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A study of the manufacture of visibility for South African black women artist practicing in post-apartheid South Africa by intersecting commercial, academic, and social media engagement

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2022
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Doctor of Philosophy, History of Art

A Study of the Manufacture of Visibility for South African Black women Artist Practicing in Post-apartheid South Africa by Intersecting Commercial, Academic, and Social Media Engagement

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Abstract

This thesis examines the visibility of Black women practicing as artists in South Africa. This is done by reviewing the demographics of artists represented by the most prominent galleries, at local and international art fairs, in South African auction consignments, and museum solo exhibition programmes. This thesis argues that the visibility of South African Black women in visual art is markedly diminished when compared to other demographics in the industry. Theories around visibility and hypervisibility are employed to frame how these function in the South African art industry. This is further complicated by the racialised history of South Africa and the marginalised visibility that Black women have been limited to. Senzeni Marasela and Tony Gum are the main artists discussed as case studies. Marasela's longevity in the industry, and especially in academic spaces, contrasts with the limited and inconsistent visibility she has had in her career. Gum's sharp trajectory in a short time combined with a determination to reject notions of Black womanhood and African art, offer arguments to alternatives for how visibility can be handled, particularly using social media.

Keywords

visibility, visual art, social media, Senzeni Marasela, Tony Gum, Black feminism

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to acknowledge the Black women who offered me community and support through this degree: Bulelwa Mbele, Nomasonto Tsotetsi, Vuyiswa Ngesman. Thank you for not letting me quit.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my supervisor Dr Alison Kearney who has changed my perspective of supervision. I hope I can extend the same support and grace to others in my position.

Thank you to Dr Stacey Vorster and Prof Rory Bester for their support at the start of this research project.

Thank you to my family for bringing me food, making me laugh, and pretending to understand why I am doing this.

Thank you to Senzeni Marasela, Emilie Démon, and the late Henri Vergon for the time you gave in furthering this project. I am honored to contribute to the remembrance of Henri, 1968 – 2020, by including his words in this thesis.

Thank you to Yolonda Mtombeni for her consultation on the correct phrasing of isiXhosa terms in this thesis.

Thank you to Wase Aguele for giving me access to out of print copy from the *Roundtable Journal* which gave tremendous incite into Tony Gum's practice.

Thank you to Tony Gum for her kind correspondence on Instagram.

This research has been supported in part by the Arts and Culture Trust.

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Introduction

Previous overviews of the South African art market and its participants have shown that the representation of Black[1] women artists is often poor due to limited access to platforms and resources (Bedford 1999; Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu 2009; Goniwe 2018; Makhubu & Simbao 2013). In this thesis I intend to explore how, nearly three decades post apartheid, artwork by Black women artists in South Africa continue to receive limited visibility. By this I mean engagement with art making in South Africa is demographically disproportionate, and thus the work of many Black women artists goes unseen or has little exposure and/or critique.

In doing this I exclusively focus on South African Black women because this research is on the visibility of South African Black women and the inclusion Black women of other African nationalities and descent distorts the statistics I am most interested in. Further, the marginalisation of South African Black women has been systemically devised by the apartheid government and in order to examine whether this has rebounded post apartheid, I must focus on the demographic that would have been affected then and continues to be affected in post-apartheid legacy. For this reason, when referring to South African Black women I exclude women who may have been born in South Africa, but who were raised and educated outside of South Africa. These women were not party to efforts to implement transformation during their early years and have not been practice in a post-apartheid context. I do include Black women who may have been born outside of South Africa but have been raised and/or educated in the country, thus their experience of race is contextualised in post-apartheid South Africa and the emergence of their careers are here as well. Finally, I have distinguished in my count of Black women those that are Black and from the continent but are not South African. Black women from the continent and its diaspora are represented by South African galleries and participating in the South African art industry. Although this is not to a significant extent, when included in the count of South African Black women it can distort the figure. I also do not define Black in terms of Black Consciousness ideology, which extends the definition to include Indian and Coloured persons as well. This research is an assessment of the visibility of a particular demographic, in order that it becomes an assessment of apartheid legacy and the heightened nature of race relations in South Africa as operating in the art industry. The apartheid regime applied distinctions between Black, Coloured and Indian, and this translated into issues of access and representation for each group. As such, to properly assess progress in this area I cannot use the Black

[1] Throughout this thesis I capitalise Black and White when referring to race. This distinguishes the references as socio-political regimes that are imbued with distinct experiences and objectives.

Consciousness definition of Black. Individuals who openly identify as gender non-binary also do not form part of the focus demographic, even if they were previously identified as women. To count them as woman artists would be to misgender them.

This study is focussed on the intersecting identity of the Black race and female gender. The complication I address regards how apartheid explicitly governed race and the legacy thereof – transformation approaches remain defined by the implications of apartheid law on racial exclusion. There is indeed a point at which race and non-binary gender identity intersect, however, that is not within the scope of this research.

The main objective of my research is to examine the representation of Black women in several important spaces of the art industry. I do this by referring to previous events between 2017 and 2019 (the designated period for the PhD enrolment) and counting the participants and calculating what percentage are Black women. This information is made available on the websites of galleries, art fairs, and auction houses, but has not been collated into tallied numbers. I also make use of the platform *Artsy* that keeps a record of international art fairs, the galleries that participated, and the work that was presented. The data analysed is of the galleries, art fairs, auction houses, museums, and the South African pavilion at the Venice Biennale. In my investigation of visibility of Black women artists, I examine the work of two artists at different points in their careers: Tony Gum and Senzeni Marasela. Gum is an early-career Black woman artist whose work asserts African hybridity – meaning she amalgamates various aspects and expressions of her African identity with elements of popular culture from the West – and contemporary Black Consciousness. Marasela is a mid-career Black woman artist whose work concerns the complicated nature of womanhood in late to post apartheid South Africa. For this research I have elected to use both Gum and Marasela as case studies. These two Black women, at different stages of their art careers employ different subject matter and perspectives and will be instrumental to proving how tokenism in practice, where singular stories (Adichie 2014:3) become vehicles to narrate all Black women experience and art production, implies the idea that Black women artists have similar or the same tropes in their work, thus flattening diversity in Black women's art practice. Both artists are on par with their contemporaries in terms of outputs in industry but do not enjoy the same extent of visibility or have not had visibility that is sustained and evenly weighted across sectors. The hypervisibility of their contemporaries is limiting to them and other South African Black women.

Through my study of how Gum and Marasela use Instagram, I build an understanding of how autonomy is harnessed and maintained when using social media. I suggest that the usage of social media platforms

affects how images of Black women's experiences are shaped with the participation of Black women audiences, and with the input of Black women artists and the imaging they employ in their practices. Through interrogating Gum and Marasela's use of social media I explore what contributions are being made to the visual culture of Black Feminist thought, and the new audiences that are being reached and/or created. Before doing so I examine two traditional components affecting visibility in the art industry, academia and commerce, and how Black women artists are particularly affected by the workings of these fields.

I analyse the careers of these artists to investigate limitations on visibility for Black women artists so that my reader will understand the implications of different forms of engagement on a sustainable art career. In doing so I examine their own personal experiences[2]; their participation in commercial spaces, and the quantity and quality of critical writing completed on these artists and their work. In doing so I discuss the differences in Gum and Marasela's early careers. Marasela having had significant academic engagement, including working with important curators that affirmed the importance of her work in the industry. This is different to Gum's early career which has opperated almost exclusively with commercial engagement, including participating in prominent international art fairs. Additionally, I consider how the galleries (Afronova Gallery representing Marasela, and Christopher Moller Gallery representing Gum) have approached artist management, and how their own circumstances as smaller galleries in the industry has influenced their handling of Gum and Marasela's careers. I set out to conduct interviews with the artists and their galleries. In 2017, at the start of this study, I was able to interview Senzeni Marasela, Henri Vergon, and Emilie Démon. Vergon and Démon are the founders of Afronova Gallery and, along with Marasela, were able to offer a contextualisation of Marasela's personal experience in the art industry. I made several attempts, between 2017 and 2019, to interview Tony Gum and a representative of Christopher Moller Gallery but was unsuccessful. In lieu of conducting interviews, I have referred to existing interviews that Gum has given.

Later I analyse the Instagram profiles of Gum, Marasela, and the galleries that represent them. I consider how the artists use Instagram to frame their own work independently from their galleries, and with the agency to build their own narrative and project their own objectives. Both the artists and the

[2] In 2017, at the start of this study, I was able to interview Senzeni Marasela, Henri Vergon, and Emilie Démon. Vergon and Démon are the founders of Afronova Gallery and, along with Marasela, were able to offer a contextualisation of Marasela's personal experience in the art industry. I made several attempts, between 2017 and 2019, to interview Tony Gum and a representative of Christopher Moller Gallery but was unsuccessful. In lieu of conducting interviews, I have referred to existing interviews that Gum has given.

galleries make use of the various features of Instagram, such as hashtagging[3], filters[4], and cropping to develop and join communities. Hashtags become uniquely employed on Gum and Marasela's profiles respectively. In different ways, Instagram becomes an extention of these artist's practice. In Gum's case she uses Instagram to continue the discussion of her work in a public forum, and to develop and articulate a visual language of her own. In Marasela's case Instagram becomes a record of her daily performance art.

Through my study of how Gum and Marasela use Instagram I build an understanding of how autonomy is harnessed and maintained when using social media. The usage of social media platforms affects how the Black woman's image is shaped.

The findings of a psychology study by Monica Biernat and Amanda K. Sesko (2009) becomes helpful in understanding the limitations of visibility. For Biernat and Sesko visibility is not necessarily the ability of groups (in this instance groups of White undergraduate university students in America) to see, or even acknowledge the presence of Black women (Biernat & Sesko 2009:356). In other words, visibility is not only the opposite of invisibility, and in fact can be extrapolated as various types or, as phrased by Andrea Mubi Brighenti, regimes of visibility (2010:3). Brighenti explains:

> "I present visibility as a phenomenon that is inherently ambiguous, highly dependent upon contexts and complex social, technical and political arrangements which could be termed 'regimes' of visibility." (2010:3).

Some of these social contexts are made particularly poignant in Biernat and Sesko's study. The study requires participants to recall whether they recognise the faces of Black women, after having been shown a series of photos of people from various demographics (Biernat & Sesko 2009:357). Later in the process, participants are shown footage of people from various demographics in a group discussion setting and, after having watched the footage, are asked to identify who had said what (Biernat & Sesko 2009:358). In both parts of this study, it was found that the sample group often failed to recognise the faces of Black women or recall what contributions Black women had made in a group discussion (Biernat & Sesko 2009:357-358). It is made clear in this study that in the context of Black women's visibility the factors affecting participants was not their ability to acknowledge that the women were present, but

[3] Hashtags are words or phrases following the pound (#) symbol that, when used online, are able to track conversations taking place.
[4] Filters are colour pre-sets that can be found available in Instagram photo settings and applied to posted images.

instead that they had difficulty differentiating between Black women and calling to memory the contributions they had made.

My use of the term visibility is not in a linear seen/unseen dichotomy, but rather is meant to frame a diagram of meaning that speaks to three components contributing to a working definition of visibility of art and artists in history and culture. These three interrelated components are awareness, recognition, and accessibility.

I define awareness as incidental familiarity. In other words, persons who may not be focussed on Black women artists, or the work of a particular Black woman artist, may still have heard of them through incidental encounters with various forms of media, and accept them to be part of the general discourse. In other words, a person may know that Gum and Marasela are artists, but they may not know significantly much about them. I refer to this as the first tier in my definition of visibility.

In the second tier I define recognition as the ability to distinguish between the work of different Black women artists and the various merits and subject matter of their work. In other words, whether a person can recognise the work of Gum and Marasela. They can tell the difference between work by the two artists when placed alongside each other and/or the work of other artists.

The third tier regards the accessibility to the work of Black women artists, particularly in a context where persons have experienced incidental familiarity and are able to distinguish the differences between the work of specific Black woman artists. For example: Upon starting this research I was aware of Gum's work (through Instagram and the general media surrounding her participation in the Joburg Art Fair) and Marasela (through Twitter and word of mouth, as well as the fact that she is an alumnus of the Wits History of Art division where I was enrolled for my PhD study); I could recognise and distinguish between the different focuses present in their work even though they both employ performance as their medium. However, it has been consistently challenging to access quality critical writing on both of their work and even superficial writing is in limited quantity. I have also never attended a solo presentation of a complete body of either of their work and have only seen individual pieces. Further – considering the third tier of visibility – there are several important texts by prominent Black Feminist thinkers that support the theorisation of emerging Black women artists in South Africa. However, access to several of their texts is limited to a privileged few who have access to the journals by means of their student enrolment, their employer, or their own private financial means to access online pay-for-view websites. This limits their visibility and the visibility of the topics and artists they have written on which may be

pertinent to the development of Black women's voices in the arts. Accessibility can also be limited by private collections and museums who do not regularly place work by artists on exhibition, or whose exhibitions are not well documented through images and writing and thus go unseen by publics who are not able to travel to the show.

Rationale

The need for such a study is apparent, even from my first public presentation of these questions at a seminar convened as a requirement of my PhD study. In August of 2017 a meeting of academics and postgraduate candidates was organised to hear and provide feedback on my commencing research project. During the subsequent question and answer section, a middle-aged White woman who was enrolled to complete her own thesis, commented that the industry had certainly changed and there were in fact Black women artists not only practicing, but achieving great success. Challenging her, I said:

> "I know the artists you are referring to because I can count them all on one hand and the repeated circulation of the same artists cannot be equated to a diverse representation of Black feminist thought in art making."

What I did not say was that the fact that I was a Black woman in an academic space presenting to only White academics was part of the problem.

The issue of Black women's visibility has a lengthy and complicated history, particularly in South Africa (Bedford 1999:73). It is especially problematic in creative industries, where a select few are celebrated giving the impression of transformation (Khan 2006; Makhubu & Simbao 2013:300; Arnold 2013:129; Goniwe 2018:6). The work of Black artists also often carries an expectation of Western perceptions of African authenticity (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu 2009:14) and is critiqued for accents of contemporaneity (Goniwe 2012:14) such as global hybridity, the amalgamation of various identity perspectives and globally relevant themes that do not fit in with Western ideas of what contemporary African art is (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu 2009:18). This general condition for Black artists to make work that reflects their 'Africaness', adds to the lack of visibility of Black women artists who are ignored or excluded for not meeting the expectation. I will further explore this in 'Chapter 1: Visibility, invisibility, and hypervisibility'.

The slim visibility of Black women artists and arts practitioners has been written about in a few instances. Quite notably, artist and academic Sharlene Khan wrote in an article, titled *Doing it for Daddy,* that very early national institutional moves towards inclusivity were skewed towards White women (2006:1). Khan goes on to say that sustained and proliferating White influence allows the exclusion of

Blacks on the premise of 'qualification' or the inclusion of a select few which she refers to as: "'yes baas' blacks" (2006:1). It is seldom examined how the hypervisibility of a few artists limits the perception and visual culture of Black women artists collectively and in doing so reinforces the expectation of a particular limited kind of artist.

The most recent report that assessed the specific number of Black women artists practicing full or part time and earning an income from their work in South Africa was in 2010 and was commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture. It showed that of the artists practicing in South Africa only 12% were Black women (Hagg 2010:14). Other prominent reports to be released since include the Assemblage[5] report in 2013 which focused on the needs of artists they serve (which are primarily emerging and early career artist, with a minority of mid-career artists, that work out of the Johannesburg central business district) and identified that of those that indicated needing additional employment in order to remain in the arts industry, 19% were Black women (Johnston *et al* 2013:33). Further the report showed that of the artists that indicated that they did not earn any income from their art and had no expectation to do so in the future, 20% were Black women (Johnston *et al* 2013:33). In the category of artists who considered their art to provide them with a sustainable income, meaning they were able to support their living costs from the money generated by their own art production, no Black women artists were counted (Johnston *et al* 2013:33). The report went on to say that: "The participation of black females in the arts market was quite limited, but also indicated a desire not to take financial risks." (Johnston *et al* 2013:34). In other words, due to the limitations faced by Black women artists in the arts market, practicing as a full-time artists would be a financial risk to them.

Brighenti discusses the context of race and visibility, particularly referring to the restriction on minority groups to look back as well as their rendering as invisible (2010:29). Again, this study does not necessarily lean towards a dichotomy of seen/unseen in a literal sense but rather an inclination to the prolonged effect of an aspect of visual culture. Brighenti states: "...visible is not equivalent to that of the simply visual." (2010:32) In other words, what we see in terms of our physical capacity to do so is further impacted by the layers of symbolism and the significance placed on the image and the symbol. Basically, images with more significant symbolism for the viewer will enjoy faster and longer lasting recognition. This significance, however, is fed by the social structures at play and what these decide to include and how these decisions are maintained over time.

[5] Assemblage is an artist run non-profit organisation that provides support and resources for emerging artists. Assemblage was founded in 2010 by Louise van der Bijl and Anthea Pokroy, and later joined by Mandy Johnston. The organisation disbanded in November 2019.

Considering Brighenti's explanation of visibility as dependent on context (2010:3), the conclusions drawn by Biernat and Sesko's study cannot function independently. It is not enough to say that Black women are less visible to the students who participated in Biernat and Sesko's study. The study and its results must be further contextualised within a history and legacy of the Trans Atlantic slave trade, the period of reconstruction following the American civil war, as well as segregation and the subsequent civil rights movement. There are several aspects of South African history that share similarity with this, including racist segragation and the delimitation of civil rights. Later I discuss the problems facing early movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), and how the voice and activism of women was marginalised (Gqola 2013:13). Brighenti goes on to link visibility to social territoriality, which he explains as the establishments of boundaries in which the one noticing is able to relate to that which is noticeable (2010:39). In other words, the power relationship between what is visible and to whom it becomes visible is weighted towards the latter. Similarly, Biernat and Sesko add as a contributing factor the predominately White campus of the participating students (2009:359), even though not fully announcing the implications of the legacy of racial chasms likely in effect in this study.

The Relationship between academic and commercial engagement

The limitations in visibility with these two artists are circular. What I mean is that the academic engagement (critical writing, inclusion into museum collections, teaching and research) with the work is dependent on commercial engagement (participation in primary markets such as gallery exhibitions and art fairs, as well as secondary markets such as auctions). Likewise, commercial engagement is further fuelled by academic engagement. In other words, the more academic engagement there is with an artist the greater the value of their work and thus their commercial viability. This relationship only becomes sustainable when the artist and their work can maintain visibility to the publics of both these spaces. This circularity further reinforces the need to examine the relationship between the art market and academia as I plan to do in this study.

My research explores the way the dialectical relationship between the agendas of academic – to bestow value – and commercial – to capitalise on that value – engagement impacts on and/or influences the visibility of Black women artists. While different, these two agendas depend on each other. Academic engagement informs critique and knowledge production. This in turn supports the development of emerging voices and their eventual entry into industry and the added capacity to access commercial spaces for sustainability. According to a 2016 statistical report 31.4% of arts graduates from tertiary institutions in South Africa (and this includes graduates from all arts disciplines, visual and performance

art) were Black, compared to 57.7% White graduates in the same field (Statistics SA 2016:30). The output of South African tertiary institutions in themselves predicts a predominantly White industry. This output of graduates includes artists, but also curators, writers, educators, and other practitioners. The influence of academic teaching and the availability of academic material in informal and formal contexts is crucial to fostering diversity in art. Academic engagement with role models young Black women artists can relate to, can affect the self image of Black students, and increase the likelihood that they will not only be empowered, but go on to empower others. Academic engagement also has the potential to affect biases of White and Black students as by learning the significance of diverse art practice they can interact with it in their commencing professional lives. Further, academic engagement signals to the market what is important in the current social context. It provides commercial spaces with the grounding to market art to a buying public.

Commercial engagement and the promotion that can develop from it increases sustainability of an artist's practice. This is important in the context of Black women artists and their participation in the art market. It is the lack of support and promotion available to Black women that makes full time art practice a risky financial choice (Johnston *et al* 2013:34). Commercial engagement that includes participation in major art fairs, and solo exhibitions at commercial galleries plays an important role in the generation of income for artists. As mentioned earlier in 2010 *An Assessment of the Visual Arts in South Africa* was released, and according to the report 58% of practicing artists in South Africa are White men, earning R229000 per annum on average, and 12% of practicing artists are Black women, earning R67000 per annum on average (Hagg 2010:14). This income disparity, and the diminished access to upward mobility subsequent to it, also means Black people are less likely to pursue and/or remain in the art industry as practicing artists' long term. As we see here there is a significant difference between the percentage of Black women practicing artists and the earlier given statistic on Black graduates in the arts.

