many women expected to stay at home and look after the kids while the men were at work. I did not as yet have any siblings and as my mother had to work, I spent many afternoons in the care of

> our upstairs neighbour and in the company of her two children, a boy and a girl who were a few years older than myself. One afternoon while we were playing in the passage way of their home, their father arrived uncharacteristically early. The exact sequence of events that followed or the exact words that were exchanged between husband and wife, I do not quite remember. What I do remember is hiding under the passage table, sandwiched between my playmates watching as their father viciously beat their mother, who at this point was crouching in the far corner of the opposite room, with what appeared to be a black slipper. When he was done, he casually walked towards the passage table, a moment I shall never forget, bent over and greeted us smiling. I smiled back. Why, I do not know. Perhaps in my youthful naivety I thought if I retuned the smile I would not get beaten. Maybe more truthfully I smiled because he had smiled at me first, my automatic response to him – as ingrained as saying please or thank you.

In *Memory: Neighbour Beating with Shoe* my playmates' father is reflected in the shadows on the walls, ceiling and light, their mother a solitary yellow shape next to the furniture. Empty chairs and wardrobes, corners and picture frames, fill up the rest of the rooms.

There is an implicit power and control in the depiction of images that re-create these narratives. The power is no longer in the subject matter of the narrative but is in the artist's creative license to manipulate, control and redefine the parameters of these experiences. As the re-creator I am able to act with a sense of agency through the control of the tone, iconography and manipulations of the paint on the surface of the image, an agency that perhaps was denied when these incidents occurred.

Dispersing the Gaze

I have spoken extensively on discourse on the gaze in relation to representations of the female body. I have also suggested that the gaze can be used as form of resistance to dominations of violence and power. When making these works I was conscious of

a need to resist a gaze that objectified the subject it depicted. I did not want to create works that glorified violence, re-victimized its victims and empowered its perpetrators by 'freezing' them in the act. Early on I realized that dispersing the gaze would be instrumental in subverting violent narratives that relied on the objectifying of the female body.

Several strategies were necessary in this dispersal of the gaze. Explicit scenes of violence involving recognisable human figures where completely disregarded. Instead symbolism and body parts were used to stand in for the whole. The paintings were not given a single focal point. Many of the works are comprised of multiple areas of equal density and equally saturated colour. The numerous elements of the images compete for attention. This meant the gaze of the viewer constantly moves across the canvas surface. The viewer no longer has power over a singular subject it gazes upon. The paintings, a mass of colour, line, texture, symbolism and iconography begin to overpower the viewer's eye.

The denial of a singular focal point upon which the viewer is able to rest his/her eye is a conscious subversion of a gaze that seeks to dominate and control. The viewer's eye is continuously forced to move around the canvas. This is achieved through scattered planes of stark, often garish, colour interdispersed with intensely worked and textured areas of paint. A multitude of forms and objects overlap and occupy multiple planes each treated with the same intensity as the next. The effect is jarring. One could say that the forced continuous movement of the viewer's eye over the painted surface creates a dynamic gaze. The paintings thus deny the viewer a singular point of view upon which to focus their attention.

One of the paintings that dealt specifically with discourses on the historical 'male Western gaze' is *Submerged*. During my practical process I began to think of bathing and water as sexual motifs. After browsing the Internet for images of women bathing I found many of these images to have an underlying eroticism, as if the viewer was privy to a private scene. The images of bathing figures were (unsurprisingly) predominantly female. The combination of exposed body parts and female figures

either soaking, lathering, or undressing seemed quite erotically charged particularly from an outsider's perspective.

In an attempt to subvert these erotic narratives but still maintain an overarching theme of sexual violence I decided to paint the viewer into the image, overtly implicating the one who holds the gaze as the perpetrator. In this painting, the presence of the perpetrator is in the feet that are responsible for the submerging. The bath is painted from the perspective of the viewer looking from above, and the feet enter at the bottom of the canvas. I decided that the figure in the bath would be an exaggerated and somewhat comic misrepresentation of womanhood – playing with the ways in which women are objectified. As a spoof of art historical paintings of women with exposed breasts, I decided I would paint the 'perfect' woman. If two exposed breasts were erotic, what about four or eight or ten? Surely this would increase the erotic value?