The market is also a platform for South Africans not enrolled in tertiary visual art courses, and very often without access to arts education at primary and secondary levels as well, to become exposed to various visual languages. In the absence of a biennale in South Africa, the largest sites of access for art falls to art fairs and galleries. These are also the sources for museums, which function as academic spaces, to purchase work for their collections. Thus, and in the context of art making, artists who enjoy commercial engagement via participation in art fairs and major commercial gallery exhibitions have increased visibility to a wide audience including an academic public. In the context of general publics, exposure to

artists in commercial spaces builds awareness and, with repeated exposure, recognition. Continued cultivation of this visibility through commercial engagement increases the potential buying market. In the context of academic publics, as I have mentioned, commercial spaces are a source for new acquisitions in museum collections which are used for teaching and research. The prestige of these collections is also lent to the artist whose work is collected, further developing their visibility, and fuelling their value in the art market. It is important to note that the gates to art fairs are carefully guarded, access is via gallerists, who can afford the stand fees that only become greater with the size of the buying audience of the fair. These kinds of visibility-producing engagements begin to frame South African visual culture, as those with more engagement are written more permanently into the history and visual culture of the country. In the case of Black women's visibility, visual culture becomes contentious as engagement will not always be equal across demographics.

At this juncture social media, as a new and autonomous platform, becomes, I will argue, an avenue to affect engagement and enact impact on visibility and the development of visual culture. Part of the work that my thesis will do is to interrogate how two Black women artists are making use of social media platforms to frame their work in their own voice and foster an audience.

With Instagram as the main platform I am assessing, I focus on the potential of curating online and how these artists have taken advantage of it. What becomes most interesting is questioning to what extent the curatorial frameworks employed by gallerists and curators in tangible spaces are different or the same as those employed by the artists online, and how this begins to affect their visibility and reception.

Black feminism and capitalism

I will also include a discursive review of selected Black feminist literature that pertains to, and presents a nuanced reading, of the work and visibility of Black women artists. My goal here is not to extend the ideology, but rather to consider how the work of other authors may offer more complex reading of South African Black women artists. Focussing on the position of feminism in relation to commerce, Akeia Benard examines race, gender, sexuality, and capitalism by theorising capitalism as both racialized and gendered (2016:1-2). Benard equates White capitalism to colonialism, particularly in its treatment of the Black female body (2016:2). Benard states: "Hegemonic colonial discourse of race/class/gender continue to structure social power relations in fundamental ways and thus terms like "neo- "and "post" colonial are false concepts." (2016:2) In other words, Benard argues that neo-colonialism and post-colonialism are inaccurate terms as they assume that the practice of colonialism ever ended. In South Africa the idea

of a post-apartheid has also come into question considering many of the legacies and attitudes of apartheid remain in place (Gqola 2017:20 & Goniwe 2018:6).

Benard makes the point that even when Black women make ways for themselves, particularly in creative practice, the structures that govern creative industries are still run primarily by White men (2016:5). She states: "...we too often incorrectly see choice where there is restraint and coercion." (Benard 2016:4) What she discusses is the relationship with White capitalists, meaning the White population with the commercial capabilities to create financial incentives for creatives, and the dissemination of Black images (Benard 2016:5). Returning to what I set out earlier as the circular relationship between academic and commercial engagements, these points on White capitalism are a significant continuation for an evaluation of the social structures existing in academic and commercial spheres. These social structures are the premise for the assignment of value in an academic and commercial sense. Both Gum and Marasela use their bodies in their work, and reception of their selfhood is publicly critiqued and becomes a part of the work as well. Benard highlights an ideological shift in Black feminism: from foundational Black feminism's critique of hegemonic structures; to contemporary Black feminisms advocacy for Black women's agency (2016:8-9). However, Benard problematizes contemporary Black feminist ideology by critiquing which Black woman is allowed agency, and how this allowance is dictated by the structure of White patriarchal capitalism (2016: 9). Benard argues that the Black women who are permitted agency are the ones who presents themselves as palatable to White audiences.

This is found in the form of tokenism in the visibility of Black women's narratives in South Africa and can be attributed to current industry and commercial engagement that is commonly framed by White patriarchal capitalism. Same Mdluli, confirming this, states that: "...black women in South Africa are not meant to be visible." (2019a:175) The conditional agency afforded Black women often prescribes the context in which they are allowed to participate in societal structures like commerce. Very often these contexts are marginalised spaces such as domestic spaces. The work of Gum and Marasela enact in this space as well but have found ways through which to subvert the context and expand their agency. Marasela forces her audience to see the historically invisible traditional housewife by habitually performing her and documenting this online. Gum's Xhosa maidens foregrounds an image of Black womanhood that has been excluded from mainstream media. In some ways the fact that this imagery has previously been excluded – especially in the way Gum and Marasela go about devising them – allows them to present something new in the market.

Social Media

Fungai Machirori discusses the further distinguished 'cyberfeminism', considering its false prophecies for Black women's agency (2013:86). She defines cyberfeminism as: "...relat[ing] to cyberspace and women's appropriation of new media tools for self and collective empowerment..." (Machirori 2013:86). Machirori claims that this "third space" – in a sense that the online space is a platform for an admixture of culture and ideology (Rutherford 1990:211) – of social media and digital audience, has the potential to oppose and dismantle hegemonic hierarchies in race, class, and gender (2013:86). Machirori does not discount the volumes of women globally using the variety of social media platforms available, but instead questions whether these platforms have afforded women the opportunity to explore the fluidity of their own identities (2013:86-87). She highlights how image-based sites generally promote traditional domestic ideals, and narrow definitions of beauty (Machirori 2013:87). Machirori also points out that the leading social media platforms, including Instagram, were all founded by men (2013:87). Machirori states that:

> "...it appears that a limited range of interests and pursuits have been packaged and marketed to women, by men, so much so that the dominant use and consumption of social media lies with women, while ownership and innovation remains the preserve of men." (2013:87).

Machirori goes on to note that the global presence does not match that of women in sub-Saharan Africa, where 45% fewer women than men are social media users (2013:87). This is due to issues around access such as cost, location, and education (Machirori 2013:87). This means that for women in the global South, new technologies and internet platforms are not creating the same scale of access as men, but instead inadvertently devising new exclusionary methods (Machirori 2013:88).

While there are a good number of academics writing on Black feminism in South Africa, it still seems largely (and understandably) rooted in a pre/during/post-apartheid basis. This is not something I am attempting to remove my research from, but instead, I will use selected texts to discuss how Gum, Marasela, and South African Black women artists generally can be appropriately contextualised – in terms of academic inclusion, socio-political context, capitalism, and cyberfeminism. Here Black feminism has aesthetic expectations and the promise of various kinds of engagement. To elaborate I discuss the currencies art carries when it is described through Black feminist reading, especially according to pre/during/post-apartheid contexts. Conversely, as these conditions are typically tied to the conventional spaces of academia and commerce, there are new conditions existing in unconventional spaces such as Instagram which begin to seep more seamlessly in broader visual cultures.

Focussing on the photographic image, Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall not only consider how the reproduced image has its own articulation, but also how this is affected by the way (and implicitly the magnitude to which) it is reproduced (1999:3). According to Evans and Hall: "...emphasis upon the integral relations of meaning and use, [...] rescues us from the solely textual concerns of a semiotic analysis..." (1999:3). This referred to the popular contexts of the time, print advertising in magazines and newspapers, but further supports the role of tagging and the caption in reading the social media image. Furthering their discussion on context, Evans and Hall go on to consider how the tool used to take the photograph and the photographer themselves also contribute to the complete meaning of the image (1999:3). This is especially seen in social media use where the range of tools used in photography is from professional DSLR cameras to cell phones. There is a further significance in the context of social media imagery such as influence – how well a social media user is known online, their reach, and their ability to start or direct conversations and trends online – and following of the photographer. In my exploration of the role of tagging and the caption, these factors allow an assessment of how the number of users following an account influences the reach of a hashtag, and how this subsequently affects how the image is read.

Evans and Hall summarise that any study of cultural production rests on an underpinning of semiotics (1999:3). I am interested in what new signs and symbols have and are being developed through social media[6] to signify meaning, specifically through the sharing of visual content, and how we "...conceive of images as 'language'." (1999:3) in contemporary visual culture. Evans and Hall go on to state that: "...visual culture always provides a physical and psychical place for individual spectators to inhabit" (1999:4) and conclude that an analysis of the image on its own is incomplete (1999:7), as an image can never be read in isolation.

I converse with Marasela and the founders of Afronova gallery. The interviews concern how they curate and situate their visual narrative on Instagram. I am also interested in where they are doing this in direct response to how their work has been engaged with academically and commercially, and what methods they have used and how successful these have been.

Gum has, by and during the time this study was conducted, conducted several interviews in print and online publications. These are the sources I will draw from to centre her view and contextualisation of

[6] For example, the peach emoji refers to a persons' buttocks (usually in a sexual way); or how fans of the American popular music singer Taylor Swift, used the snake emoji which refers to reality television star Kim Kardashian as a backstabber and bully.

her work. Gum has also usefully discussed how she considers her position in the art industry, and specifically the marketplace, in a 2018 interview for *Roundtable Journal*.

Particularly regarding my research of Gum and Marasela's use of social media, I do close reading of selected posts. In these posts they show their art installed, in studio, and in progress. I look at the way their followers are engaging with their images on Instagram. I investigate how far the reach of their content has gone by running their hashtags through search engines, and examining whether they are falling into relevant audiences, or creating their own. Using the platform *HypeAuditor,* an application that organises available data on social media websites based on user set criteria, I also analyse the followers of Gum, Marasela, Afronova, and Christopher Moller Gallery.

Chapter 1: Visibility, Invisibility, & Hypervisibility

When I first proposed this research the initial response, from my proposal examiners, was an apprehension to the term 'visibility' as being too linear for a PhD study. While I do agree that visibility can appear simple however, unlike sight which is physiological, subjectivity is implicit in visibility particularly in the case when someone or something becomes visible to a person. In other words, visibility hangs off the relationship between what is made visible and who it is made visible to. This introduces politics of relatability that are often seen in race relations and the ways in which Black bodies become visible. In other words, an attempt to make the work of Black women artists – especially work that is centred around the Black woman's body – to collectors from White supremacist backgrounds may go ignored or result in the work becoming visible in a negative way. In both circumstances the inherent inability of White supremacy to positively relate to Blackness affects the outcome of the visibility, and whether visibility is established at all.

In this chapter I discuss the relationship within visibility as between seeing and being seen. Further I determine this relationship in the context of three hierarchies that I refer to as 'awareness'; 'recognition'; and 'access'. Each of these determine the depth of the visibility being established and potentially influences the outcome of that visibility, with each respective hierarchy having increased impact on the overall visibility. Specific to the outcome of visibility I also discuss invisibility, as in the opposite of visibility, and hypervisibility, as an exaggeration of and often negative kind of visibility. Andrea Mubi Brighenti (2010) usefully establishes visibility in the framework of Social Theory, and Amanda Sesko and Monica Biernat (2009) have applied a psychological definition in their experimental study which reveals the role being able to relate to what is being seen plays in the visibility of Black women. I use both definitions foundationally but must expand my definition to become suitable for art

and artists. I also employ Nicole Fleetwood's 2011 concept 'iconicity' that she considers in terms of hypervisibility and its employment as a tool for Black women to establish notoriety in the absence of positive visibility.

I go on to apply my definition of visibility to two recent texts provided by prominent South African curators and art historians that each discuss the implications of a lack of visibility on Black artists in South Africa. These texts are the 2018 *Mail & Guardian* article Thembinkosi Goniwe wrote concerning the lack of representation of Black arts professionals in senior and influential roles in the South African art industry; and the current day implications of the past exclusion of Black Modernist artists that Same Mdluli considers in her essay in the catalogue for the 2019 exhibition *A Black Aesthetic* as well as a chapter she has written for *Acts of Transgression* by Jay Pather published the same year. Both authors foreground tokenism as problematically impacting on visibility.

Referring to my earlier points about relatability, tokenism is a prominent obstacle in how Black bodies can be perceived and become visible, hypervisible, or invisible to non-Black persons. I intentionally polarise 'bodies' and 'persons' as tokenism flattens the image of Black women to a singular image without subjectivity that can be cut out and pasted wherever tokenism needs to be fulfilled. Tokenism employs one or a few Black women (or previously excluded groups) to be included to give the impression of diversity. It is therefore not the individual subjectivity of the Black woman that is required, but rather her image that speaks generically for all Black women and their experience. In South African history a fundamental example of this is 'rainbowism'. Pumla Gqola (2001) discusses the concept of 'rainbowism', that she defines as the proliferation of the rainbow nation narrative – that aims to same citizens in their representation and referral but not in the actualisation of opportunities that offer upward mobility for previously disadvantage groups, overshadowing growing disparities between them – that was prevalent in the mainstream discourse of early nineties South Africa and persists today. I closely relate these discussions to examinations of tokenism, conjuncture, and intersectionality.

Awareness, recognition, & access

Brighenti's theory of visibility intertwines various approaches. He roots the concept in social theory when he states:

> "From a socio-theoretical point of view, visibility is interesting precisely because it allows us to enhance our understanding of the social as simultaneously a material and immaterial phenomenon – or better, as a significant prolongation and convergence between the layer of the material and that of the immaterial in the constitution of the social." (2010:4)

In other words, while the materiality of what we see is different to the immateriality of the social context within which we see, the two are also complexly conjoined. The immateriality of a social norm or taboo, or the interpersonal relationships in communities, affect how we look at or perceive something. Even further, it can determine how long our attention is held and the memory we have of it.

Brighenti speaks of the tension between the image we see and the symbols we can relate to (2010:32). As we know from Barthes, images are layered with not only what they visually contain but also the cultural connotations of this (1977:152). It is these cultural connotations that allow for a dynamic relationship between noticing and noticed (Brighenti 2010:39) and it is in this relationship that the currency of the visibility is established, and what that visibility will mean for the noticed.

Brighenti usefully proposes that: "...visibility is not homogenous... In the absence of alarm signals, the setting is transparent to the observer." (Brighenti 2010:25) Here Brighenti is drawing attention to the importance of context to visibility. These 'alarm signals' that Brighenti mentions are the social norms and symbols that help us organise what we are looking at and decide what this will mean to us. The sorting exercise we undertake as we notice something is dependent on our varied backgrounds (Davis 2011:279). This becomes useful as it establishes for me that singular images, or to borrow from Chimamande Ngozi Adichie, "single stories" (2014:3) (referring to the danger of having one narrative to define entire groups, cultures, and nations) affect visibility in that they flatten the dimensions of what we perceive about what we see. The 'alarm signals' allow us to dismiss certain information while looking for more complexity in others.

Brighenti goes on to say that the development of visibility bares subjecthood (2010:27). Meaning the relationship between the noticed and the one noticing requires subjecthood on at least one end. To clarify, this noticing can be on varying scales and in varying contexts. Young children in family contexts gain subjecthood by being noticed by and by noticing their family members around them. The bank teller noticing a customer offers a level of subjecthood. If by being noticed otherness is experienced, this subjecthood exists in the one noticing. This often happens in historically uneven relationships such as male and female, and Black and White. However, the event of being noticed, especially when through positive perception, can also build subjecthood. Brighenti states: "The field of visibility is relational...because it determines relationships between seeing and being seen or, more generally, between noticing and being noticed." (2010:39) Thus the relational circumstances of visibility are also not singular as more than one party is required. Particularly in the case of Black women artists in South Africa, in as much as autonomy to make the art that one wants to make is sought, it is not and cannot be

to the exclusion of spaces in the market and the academy. To have visibility the two must be able to relate, and to deepen visibility the relation must be sustained. Meaning, the Black women artist needs to have sustained relatability with the art market and academy to avoid being dismissed, which would prevent visibility from being established and deepened.

Visibility does not occur outside of the circumstances of relatability, and this can pose unique challenges to Black women artists attempting to establish visibility in White-led spaces. In these historically White institutions, Whiteness has a mainstay of familiarity and relatability. Brighenti goes on to state that: "One must not only create procedures for visibility, but also create alliances and communities of practice to adopt and support them." (2010:34) This is important foregrounding for my research as he argues that there is a direct relationship between audience and visibility. I establish these procedures for visibility as 'awareness', 'recognition', and 'access'. Black women must develop the awareness an audience has of them and their work. In the initial event of being noticed, even though the perception is not necessarily positive, 'awareness' can be established. The impact of this 'awareness' and its longevity is largely dependent on the relatability of the one noticing to the one being noticed. As I mention earlier, the background of the audience – the one(s) noticing – plays a crucial role here. The event of noticing may need to take place multiple times for 'awareness' to be established, especially if the audience has no interest in the artist or their area of practice or more importantly, if the audience has implicit bias against the artist. It is not uncommon for Black women artists to spend significantly longer time as emerging artists than their peers in less marginalised demographics. Once 'awareness' has been established it becomes possible for 'recognition' to follow, and in subsequent encounters the audience is able to identify when they are meeting with the artist's work again and are able to accurately refer to and briefly outline its concept. In the final level in this hierarchy of procedures towards visibility, 'access' determines that the audience is not only able to identify an artist and their work but should they elect to do so, they are able to access further information.

This hierarchy on its own is a visibility relationship that assumes that each successful step leads to the following one. It does not consider the impact of perception and relating at play within the visibility that is established. Visibility can be negative (Brighenti 2010:47). The fact that it depends on our ability to relate and indeed how we relate (Brighenti 2010:44), means that we can employ negative perceptions of the things that are visible to us and that the nature of what we see is not isolated from how or where we end up seeing it (Davis 2011:280). As much of the audience noticing Black women artists exists in space in the market and academy which have long held artists of this demographic as separate to their

counterparts, the negative visibility that may come with this hegemonic nature of the industry may prove more threatening to their careers. For example, two articles written by different critics about Tony Gum within less than a year of each other create different kinds of visibility for the artist. In the first, Ashraf Jamal (2017) includes Gum in his survey of contemporary South African artists, *In the World: Essays on Contemporary South African Art.* In the chapter on Gum, she is referred to as "the palpable power of a rigged simplicity" (2017:387), "high-end trash art" (2017:388), and as a "flattening of difference" (2017:389). These referrals distil the complexity at work in Gum's imagery to something trendy and disposable. In a 2018 article for *Round Table Journal* Ayoade Bamgboye puts forward a perception of Gum's work as "carefully woven together to tell stories that too often go untold" (2018:142), "archiving and documenting her foremothers" (2018:143), and "laden with a deep sense of responsibility" (2018:144). Alongside each other the framework of Gum's visibility looks vastly different depending on who is looking. On the one hand Gum's practice is light, universal, easily consumable, and easily disposable. On the other hand, Gum's work has weighted purpose and is streamlined to a specific audience. These different visibility relationships are determined by the one noticing. However, these publications and authors have their own audiences with whom their text provide the event for them to notice Gum. The way in which these audiences become aware of Gum will affect how her visibility develops and if it develops at all.

The consideration above can also not be independent as it assumes access to these pricey publications, revealing yet another layer of access. In my initial establishment of my three tiers of visibility I contextualised them with myself in relation to Gum and Marasela. Meaning, the position from which I arrive at access is that of a person working in the South African art industry, with an advanced degree in Fine Art, and currently enrolled for PhD study at a prominent African university. These currencies make it possible to borrow copies of expensive books, gain trust for interviews, and all-in-all influences how I begin to understand the differences in depth of visibility and how prominent position is in this process. In problematizing my own act of noticing, and how this makes Gum and Marasela more or less visible to me, it is quite clear that the visibility of an artist and their work is also substantially dependent on position and privilege. What I mean here is that by my having an arts education and an arts professional background I became more likely to be made aware of Gum and/or Marasela at some point in my career than a domestic worker or postal service worker, or any professional whose work does not centre around the examination of art. The fact of my academic training in fine art and visual analysis makes it more feasible for me to distinguish and debate art styles, even though it does not guarantee that I will. Basically, even though visibility and visuality can become equitable terms (Brighenti 2010:32), as

Whitney Davis puts it: "...the visibility of things and the extent to which they are wholly visible in visuality are often poles apart..." (2011:279)

The art industry is imbued with systemic imbalances not in favour of Black women. Visibility for artists is dependent on the art market structures, and with the complex dynamics of the relationship, being present in them does not equate to upward trajectory. As I have mentioned before, the first step of 'awareness' may need to happen several times and it is possible to become trapped in a loop of fringe group exhibitions at minor establishments or superficial writing on your work. Without building sustained relatability, the structures and persons employed in them do not have a deepened visibility of the artist and thus cannot develop rationales for increasing the value assigned to their art. These persons include curators, critics, academics, and gallerists. They function in museums, galleries, fairs, biennales, and learning institutions. There are those tha are more and less prominent, and those that exist on the periphery of the industry. Likewise, the influence of these structures and the persons in them will have on audiences and what they can make visible to them – like Jamal is able to do with his book – varies from the periphery in. Simply, the visibility of artists impacts directly on the value assigned to their work (Hagg 2010:65). An artist who becomes stuck at the same level of visibility is also stuck at the correlating value.

Brighenti states that: "...inclusion and exclusion do not correspond with visibility and invisibility in a linear way...visibility does not lead to recognition." (2010:52) In other words, while inclusion has long been the answer to diversifying industries (Nwonka 2015:77) it does not guarantee visibility particularly as the structures retain the same nature of relatability to the previously excluded groups. On a similar tangent, Nomusa Makhubu writes: "Many institutions are seen as spaces of white proprietorship even though they are civic establishments." (2013:418) The inclusion of Black artists can seem like a technicality when the standards, expectations, and representations for Black and White artists are not even. These standards, expectations, and representations are hangovers from colonialism that influence prescribed styles for Black artists and use those prescriptions in representations of Africans and their art (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu 2009:10). This can also include access to cultural capital and soft skill, such as business acumen and professional networking, that ease navigating industry spaces (Nwonka 2015:82). What Makhubu is referring to is the incomplete transformation project in South Africa in which we see that while there have been shifts in whether people of colour are allowed to access certain spaces, not enough work has been put in to ensure that people of colour are fully supported and are given an equal chance to succeed in those spaces. It is because the systems in which White people have operated and

become accustomed to have not changed, that people of colour, who do not have the same kind of longevity in the systems that govern professional art industry, cannot be expected to excel at the same rate as their White counterparts.

The role of privilege is more pronounced in a 2009 visibility study that took place on a predominantly White university campus in America, with all participants in the study being White. Biernat and Sesko set out to prove that Black women are often unaccounted for in the recollection of group conversations and tend to fall through the cracks due to perception and stereotype surrounding them being non-prototypical (2009:356). Non-prototypical here means that Black women meet prototypes of both women and Black people and have distinct aspects that result from them being Black and also women (Biernat & Sesko 2009:356). The definition Biernat and Sesko use for invisibility is the "...absence of, or erroneous representation of..." (2009:357). Their findings reinforce the role social and cultural context and position plays in visibility. They found that in groups consisting of Black men and women as well as White men and women, Black women were less likely to be remembered than other demographics (Biernat & Sesko 2009:357). This was determined by participants being presented with a selection of images of faces from all demographics to memorise (Biernat & Sesko 2009:357). They were later presented with a new selection that included the previous selection along with new faces and were asked to identify the faces they remember seeing before (Biernat & Sesko 2009:357). Biernat and Sesko also found that when participants witnessed a conversation between persons of all demographics, they were less likely to remember what Black women had said and were more like to attribute what they had said to the other demographics in the conversation (2009:359). They showed participants a video of Black men and women as well as White men and women all conversing, and later asked the participants to recall what had been said and by who (Bienat & Sesko 2009:358).

I am especially intrigued by this concept of "erroneous representation" and – while it also describes the examples of distinctly different writing on Gum's work mentioned above – I would like to link it to the malfunction in 'awareness' where lack of relatability and/or negative perception stunts the visibility of the one being noticed.

Biernat and Sesko go on to say that:

> "We define it here as a *lack of individuation of* or *lack of differentiation* between group members, which is evident in Black women's faces going "unnoticed" (being poorly recognized), and their voices going "unheard" (i.e., misattributed to others), relative to those of White women and Black and White men." (2009:357)

Their study does not state that Black women are not making contributions but that Black women's' contributions are not being recognised. If we return to the three tiers of visibility, I argue that it is not that the participants are not aware that Black women are contributing but that they do not recognise the contributions or the differences between their contributors. The visibility of the Black women to this group is not altogether lacking, but it is limited. The participants in the study, which were White undergraduate psychology students, were less likely to determine if they had seen an image of a Black woman before when compared to White men or women or Black men (Biernat & Sesko 2009:358). In this study we see that Black women have certainly been included at the same rate as White men and women and Black men speaking in the same conversation, but it has not amounted to visibility for them. Or rather, the depth of their visibility is still more limited and stagnates at awareness. In other words, inclusion does not solve visibility.

What is lacking in Biernat and Sesko's study and Brighenti's text is an account of access. Not necessarily of the artist to industry, although this is a problem of its own, but of the one noticing. In the final step of developing visibility 'access' is crucial as it ensures that the one noticing is able to continuously sustain the relationship with the one noticed. This is again dependent on the audience that the one noticing comes from. Referring to the example of the two texts written about Gum and her work, access can mean being able to consult the artists on their own artistic language and objectives. While Jamal taught Gum as an undergraduate student, and likely had access to her over a prolonged period, his text focuses on the modernity of her use of social media and refers mainly to very early works produced while the artist was still establishing her own visual language. Thus, Jamal presents a superficial and even fickle Gum. It may also be that the way he relates to Gum while accessing her is not evolving as the artist does so. Bamgboye however, has strongly incorporated the artists voice into her article and demonstrates that not only did she have sustained access to the artist but that she has used it to centre Gum's own conceptualisation of her practice. This centring provides an acute image of Gum and her work so that when encountered in this event the way in which awareness is guided sets her up to succeed in developing visibility. Although there may seem to be an emphasis here on Jamal's text as limited compared to Bamgboye's text as complex, both authors have demonstrable access to Gum. Instead, what I read here is the role perspective and relatability has played in the resulting visibility from each author's access. Jamal with an earlier perspective, and Bamgboye coming in at a later stage when Gum has a better developed language. It is also worth noting that not only is Bamgboye a cultural writer, but she is also herself a Black woman which gives her a shared perspective on the nuances of Black women's expression and representation regarding at least part of Gum's practice.

Iconicity & Hypervisibility

Nicole Fleetwood explains *iconicity* as "...the ways in which singular images or signs come to represent a whole host of historical occurrences and processes." (Fleetwood 2011:2). Fleetwood calls the opposite, *non-iconicity,* "...an aesthetic and theoretical position that lessens the weight placed on the black visual to do so much." (2011:9). In other words, and perhaps if we think in terms of visual communication and design theory, the icon is static, and its meaning is imbued by a public. Once the meaning is assigned it remains static and one dimensional. The rigidity of assigned meaning is a prominent feature of colonial subjugation (Bhabha 1983:370). Bhabha writes:

> "The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction." (1983:371)

The legacy of this justification is present in global media and marketplaces. The nation states prescribed by colonialism to Africa were done so based on Western economy and ideology. These ideologies are not easily shed (Enwezor 1997:22). The proliferation of African imagery as primitive and outside of art historical contexts has become a contributing factor to the market for exotic and traditional African art (Enwezor 1994:4). It is this *proliferation* that lends to stereotyping and the development of iconic Black images. In other words, by disseminating a justification for the subjugation of Africans to the Western world (as well as to Africa itself), colonialism fixed an image of African culture and bodies as "exotic, ritualistic, tribal, naive, urban, functional, un-tutored, extinct, pre-modern" (Enwezor 1994:4). This image exists outside of and in opposition to the malleable images of the West and becomes desired and collectible.

Prior to an icon being established, it would have been repeated over time. Centuries of slave trade and colonialism formed a sturdy foundation, and stereotyped images of Blackness continue to be propped up in popular culture. In South African visual culture, the Black body remains a site of strife and oppression (Jamal 2017:380). Benard writes: "...very little has changed regarding the overall dynamics of oppression in society..." (2016:2) Benard discusses examples from popular music and the representation of the Black women prominent in American popular culture. She argues that the systemic structure remains the same and public figures who purport to own their sexuality, operate in the same historic systems that capitalise on the hypersexualisation of the Black female icon (2016:6). Once an icon is established by its public, it belongs to, and is meant to serve that public and its objectives (Mupotsa 2015:193). In other words, the real Black woman who has her economic viability tied into the iconic

Black woman becomes bound to perform it for the purpose of her own professional and economic survival, while simultaneously contributing to the reinforcement of the icon.

The now infamous interview of Ouattara Watts can demonstrate this predicament. Ouattara (as Olu Oguibe refers to him) was interviewed by Thomas McEvilley following his inclusion in the 1993 Venice Biennale. The line of questioning followed the hegemonic rhetoric imposed on African artists. McEvilley focused on questions about Ouattara's upbringing in Abidjan, his family, and his religion (Oguibe 1995:26). While Ouattara initially protests and attempts to redirect the interview to the merits of his work, McEvilley is intent on confining him to the context of an exotic curiosity (Oguibe 1995:27). By 1993 Ouattara already had a significant career and had held solo exhibitions in New York, Japan, and Paris. Despite his success Ouattara is resigned to an iconicity that cannot represent him, but is the only platform offered to him by McEvilley. Here the opportunity for Ouattara's visibility is presented on condition of the hypervisibility of an idealised hyper African aesthetic.

In a South African context these layers and conditions for visibility are significant. In an article for *Roundtable Journal* Gum expressed that while she creates her work with Black consumers in mind, it is often White collectors who purchase her work (Bamgboye 2018:146). Gum's work explores a visual narrative that is intended to expand the image of Xhosa Black women (Bamgboye 2018:145). However, to gain a sustainable foothold in the art market, she is reliant on White collectors.

Black women artists in South Africa make up only 12% of the market (Hagg 2010:14). Part of what I am examining is visibility of those practicing artists in terms of the portion of the art market that they occupy and the extent to which, and the ways that they are admitted into art history. Visibility in the art market is integral to economic sustainability. Specifically, the artists ability to afford their lifestyles and that of their dependents, as well as the accrual in investment value their work holds for the collector's market. Visibility in art historical spaces such as inclusion in public museums provides opportunity for critique, and the artists' work to be included in knowledge production. However, because Black women make up such a small, demographically disproportionate, component of the art market the visibility of individual artists becomes a more significant issue for the group.

The marketplace where culture is capitalised on is owned and maintained by Whiteness (Benard 2016:6). Ouattara complies with a problematic interview to benefit from the visibility it offers (Oguibe 1995:27). Decades after Ouattara, Gum's work, which is intended to contribute to a specific visual culture, ends up in the private collections of White buyers which is not her intended audience

(Bamgboye 2018:145). This systemic lack of agency combined with a need for Black artists to feed a market what it wants in order to feed themselves, so to speak, enables the perpetuation of the icon. While Gum herself is not intentionally making work to feed into the market need, the work she makes for the consumption of Black women is in large consumed by White buyers (Bamgboye 2018:145) and primarily becomes available online and only to the Black women who can afford to engage in these spaces (online and otherwise). Additionally, private White buyers can be prohibitive to ongoing engagement with the work as it ends up in private collections that are inaccessible to public audiences. In a capitalist view, images of Blackness are frequently problematic in their representation and discursive framing (Fleetwood 2011:18).

Two examples of prominent artists that represent expressions of South African Black women are Zanele Muholi – Muholi indentifies as non-binary, however much of their work documents the lives of lesbian and transgender women – and Esther Mahlangu. Zanele Muholi is renowned for their work representing Black lesbian and transgender women. This is significant and necessary work as it has exposed wider audiences to this demographic. By photographing Black lesbian and transgender women in everyday poses, at home, with lovers etc. Muholi normalises their existence in South African society. Although this work makes visible Black lesbian and transgender women, it shows limited experiences of this identity. Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu refer to the portraits as "...loving but militant..." (2009:49). This is not a problem on its own, it is important to recognise this experience as normal and legitimate. It is the absence of other artists representing alternative experiences of Black lesbian and transgender identity that contributes to the fixing of the experience and image of a Black queer woman living in South Africa. Similarly, Esther Mahlangu's representation of traditional Ndebele painting, and dress is not problematic on its own. She makes visible a distinct kind of woman who has a particular experience of Ndebele culture. However, hers is not the only experience of women in her culture, even those in the same age group, and the visibility of her work to the exclusion of other Ndebele women fixes her experience as an icon. Both Ndebele and queer women experiences in South Africa are visible to the extent that publics are aware of them. However, similarly to the Beirnat and Sesko study, in certain publics they become fixed and indistinguishable from other experiences leading to their iconicity.

When Goniwe critiques the visibility of Black arts practitioners in South Africa he alludes to what I call the currency of the visibility. By currency I mean the ability of visibility to move the career of the artist (and I do not say forward, as this is not necessarily the case). For example, as I notice Gum and Marasela and they become more visible to me in my awareness, recognition, and access to them, the currency of

that visibility is that I can write this thesis that – in fulfilment of my rationale for doing this study – contributes to critical writing on these artists and in turn has the potential to affect their visibility to additional parties. For Black women artists the same or very similar kind of writing or, rather, kind of contexts in which their visibility is developed has layers of complexity that can affect the currency of their visibility. We can assume that, as with any industry, there will be artists that are more prominent than others. What I am referring to is the trajectory of their careers that is afforded by the currency of the visibility they accrue. Meaning, does their visibility deepen and allow their evolution as artists to be visible to the extent of accessibility, or does it stagnate and tend towards iconicity that prevents malleable perception of their practice.

A further complication with the visibility of Muholi and Mahlangu is that they are both framed as artists concerned with their own identity to the exclusion of external concepts. Jamal remarks that Mahlangu is as well known for her art as she is for her person (2017:370), a Ndebele woman. While Jamal does well to discuss the contemporary relevance of the artist's work today, its locus remains the self-identity of a Ndebele woman whose aesthetic may have been transplanted into modern objects but remains the same (2017:370). Jamal does critically discuss the transplantation of Mahlangu's house to the Centre Georges Pompidou for the infamous *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition (2017:374) but he does not entertain the same considerations in the case of BMW or Belvedere Vodka (2017:369). Similarly, to the erection of the replica of Mahlangu's house, her collaborations with BMW and Belvedere have the artists traditional pattern aesthetic repeated onto the products. There is little engagement with the aesthetic beyond its inclusion. In as much as Jamal distances himself from the problematic nature of a race-based reading of Mahlangu (Jamal 2017:373), he fails to discuss the design and aesthetic merits of the art product itself. When Jamal discusses Mahlangu's work in the context of abstraction, his main objective is to contrast it with a larger tradition of figurative art in South Africa and the significance of the Black body in protest art (2017:380). The currency of Mahlangu's visibility in the art market propels her forward economically, and this is not a small matter as it ensures her sustainability as a practicing artist. Jamal writes that Mahlangu is "...well aware of her bankability and her singularity." (2017:375) Mahlangu has a fixed aesthetic of classical Ndebele pattern making. She does not complicate it, or rather, if she does it is not discussed. Compelling knowledge production within the area of traditional Ndebele pattern making (outside of her home community) is not Mahlangu's responsibility. Her visibility, and even hypervisibility, repeats the idea of Ndebele culture as one immovable thing. Audiences are repeatedly told that this is how Ndebele art looks, and that it has not evolved between the time we first encountered Mahlangu in 1989 until now. Regarding Mahlangu's work Jamal states:

"Her work does not tell a story, it has no internal meaning." (2017: 382). This is untrue of the history of Ndebele art[7] (Smuts & Mhlangu 2015; Hoard 2001; Levy 1990; Schneider 1985), and Esther Mahlagu's practice[8] (Smuts & Mahlangu 2015:132&133).

Muholi's practice is also tied to their self-identification. Their objective is to make visible their lived experience (Salley 2012:59). Certainly, Muholi employs the tactics of iconicity. By repeating the image of a particular experience of Black lesbian and transgender identity they make it hypervisible. This expands public understanding through consistent exposure, and expands definitions of beauty, affection, and companionship (Salley 2012:60). Muholi's work intends to "...use visual means to assert an inclusive logic of belonging." (Salley 2012:60). In other words, to a public once apprehensive to the aesthetic and compositions shown in Muholi's work (Gqola 2017:65), *this* image of Black lesbian and transgender women is normalised. Muholi's prominence provides positive visibility not just for them as an artist, but also the women they represent. However, in as much as "...visibility in and of itself does not erase a history of silence..." (Hammonds 1994:14), visibility can also have negative outcomes. This is often the outcome of hypervisibility. Muholi's work is more widely disseminated as it gains affirmation in the international art fraternity (Gqola 2017:69). A 2018 study on the prominence of African artists in the international art market name Muholi as a top tier Black South African artist (Murinik 2018:64). This study shows that it is the limited players in the management and structuring of the art industry that have the greatest contribution to visibility, hypervisibility, and invisibility. Muholi is ranked in the top tier of African artists based on how often and widely they are included in international exhibitions (Murinik 2018:63). The small pool of international curators with access to major platforms such as art fairs, biennales, and metropolitan museums tend to seek out the same artists repeatedly to be included in their exhibitions (Murinik 2018:64).

[7] Ndebele art has varies depending on clan lines, trends, cost and availability of materials, and political events (Smuts & Mahlangu 2015:132-139). The history of indenturement for Ndebele communities is also significant as houses were painted to communicate and self-identify (Hoard 2001:37). The hypervisibility of Ndebele art in general as an indicator of authentic South African tribal art has also been problematised (Peffer 2009). Ndebele art then and now is not untouched by outside influence (Hoard 2001:38). Today some Ndebele design incorporates popular brands like Nike.

[8] Smuts and Mahlangu have written about the layered meaning in Esther Mahlangu's work, as well as the design and creative choices she makes. She adapts aprons into skirt as a fashion choice (Smuts & Mahlangu 2015:132, and she uses the *ikghupu* style to influence her contemporary paintings (Smuts & Mahlangu 2015:134). Review of Mahlangu's work, especially compared to traditional painting for the homestead as well as her early work, demonstrates deviations in colour and other design elements.

In his article for the *Mail & Guardian* Goniwe critiques the positioning of Black arts practitioners. Goniwe refers to transformation in the art industry as "unreflective" and "cosmetic" (2018:6). Similarly, to my earlier discussion, Goniwe does not mean that the artists enjoying multi-tiered visibility are undeserving or unnecessary to the development of South African visual culture, but rather he highlights that it is only some of the many Black artists practicing who rise to prominence and questions why and how that is (2018:6). Goniwe names several prominent artists, emerging artists, and other arts practitioners of colour which do show that some changes have been made (2018:6). He also goes on to say that:

> "These changes are also evident in fine art departments that are part of our historically white universities, which are now increasingly admitting black students, employing black lecturers and allowing deserving black professionals to assume the positions of programme co-ordinators, headships and directorships." (Goniwe 2018:6)

However, if we consider the statistic I referred to in my introduction – only 31% of graduates from arts degrees, including visual and performance art, are Black compared to 57% White students (Statistics SA 2016) – while many more are going in, the outcomes from these programmes are not as encouraging. Especially as much of how these structures function is inherently Western (Mbembe 2000:9) which places students of colour at a disadvantage.

Goniwe also considers the requirements of Blacks that are allowed in, so to speak, that are not present for their White counterparts (2018:6). He notes a "...burden of excessive expectation to demonstrate black excellence" that is placed on Black arts practitioners that do go on to occupy senior places in the industry (Goniwe 2018:6). While this is surely an expectation from Black onlookers in need of role models and eager to have a point proven, Goniwe points at the "...pervasive white gaze... always at work policing, haunting and traumatising young and established black professionals" which adds a layer of friction to the progression of their careers (2018:6). Distressingly, Goniwe goes on to say that:

> "If you listen to their whispers about white authority, intimidation and violence you will understand the sad reality behind the mirage of a democratic art scene and social interactions staged during the glamorous exhibition openings and arty parties at our galleries, museums and art fairs." (2018:6)

He goes on to interrogate the artwork that inhabits these spaces and frames them as sterilised for the purpose of consumption in an art industry that would rather market essentialist ideas of Black artists – evident in the discussion on Mahlangu's practice where a history of symbolism in Ndebele art, steeped in a legacy of forced removal (Levy 1990:19), is ignored. Obscuring any critical reading into how

Mahlangu subverts and abstracts it further in service of her contemporary context. This is not in a sense that the artists intend to have the potency of their work reduced, but rather that through the dissemination of the work which happens through channels governed by Whiteness the conceptual weight of the work is lessened and/or changed. Or, in Gum's case earlier, the audience is unreceptive to the content and thus able to consume it superficially and without burden. With their being slim critical writing on Gum's work the economic consumption of her work is the largest extent to which it is engaged with. It is so that work that often holds significant sociological and conceptual depth, not only for the artists but for the audiences it relates to, is glossed over as a new artistic trend that is fleeting and removed from reality.

Goniwe considers the implications of "...white enterprises that rent natives for the purposes of tokenism and window dressing..." and how the meaning of transformation for the Black majority in South Africa, particularly in the arts, is for Black practitioners to conform to the structures and expectations of White capitalism in exchange for visibility (2018:6). He mentions Johannesburg Art Gallery, Iziko South African National Gallery, and Standard Bank Art Gallery as all having made recent progressive appointments in terms of race and gender (Goniwe 2018:6). Going on to detail the distresses faced by these art professionals in historically White establishments, he is not as specific to name names. However, it is telling that he highlights the burden of Black excellence, and the duty to outperform a White predecessor. Goniwe also falls into a sustainability predicament. Although primarily a freelancer, Goniwe works with and for the organisations he critiques. I use his exhibition *SPace Currencies in Contemporary African Art* to measure his individual complicity in the limitation and problematizing of Black woman artists.

The exhibition was a seminal moment in my own early career as I was an unpaid gallery assistant, giving tours and maintaining the exhibition spaces. At the time Goniwe was the first Black academic and arts practitioner I had ever encountered. I was a second year Fine Art student at Wits. Looking back on the tangible legacy of the exhibition, its catalogue, the purity of my experience is rather soured. The exhibition was *co*-curated by Goniwe and Melissa Goba (then Mboweni) but she is not a contributor to the catalogue and is scarcely mentioned in it. Eight out of the 25 exhibiting artists were South African. Of these four were women and two (Mary Sibande and Nandipha Mntambo) were Black. There was a total of six Black women including those originally from other countries on the continent. Already this is problematic as it is skewed male and South African Black women are grossly underrepresented. In his essay for the catalogue Goniwe writes:

> "...*SPace* did not espouse a discourse of Afro-pessimism, that negative portrayal of African identities and experiences in ways that seem impossible to liberate from their foundational source of colonial oppression and racism." (2012:14)

Whether this has been achieved is arguable. The exhibition formed part of a roster of activities for tourists to take part in during the FIFA world cup in 2010. This meant that it was swallowed up in marketing that intended to accentuate the unique Africanness of Johannesburg and will have contributed to a preconception from visitors. Goniwe does concede the geographic remoteness of Africa from Western centres in Europe and America, but the conception of a major African art exhibition on the continent is significant as most of the kind have been imported from the West to South Africa and its neighbours (2012:17).