A grotesque painting of a mock female form in the process of being drowned in its own bath began to evolve. Multiple bobbing 'breasts' float on the surface of the bath water, the face of the breast-figure is completely submerged as two hands on either side of the bath indicate an attempt to escape, as one large foot pushes the figure under the water and another enters the frame. The mockery is thus not of the woman, but reflects the gaze back onto the viewer/perpetrator/the one who gazes.

Another work that unsettles the gaze is *A Parody: Reclining Nude.* As the title suggests, the painting is a take on the Western oil painting tradition of representing reclining female nudes. The painting is a mock self-portrait. The sofa is based on the one I have at home, the position of the figure on the sofa is how I sit on it, and the figure a large female with a male face protruding from her profile is a comic comment of my own bisexuality as well as the numerous female white nudes that I look nothing like. A key feature in the work is the inclusion of multiple sets of eyes on the figure. This was an allusion to the acknowledgement of a multiple gaze reflected upon and in myself and through this association - my work.

After the studio: The Creative Workshop – an Experiment in Process

Towards the end of the completion of my studio body of work I decided to run a three day creative workshop.

My initial reason for running the workshop, as well as taking part in it, was to create a forum in which I could critically engage with others on the topic of my research. I also hoped to create a collaborative work that in some way would disrupt my own processes of production. In this regard the workshop was more about my questioning of working alone as much as it was a culmination of all my ideas and processes over the past two years.

It is important to note that the workshop was an extension of my own practice. At the time of the workshop the paintings I had been working on for the practical component of my research were complete. The workshop in essence was an experiment into the possibilities for extending my written and practical research beyond the studio space as well as looking at alternative modes of production within the parameters of the themes I had been working with in my written research.

The workshop was held in the Division of Visual Arts first year studio space located next to the Wits School of Arts. Participants (including myself) worked collaboratively in pairs to create artwork that addressed themes of violence and its relationship to sexuality and identity. The artworks took the form of collage, installation, drawing and painting. Participants were asked to draw from existing representations and objects. These included masks, sculptures, photographs, drawings, prints and paintings. Participants were also shown images referenced in my thesis, including Titian's *The Rape of Europe*, Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa*, Poussin's painting titled *Rape of the Sabine Women* and Giambologna's sculpture of the same name as well as images of my own work. These images were later discussed in relation to themes in the theoretical component of my research. A slide show of some of their works was made available. Participants also drew on their own practices and used imagery that had been developed during the workshop. These included sketches drawn from specimens in the Wits Bio-Science Museum, images found in magazines and on the internet, x-rays and past works and sketches.

Participants came from an array of professional and cultural backgrounds. All the participants had an interest in the representation of violence and had worked with the human figure in some artistic form. All the participants were given a copy of the theoretical and practical project outline along with an image of Mntambo's *The Rape of Europa.*

During the workshop we explored ways in which the relationship of violence, sexuality and gender are/can be represented in non-verbal forms such as painting, collage, drawing and installation. The workshop aimed at questioning – through the making process and the interrogation of existing imagery – the ways in which certain representations of the human body reinforce historical power relationships.

Group discussions reflected on questions such as how these power relationships are portrayed/constructed in images, particularly in painting; what their function is, if any, and what the role of the artist is in her/his construction/reproduction of these images.

Through a process of deconstructing, re-assembling and layering of existing iconography and available references/objects, we explored existing references as metaphors for violence. Using Mntambo's print and her choice of references we discussed prevailing socio-cultural power relations and links between narratives of sex and violence to postcolonial identity and historical relationships of power.

The collaborative process proved to be both dynamic and intense. Out of the five groups, six large scale works were created in less than three days. I was surprised at both the strong similarities and vast differences in approaches to work, development and use of iconography. There are two collaborative works that I would like to discuss in particular. The first is Caroline's and mine, and the second is Marlene and Storm's. The processes engaged with in these two examples were vastly different and, in my opinion, were the most successful.