As in my earlier discussions, the problem of visibility is in the hyper focus on one kind of artist (as with Muholi) or on one aspect or characteristic of the artist instead of a critique that is led by the artwork (as with Mahlangu). In Muholi's case I discuss how the experience they represent becomes hypervisible and is thus to the exclusion of other Black lesbian and transgender women experiences. This is not dissimilar to Goniwe's male dominated roster of artists. The visibility of women is lacking in his and Goba's, exhibition and so he becomes complicit in the structure he aims to critique in the later text.

I cannot say though that it is not possible for an artist to play into certain narratives intentionally in an effort to garner visibility. As with Black women in American popular culture, who trade on a market for hypersexualised Black women's bodies (Benard 2016:6). In fact, Fleetwood has referred to hypervisibility as "...processes that produce the overrepresentation of certain images of black and the visual currency of these images in public culture." (2011:16). She argues that some Black women may exploit the expectation of the Black female body as *excess flesh* – a term she uses to refer to Black female bodies as in excess of Black male and White female bodies as well as overtly culturally inappropriate and/or visually controversial or problematic – to not only develop a visibility of their image but a hypervisibility (Fleetwood 2011:111). Fleetwood writes:

> "Within classic visual narratives and historical discourse, whether rendered asexual in the figure of the mammy, ambivalent or sexually submerged as in the trope of the passing woman, or bestial as in representations of the Jezebel, black women are produced through visual signs as in excess of idealized white femininity." (2011:110-111)

In other words, the role of the Black female body is to highlight what is abnormal especially contrasted against that of the White female body (Fleetwood 2011:111). This abnormality can potentially draw

attention and has been a site for marketability (Fleetwood 2011:112). Fleetwood goes on to write: "...the black female body is always troubling to dominant visual culture and that its troubling presence can work productively to *trouble* the field of vision." (2011:113). Muholi's work achieves this in the 2009 exhibition *Innovat1ve Women.* Expected to be opened by the then Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana; upon seeing Muholi's work the minister refused to engage any further and left the exhibition venue (Gqola 2017:63). This brought debate and visibility to the complexity of gender normativity in Muholi's work and the acceptable display of Black female bodies (Gqola 2017:71). The controversy elicited engagement from individuals and organisations in and outside the arts community. However, this visibility was at the expense of the eight other artists that were included in what was a group exhibition (Gqola 2017:67).

Problems of Agency

Visibility is also as endemic in historically racialized societies as racism itself (Collins 2000:3 & Mdluli 2019a:175). By this I mean that the relationship that develops in the act of looking requires agency that is not always afforded to people, and especially women, of colour (Brighenti 2010:29). In the South African context Mdluli states that: "The appearance of the black female body in the public sphere is embroiled with the visible/invisible dialectic" (2019a:187). In other words, not only is there a lack of agency for Black women, but their image is also relegated to the margins and centring it is a form of political activism. From the asymmetrical sexual relationships and rape of Black women during colonialism, to the contemporary portrayal of Black women in the media, the visibility of Black women has too often been contingent on its subjugation and hyper sexualisation (Benard 2016:2). Introducing this thesis I shared an anecdote from my proposal seminar, a fellow academic was adamant there were plenty of Black women achieving great success in the art industry, my mention of marginalisation in an academic seminar prompted quick correction. I have also been told several times by scholars and academics that the artists I will discuss later, Gum and Marasela, have experienced considerable success – as though to say they are not in need of further exploration, exposition, and proliferation. This regards all images of Black womanhood. As Fleetwood describes it, the asexual figure is as marginalised and simultaneously political and hypervisibile as the sexual and hypersexual one (2011:110).

Mdluli has referred to the experiences of Black women during the 2015/16/17 student protests for decolonised tertiary learning spaces and affordable education (2019a:170). During these protests, dubbed the Fees Must Fall movement, several Black women at prominent South African universities bared their naked bodies in protest of the brutality enacted on Black bodies in general including during

the protests (Mdluli 2019a:175). During these protests women had been consistent participants and even leaders of the movement, but it was often apparent that male activists were foregrounded and credited in a way that their female counterparts were not (Mdluli 2019a:174). Gqola discusses this as a common trait of struggle movements, and specifically the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) that emerged amongst the Black, male, and urban university populations between the 60s and 90s (2013:11). The narrow limitations on the state of being for women in BCM corrupted the sexual expression and identity of those who operated outside of defined parameters (Gqola 2013:13). In baring their bodies, Black women in the Fees Must Fall movement intended to draw attention to their own marginalisation but instead they were admonished for being obscene (Mdluli 2019a:175). They and their activism *were visible*, seen – and immediately became hypervisible as a political site in the media. However, their message became distorted in the media narrative which limited any depth in visibility as they had already been dismissed as obscene. The points and merits of their protest did not become distinguishable. Visibility is seen in this example as more complex than a linear relationship between seen and unseen. This example highlights even more so, that the three tiers of visibility that I outlined before have complications regarding position and diversity of the one noticed and the one noticing.

One of the aims of these Black women was to challenge the dominance of male activists in conversation around the movement (Mdluli 2019a:174). In other words, it is not that Black women were not making any contributions, but that their contributions were going largely unheard. Biernat and Sesko's (2009) study focuses on the predicament of intersectionality Black women face. They indicate that:

> "...the majority of research investigates *Black men* as targets of racism, and *White women* as targets of sexism, disregarding members of groups belonging to multiple-subordinate-group identities, such as Black women." (Biernat & Sesko 2009:356).

Kimberle Crenshaw states that: "These problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women within an already established analytical structure." (1989:140) Particularly in art, these structures, such as museums and art fairs, are well established and come burdened with historical perceptions of race and gender-based gatekeeping (D'Souza 2018:143). In the early nineties South African museums hurried to acquire the work of Black South African artists to prove a balanced collection (Enwezor 1997:23). This was not always actioned with the required critical thinking and led to "...an intensified activity of gobbling up any work of art made by 'black' artists (Enwezor 1997:23). Enwezor writes:

> "...since the pragmatic value of everything that defines the sense of the old South Africa derived from the interregnum of white nationalism and black resistance ... it goes without saying that, to speak authentically about the nation ... ultimately belongs to the white interlocutor." (1997:23)

In other words, as the aim of this collecting was to *show* that there were Black artists in the collection, Black artists' inclusion in the collection was contingent on criteria of Black art defined by White museum practitioners. When the selection of work by Black artist is framed in opposition to White nationalism, Black artists become perpetually posed in resistance and that resistance is often led by Black men. In the interest of their own Whiteness, Black subjectivity is always represented as marginalised and/or patronised (Enwezor 1997:26).

There is also another insidious kind of essentialism. This essentialism is in service of the market's desire for an African negotiation with socio-economic predicaments (Mbembe 2000:7). Mbembe writes:

> "...interpretations are almost always cavalier, and what passes for argument is almost always reductionist. The criteria that African agents accepts as valid, the reasons they exchange within their own instituted rationalities, are, to many, of no value." (2000:7)

African artists in turn seek to resist this by contextualising and conceptualising their own value systems in their work (Ngcobo 2006:49). The market values images of struggling artists whose hope is to overcome socio-political/economical obstacles while also roaming around in search of identity. In a South African context this is confounded by the post-apartheid move for museums to collect the work of Black South African artists in a way that was skewed towards work that conceptualised the Black struggle in the country (Enwezor 1997:23). This is further exemplified by the proliferation of so-called 'township art' in exhibitions, collections, and school curricular. These frames of reference do not allow Black artists the same freedom of artistic practice afforded to White artists. If anything, this essentialism, that permits a limited consumable thing, makes it possible for the market to advance the image that Black artists are full participants in the art industry and they look this way. Meaning there is again an economic predicament where an artist feeds a market to be sustainable, and in doing so maintains their own iconicity. Post-apartheid this has especially affected the practice of Black women artists in South Africa (Ngcobo 2006:49). Oguibe writes: "Within the scheme of their relationship with the West, it is forbidden that African artists should possess the power of self-definition..." (1995:28) In other words there are pre-sets maintained for African artists to employ in interacting with the West dominant art industry. These pre-sets – of a struggling artist; a hypersexual artist; an identity focussed artist; etc. – keep African artists oscillating between being invisible and hypervisible.

The implications of invisibility and hypervisibility are not dissimilar as they both concern agency (Brighenti 2010:47). In fact, "...being overly visible, becomes so enormous that it paralyses the person performing it." (Brighenti 2010:47) Crenshaw refers to this hypervisibility as tokenism, and aptly states that it is: "...at least as disempowering as complete exclusion." (1991:1261) In consideration of tokenism, particularly in relation to the operational context of the South African art industry, representation cannot be assumed to be achieved when vast components of the industry do not reflect the demographic constitution of the country. Further, tokenism can become more disempowering than exclusion as it plays on the post-apartheid expectation of previously disadvantaged persons and leaves them disillusioned in the so-called new South Africa.

Returning to the Fees Must Fall protests provides a suitable example of the implications of hypervisibility. During the protests, images of two women of colour[9], Shaeera Kalla and Nompendulo Mkhatshwa, at the frontlines of marches with fists raised and wearing brightly coloured political khangas as headwraps, were widely circulated (Gqola 2017:39). This promoted an image of strength and the heroism of women of colour (Gqola 2017:39). However, women of colour in the student movement were largely marginalised by men (Mdluli 2019a:174). Further, Mkhatshwa faced harassment – due in part to the falsehood for women of colour that her representation in the media fostered. This included the misconception that she was a sole leader and liaison with governing structures, because of the tokenisation of her image in the media. When Kalla was shot in the back by thirteen rubber bullets, the media ignored this narrative that may have shed light on the victimisation of women of colour during Fees Must Fall and in higher education (Gqola 2017:40). Representations of heroism and victimhood are contradictory. Gqola states:

> "The hypervisibility of radical student action on the one hand, and the refusal to engage with the brutality with which the state and public institutions dealt with them on the other hand was the reality for Fallists of all genders. What differed for women is the manner in which they were both held up as visually iconic as individuals and not engaged substantially." (2017:40)

The visibility, or rather hypervisibility, of the image of Kalla and Mkhatshwa certainly would have fostered a sense of awe from an audience exposed to images of powerful women leading a crowd of disadvantaged students. Unfortunately, it also disallowed them from being anything else. Their image was fixed to the frontline of the march and any visual or narrative of them running away or being vulnerable was inconvenient. Gqola also uses the term *iconic* (2017:40). The iconicity of Mkhatshwa and

[9] Women of all non-White racial groups.

Kalla by the media preceded their attacks and left them no room to publicly embody these experiences. Indeed, the icons that the media had created of them had to continue to serve a public that wanted heroines. The hypervisibility of these two women also affected other women of colour. Women whose narrative contradicted the heroine one – who felt voiceless even in the movement – lost their agency to divert from the dominant narrative, and when they protested this, they were called immoral (Mdluli 2019a:175).

Applying this thinking to Mahlangu's career is of interest. There are entire communities of artists continuing to evolve the tradition of Ndebele art, which Mahlangu is highly regarded for. Francina Ndimande made classical and contemporary subvertions of Ndebele art, yet little is written about her work. Ndimande practiced as prolifically as Mahlangu, operating in largely commercial and often informal spaces (Smuts & Mahlangu 2015:133). The comparative trajectories of Mahlangu and Ndimande's careers is not necessarily a reflection of the direct labour of the artists they concern. Both artists were from the same community (Smuts & Mahlangu 2015:132), with a continued tradition of beadwork and industrial painting. It is the way in which White art structures elect to make them visible or hypervisible. Mahlangu's participation in this hypervisibility of a certain perspective of Ndebele art is clear. Especially since a prominent component of her work is the photo opportunities that follow its presentation, in which she is always dressed in full Ndebele cultural attire.

Goniwe speaks of the burden on Black practitioners to excel in the industry under the gaze of White practitioners who place limits on their interactions. He also highlights the lack of agency afforded Black arts practitioners (Goniwe 2018:6). Goniwe insinuates that permission to occupy spaces in art industry and, more importantly, advance in these spaces is held by White gatekeepers. He further highlights the ways in which the terms set for admittance are fixed, determined by White institutions, and immoveable and limiting to the needs of Black people. Goniwe certainly acknowledges the qualifications of artists and arts practitioners in their ascension in the art industry. However, he still sees the industry as White held. This is not his unique view; many public institutions still carry the impression of being White held (Makhubu 2013:418).

In another article for *Frieze,* Naeem Mohaiemen agrees that a change in staffing at academic institutions is not a significant enough change and considers the further burden on a person from the global south of having to understand their own cultural context *and* that of distinctly Western structures (2018:20). According to Mohaiemen, not enough work has been done by us, in the global south, to gain complex understanding of our own contexts (2018:20). However, this does not consider the complications faced

by Black artists who need the market and the financial stability it provides to remain in the arts industry overall. Indeed, Black artists play a seminal role in what we understand as contemporaneity today (Njami 2007:14). However, as Zakes Mda points out, even with Black artists and professionals present they are often disenfranchised when it comes to the center-ing of their work (2019:ix). Historically, even when Black artists managed to endure a sustained career they were held at the periphery by so-called liberals who participated in an industry where the mainstream was reserved for White artists (Mda 2019:ix). Of early modernists, Mda writes:

> "It's untenable that even in today's liberated South Africa artists like George Pemba, his coeval Gerald Sekoto, Louis Maqubela and John Muafangejo are still viewed as 'alternative' by some influential collectors and dealers, despite their canonisation in the academy by progressive art historians." (2019:ix)

This echoes Goniwe's critique of the exclusive approaches of auction houses that affect the valuation of mid-career, established, and classical artists alike (2018:6).

The burdens faced by Black artists, particularly in South Africa, are part of a historic practice of diminished autonomy. Mdluli phrases this as being:

> "...premised on an emphasis on difference as opposed to sameness, which was an ideology enforced by the spatial configuration of separation legislated by apartheid South Africa." (2019b:xvi).

Interestingly, Goniwe always refers to *colonial apartheid* (2018:6), which emphasises the link between the two regimes while also attending to the fact that the period of colonialism in South Africa was extended by apartheid. Mdluli also highlights that amongst Black modernist artists in South Africa who already have a marginalised place in art history and whose contributions remain significantly invisible, women are limited and Mdluli names only four: Noria Mabasa, Esther Mhlangu, Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi, and Gladys Mgudlandlu (2019b:xvii). In an essay for the exhibition *A Black Aesthetic: A view of South African Artists, 1970-1990* that Mdluli curated in 2019 at the Standard Bank Art Gallery she makes an interesting note on the convention of curating Black artists as a group instead of as solo presentations which would provide far more depth of engagement (2019b:xvii). However, regarding the format of her own curating in this instance, she also writes:

> "In this sense, it becomes contradictory that, although it seeks to encourage a more rigorous engagement with individual artists, it too takes the form of a collective show." (Mdluli 2019b:xvii)

Mdluli has critiqued the group exhibition format, writing that:

> "…the group-show model has become an inclusive exercise, but one that has proven ineffective because the mechanisms it uses are to integrate Black artists into an epistemology framework informed largely by a Western art canon." (2019b:xviii)

In fact, Mdluli spends a substantial portion of the essay problematizing the conventions art historical discourse and curatorial practice, seemingly to outline her reasons for returning to them. She acknowledges the manner in which group exhibitions diminish the voices of individual Black artists (Mdluli 2019b:xvii), and then counters that this format has also allowed her to reclassify the varieties of art making at the time and present it in a more suitable landscape of Black Modernism in South Africa (Mdluli 2019b:xviii). She examines the reductionist nature of academic surveys (Mdluli 2019b:xviii) that flatten Black artists as emblems of diversity in South African art history, then goes on to demonstrate how this exhibition is a survey of South African art that is better able to distinguish the nuances and overlaps in artistic practice (Mdluli 2019b:xix). Mdluli's survey exhibition does include more of the artists that are barely mentioned in South African art history, however she still dedicates large chunks of the selection to more well-known Black Modernists as others have done. Although works by Dumile Feni, Ernest Mancoba, and Gerard Sekoto are important and able to drive interest in the exhibition overall – in ways that sculptors Bonnie Ntshalitshali and Josephine Ghesa might not have been able to due to their lack of visibility – this undermines her point of attending to historic exclusions.

Mdluli's point (at least in part surely) is to ensure as little chance of the exhibition being lumped in with a long history of exhibitions and surveys that included Black artists without affording them the same agency as their White counterparts. However, I remain dissatisfied with her argument that women Black modernists must better be engaged with in further depth and within a format that affords closer inspection than a group exhibition. Mdluli includes Black men who also require further inspection. Black women could have been included and then substantiated in solo exhibitions. My dissatisfaction is fuelled by my disappointment that this is still far from resolved within the wider South African art industry. Mdluli calls for a later time, with better opportunity, and more room to deal with the matters that she has left out.

While I do not have first-hand knowledge of Mdluli's experience at Standard Bank Art Gallery, there are lengthy accounts of her involvement in a previous Black Modernism exhibition at Wits Art Museum. The 2016 exhibition *Black Modernisms in South Africa (1940-1990)* was curated by Professor Anitra Nettleton, assisted by Mdluli and Bongani Mahlangu who were Research Associates at the time (Munro 2016). The exhibition was heavily critiqued for the contextualisation of Black artists by a White curator

(Fikeni 2016; Sosibo 2016). Following this exhibition Mdluli framed her experience in arts as being a Black token in a White art world (Fikeni 2016). The Standard Bank Art Gallery has an annual exhibition programme with the capacity to include solo exhibitions by several Black women in a year. Instead Mdluli hands off the responsibility for advanced curatorial study of Black women artists and attends to the men first. This also shows how entrenched the invisibility of Black women artists in South African art history is, to the extent that Black women are complicit in its continuance.

Mdluli was also heavily critiqued for using the group exhibition model, and for the curation of the exhibition itself. Athi Mongezeli Joja writes:

> "Unfortunately, my article placed emphasis on the discursive weight of the exhibition as a whole, treating it as it were an art object itself, perhaps to the detriment of the individual works of art." (2019)

He considers the exhibition a repeat of the 1992 catalogue, *Images of Man: Contemporary South African Black Art and Artists,* that draws works from the same collection as *A Black Aesthetic* (2019). This is problematic because of the ethnographic and dehumanising methodology employed by the 1992 catalogue. Interestingly, Joja points to several Black woman artists in the source collection for *A Black Aesthetic* that could have been fore fronted but were not (2019). Joja concludes that:

> "Thus Dr. Mdluli's project here vacillates between condemning the art world's historical elitism, whilst simultaneously deliberately relying on it." (2019)

This is made more apparent in her essay for the exhibition where, as I have shown above, Mdluli both critiques a convention and then explains why it becomes useful to the purpose of this exhibition.

Thuli Gamedze considers the implications of "white-on-black acquisition" (2019). Responding to Joja's critique of the *A Black Aesthetic,* Gamedze suggests that what was missing from Mdluli's curatorial framework was a more complex interrogation of the collections' colonial and apartheid past (2019). Without this critical engagement, the problematic nature of previous textual and curatorial responses to the collection sits like a hangover on *A Black Aesthetic* (Gamedze 2019). Gamedze takes a different approach and critiques the critics that have written on the exhibition. Many referred to the exhibition as revolutionary for making visible obscure Black Modernists, while simultaneously only naming more visible artists such as Dumile Feni and Gerard Sekoto (Gamedze 2019). Elizabeth (Bubblegum Club 2019), Tsumele (Sunday Times 2019), and Oberholzer (Sowetan Live 2019) all write about the exhibition foregrounding artists that have a wider teaching use in secondary and tertiary art history curricular and that are internationally known. She critiques Joja's inability to engage with Mdluli's response to his

rhetoric without a tone laced with patriarchy (Gamedze 2019). Significantly, Gamedze complicates the hypervisibility of White definitions of Township Art (which are now viewed as reductive and limiting) (2019). She writes: "...we absolutely cannot ascribe the definition of 'township art' solely to white discourse, because in one important sense, Black critical reference to 'township art' was a crucial part of defining what [Black Consciousness] cultural practice should look like." (Gamedze 2019) Gamedze also suggests that Black artists, aware of White expectations of Township Art, leant into this aesthetic for the benefit financially (2019), even though this further contributed to the problem of hypervisibility.