Caroline and I

After a few minutes of discussion it became quite clear that Caroline and I had very little in common and indeed very different backgrounds. We decided that in order to create a work successfully we would have to work with what we had in common - our love of drawing and experimentation. We decided that the violence would come through the process of working simultaneously on a large scale drawing rather than working with a specific narrative of violence which we did not share.

Using images we had collected from the Wits Biology Museum on the first day of the workshop we began drawing on two large sheets of brown card. I would put a mark down or draw an object thinking that I would return to it later, only to find it completely transformed by Caroline in ways I had not imagined. This process continued back and forth. I found the process to be both liberating and frustrating. Used to completely controlling what images I would create the collaboration forced me to question my own penchant for working solo.

The manner in which we worked also took on a performative style. I would work on the left hand corner and Caroline on the right. And so we continued switching positions from left to right top to bottom every ten minutes until we felt the image to be complete.

The end result was, to our great amusement, a frenetic amalgamation of shapes and colour erratically dispersed along the surface. In the end neither of us was able to clearly discern who had added what to the images.

The two figures we had created faced one another in a type of push-pull conversation that mimicked our collaborative process. Although the final image did not necessarily speak to themes I had dealt with in my own practical work pertaining to violence, I felt the disruption of process offered intriguing possibilities for future works. The combination of strongly contrasting colour and aggressive line gave the image an overall quirky quality that was not unlike some of my own work.

Marlene and Storm

Choosing to reference and subvert the images that I had presented during my presentation of Mntambo's work, Marlene and Storm decided to create an installation-based performance piece that would tackle the notions of purely male perpetrators. The two spent many hours researching mythological goddesses that were the perpetrators of violence. Their interest became the representation of agency in powerful mythological female characters and the ability of these characters to also inflict serious damage upon those who they felt deserving of their wrath.

The project became a multilayered installation that included painting and drawing across a three dimensional surface which the women had pieced together using cardboard, canvas, cut out magazine pictures and pieces of scrap cloth. The two women used a projector to outline their own bodies onto to the backing installation. These figures would later be transformed into goddesses. The artists would later act out the oppressed subjects - walking heads bowed and covered. The two women referenced the following three ancient Greek goddesses in their installation: Circe[24], Medusa[25] and Artemis[26]. Associations to Circe are depicted in the human figure with the pig head, while snakes drawn on the floor of the installation reference Medusa and a reference to Artemis is made in the multi-breasted standing figure wearing a crown on the left hand side.

The Greco-Roman references to narratives and iconography paralleled my own work, both written and practical. This symbolic use of the artists' outlined bodies superimposed with Greco-Roman mythological imagery had strong links to Mntambo's choice of imagery and process in her work as well.

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[24] Circe (meaning falcon) is a minor Goddess of magic the sister of Pasiphaë, the wife of king Minos and the mother of the Minotaur. She was banished by her father to live in solitude on the isle of Aeaea after murdering her husband the prince of Colchis. Circe's vast knowledge of herbs and potions was infamously used to transform her enemies into animals. In Homer's *Odyssey* Circe invites Odysseus' crew to a feast. The meal was laced with a magic potion and with a wave of her wand the crew were turned into swine.

[25] Medusa is the iconic mythological monster who had venomous snakes as hair. Gazing upon her face would turn onlookers into stone.

[26] Artemis Ephesia is a statue of a many breasted woman (also known as Diana of Ephesia) that resided in the temple of Ephesia. The origins and cult surrounding the figure vary but many believe the sculpture to be a symbol of fertility and Artemis a representation of the mother Goddess. (wiki and pdf download.)*

Surprisingly the image of the multi-breasted women had been one I had used in a painting as a marker of female sexuality and violence - *Submerged*. What made this more astounding was the fact that I had not shown this particular work to the group. I had also never heard, seen or read images pertaining to the sculpture of Artemis.

What was most compelling about this collaborative work was the engagement with multiple narratives interweaved with the layering of multiple modes of production - painting, drawing, performance and installation. Marlene and Storm had produced a work that was vastly different from my own in both imagery and process. However thematic concerns between my body of work, Mntambo's image and Marlene and Storms' collaborative piece had very strong links. I found this aspect the most fascinating – that the possibilities for such an array of different and dynamic processes could be derived from a similar theoretical viewpoint.

Overall the collaborative process was something I felt I would continue with in later projects. In addition, the workshop proved to be an excellent testing ground not only for the theoretical ideas I had been mulling over in my written research but also alternative creative approaches to dealing with themes of violence. Most surprisingly, it opened up new avenues for possible new modes of production and collaborations in the future.

Summary

To close this chapter I would like use a paragraph I wrote on my understanding of the nature of violence:

> Violence lives in the recesses of our minds, either as constant threat or constant reminder of its transgressions. The effects of violence last long after the physical wounds have healed. The mind is thus like a house divided into many rooms. Residues of violence seep into these rooms like the damp that creeps into the mortar and bricks of our homes, each room containing in it some aspect of our personality and the events that shaped that particular way of thinking in us.

The series of paintings discussed in this chapter were created through a process of combined personal experience, chance and narrative - a combined layering of stories and settings of both the real and the imagined.

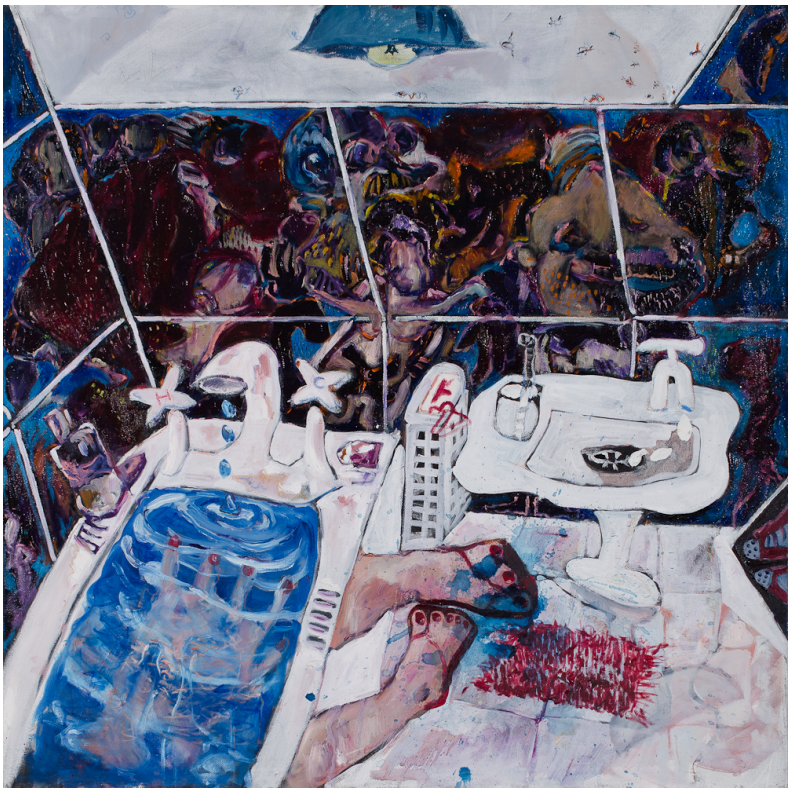
Work processes have involved both the disruption of surface material and the distortion of imagery to convey the seeming fluidity in the relationship between sexuality and violence. Allegory and metaphor play a key part of meaning making in these works. Interiors, particularly those indicative of private spaces like the sofa and bathroom, have been used as symbolic internal spaces of the psyche.

Through the engagement with the properties of paint and the use of satire in the paintings I had hoped to highlight the uneasy relationship between actual violence and the imaging of violence. Allegory, iconography and formal properties of paint were used to comment on the elusive and ubiquitous nature of violence. In the process of creating this body of work a visual language has begun to emerge. This has included the possibility of extending the project outside the studio space. My aim was never to explicitly portray images of violence but allude to their narratives, function and relationship with sexuality and the effects on the psyche through both the affect and narrative possibilities of working with paint.