As Davis and Brighenti have established, visibility is dependent on an audience that can relate to the visual presented (Brighenti 2010:39 & Davis 2011:279). An audience that can relate to an image can engage it. However, as Mduli points out, there is a "...vulnerability of black women in institutional structures that work to suppress their participation in academic, political and social issues…" thus limiting their ability to engage with and subsequently gain visibility in these spaces (Mdluli 2019a:184). As in the Biernat and Sesko study, it is not that women are not present but that where they are present, they are vulnerable and marginalised (2009:359). In her response to Joja and other critics, Mdluli debates the context and state of art criticism in South Africa (2019c). She again reiterates her choice to foreground curatorial framework over more robust engagement with individual artists (Mdluli 2019c). She also makes clear another objective of the exhibition: "...to expand the gallery space to be accessible to a wider audience through the kind of content and context in which the artworks were displayed." (Mdluli 2019c) In other words, Mdluli's main objective for this exhibition was not to cure a colonial hangover but to create awareness of this period and some of the artists making during it.

I do not agree that the inclusion of Black women artists could once more be put off for another time. I am also concerned by the seemingly hasty and all-at-once approach taken by Mdluli. However, she is saying herself that this was never the point, and it is telling that Joja confidently tells her that it must have been the point and she has simply missed it. Arguably, Mdluli is rejecting the burden of curing the endemic problematics of South African art history. Her essay shows she is aware of it; she is just not dealing with it right now.

In addition to the burdens placed on Black arts practitioners, I would also like to address the burdens often placed of the work of Black artists. The art product. Above I briefly discuss the visual language employed by Muholi and the various ways their images work and could be put to work. However, this places an obstacle before the artistic practice of the Black women I discuss. Very often the work of Black

artists is expected to *do* something. Mdluli categorises works in various sections that all do something to demonstrate the category. It demonstrates life at the time or elaborates on African religion. Joja expected the inclusion of Black woman artists in *A Black Aesthetic* to clear up a backlog in South African art history. The creative practice of Black artists is stuck in identity politics and socio-economic strife (Mbembe 2000:7), it is also anticipated that in dealing with these concepts their work will have a kind of currency and move the discourse forward. Fleetwood phrases this as "...the desire to have the cultural product solve the very problem that it represents..." (2011:3). She goes on to say that there is a "...weight placed on black cultural production to produce results, to do something to alter a history and system of racial inequality that is in part constituted through visual discourse." (Fleetwood 2011:3)

Indeed, it would be remarkable to have a Black Modernist exhibition focused on the women making at that time. However, that singular show will not conclusively rewrite history and continuous and varied engagement with this topic is essential. Likewise, one curator cannot become responsible for revolutionising curatorial practice or art historical writing. Visibility, while conducive to sustainability in the art market, cannot alone produce change in the historically lopsided structures of governance in the art industry (Hammonds 1994:141).

In this chapter I substantiated how visibility that is considered in different tiers accounts for a layered visibility, including awareness, recognition, and access. This view of visibility complicates the idea that singular subjectivities are sufficient for the larger demographic of Black women in South Africa, or anywhere for that matter. Awareness, recognition, and access are related to audience. It is through the audience awareness, recognition, and their ability to access an artist's work that visibility is garnered. Various kinds of visibility are necessary. Variety in visibility will avoid flattening the nuances in which narratives of Black women artists are different from each other. These nuances have historically been lost in institutions that remain managed, owned, and perceived to be owned by Whiteness. The study by Biernat and Sesko made clear the implications of the visibility of Black women in White institutions. It is not that Black women become invisible in White institutions, but rather that due to the set visibility of Black women in White institutions that a singular assumption of Black women becomes hypervisible. Black women are listened to less and their contributions are remembered for shorter periods or are incorrectly attributed.

The hypervisibility of Black arts professionals gives the perception that Black people are advancing and doing so autonomously in the arts industry. The advancement may indeed be taking place; however, the autonomy of this advancement remains in question. Goniwe's text in the *Mail and Guardian* is very

useful in discussing this. The very early example of Ouattara Watts who even at the time of the interview was having a prolific career, shows how little autonomy he had in the creating of his own profile. This interview was discussed in a seminar I took as an undergrad. Nearly a decade later, Goniwe echoes the sentiments of Ouattara. The hypervisibility of artists such as Muholi, who we see eclipsing her fellow exhibitors in a group show, is complicated by the iconicity of the Black female body seen in Muholi's photographs. In another example the hypervisibility of Mahlangu's work, likewise, lends at least in part to the invisibility of Ndimande.

As arts professional we are aware of these histories and their implications. Mdluli, Joja, and Gamedze have all demonstrated this. They have also turned it around as an added burden on Mdluli to solve this history. Standard Bank Art Gallery is a leading institution, with extensive networks in academic and commercial aspect of the industry. Thus, it can be assumed that this is a prominent position of influence that Mdluli finds herself in as manager and curator. What is clear in the critique of *A Black Aesthetic* is the role fellow Black practitioners play in adding to the burden of arts professionals in positions of influence. It is Joja, a Black man, who insists that Mdluli has the responsibility to solve the colonial and racist past of the collection from which artworks from *A Black Aesthetic* are sourced. This despite Mdluli making it clear, both in the essay for the exhibition as well as in a subsequent article, that this is not her intention. She intends on using the conventions available to her to meet her own objectives for the exhibition.

In my discussion Kalla, Mkhatshwa, and other women activists in the Fees Must Fall movement it becomes apparent that heroism and victimhood are antonyms. Similarly, Mdluli who was praised and celebrated in several articles, including Goniwe's, for having been *selected* (I choose this word specifically to echo Goniwe's wording of "allow") by Standard Bank Art Gallery becomes a heroine of the arts industry. There is no room for her to not be held accountable for the visibility of Black artists. A man, Joja, in a very patriarchal way, explains to her how she got this wrong and that it should be rectified.

This chapter overviews the nature of the art industry as biased against Black women. In the next chapter I will discuss the complexities of Black feminist discourse in a South African context. Focussing on the implications that apartheid had on the manner in which Black feminism can and is applied academically, but more especially in the general lives of South African Black women.

Chapter 2: Black Feminism in Post-apartheid South Africa

The visibility of Black women, particularly living and working in South Africa, and Black feminist discourse are implicitly tied discussions. When the work and lived experiences of a diverse array of Black women become complexly visible Black feminist discourse can be advanced in an intersectional manner. Specifically, I mean that as we see different ways to have a queer experience; an experience of motherhood; an experience of youth; these experiences and their visibility have the potential to garner validity and in turn a basis for the debate and advancement of their equality.

By its very nature, Black feminism is not intended as a lofty academic discourse, but instead as a flexible mandate for the opportunities of all Black woman at a community level (Higgs 2018:51). In a South African context, women's movements of various kinds and especially during the apartheid struggle operated in this way. These movements have been extensively written about and are able to establish a grounding for Black feminist discourse during and after apartheid. In this regard the contributors I focus on are: Pumla Gqola, Zine Magubane, and Carol Boyce Davies. Gqola has written extensively on Black feminism in the context of apartheid and apartheid legacy. More specifically, Gqola discusses the implications of the restrictions of roles for Black women. She discusses the structures that have enforced this, including: The Black Consciousness Movement (Gqola 2013), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Gqola 2004), and the Fees Must Fall movement (Gqola 2017). Magubane makes an argument for the assumption of traditional roles for Black women as an act of feminism (2010). Davies discusses conjuncture in the context of Black women in African political movements (2011). Gum and Marasela have both made contemporary considerations of traditional roles for Black women in certain South African cultures, particularly in a post-apartheid context, and the texts by these authors will support my discussion of the artists' work.

Gqola and Davies both problematize the application and contextualisation of Black feminism in South African discourse; and do so in a way that shows how foundational uses of the theory in that problematic post-apartheid context make it difficult to cohesively consume Black feminism in contemporary South African situations unless it is employed flexibly. Magubane does this by positioning the South African Black woman in such a way that allows for the consideration of alternative applications of Black feminism that account for the effects of apartheid on the lived experience of Black women in South Africa.

Black and also women

Black women do not always fall neatly in the framework systemically designed for women or Black persons (Biernat & Sesko 2009:356). Nor do they always fit neatly in the framework of feminism which is systemically designed for White women (Crenshaw 1989:149), and often Western White women (Davies 2011:84). According to Biernat and Sesko the difficulty in identifying Black women in any singular identity, both marginalised, increasing the already existing likelihood of them going unnoticed can be termed as intersectional invisibility (2009:357). Intersectional invisibility is what takes place when marginalised factors of identity, such as race and gender, are layered with the complex work done to distinguish how the experience of gender is different dependent on race and vice versa (Yuval-Davis 2006:197). Without these distinctions being made, societal and political hierarchies develop (Yuval-Davis 2006:197).

In a South African context this is highlighted by Gqola who discusses the concerns of South African women at the demise of prominent and progressive women's movements in the country's governing and community structures (2017:28). Gqola writes: "...women's activism sits uncomfortably with heroic nationalism." (2017:31). In other words, without distinct and critical discourse on the intersection of the gender discrimination and the racial discrimination experienced by Black women under apartheid law, it becomes difficult to uniquely recognise their achievements in the face of and relating to their racialized gender discrimination as well as their gendered racial discrimination. Subsequently as this work continues to go undone it is also difficult to recognise the way in which this discrimination continues today. In many ways and systems this discrimination is, or is at risk of becoming, invisible. For example, in South African art history, where there is much awareness of struggle themed art, the work of Black women has gone ignored by being excluded or simply lumped in with this very vague category. This renders the practice of Black women artists – as they exist not only on intersections of race and gender, but also sexual orientation; religion; class and others waiting to be discussed – invisible in South African art history (Ngcobo 2006:50).

In a Pan African context, Carol Boyce Davies refers to conjuncture as the *and* between two signifiers of identity (2011:79). In other words, the conjunction that joins the two identities and describes their relationship to each other. For example, Black *and* female. This is an interesting relationship as one identifier leads on the left of the conjunction, while the other follows on the right. In the conjoined term 'Black women' this relationship persists with the conjunction permanently implied. Simply put, we never hear it colloquially said: women Black. This is a historic predicament for women of colour activists,

especially when operating in the same movement as men (Davies 2011:79). This is prominent in South African movements. In early woman lead anti-pass protests racial inequality overshadowed the complexities of their right to motherhood and the ability to provide for their children (Gasa 2007:226). More recently in the media we have seen the way the experience of Black women in the #FeesMustFall movement was sanitised during the protests and within their universities (Gqola 2017:40), as well as how they rejected this and the consequences that followed thereafter (Mdluli 2019a:175).

Davies highlights the condition of conjuncture, considering how it allows for the erasure of Black feminist contributors across African movements (2011:79-80). Particularly speaking to race and gender, and the complexities this imposes on Black feminism, Davies' assessment is that Black women contributors are typically less visible than White women in the discourse of feminism and less visible than Black men in the discourse of race (2011:80). Davies implies the tension of two identities, which can compose new identity, are not only irreconcilable within these frameworks but are also the cause for erasure (2011:80). Again, the experience of racism for Black women is gendered and therefore not the same as that of Black men; and the experience of sexism for Black women is racialized and therefore not the same as that of White women. When on the position of conjuncture Black womanhood forms a new identity (Davies 2011:80). They may share features with Black men and White women, but they are inherently different (Yuval-Davis 2006:200).

While these differences in the way discrimination is experienced does result in exclusion from discourse and their solutions (Crenshaw 1989:140), if attended to there are opportunities to consider Black womanhood as a new identity that encompasses various experiences and modes of expression that can contribute to social and political movements. In other words, the complexities in discourses that happen in conjuncture are exponential and greatly beneficial to the inclusion of particularly the Black women that exist on conjuncture. This is not only for persons who are Black *and* female, but also those who live on other kinds of conjuncture such as Black feminist *and* activist. In my earlier discussion I looked at how in the Fees Must Fall movement this conjuncture leads to the erasure of the women who experienced it. The Black women activists in the movement were spurred by their Black feminist ideals to protest the inequality they were experiencing in their movement but ended up dismissed from the activism as attention seekers (Mdluli 2019a:175).

Mdluli states:

> "Intersectionality was therefore often evoked to illuminate the role of black women and queer bodies engaging in extremely restrictive and policed spaces in which men traditionally dictate how and when women are rendered visible or invisible." (2019a:175)

Intersectionality considers the fact that various forms of oppression cannot be separated from each other (Segalo 2015:73). Their simultaneous operation compounds the experience of them (Crenshaw 1989:150). This is not thwarted simply by the application of intersectional thought (Crenshaw 1989:140). South Africa democracy started with most of the previous art structures firmly in place, even though more willing to include people of colour and far more eager to collect their work (Enwezor 1997:23). What this has meant is that Whiteness holds significant amounts of Black cultural production, while the extent of agency, critical discourse and knowledge production are not comparable. Further, and particular to Black women artists, a lack of critical discourse that is not concerned with the artistic practice as well as the unique intersections that the artists occupy disallows comprehensive visibility of their work (Ngcobo 2006:50).

To combat this, there is still much lacking for the development of new and intersectional structures in South Africa. In the arts the distancing from systemically exclusive structures is not yet a necessarily permanent resolution (Makhubu 2013:418). These spaces have maintained their power and continue to hold the influence and established sustainability to advance the careers of those that they endorse and integrate into their organisations. These include museums and similar platforms that, while being civic establishments, continue to be perceived as White organisations (Makhubu 2013:418). The space often turned to by Black women artists and other marginalised practitioners are substantially made up of artist run spaces and independently curated projects (Malatjie 2013:368). While these spaces are not as ignored as has been the case in the past (Malatjie 2013:369), they continue to operate on the periphery and have a long history of being poorly resourced (Malcomess 2012:37). Black woman artists are more likely to operate in these spaces and this affects the trajectory of their careers. For Black women

> "Resisting marginalisation has become a point of departure ... working at the edges of dominant systems of operations..." (Ngcobo 2006:49)

Despite the intersectional challenges on the careers of Black women in the arts – which we begin to see are complicated by economic factors in terms of their potential for career longevity and the sustainability of the spaces they can operate in – they must also navigate the cataloguing of their bodies in capitalist hetero-patriarchal society (Ngcobo 2006:49).

Imbued with meaning, the bodies of Black women are permitted to public visibility based on their appearance (Mdluli 2019a:187). In an example of how sexism is experienced uniquely by Black women in a manner that is racialized, we see Marasela's participation on an independently curated exhibition being eclipsed based on how she chose to employ her body in her own work. The *Innovat1ve Women* exhibition, as I mentioned earlier, was successful in opening discourse about the display of women's bodies. However, this discourse was skewed towards the examples of women who had not entertained conventional compositions of Black female bodies, specifically regarding pleasure and sexuality, such as in Muholi and Mntambo's work.

Marasela's work *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg* (2005), from a series of the same name, was one of four prints presented for the exhibition (see figure 1). In the photograph she poses to the left of the image with her back turned. She is in the Turbine Hall prior to its renovation, looking out a row of massive windows. A few buildings can be seen out of them, but the view is dominated by the clear sky. She wears her yellow dress with the floral trim and a *doek*. Leading out the right side of the image frame is a row of blue dustbins. At the time that this image was composed, the Turbine Hall was long obsolete and had been

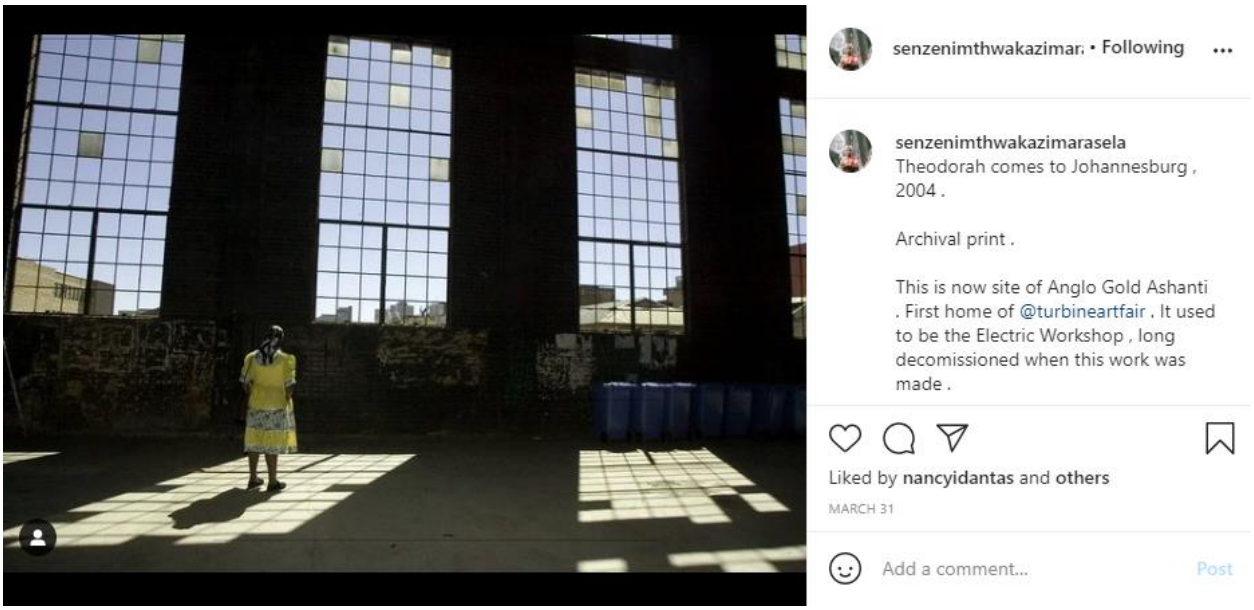


Figure 1: Screengrab from Marasela's Instagram profile. Artwork pictured is 'Theodorah comes to Johannesburg' (2004). Post is dated 31 March 2021.

assumed into the property portfolio of AngloGold Ashanti, a mining company (Khan 2014:98). The history of dispossession and labour injustice in Johannesburg's mining history, juxtaposed with the row of dustbins we often see (Black) domestic workers wheel outside of their employers' home in the early

hours of the morning, tell a complicated and racialized narrative on class in South Africa. The carefully layered meaning in Marasela's work is literally a visual discussion of the intersections of Theodorah's identity.

In the aftermath of the exhibition various writers, journalists, and art critics have responded. The articles extensively detail perspectives on the sexual politics of Black women, their bodies as sites of violence, and the censorship thereof (Baderoon 2010, Corrigall 2010, Evans 2010, Gqola 2017). Critical accounts of Marasela's work from this exhibition are few, far between, and thin. In Gqola's exposition, the most extensive one available on the exhibition and its impact, she assumes Theodorah a domestic worker without question and discusses her journey of memory (2017:86). The essay is 29 pages long and two and a half of those discuss Marasela's work. Mntambo's work is discussed over nearly seven pages. Marasela is better fared as only half of the artists featured are discussed in Gqola's essay, and similar representation occurs in the media.

In the context of *Innovat1ve Women* Marasela maintained, at least comparatively and superficially the status quo. Her body was appropriately covered and composed. Although there are layers of provocative meaning in *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg,* contrasted with other works on show Marasela seemingly fulfils her obligation to remain invisible. Even when assumed to be a domestic worker, by concealing her face – and with it her identity and her expression – Marasela refuses the viewer to decide they already know her, subsuming her identity into that of the Black domestic worker (Gqola 2017:89). However, the lack of critical discourse around the intersectionality of Black womanhood has limited the understanding not only of artists who received controversial reception, but all artists on show.

Exclusivity of Early Feminist Reading in Fine Art

South African post-apartheid history poses additional and unique obstacles in the alignment and progression of Black women's identity. There are several texts where Gqola has discussed the difficulties faced by Black women in South Africa who participate in anti-racist movements. Many of these texts date back to the 90s and 2000s but are still relevant today. In one of these she examines an early and prominent anti-racist movement in South Africa, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). In later texts Gqola continues to write about the subjugation of Black women in South Africa by various means and especially in how their characterisation is limited (2017:40). Although Black women are more present – and the phrase 'more present' continually shifts in definition from more actual Black women, but all in junior standing, or very few Black women in senior standing but with limited capacity to impact

the presence of other Black women in that room – but somehow never extends enough to mean equal participation of Black women at all levels and with the agency to support other Black women in the room. The room itself often comes with conditions of existence. Segalo states:

> "...women emancipation, cannot be fully attained when women continue to exist in a "crooked room" where injustices such as gender inequality persist in crippling and rendering them invisible." (2015:71).

This exemplifies my argument that visibility must be multi-tiered, as simply being in the room and having awareness is not a significant enough change in the experiences of Black women artists. What Segalo says here means that the kind of visibility that would be effective in the lives of Black women remains pending. Additionally, discussions on Black feminism may not always be possible in the rooms that exist now. This also echoes Crenshaw who stated that "...problems of exclusion cannot be solved simply by including Black women..." (1989:140) Collins as well critiques institutions that include texts by Black women authors in their curriculum while still having predominantly White enrolment and White educators (2000:6).

The South African art industry and its structures, as framed by Goniwe, that includes Black arts practitioners while permitting them limited autonomy and growth in visibility, are not effective in achieving visibility for Black women. Particularly in art practice, feminism in South Africa had a slower up take than America and Britain (Schmahmann 2015:29). When the ideology did begin to emerge, it was almost exclusively amongst White artists (Schmahmann 2015:31). Schmahmann attributes this to the "...very limited numbers of black women receiving any formal training in the visual arts, let alone universities." (2015:33) This is certainly one argument. Academic spaces were at the time far more open and progressive regarding feminist discourse, whereas the general political climate excluded feminism form its rhetoric (Schmahmann 2015:32). However, the implication here is that feminist discourse is only entered into and affirmed in academic institutions. Schmahmann also distinguishes earlier work by Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi consisting of "idyllic scenes of rural life" from later work that consists of her experience of urban life (2015:34). The latter, that Schmahmann notes as having been completed after Sebidi received training at the Johannesburg Art Foundation and are pronounced feminist expositions (2015:34). Sebidi never refers to herself or her work as feminist, rather she discusses the work in the context of a dichotomous relationship between men and women (Schmahmann 2015:34).