Chapter Four Images



Leviathan (2010), acrylic and oil on canvas, 81 x 93cm



Bathing (2011), acrylic and oil on canvas, 85 x 85 cm



Guarded Passage (2012) acrylic and oil on canvas, 76 x 101cm



Memory: Neighbour Beating with Shoe (2011), acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 92 cm



Water Closet (2012), acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 180 cm



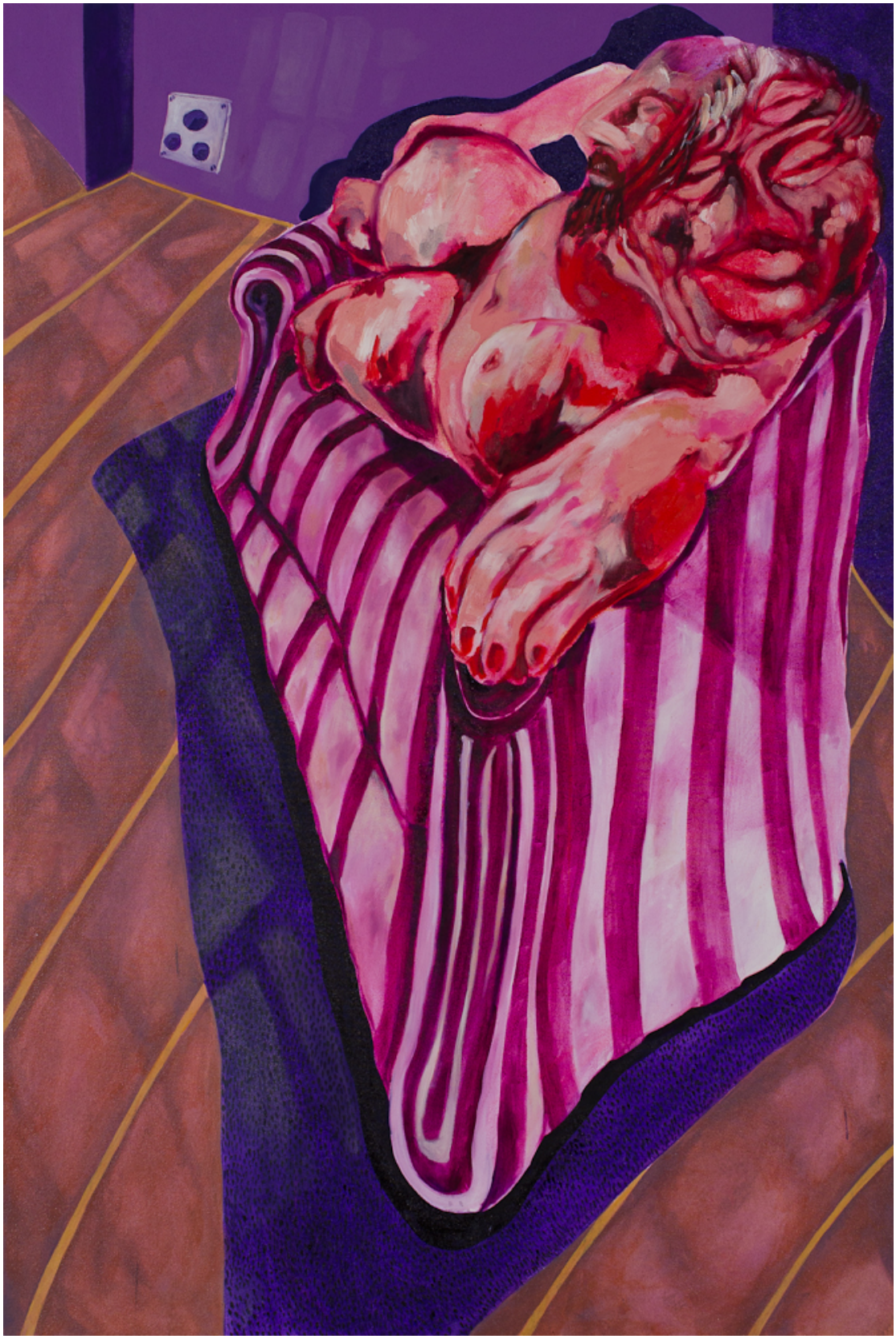
Submerged (2012), acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 180 cm



Pink Bed (2012), acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 180 cm



The Study: A Cabinet of Curiosities (2012), acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 180 cm



A Parody: Reclining Nude (2012), acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 180 cm



Dance of Laocoön (2012), acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 180 cm



Apollo (2011), acrylic and oil on Venetian stucco sealed with wax 119 x 84 cm



Untitled (2012), Caroline and Gina, mixed media on brown card, aprox. 150 x 200 cm



Untitled (2012), Marlene and Storm, digital photographic still of performance installation, aprox. 300 x 200 x 250 cm

Europa

And he rises, ever so gently, and slowly edges
From the dry sand toward the water, further and further,
And swimming now, with the girl, trembling a little
And looking back to the land, and the other resting easy
Along the shoulder, and her flowing garments
Filling and fluttering in the breadth of the sea-wind.

***Metamorphoses,* Ovid** (II. 870-875)

Conclusion

This research critically examines the imaging of sexuality and violence in Nandipha Mntambo's staged photographic work *The Rape of Europa* (2009). In it Mntambo actively engages with the complexities and ambiguities that occur in the imaging of Black bodies in Western narratives of sexuality and violence. The use of Mntambo's own body as representative of both Zeus/Minotaur and Europa characters in her work and therefore Greek mythological narrative make her presence visible within the Western historical art canon. This act of agency asserts Mntambo's identity as an artist but also opens up certain ambiguities that exist between the contexts of her image and the 'texts' she has referenced. The three main 'texts' that Mntambo references in her work are the Ancient Greek mythological narrative *The Rape of Europa;* the Picasso print *Minotaur Kneeling over Sleeping Girl* (1933) and the Western genre of oil painting during the period of the High Renaissance.

In this research I have critically reflected on the possible meanings of the multiple narratives employed in Mntambo's digital photographic print. My principle engagement with Mntambo's image is founded on Victor Burgin's hypothesis for the photograph as a type of 'text'.

In *The Photograph* Graham Clarke illuminates on Burgin's hypothesis of the photograph as a layered text and the precarious relationship between the artist, the photograph and these texts.

> […]the photograph is itself the product of a photographer. It is always the reflection a specific point of view, be it aesthetic, polemic, political, or ideological. (….) The photographer imposes, steals, re-creates the scene/seen according to a cultural discourse. (…) however, the photographer encodes the terms of reference by which we shape and understand a three-dimensional world. It thus exists within a wider body of reference and relates to a series of wider histories, at once aesthetic, cultural, and social. (Clarke 1997: 29)

Mntambo's reference to multiple 'texts' alludes to a wider context of intertextuality and layering, which is reinforced by the layering process in the construction of her image. Her choice in the photographic print as a medium links her image to historical and contemporary discourses on the politics of photography in Africa. Historically photographs of Africa and African subjects have imaged its subjects as inferior and exotic specimens to be studied. These images constituted a wider colonial context of violence and 'consumption' of black bodies. The subject's i.e. African's point of view and experience was conspicuously omitted from these images (predominantly photographs and postcards). African photographers have since fought to portray the realities of their lives and produce images that reflect an African imaginary that is conscious of the complexities and diversity of its African subjects.

Similarly Black women artist, writers and filmmakers have defied negative stereotypes and worked towards celebrating Black power. By incorporating images of Black women into systems of power Black women have claimed their individuality, identity and authority through the creation of a conscious African imaginary. In this research I have argued that Mntambo is such an artist.

Through an examination of the Greek mythical narrative I have linked Mntambo's image to the historical function of the *Rape Script* (metaphor) in Western art. In the second chapter I discuss how rape, as a metaphor for the expected roles of men and women in Renaissance society, has repeatedly been used as a motif in the Western historical canon of fine art. The imaging of rape in Western art has broadly been understood as a metaphor for power, gender and political violence.