It is a significant move, and signal towards agency, for an artist to name themselves as a feminist. However, that is not essential for a feminist reading to be done of an artist's work. Schmahmann makes

a feminist reading of Sebidi's work – after she has completed training – without Sebidi having to say the work contains feminist subject matter. In addition to a slow up take of feminism in South African art, there has also been a lag in taking theoretical feminist perspectives of the work of Black women (Aronson 2012:1). The completion of training though, is no guarantee that the feminist potential in the art of Black women is examined. Marasela's early work, towards the end of and shortly after completing her Fine Art qualification, are often solely regarded in post-apartheid contexts without the interlaced complexities of Black feminism or feminism (Zervigón 2002:72, Richards 2004:230, Law-Viljoen 2008:206).

It is not necessarily incorrect to contextualise Marasela's work in a predominantly post-apartheid reading. I am arguing that doing so loses the intersectionality of race, gender, and class – and the racialized and gendered nature of class – that is as present in the work as a post-apartheid commentary. In her 1997-8 *Untitled* series, Marasela silkscreens collages of the photographs by well-known photojournalist Peter Magubane in an embroidered lace frame. Racist phrases are delicately hand stitched alongside the images, which are of Black women mourning. The works are presented as covers for silver trays that might be found in a home. Zervigón reads this series alongside the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC), and while they acknowledge fact that Marasela intends the reading of the work to be more open, they not only read the work in a post-apartheid context but also considers the open reading to be similar to the no-judgement approach that was taken by the TRC (2002:72). Again, Marasela was exploring artistic research of the apartheid regime, especially by employing work by apartheid era photographers. However, again, an intricate layer of the work is invisible without a Black feminist reading being included with the post-apartheid one. There are several aspects of the series that Zervigón mentions but does not explore: "surrounds them with lacework"; "carefully embroidered"; "silver tray" (2002:71-71). Zervigón goes on to write: "...her reproduction of them as silver-tray covers evokes the cliché of something being "served on a silver platter" ..." suggesting that South Africa's painful history threatens to become a commodified luxury..." (Zervigón 2002:73) Relating to Zervigón's TRC reading, this is interesting as it not only brings oddity of the publicly broadcast confessionals into review – which were viewed in the comfort of homes where TV and electricity were affordable – but it also suggests an insidious tenet of the TRC as dark entertainment for a South African public. Zervigón does not, however, unpack the relevance of Marasela's materiality to Black women. The fact that lace and embroidery is often handmade and done so in a style that may be found in an ordinary township home of a Black woman. Zervigón observes the reference to being served, but attributes it to the public mourning of the women pictured being offered to public consideration. It could also be

attributed to Black women's apartheid sanctioned role as domestic servants to White women and White households. A servitude that would take place during and despite mourning.

Rory Bester, who was an early writer on Marasela's work, also examines the details of the artist's work through a post-apartheid reading. He complicates this by considering the way archival theory sets up the private and the public as oppositional to each other. Particular to Marasela's work, Bester writes: "...Marasela's own childhood life where she was cosseted and protected from the events of the 1980s." (2001:10) Herein Bester makes the argument that like the rest of the country at the time, Marasela is grappling with the archive of apartheid history without a private coherent memory of her own. The detailing of lace, beading, and ribbon trim found on many of Marasela's works can then be considered: "As an aesthetic device that personalises memory..." (Bester 2001:11). Indeed, this is so. Marasela "...introduces a sense of intimacy to what are often impersonal political narratives." (Bester 2001:11) She "...further implicates herself in the historical narrative by painstakingly sewing lace, beads and ribbons around the edges..." (Bester 2001:11). However, it is important to note that she does all this in a distinctly female coded manner. This brings out the nuances of her own racial and gendered relationship to this history. The nature of her Black feminine labour is not only an ode to the realities met by the Black (male) victims of apartheid, but an activist inclusion of the victimisation of Black womanhood during this time.

Diversity & Transformation

There is the illusion, since the first democratic elections in South Africa that very much persists today, that South African society is evolved to be racially inclusive and equitable (Segalo 2015:71). Movements such as Fees Must Fall signal a shift in society to call out the remaining inequalities more openly in South Africa that are the legacy of apartheid (Mdluli 2019a:181). Gqola borrows the phrase 'normalising freedom' from Njabulo Ndebele to express the specific ways in which South Africa's post-apartheid rainbow nation affects Blackness (2017:13-14). Gqola describes campaigns that ran in the lead up to the 1994 elections and, while seemingly benign, returned to the same racial language used during apartheid, but with a presumptively different objective (2017:14). This objective was to springboard from the sense of hope that permeated society in 1994 by showing difference without it having to matter. She goes on to say:

> "Each time we saw it in 1994, we knew it was a poster selling a dream we had waited too long to see materialised. However, it was also a poster that spoke without irony in the specific race language we were invited to vote ourselves away from. It looked like one of those billboards,

> posters and magazine adverts for United Colours of Benetton: a range of people with different skin tones and other signifiers of race clad in colourful clothing, arranged so that their bodies touched slightly, against a white backdrop. The most important message in those ubiquitous Benetton print advertisements, as in the "A better life for all" advert, appeared uncluttered in white font on crisp green background, the poster represented "all" through visual markers of difference that suggested embodied race classification." (Gqola 2017:14)

In this description Gqola has done two things to further provoke the already spurring statement made by this post-apartheid poster. She links the poster to the controversial campaigns of the clothing company Benneton, which was known at the time for often controversially using race relations and other global issues to draw attention to the brand. Gqola also places the word "all" in quotation marks, as though to mock its inclination. Gqola considers the poster and its surrounding campaign as a tactic by the African National Congress to still paranoid Whites' fears of retribution (2017:15). By this measure, to ensure that there would be no Black revolt there needed to be a calculated design of racial representation of not only all races, but all races appearing content with each other in the depicted setting. This method of rainbow nation building employed bodies, in this case both Black and White, as tokens to communicate cohesion. This is not unlike the method of including a few Black women as tokens to communicate transformation of an exclusive industry almost thirty years post-apartheid. The posters were a veneer over the actual experiences of Black communities that remained segregated and steeped in poverty and social ills.

Gqola writes that: "Belonging to the rainbow nation implies that the members of the rainbow have equal access to the mythic pot of gold, wealth." (Gqola 2001:100) Goniwe has also signalled that there is a clear separation between Black art practitioners and the wealth of the art industry. Specifically, he writes:

> "My concern here is the common practice of white enterprises that rent natives for purposes of tokenism and window dressing, legitimacy and political correctness whilst alienating black professionals from the actual means of wealth. This racial exclusion in the visual arts is most evident in the auction houses whose ownership, executive officers, specialists and operations are white business as usual. If black people are part of these companies, they mainly feature in peripheral and menial jobs." (Goniwe 2018:6)

In other words, while the effort to appear diverse is being made, the culmination of wealth and thus sustainability and access for Black arts professionals is not matched (Nwonka 2015:77).

Gqola recounts over several pages the methods devised to keep Black communities focused on the singular goal of freedom (2017:13-19). Later she returns to rainbowism in which the issue of race was flattened and plastered over instead of resolved (Gqola 2017:20). Writing: "...its absorption into post-apartheid nationalism flattened the hierarchy and institutional violence encoded in difference, instead of transforming it." (Gqola 2017:20) Gqola makes a distinction between race as power, and race as colour (2017:20). There is an effort to ignore how intertwined all forms of oppression including gender-based oppression are (Segalo 2015:73), and how these oppressions are integral to the continuation of White supremacy (D'Souza 2018:51 & Gqola 2001:96). Gqola elaborates that the rhetoric of rainbow nation building and how it sought to same "all" citizens of South Africa, declared in each poster that because we have said we are the same, we are the same; without requiring much effort towards actualising equality or considering the past of apartheid (Gqola 2017:19-20). Much like Makhubu and Simbao have said of the art industry and transformation (2013:300), this same-ing and choreographing of race as simply colour not only negates the power race had during apartheid and colonialism (for the White race) but it also denies any accountability for the power it carries now (for the White race) and any power that could be afforded to the Black race (Gqola 2017:21). Gqola states: "Avoiding race power has led not to the disappearance but to emboldened racism – institutional and individual." (2017:23) This emboldened racism becomes difficult to address in the face of a history of rainbow nation rhetoric that is celebrated on all the many public holidays and political centenaries the current government goes to great lengths to propagate.

The flattening – equating all lived experiences regardless of race – of rainbowism provides a loophole for White understanding (Gqola 2001:99). It is, I argue, also profitable for Whiteness. By disseminating the myth of diversity Black people are included. Following Nwonka, by *myth of diversity* I mean that the impression of diversity is that it is equal grounded and provides equal access (Nwonka 2015:77), and that difference is not just an acceptable quality but a sought after one. Blackness and Black people can be propped up in White spaces as trophies for the sport of sympathising. In other words, in the proliferation of diversity projects it becomes an exercise to see whose diversity is most diverse, which only further others Blackness as the object of diversity. This is endemic in the art industry. Major South African galleries average 10% of their represented artists as South African Black women, but this 10% is made so hypervisible that all diversity hopes are pinned on them. Arguably, Mdluli's *A Black Aesthetic* is also a symptom of this as it crams Black modernists into one show to represent set categories of practice, but on closer inspection there is little depth of engagement with the individual artists' works and it is wholly lacking in women. This, combined with the prolonged project of rainbowism and

transformation, lends a political correctness for White capitalism that would rather not be accused of being unevolved in the marketplace (Goniwe 2018:6).

This unevolved marketplace – stuck at superficial and/or problematic readings of race and racial experiences – has particular complexities for Black women. Rainbowism's reductive nature – as if all South Africa had to do was realise we were one rainbow nation and equality would be achieved – flattens the concept of apartheid as having universal effects for men and women of colour. In other words, an industry interested in taking a rainbowistic approach to transcending apartheid foregrounds race as the issue and places gender separate, leaving room for those at the intersection to fall by the wayside. More simply put, if the issue is race it can be solved by addressing the needs of men, and men who are not also limited by the experience of sexism compounded by racism will have a head start. Additionally, the post-apartheid government complicates this further by hyper focusing on the apartheid experience of particular kinds of Black women. Since as early as the BCM, Black women have been relegated to two polarised roles: the mother and the whore (Gqloa 2013:15). The TRC dwelled on this significantly by making hypervisible the Black mother who had lost a child or husband due to apartheid crimes (Gqola 2004:62). This did two things to the perception of Black women's experience in South Africa. The first is that it homogenised Black women's experience. Gqola states:

> "...the suffering of (older) Blackwomen becomes one of the most 'naturalised' way to conceive of Black female subjectivity, this colludes to mask the variety of ways in which Blackwomen continue to be terrorised by (white supremacists) heteropatriarchy." (2004:62)

Secondly, the hypervisibility of the Black mother who has been heard, especially through the spectacle of the TRC, gives the impression that her predicament is solved now that she has said her piece. The whore who is habitually and easily dismissed, is "inscribed with gendered violence for her refusal (or failure) to conform to the previous mould of regulated sexuality (Gqola 2004:48). In other words, by not performing Black motherhood their violence is justified. Again, my purpose is not to disavow the experiences of these women, but rather to critique the way in which their hypervisibility eclipses the experiences of other Black women and, especially in the context of Black feminist discourse, stylises how as Black women we are able to voice those experiences.

Gqola also states that: "The circulation of stereotypes therefore is neither coincidental nor arbitrary but contributes directly to knowledge production on those groups typecast." (2004: 44). In other words, how we learn about Black women in South Africa is deliberately tainted by systemically circulated stereotypes. The way in which South African society has historically been taught to see Black women

casts contradictory images of Black women as unnatural and "colludes to mask the variety of ways in which Blackwomen continue to be terrorised by (white supremacist) heteropatriarchy" (Gqola 2004: 62). Marasela challenges this by navigating spaces that aim to exclude her. Later I discuss further how Gum's *Black Coca Cola* series questions that relationship between Black women's iconography in South Africa, and American consumerism. Gum performs the Black mother icons: woman with a parcel on her head, and woman with a child on her back. In each instance she replaces the parcel and the child with coke. She also replicates the Black whore by performing the American iconic Playboy Bunny (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Screengrab from the profile of one of Gum's followers on Instagram, Polina Zakh, dated 4 September 2015. The artwork posted is 'Playboy Bunny' from the 'Black Coca-Cola Series'.

Gum poses in front of the same green shrubbery used throughout the *Black Coca Cola* series. She wears a strapless item, that recalls the costumes often donned by the young women associated with the American adult entertainment brand Playboy. Worn on her neck is a collar and bow tie, without the shirt. In place of the emblematic bunny ears, Gum has fashioned two Coca-Cola 340ml cans attached to a red hairband to mimic the head gear. She holds a tray with an ice filled glass and a bottle of coca cola. This echoes the young women who would wait tables in the gentleman's club associated with the Playboy brand. Although the artist makes a playful wink, the composition is clearly considered. The red

tray followed by the red bottle cap, Gum's red lipstick and headgear, create a dynamic diagonal line. This creative licence shows the artist taking agency over how she is portrayed, which contradicts the diminished agency experienced by the images of the women who worked in the clubs associated with the brand and those who posed for the adult magazine. This is not to say that the women who worked for Playboy did not exercise agency in electing to work in adult entertainment, but rather that they have not historically held agency over their image. Gum's image is self-published and there is an implication of fun in Gum's wink which speaks to her own enjoyment and agency. Gum furthers her affirms her agency by her positioning her Blackness as a challenge to Western beauty standards and the Playboy beauty ideal. This subversive challenge to beauty standards and beauty standard of Blackness is a core concept of the BCM. The BCM encourages that:

> "self-definition will take the form of a negation. That is neglecting all that has been imposed on him, super-imposed by white cultural values, white economic domination and white stratification of society." (Gqola 2013:12)

Basically, "Black Consciousness emphasised positive images of blackness." (Gqola 2013:12) and for this to be the case in all socio-economic contexts.

Black Feminist Action

Speaking on the conditions leading to the formation of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa, Gqola reflects that: "Black people needed to be able to feel validated and affirmed in the absence of white people to be able to really realise their full potential" (2013:11). This quote appears in a paper titled *Contradictory Locations: Black Women and the Discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa* (Gqola, 2013). In this paper, Gqola states that her primary objective is to examine how liberation movements defined the role of women in South Africa (2013:11). After reviewing the benefits of the BCM, such as the promotion of positive and pro-Black narratives and visuals, and the implementation of community development programmes, Gqola considers its drawbacks (2013:13). Gqola reflects: "I think that it is important to realise that the BCM came in a cultural environment where women, whether they were black or white, did not matter." (2013:13) Gqola draws attention to the way the BCM approached oppression as a hierarchal structure, in which racial subjugation was primary (2013:13). This point of view meant maintained and intentional ignorance of any alternative views or co-existing experience that did not prioritise Black solidarity and see racism and the apartheid regime as the only opponent (Gqola 2013:13), side-lining feminism. Therefore, the Black experience that was represented in the BCM was that of young Black men in urban contexts (Gqola 2004:46). Gqola highlights how the foundation of the BCM was by majority Black men

who had experienced a privileged access to a comparatively decent education (2013:14). This draws attention to the foundations of the BCM ideology as having "an explicit largely uninterrogated masculinist bias" (Gqola 2004:46). Gqola points out that the BCM was amongst several liberation movements that were either oblivious to the specific oppression of women or saw no issue with it (Gqola 2013:14). For the most part, women could pursue political ambitions, except when it interrupted their role as domestic and subservient which were seen as principal to the character of Black women (Gqola 2013:14-15). Although many women made these pursuits within the male dominated contexts. This problematic singularisation of women poses a challenge for the BCM ideology to recognise women, including those playing prominent leadership roles in the movement, as having individual identity, and instead grouping them into categories: mother, whore, honorary male. Women in leadership in the BCM were instead first given "honorary male status" to have some sense of an identity in the organisation (Gqola 2013:15). Similar critique has been levelled against the Fees Must Fall movement (Mdluli 2019a:174). Further, motherhood – of community and nation – has been centralised in women's political activism in apartheid (Stevenson 2011:134).

Even now, Black women grapple with having to explain themselves in relation to feminist discourse (Makhatini 2018:186). Afrocentric scholarship has critiqued feminism as Western and opposing of cultural paradigms (Davies 2011: 84). At times this has been problematic in its negation of the existence of oppression within culturalist gender paradigms (Davies 2011:83). It has allowed for White feminism to make general assumptions of all African gender paradigms based on studies of a few cultural groups (Davies 2011:84). However, this has largely been due to the popularisation of specific texts that are written with particular African tribal contexts in mind (Davies 2011:84). In other words, due to the range of different cultural groups crammed into the borders of each African country what is written in the context of one cannot necessarily be easily consumed by another (Njami 2007:13). The purpose of authors who used their own cultures to critique the uniformity of White feminism was rather to centre culturalist theory (Davies 2011:84). For example, in art, the study of gender paradigms in African art practice was used to disprove male dominance in many traditional media such as wood, clay, and other forms of sculpture (Aronson 2012:1). It is White feminism that has taken these critiques and blanketed them across all African contexts. This is a circular system as this perception of homogeneity only further stifles and marginalises feminist thought within traditional African settings. Examining early South African activist structures, it is easy to pick several prominent leaders and authors who confirm that in anti-apartheid movement's feminism had a tertiary (if any) function (Berger 2007:186, Gasa 2007:225, Magubane 2010:981, Gqola 2013:17). In fact, Iris Berger states:

> "Outside a small circle of academic feminists, most South African political activists considered questions about marriage and the division of household labour as bourgeois distractions, divisive to the larger struggle against apartheid" (2007:186).

It is as though identifying as a feminist came with a stigma that would set Black women apart from anti-racist struggles and against it. This is again determined by the restrictive way in which Black women in South Africa are envisaged as stoic and domesticated, as well as dutifully and unquestioningly supportive of the men in their lives (Gqola 2004:48).

Magubane lays out a foundation for Black feminism in Africa that takes into account the significant implications of apartheid on South Africa's social systems. Looking over the narratives of Black women living under apartheid law, Magubane identifies trends of domestic division (2010:988). These include the predicament of domestic work as employment, wherein Black women left their own children and raised the children of White families in order to have a meagre income; the migrant work available to Black men in mines, which relegated Black women as long distance wives and denied them the right to a full time marriage with their husbands in the same home; as well as the zoning of certain areas and hostels where men and women could not share their urban accommodations. During apartheid's divisive laws, Black bodies were diminished to units of labour, and this dismantled home and family (Magubane 2010:987). While movements such as the BCM were stressing the importance for Black women to remain home and nurture their families, and apartheid law denied them the right to *choose* this.

Feminist ideology in a South African context is more complex than a diversification of roles for women outside of the home and beyond their sexuality. In a discussion on several early historical women's associations, many of which were branches of a political party, Magubane examines the natural relation to feminism under the circumstances of apartheid (2010:983). Apartheid laws, such as the Pass Laws Act (1952) and the Group Areas Act (1950) should be taken into account when reviewing the conditions of Black women. To suggest that Black and African movements rejected feminism based on its Western-ness (Magubane 2010:982), or that the national movement for freedom operated to the exclusion of feminism (Magubane 2010:988) is too simplistic of a conclusion. Magubane states: "To explore what actually happened requires us to understand the historical context within which women's ideas about family, gender, community and resistance developed." (2010:989) In other words, the structure of the apartheid government enacted systemic violence on Black women as well as their right to family. Additionally, by limiting the rights of Black women in mothering their children, sustaining domestic

havens, and living at the side of their husband (Magubane 2010:975), the political and social context created by the apartheid government directly informed the articulation of a kind of feminism. By this I mean, for women to insist on traditional family values is feminism as it demands equal rights to family that have been possible for White women, especially regarding Magubane's notion that feminism and nationalism are paralleled ideologies (2010:981). This also offers room in the debate for Black feminist queer women to insist on their right to conform to traditional roles of motherhood previously denied by marriage and adoption laws as well as homophobic perceptions. Magubane's argument is certainly valid, however the subsequent complications of this kind of feminism (particularly as it gives way to opportunity to restrict Black women to the home) does also present opportunity for exploitation. This indeed highlights the need for a multiplicity of voices in the discourse of Black feminism showing a diverse array of how women can use their home life and family roles for activism.

Black women were employing this kind of activism commonly during apartheid as well, although the prominence of Black women participating in local activism had a significant decline shortly after the first democratic elections (McEwan 2001:53). During apartheid

> "...overlapping constructions of motherhood shaped South African Black women's political activism at the height of the township revolts against the apartheid government during the 1980s." (Stevenson 2011:134)

This did not equate to full inclusion but did see Black women in townships using existing structures where women could operate, such as church groups and society burial groups, for political gathering and strategizing (Stevenson, 2011: 138). Within political movements themselves the scope of motherhood as political activism was as limiting as its location.