Critically, rape has also been used as metaphor for colonization. The archaic definition of the term rape as the taking of property without consent as well as its more contemporary definition as an act of sexual violence have often been used as a metaphor for the sexual and economic exploitation of Black peoples. This is an allusion to the seizing of African property and peoples without their consent during colonization and the advent of slavery. An extension of the this definition of the rape metaphor has also been used to describe Black women's experience of oppression, marginalization and violence based on discourse pertaining to race and gender.

Stereotypical representations of women as passive victims have implied a greater context of possession, propriety and voyeuristic fetishism. Significantly in Western culture the viewer of such images has predominantly been white and male. It is within this context of white male domination and Western cultural narrative that Mntambo locates her image. Through her use of western cultural references and placement in the image Mntambo engages in a manner of conversation with these symbolic Western cultural narratives and icons. Thus enabling her to comment on the roles of Black bodies and Black female artists in the Western art canon.

In the second chapter I briefly spoke about the white female nude as the symbolic embodiment of all the ideals associated with Western sexuality, beauty and art.. The iconic archetypal white female nude becomes the foil to which Black bodies stand in sharp contrast. In Western iconography the black body comes to embody all the negative metaphors equated with blackness. The case of South African born Sarah Baartman's treatment and reception in European society in the early nineteenth century has been used a prime example of this.

Mntambo's placement of her self in the image, the interlocking gazes of Minotaur/Zeus with Europa and combined framing techniques employed by the foliage draw attention to the complex interplay between viewer an viewed, visible and not visible. "There is power in looking." (hooks 2003:94) To see is an act of agency and be seen is an acknowledgement one's existence. The viewer is allowed a voyeuristic entry into the unfolding scene through the foliage however the interlocking gaze of the images' subjects denies the viewer any direct access or the familiar possession through operations of the gaze of its subjects.

By excluding male bodies in her work and denying a direct gaze between the viewer and its subjects (which are looking at each other) Mntambo interrupts the stereotypical dominant male Western gaze. Instead the interlocking gaze of her subjects can be read as an identificatory gaze which recognises negative historical and violent images of Black women and actively denies them entry. Thus Mntambo is able to use the gaze as a site of reclaiming power.

> Even in the worst circumstance 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. (hooks 2003:94)

Visibility through operations of the gaze, are instrumental in a reading of Mntambo's work as an active form of resistance to negative images of Black women and historical injustices done to Black bodies. In the third chapter I apply Foucauldian theory on power /knowledge and the body and feminist critiques on structures of violence and power, to a reading of Mntambo's work.

Theories of Foucault's social body and knowledge/power paradigm applied to women's experience by theorists such as the MacCannells have shown that violence or the threat of violence is essential in maintaining constructs of power linking constructs of violence and power to the gaze. Significantly Mntambo's appropriation of the violent rape narrative combined with her portrayal of its characters by the placement of her nude body in the image link narratives of violence to Western constructs of power and discourse around the gaze.

By asserting herself with the characteristics of her subjects and her body in the image Mntambo claims a certain agency. Through her acts of agency within these violent narratives Mntambo reflects on her postcolonial identity as shaped by historical modes of violence and power and their relationship to the determinates of sexuality. I have argued that Mntambo's work is not solely about binaries between Eurocentric pools of knowledge and African postcolonial identity but the ambiguities and its relationship to power that exist in spaces that begin to merge the two. Mntambo's referencing of these works is a reiteration of her own identity as an artist as well as an assertion of her agency and power, as a Black woman. Paradoxically by appropriating Western narratives and iconography this also reaffirms the authority of the Western art historical canon.

Drawing from a wide set of codes and conventions Mntambo is able to subvert stereotypical imagery of Black women. In my own practice I have worked towards critiquing and subverting stereotypical images of violence and particularly sexual

violence. In the last chapter of this thesis I have tried to articulate my concerns with narratives and images of violence. In it I have reflected on discussions of violence and particularly the gaze as a mode of power and resistance addressed in previous chapters. An engagement with theory that examined the use of rape as a metaphor and the appropriation of Western iconography allowed me to better understand the ambiguities in creating images that seek to empower/ disempower their subjects. In this regard a critical analysis of Mntambo's work has proved invaluable in the production of my own body of work.

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