Visual art was considered by some communities as being a valuable part of the struggle movement (Schmahmann 2015:32), although Black women were admitted at a very low rate (Schmahmann 2015:33). This kind of activism, through art practice and research, remains prominent in Black women's art in South Africa (Ngcobo 2006:49). In Marasela's work it is clear how her motility and everyday life experience becomes an integral part to how she challenges the autonomy of South African Black women to occupy space, and spaces not always accessible and expected for them. Gum's use of Black female domesticity as activism shows how she uses it to challenge consumerism and beauty ideals.

Gum's playboy composition is the antithesis of Marasela's Theodorah, however both give view of different ways to use the Black women's bodily and lived experience as activism. This need for a multiplicity of voices is made complex by Gqola later in her text. In addition to her examination of the

identification of women's roles in BCM ideology, Gqola mentions the perception of White feminists. Gqola states that:

> "The valuables of white society are up for rebuttal by Black Consciousness writers but this becomes a double edged sword when one considers the fact that "feminist trials" are relegated to the same status as romance novels. ...the contempt demonstrated here is a commentary on all anti-sexist theorisation" (2013:17).

By referring to the way in which male BCM writers considered the trivialities (which, in their positioning, often emboldened the difficulties faced by Black people) in White privilege as including "romance novels" and "feminist trials" Gqola highlights the ranking and expectations on Black women in the movement to be steeled against these pass times and the temperament they allude to, while also being subservient and good-natured. Mothers are not romantic, nor are they hypersexual women. Very often the hypersexual woman appeared in short stories where violence was enacted on her as punishment for deviating from the prescribed roles (Gqola 2004:48), but also as foreboding to the real-life Black women who may read them. Not unlike the lambasting[10] received by Mntambo and Muholi in *Innovat1ve Women.*

Conversely, Gqola reviews how Black women writers – who were substantially fewer than men – in the BCM were relating to feminism, often with problematic contradiction and limiting views (2013:17-18). While the literature of the BCM echoed the sexist culture of the movement itself (Gqola 2013:17), it has also managed to leak into contemporary society under the guise of respectability and the reprimand that befalls some Black women for not behaving within the limits of what will be deemed respectable by men (Makhatini 2018:191). According to the Black women writers of the early BCM: "The role of the woman writer is here seen as a custodian of a lost (or rapidly disappearing) culture. Hers is to seek the affirmation of her community. ...in a sense she is to mother her society..." (Gqola 2013:13). Indeed, in this and other official anti-apartheid movements, the act of childcare in motherhood is not particularly fore fronted (Stevenson 2011:144). It is the nurture of cultural identity and political affiliation that more broadly define Black motherhood (Stevenson 2011:142). These views sum up the roles of women as nurturing being a measure of the success of their writing and experience, in a way that it is not

[10] *Innovat1ve Women* and the work of Mntambo and Muholi in particular was referred to as pornographic by the then Minister of Art and Culture, Lulu Xingwana (Evans 2010). The minister is quoted in a Times Live article by Evans as saying: "It was immoral, offensive and going against nation-building." (2010) Xingwana left the exhibition before giving the opening address, although her department had supported the exhibition with a grant of R300000 (Evans 2010).

prescribed to men (Gqola 2013:18). Gqola concludes that it is not necessarily active exclusion that is most operational in the marginalisation of women in the BCM, but how through a passive use of language, practice and ideology towards women, the pervasive thought patterns make women complicit in their own oppression to identify with the liberation movement (Gqola 2013:19). This is especially poignant considering how Black women have been historically framed by the apartheid government (Magubane 2010:989). This framing remains in contemporary South Africa (Mdluli 2019a:175).

Gqola points to language as reinforcing existing predicaments (2013:16). She highlights a popular BCM phrase used at rallies: “Black man, you are on your own.” (2013:16) Distinct here is how the use of the English language, which was utilized to resolve the problem ten African languages posed to Black solidarity and the BCM in South Africa, further side-lined feminism (Gqola 2013:15-16). Indigenous languages tend to be less exclusionary, and may have used the Nguni term *muntu*, meaning person, rather than specifying a male body (Gqola 2013:16). At the midpoint of her examination, Gqola finally declares: “Black is consequently seen as male, and the struggle presented as one between black men and white men.” (2013:16)

The default condition for participation in this struggle becomes honorary male status (Gqola 2013:15). The predominant narrative for women in the BCM was that of the mother character that provided the community with nurture and domestic service (Gqola 2013:14). However, the few women who resisted this did so on the premise that their character was masculinised and made different from regular women (Gqola 2013:15). This was necessary especially considering how the act of tokenism (of Black men to represent the experiences of themselves and Black women; of White women to represent the experiences of White and Black women; and of a few Black women to represent the experiences of a disproportionately larger group of Black women) can be instrumental in developing a politically correct reputation. The condition, officially, for being included in the BCM was Blackness. The ways in which prescriptions made to women for their existence contradicted the movement and its expressed focus on celebrating all forms of Black excellence and beauty threatened this, and to counter it there had to be a way to include at least some Black women in the same manner that men were included. The fatherhood and fathering nature of Black men impact on the struggle is not discussed as prolifically as the motherhood and mothering nature of Black women.

In the art industry tokenism becomes an act of oppression, not only for the artist’s affected but their potential audiences as well. In Schmahmann’s text we see how the work of Sebidi is initially relegated to being homely and rural and is almost romanticised in this aspect. Marasela’s early work is read almost

exclusively as Black struggle and loses some complexity. There is an interesting dichotomy here between the two artists as existing in quiet and idyllic setting or activist and in struggle. Such stark distinctions leave little room in art historical discourse for the nuances that happen in between these two settings. In the context of Black feminism, and the BCM in particular as a seminal ideology of Black empowerment in South Africa (Maart 2013:7), tokenism paints Black women's activism as unusually masculine and necessarily hard. Indeed, much of the softness of lace and embroidery that Marasela employs as part of her visual language becomes lost in a reading that focuses on the hardness of Black labour. Representation in Black feminism itself as a discourse is not and cannot be singular. Black feminism is an opportunity for depictions of Black women to embody joy, as in Gum's playboy composition, and for this to be as much activist as any loud protest.

Owethu Makhatini writes a heartbreakingly familiar account of her experience of identifying as a feminist in Black community:

> "Sometimes the statement pours out of the mouth of a twenty-something-year-old between burps of Black Label, sometimes it tumbles out of an academic at a seminar. Sometimes it comes from your own father. ... The resentment and entitlement sting all the same." (2018:185)

Here she is referring to the experience of being labelled angry for identifying as a feminist (Makhatini 2018:186). The historical conditions for Black womanhood continue to permeate contemporary South African society (Segalo 2015:75). Principal of these is how Black women's activism looks and how it is allowed to act in a distinctly South African society.

The relevance of Black feminism, which was initially developed in and for a Black American community (Davies 2011 & Collins 2000), in a South African context is debatable (Gqola 2013) even today, especially once the lack of transnational intersectionality is considered (Davies 2011:78). Prominent academic, Desiree Lewis, argues:

> "...South African critics have been preoccupied with recognising difference to the extent of reifying it, with separatism becoming a goal rather than a strategy of critical thought and action." (2007:24)

This is evidently historic in many anti-apartheid movements (McEwan 2001:49, Gqola 2013:17, Berger 2007:186). The consistent repudiation of feminism as applicable in an African context begins to shed light on the practice of erasure towards positions of conjuncture typical to Black women, as seen in the BCM regarding race and gender. Davies concludes that while Western feminisms are Eurocentric in their

understandings of women's experiences (2014:84) and have been rejected by non-Western cultures (2014:84-85), culturist gender studies are also limiting and problematic.

In the previous chapter I discussed the opposing concepts of the heroine and the victim. In this chapter it becomes apparent how the Black mother, like the heroine, is incongruous with other experiences of Black womanhood. This hypervisibility of motherhood pertains more to nation than anything else. It is more concerned with the advancement of the male led political movements than it is the needs and experience of Black women. Conversely, early feminism is maintained as a theory for the academic elite. This leaves out Black woman artists, and especially early on in their careers, out of feminist discourse and having their work read through feminist theory. Arguably, this further supports the idea, according to academic history, that early Black art in South Africa was exclusive of feminism.

A lack of intersectionality is endemic in South Africa and, in particular, art structures. Examples of these are seen both in the Black elite (as seen with the former minister of Arts and Culture) and the White elite (as seen with Schmahmann's gatekeeping of feminist theory regarding Sebidi's work). In the case of art this results in superficial dismissal. As with the *Innovat1ve Women* exhibition, in lieu of in-depth critique, the work is a read as pornographic imagery and the sophisticated exposition of the artist's use of the Black female body and its layered meaning is lost. While I would agree that art should be read in various ways and with the application of various ideologies, it is telling that Black artists are significantly fewer and almost altogether excluded from early feminist discourse. It is worth noting that the slow trajectory of Black feminist discourse – by name – within Black societies is potentially a justification of Black women's' work being excluded from feminist theoretical reading. Sebidi's experience of Black womanhood does not preclude her time outside of the institution, even though Schmahmann (2015) only regards her post-training work. Excluding her early work from feminist reading prevents engagement with potential visual articulations that are relevant to Black womanhood at the time that Sebidi was creating that work. Additionally, it is also worthwhile to make layered reading of individual work. In this way the complexities of an artist's work become better visible.

Chapter 3: Commercial Engagement

Sustainability serves as a prominent gatekeeper in the arts industry. If an artist is not able to maintain their livelihood and those dependent on them, they are unlikely to remain in the industry. In this chapter, I look at the way in which engagement with the art market and thus commercial success has excluded the visual art careers of Black women in South Africa. I discuss the way the role of commercial engagement is integral in the realisation of visibility, as the increase of financial stability affects the

longevity of an artist in the industry and their ability to afford creative growth. This often means being able to afford the cost of new materials and/or additional training as well as daily living expenses. I do not mean that it is impossible to have successful and visible art production without commercial engagement, and therefore I do discuss how academic and social media engagement can aide in the manufacture of visibility. However, and especially in the instance of Black women artists in post-apartheid South Africa, commercial engagement that gives way to financial sustainability makes it possible for Black women artists to remain in the industry and garner other forms of engagement. By this I mean developing their career and cultural contribution to the extent where they are being represented in museum exhibitions and collections, as well as building their social media reach and influence. Additionally, the commercial success of artists directly benefits other arts professionals. This includes but is not limited to the family and dependents of the artist. The 2010 VANSA report on the South African Visual Art industry indicated that "…a significant portion of the workforce in the sector are comprised of people that artists provide work for in a variety of roles." (Hagg 2010:51) These roles can include artistic and administrative assistants. At the time of this report there were an estimated 17700 people employed in the Visual Art sect, and 16% of these worked in jobs created by artists (Hagg 2010:47). The income of these persons becomes dependent on the success of the artists.

In this chapter I also highlight the historic and current disproportionate nature of the South African art industry. I demonstrate that Black South Africa women artists are not well represented in galleries and at art fairs, and therefore are largely excluded from the art market. I do this by analysing the extent to which artists are represented in the seven top galleries in South Africa, as identified by market researcher Mary Corrigall (2019:4). Further, I discuss the influence of these seven galleries on the 2019 art fair in Johannesburg that was revised and re-launched as Art Joburg.

In terms of art fairs outside of South Africa, I also look at the complication of White South African artists representing Africa disproportionately to Black women in the international market. For this purpose, I compare the representation of South African artists included at Miami Basel, Frieze London, and I:54 London, New York, and Marrakech. While the first two included artists from the globe, I:54 is an exclusively African and African diaspora art fair. I argue that the exclusion of South African Black women in art fairs limits the dissemination of Black women's expression and the possibilities for the exploration of various Black feminist ideals as a valued aesthetic and conceptual field in commercial spaces. Additionally, it affects Black women's ability to access international markets. I argue that the lack of representation of Black women artists presents a distorted view of artists practicing in the country to

the global art market. In my analysis of the seven top galleries in South Africa, I also look at their inclusion of Black women in solo and group exhibitions that took place between 2017 and 2019. This will serve to identify the interests of the market as interpreted by galleries, who are a prominent structure of the primary art market (McAndrew 2018:18).

I will also consider the secondary market by examining the represented artists in auctions held by two South African auction houses between 2017 and 2019. These auction houses will include Strauss & Co. and Aspire Art Auctions. Strauss & Co. is an established auction house with premises in Johannesburg and Cape Town. It also works with prominent South African art specialists in the categorisation and the valuation of its consignments. Aspire Art Auctions was recently founded in 2016, compared to Strauss & Co. being founded in 1968. Likewise, it tends to consign more contemporary artists for auction, although it does include a significant proportion of old masters from South African art history. An analysis of the artists represented will be revealing of the demographics and style of art invested in over a period of three years. This secondary market is strong evidence for the longevity of Black women in the South African market. The time between an artists' entry to the primary market and their entry to the secondary market is often considerably long (McAndrew 2018:74).

Finally, I will analyse the commercial engagement with the work of Tony Gum and Senzeni Marasela. I will do this by considering the calibre of the galleries that represent them; their participation in local and international art fairs; and their prominence and value in the secondary market. The opacity of pricing in the primary market prevents me from analysing their growth in commercial value, however, I will relate their prominence and establishment in the primary market to their success in the secondary market. This will be more extensively done for Marasela who has been a practicing artist for over thirty years compared to Gum's roughly six years.

Gallery influence on the Joburg Art Fair (Art Joburg)

The art market, globally, is notoriously opaque about its finances (Macdonald 2019:7). This makes it difficult to ascribe value in financial terms. Value and art can much easier be measured in terms of reach and influence. These determinations tend to permeate within industry, allowing hierarchies to develop that are difficult to defy. An example of this is seen in the Joburg Art Fair. The fair was established in 2008 as a Pan-African art platform (Corrigall 2019:3). While the fair may not have intended this, economic and geographic burdens are obstacles for less established art galleries on the continent to access this fair. Bettina Malcomess critically contextualises the Joburg Art Fair as less continental and more international. She writes:

> "This 'African contemporary' is located less specifically in Africa than within an international art circuit and market, where the major players are international group shows, the Joburg Art Fair and private galleries." (Malcomess 2012:34)

In other words, the Joburg Art Fair formed an integral component of the primary market in South Africa not because it was particularly Pan-African but rather because it linked the higher status galleries, who could afford the cost – of renting space at the fair and logistics towards presenting art and participation – of the Joburg Art Fair to a global market.

In a report on the three art fairs taking place annually in Johannesburg (Joburg Art Fair, Turbine Art Fair, and Latitudes) independent market researcher and art critic, Mary Corrigall identifies these higher status galleries and their impact on the structure of the Joburg Art Fair. Corrigall refers to them as first and second tier galleries, and includes the following galleries: Goodman, Stevenson, Everard Read, Whatiftheworld, SMAC, blank projects, and Momo (2019:4). While Corrigall does not distinguish between the first and second tier galleries, there are apparent distinctions. Goodman and Everard Read both have gallery spaces in London. Although Stevenson does not, it participates in major international art fairs alongside Goodman Gallery. Whatiftheworld, SMAC, blank projects, and Momo also participate in international art fairs; however, their participation is not as extensive – by means of the amount and calibre of the fairs they participate in, as well as the scale of the gallery presence when at art fairs – and has been inconsistent. Another contributing factor is the visibility of the artists represented. Stevenson Gallery represents artists like Kemang wa Lehulere and Zanele Muholi who have been widely and globally exhibited, compared to artists like Donna Kukama and Lerato Shadi whose visibility is to a lesser extent. Of the top twenty artists in Africa nine are represented by South African galleries (Murinik 2018:65). Of these, four are represented by Stevenson, three by Goodman, and one by blank projects (Murinik 2018:65). While it is possible to identify top galleries in a region based on the factors I have mentioned, these factors are not rigid.

Following the growth of the Cape Town Art Fair, especially in its participation and reputation with European-based galleries and collectors, interest in the Joburg Art Fair had fallen (Corrigall 2019:3). This shift in interest – likely also driven by the establishment of new institutions in Cape Town such as the Norval Foundation and Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art (Zeitz MOCAA) – lead to a change in management, and a rebranding of the Joburg Art Fair. In 2019 the fair's name was changed to Art Joburg, which also "...coincided with a comprehensive rebranding and restructuring that shifted its identity, announcing divisions between first and second tier galleries and the rest." (Corrigall 2019:1)

The main change made was the number of participating galleries, which was scaled down from over twenty galleries a year to under ten in 2019. This was a reduction of 60% (Klingelfuss 2019). There were also increases in space for lounge areas.

In the catalogue for Art Joburg 2019 – which is referred to as an inaugural event and not a continuation of the Joburg Art Fair – the Founding Director, Mandla Sibeko, states: "Evolving from an approach focused on filling exhibitor space, sponsorship ... the inaugural galleries now subsidise the new model." (2019:1) Corrigall observes: "...it appears that galleries of a higher status no longer wished to be grouped with galleries perceived to be less important." (2019:4) This is not to say that Joburg Art Fair was necessarily more inclusive than Art Joburg is. In 2010 there was an estimated 650 galleries in South Africa (Hagg 2010:51) and 23 galleries participating in Joburg Art Fair.

In an interview with the directors of Afronova Gallery, Emile Démon and Henri Vergon, they explain that they were excluded from the fair because they do not operate from a fixed space gallery (2018). Démon and Vergon had previously operated from a by-appointment gallery in Newtown Johannesburg, but later decided to continue without a permanent space (2018). Vergon said:

> "On the grounds that we don't have a physical space. Um, so, it shows a measure, on their side, because, you know we were a part of it, and we stopped doing the fair, because it was very local to be honest, at the time – and it was not opening new avenues for the artists we were working with. Um, but it's uh, a bit bizarre that the only criteria is not about the strengths of the different artists who are represented, but about the very basic condition of having a space." (2018)

This is not unique to Joburg Art Fair, as having a physical gallery is commonly a requirement to many art fairs (McAndrew 2018:89). Afronova's resolve to not be part of the fair, however, is a growing move for galleries of all sizes who tend to transact at fairs and online (McAndrew 2018:88).

Another obstacle to the Joburg Art Fair faced by smaller galleries and art platforms was the distinction between the two. Participating in the fair as a gallery, regardless of how small, made the represented artists eligible for the FNB Art Prize. This prize had a monetary award attached to it and showcased the artist's work in a prominent part of the fair, both at its physical location as well as in marketing and in the catalogue of the fair. Artists who participated via art platforms such as Bag Factory and Artist Proof Studio – these spaces also tend to be development focused such as Bag Factory offering affordable studio space, networking, and funded residencies, and Artist Proof Studio which offers training – were

excluded from the opportunity to compete for the visibility and financial boost the FNB Art Prize offered. Art platforms, independent from more conventional gallery circuits, often offer more agency for artists and thus foster more explorative and provocative rhetoric with contemporary culture. They can expand on increasingly accessible avenues for knowledge production and dissemination (Makhubu 2013:416). Art platforms tend to be more progressive than the mainstream, and may even appear more appealing to alternative interests, particularly as in recent years they have been able to carve out larger spaces for themselves in the art industry (Malatjie 2013:369). However, without full access to commercial spaces such as the art fair artists included in the booths of art platforms remain precluded from some of the financial gains available there.

The influence of galleries on the primary market is not surprising. The primary market in South Africa has experienced the most significant growth in the art industry over the last decade (Macdonald 2019:3), and the gallery circuit is a prominent component of this. The discontinuation of the Johannesburg Biennale also plays a role in increasing the authority of the primary market to validate contemporary art (Macdonald 2019:3). This is not to say that commercial engagement acts exclusively on the value of art.

> "Market valuation tends to follow institutional validation. In other words, an artist's work only accrues fiscal value after it has accumulated continued acknowledgement from those who are seemingly detached from 'the market' and are only interested in the cultural or discursive value of art." (Macdonald 2019:12)

This is echoed in Portia Malatjie's review of alternative spaces. She considers the non-normative nature of the spaces an allure and as better marketing routes for artists (Malatjie 2013:372). There can be a draw, and even power, in the otherness of marginality when compared to the centre (Makhubu 2013:417). In other words, while the artists represented by top tier galleries tend to have an established oeuvre such as blank projects' Billie Zangewa, Artist Proof tends to present the work of its students and recent graduates that are still evolving in their style. Likewise, the artists represented by Bag Factory at art fairs are typically the winners of residencies and awards earmarked for emerging and early career artists who still have significant room to grow. These artists also tend to be Black, women, or both.

This is arguably at least part of the reason why Joburg Art Fair invited art platforms to exhibit alongside galleries, even though they paid less in stand fees. These platforms, often supported by external funding (Malcomess 2012:34), are less focused on commercial interests and thus more allowing of experimental artists. Likewise, Art Joburg, although heavily exclusive in the galleries allowed to participate, has

continued with what it refers to as the LAB incubator. It is worth noting that while these art platforms and alternative spaces do continue to draw attention from actors in the market such as gallerists, this is often for the purpose of evaluation exercises or talent scouting to decide who graduates into the main gallery circuit to lend ingenuity to a conventional space. This talent scouting is a widely practiced activity that contributes to small galleries and art platforms remaining small while already larger galleries grow even more (McAndrew 2018:90). Meaning, while artists often stay in studio spaces at Bag Factory, they often move on eventually to formal gallery representation by larger institutions.

Malcomess posits another complication to this distinction between galleries and art platforms. The indelible link between South African galleries and the international market, that is dissimilar and even non-existent with alternative spaces, has meant that commercial engagement often takes place outside of the Joburg Art Fair itself. She suggests that works are often sold before arriving at the art fair (2012:36). She writes:

> "What this is indicative of is that, while the Joburg Art Fair sets itself up to engage directly with art from the continent, its actual engagement is with African artists already operating internationally." (Malcomess 2012:36)

This is further to my point that the inclusion of art platforms is not equitable to the benefit of the commercial engagement of the fair unless and until an artist graduates to a gallery that can provide access to the full benefit of the fair. This benefit is not simply being allowed to show work, but also to be eligible for accolades; considered within international collector networks; and receiving the validation that comes from being represented by a higher status gallery.

Malcomess considers, but does not problematize, the way art structures situated in the market such as fairs and commercial galleries, assume the roles intended for art structures conventionally situated in academia such as museums and biennales (2012:36). She argues that by assuming these roles, the art market has been able to "directly engage the South African context" (Malcomess 2012:36). Although Malcomess highlights the significance of smaller projects and their ability to engage African artists and their communities, she notes that these projects lack visibility unless and until they engage with the art market (2012:38). Malcomess also neglects to make a full description of the kind of artist that is represented in the international art market. She mentions how African artists are likely included based on their differences within Western art markets (2012:36). Malcomess does not problematize how the generally 'hyper-African' – that leans to an exaggerated visual representation of singled out African cultural practices and aesthetics, not completely representative of contemporary African situations or

persons – work made by these artists limits the visual culture of Africa. She does not complexly engage with the tendency to include artists who have spent large portions of their lives outside of the continent, nor how this contributes to their visibility. Finally, when discussing South African artists, she fails to note the disproportionate inclusion of White practitioners and the problem this poses for a Black majority country. This is a significant omission in a country with such a turbulent racial history.

The last Joburg Art Fair in 2018 included 29 galleries and fifteen art platforms. There were also three other classifications: special projects; solo; and limited-edition prints. The special projects selection included three booths, two of which were for awards: the Featured Artist and the FNB Art Prize. The solo section included six solo presentations by five galleries and one hybrid project and gallery space (David Krut Projects11), three of the galleries also had gallery booths in addition to the solo booths. The limited edition prints section included eight booths, one of which also had a gallery booth. Print studios often bring to art fairs editions from artists that are already represented by their galleries at the same fair in a different booth, thus increasing their visibility through various points – and price points, as print editions are conventionally more affordable than original works – of access within the fair. Excluding the galleries not based in South Africa, nineteen galleries represented 153 artists at Joburg Art Fair in 2017. Of these, eight (Asteria Malinzi, Lhola Amira, Mary Sibande, Mbali Mdluli, Nandipha Mntambo, Lungiswa Gqunta, Sethembile Msenzane, Tony Gum) were South African Black women, amounting to 5% of the artists represented at the Joburg Art Fair by South African galleries. The artists represented by art platforms have been altogether excluded from the catalogue, further demonstrating the unequal access to the benefits of the fair that these artists experience.

Art Joburg aimed to be a much smaller, more tightly curated fair. With only 8% of the South African artists represented by galleries in 2018 being Black women, a smaller fair does not bode well for the demographic, their visibility, or their visual culture. Nine galleries (Stevenson, SMAC, Everard Read, Whatiftheworld, Goodman, blank projects, Kalashnikovv, Gallery Momo, Smith) and eight art platforms (BHkz, ELA–Espaço Luanda Arte, Rele Gallery, Eclectica Contemporary, Yebo Contemporary, Modzi Arts, No End Contemporary, 16/16 and hFactor), now classified as lab incubators, participated in the Art Joburg fair. All nine galleries were South African based. The nine galleries represented 83 artists, and of these two (Donna Kukama and Phindile Mamba) were South African Black women. Of the eight lab

11 David Krut Projects is a print studio, bookshop, publisher, as well as gallery. Unlike many art platforms however, it enjoys multiple international links including printing for international printmakers.

incubators included three were based in South Africa. No Black women were represented in this section. Art Joburg also had a section called Max. This consisted of six solo booths that displayed large scale work, and no work by Black women was included here either.

The data from both fairs comes directly from the associated catalogues. I also attended both fairs in order to assess representation for this research. The role of galleries is apparent and significant. Initially the galleries authority is over who they represent and then select for inclusion in the fair. Although I am not naive enough to believe the influence ends there, the extent of the control higher status galleries have over the curation and gatekeeping of the Joburg Art Fair now called Art Joburg later becomes overt. The development of art value is dependent on "…interlocking relationships between art-producers, institutions, gallerists, dealers, publishers…" (Hagg 2010:65). The selection committee for the Art Joburg 2019 included Jonathan Garnham (blank projects), Mark Read (Everard Read), Monna Mokoena (Gallery MOMO), Liza Essers (Goodman Gallery), Baylon Sandri (SMAC Gallery), and Joost Bosland (Stevenson) (Klingelfuss 2019). In short, the top galleries not only restructured the art fair, but they also selected who can participate in it. Further, as evidenced in Sibeko's quote, these galleries also subsidise Art Joburg. Therefore, there cannot be a relationship between Art Joburg and the gallerists it hosts because they are one and the same. Gatekeeping already limits the visibility to local and international collectors that visit the fair, however, in the case of these top tiered internationally connected galleries there is potentially another layer of sales that engage collectors before the fair has had a chance to open. Visibility is clearly a manufactured and manipulated commodity, particularly in the case of commercial engagement and the art fair.

The consensus of the top galleries was that the Joburg Art Fair was perceived to be less interesting than other events taking place elsewhere in South Africa (Corrigall 2019:3). The solution was to reconfigure it to a fair that the galleries deemed more interesting. The outcome of this being that, although 50% of the Art Joburg visitors are reportedly Black (Corrigall 2019:4), less than 5% of the art on display is made by South African Black women. The seven top galleries are unsurprisingly run overwhelmingly by White men. Stevenson is an outlier with three Black women (Lerato Bereng, Sinazo Chiya, and Sisipho Ngodwana), out of thirteen people, as part of its directorship. This again supports Goniwe's argument of the wealth of the art market remaining held by White practitioners (2018:6). The VANSA study of the Visual Art sector showed that 89% of the managers and owners of art businesses were White and 53% were men from a sample study of 1200 businesses (Hagg 2010:7).

In terms of the numbers, there are not actually significant differences in the number of South African Black women that participated in the last year of the Joburg Art Fair and the first year of Art Joburg. Where artists are mentioned by name, in the solo MAX booths, no Black women are represented. ROOM Gallery, for example, participated in Joburg Art Fair 2018 and represented one of the few South African Black women included, Mbali Mdluli. At Art Joburg 2019 Room Gallery was absent. Although Mdluli is just one Black woman, when all the Black women can be counted on one hand, one Black woman makes a significant difference to the diversity of Black women represented.

When I visited Art Joburg, I was surprised at how lean it was. The fair did, however, include more bookshop stands selling art books, which had waned over the years of Joburg Art Fair. There was also the usual talks theatre as well as a mini food court. There also were two lounges, one called the 'Institutions Lounge' and the other sponsored by the *Business Day* culture insert *Wanted.* The open plan nature of the solo booths made them appear as different sections of the same exhibition. The fair distinctly diverted from what I had seen at established international art fairs like Frieze London by adopting a more circular layout as opposed to having rows of booths that can be systematically viewed. The fair was successful, in my opinion, at detaining audience. The layout prevented me from quickly following the grid to the galleries whose booths I came there to see, and instead I meandered longer. The layout also privileged the galleries with the most global influence. Goodman, Stevenson, and Everard Read were in the centre, flanking the solo booths. Smith Studio, a small Cape Town based gallery, and Kalashnikovv, a small Johannesburg based gallery, were at the far end of the Sandton Convention Centre where the fair takes place.

Only 53% of South African galleries participate in fairs taking place outside of the continent (Macdonald 2019:13). Meaning that the opportunity to gain international visibility for all South African artists is cut in almost half. The two major art fairs in Johannesburg and Cape Town aim to draw the international market to South Africa, which can be especially useful for galleries and artists who do not have the means to access the market by going outside of South Africa. The Cape Town Art Fair has had some success in attracting commerce, however 38% of the galleries that participate there are based in Europe (Corrigall 2019:3). By placing further limits on an already exclusive market, Art Joburg and the galleries that enacted their influence, have impressed further strain on the representation of South African Black women in the primary market.

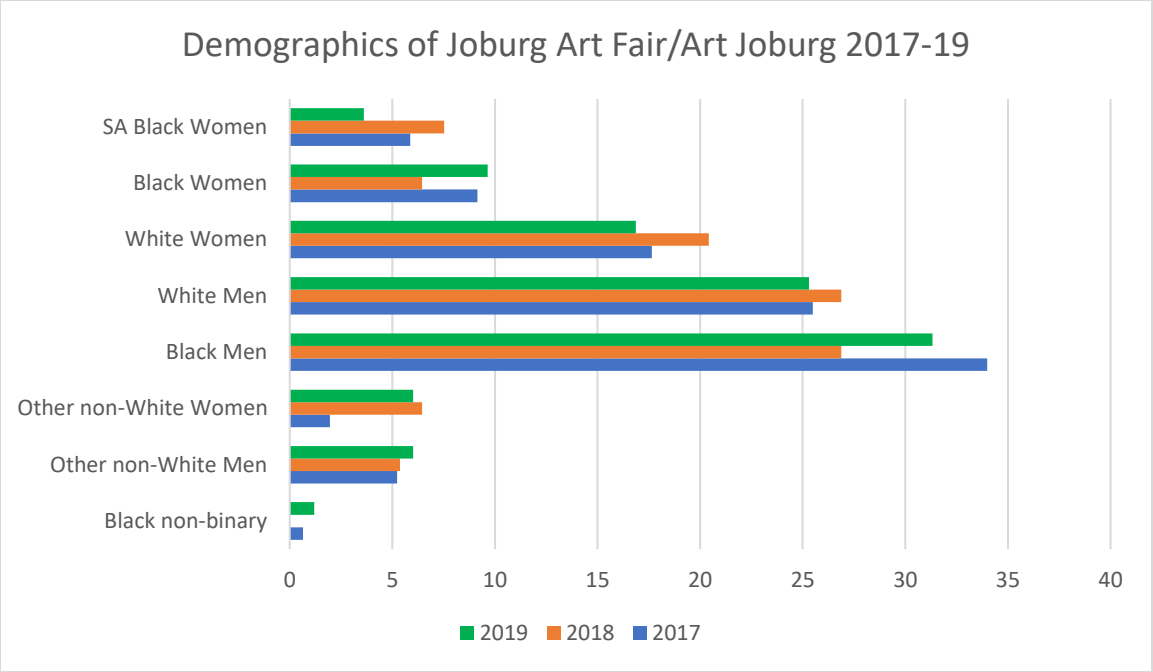


Table 1 self-collected data on Joburg Art Fair/Art Fair Joburg from 2017 to 2019 by tallying artists listed in catalogues, cross referenced with tallies taken in person while attending the fairs.

Black women & gallery representation

It is now apparent that gallery representation can be quite advantageous in by-passing the gatekeeping that obstructs visibility. Inclusion in these institutions advance careers and carve space in global discourse (Goniwe 2018:6). The gallery is also the only measure of an artist's value for some time after they enter the market. Some time usually passes before an artwork enters the secondary resale market to avoid possible capital loss (Baur 2014:8). Although the art fair is a significant locale for commercial engagement, galleries are still reliant on the revenue from solo exhibitions (Macdonald 2019:13). Conversely, the artists first encounter with the market is through the gallery sale (Hagg 2010:33). The status of a gallery affects the status and value of their represented artists and thus the income they can make from the sale of their artwork. The VANSA report states:

> "Visual artworks are characterised by their uniqueness, and the investment of quantities of symbolic capital in individual works, and the close identification between artworks and the reputation and profile of particular producers – and in turn the reputation and profile of those involved in presenting and selling work (gallerists and dealers)." (Hagg 2010:34)

Meaning it is structured as a symbiotic relationship. The initial development phase requires a network for the artist to tap into, and this is fostered by the gallery (Hagg 2010:34). In other words, at the start of

what is an economic relationship, the responsibility of success is skewed towards the gallery and its reputation.

More than half of the organisations in South Africa are geared towards the representation of art directly to consumer audiences (Hagg 2010:35). The majority of these are smaller galleries, including non-profit spaces, with the top three largest galleries accounting for five to ten percent of the market turnover (Hagg 2010:56). The selection of the galleries I focus on in this research is, in addition to being the top galleries in South Africa, also based on their geographical location. A major proportion of the South African art industry's infrastructure in located in Johannesburg and Cape Town (Hagg 2010:37). Gauteng accounts for 32% of the country's infrastructure, and of this Johannesburg has a 64% share (Hagg 2010:37). The Western Cape accounts for 41% of the country's infrastructure with 50% of this being in Cape Town (Hagg 2010:37). The top galleries are all based in either the Western Cape or Gauteng, and those in Gauteng are all in Johannesburg. Specifically, in the case of the seven top galleries, they tend to be within walking distance of each other. This is the case in both Cape Town and Johannesburg, with Parktown being the centralised suburb in Johannesburg and Woodstock in Cape Town. This plays a distinct role in access, as a visitor to an exhibition at Stevenson can very easily visit an exhibition at Goodman. In this way the top galleries can end up sharing the same audience.

The status of South African galleries has been determined in a report on pricing in the industry to be reliant on the track record in art fairs and their position in global and local industry (Macdonald 2019:11 & Corrigall 2019:1). Corrigall names the top South African galleries to be Goodman, Stevenson, Everard Read, Whatiftheworld, SMAC, blank projects, and Momo (2019:4). Macdonald identifies Goodman Gallery as the top gallery in South Africa as well as on the continent (2019:14). Goniwe writes that:

> "What remains deeply problematic is the fact that these commercial galleries together with their clientele, network, media and technology dictate the being and becoming of these celebrated black artists in the art world." (2018:6)

A straightforward tally of the Black women represented by these galleries is brutally telling of the visibility of Black women's narratives in the South African art market. This analysis is current to 28 October 2020.

Not only is Goodman the gallery with the highest status in terms of reach and influence, but it also represents an unusually high number of artists. Goodman currently represents 45 artists. This is second only to Everard Read which represents 57. The average amount of represented artists amongst the top

galleries is thirty. Of the 45 artists at Goodman, excluding artists that are associated with the gallery (meaning they often work with the gallery but are not formally represented by them), there are no South African Black women. Over the three-year period that I examined the exhibition patterns of the top seven galleries, Goodman held 58 recorded exhibitions. Ten of these were group exhibitions, and in these South African Black women were included three times. For the Art Joburg 2019 catalogue, Goodman Gallery was asked how they envision the contemporary African art market in twenty years (Sibeko 2019:8). They responded:

> "We hope to see an increase in cross-continental exchange and a breaking down of geographic descriptors which determine an artists' value as well as more art infrastructure to show work on the continent." (Sibeko 2019:8)

This goal is evident in the artists Goodman represents. Goodman's represented artists are 38% foreign nationals. The majority of these are from the continent, but there are also a few in America and Britain who are of the African diaspora. The proportion of foreign artists represented by Goodman is on par with the overall industry average of 35%. With South Africa being a leading country on the continent in terms of participation in the global art market (Macdonald 2019:11), it is worth noting that this inclusion is positive. My aim is not to argue against the inclusion of Black women from elsewhere on the continent, but instead to critique the lack of representation of South African Black women in galleries and elsewhere in industry.

Stevenson currently represents 31 artists. Again, none of these are South African Black women. Like Goodman, Stevenson represents artists from elsewhere on the continent as well as further in the African diaspora. Although foreign national representation is to a lesser degree than at Goodman, with 16% of Stevenson's artists being foreign nationals. Over the same three-year period Stevenson held 53 exhibitions. Of these six were group exhibitions in which a Black South African woman was included eight times. One of the 48 solo exhibitions held at Stevenson two were by South African Black women. The first exhibition *The snake you left inside me* by Nandipha Mntambo, and it ran from 25 November 2017 to 19 January 2018 at the Johannesburg gallery; and the second was called *Caras* by Nelly Guambe, and it ran from 9 November 2019 to 24 January 2020 at the Johannesburg gallery.

The group exhibitions undoubtedly do offer a level of visibility. However, the group exhibition format comes with a pre-packaged curatorial concept into which the most suitable art is slotted in order to fulfil the conceptual framework. Artistic frameworks are conveyed via the vehicle of an existing and

pronounced curatorial statement. Historically this has led to Black artists in particular experiencing lessened, and even no, theoretical and academic engagement (Mdluli 2019b:xviii).

Everard Read is the oldest commercial gallery in South Africa and has the most permanent spaces. There are branches in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Franschoek, and London. Amongst the seven top galleries in South Africa, while they all engage extensively in international markets, only Goodman and Everard Read have galleries in London. Whatiftheworld Gallery and blank projects are the only two galleries in this selection that only have one gallery space. Although both galleries participate rigorously in international markets including art fairs in the UK and America.

Everard Read represents 57 artists. Three (Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi, Nandipha Mntambo, and Nomthunzi Mashalabla) of these are South African Black women. Other galleries whose representation I am analysing do have Black women under their umbrella, but they are not South African. Goodman represents five Black women from the continent and the diaspora, Stevenson three, and SMAC two. Gallery Momo is the only gallery in this selection that does not represent any Black women from South Africa or elsewhere in the world. Gallery Momo was also the gallery with the lowest total representation of women, having one woman under their stable who was of Coloured decent. Collectively 211 artists are represented by the seven top galleries and of these nine are South African Black women.

Between 2017 and 2019 Everard Read held 177 exhibitions. This is not only afforded by having four galleries, but also by the size and layout – including multi-story spaces – of the galleries. Meaning in one gallery two or three exhibitions can take place at the same or overlapping time. Of the 177 exhibitions 143 were solo exhibitions that included two by South African Black women. The two exhibitions, both at the Cape Town gallery, were *Me Without My Shadow, My Shadow Without Me* by Nomthunzi Mashaba held 4-26 April 2018, and *Tears of Africa* by Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi held 16-28 July 2018. In the 34 group exhibitions, work by South African Black women was included three times. Everard Read had the largest disproportionate representation of White artists at 81%, 49% of whom were men. The work shown across their galleries was mainly traditional in subject matter and medium. Whatiftheworld had the next highest concentration of White artists represented at 60%. However, comparatively the artists represented by Whatiftheworld is more contemporary in terms of subject matter and medium than Everard Read. The predominant style of artists represented by Everard Read cannot be definitively attributed to their demographic. Artists represented by Gallery Momo are 53% Black, and the predominant style and medium tends to be traditional as well. Conversely, 51% of the artists

represented by Stevenson are Black and the predominant style overall by artists at this gallery is conceptually and materialistically contemporary.

Whatiftheworld is a much smaller gallery compared to Everard Read. It has one location in Cape Town and it represents 25 artists. Three of their represented artists are South African Black women (Lungiswa Gqunta, Asemahle Ntlonti, Buhlebezwe Siwane) and they do not represent any Black women from elsewhere on the continent. Between 2017 and 2019 they held 27 solo exhibitions and one group exhibition. Although 48% of their solo exhibitions were by White men, they do have a smaller cohort of artists and a smaller exhibitions programme. Two of the solo exhibitions Whatiftheworld held in the examined period were by South African Black women, and in the eight group exhibitions held a Black South African woman was included once. The two solo exhibitions were *Qab'imbola* by Buhlebezwe Siwani held 24 October to 30 November 2018, and *Qwitha* by Lungiswa Gqunta held 17 May to 7 July 2018.

SMAC gallery is more comparable to Whatiftheworld, although with a much larger exhibitions programme. SMAC represents 27 artists, four of which are South African Black women (Lhola Amira, Simphiwe Buthelezi, Bonolo Kavula, Mary Sibande). This is the highest representation of South African Black women amongst the top galleries. Over the same three-year period they held 57 solo exhibitions and fourteen group exhibitions. Six Black women held solo exhibitions during the three years, however none of these were South African. South African Black women were represented in group exhibitions. Their work was included nine times over the three-year period.

In this selection blank projects and Gallery Momo represented the fewest artists at fourteen and seventeen respectively. Three of blank project's artists were South African Black women (Donna Kukama, Lerato Shadi, and Bronwyn Katz), and they held six of the 22 solo exhibitions held. These exhibitions were *mooood* by Donna Kukama held 17 October to 23 November 2019, */// !* and *Grondskryf* by Bronwyn Katz held 9 February to 16 March 2019 and 31 August to 7 October 2017, *Wabona lapho isifebe, wangena kuso* by Turiya Magadlela held 31 August to 7 October 2017, *Ijeremani Lam* by Senzeni Marasela held 28 April to 3 June 2017, and *Kukho Isililo Somntu II* by Asemahle Ntlonti held 28 April to 3 June. This is the highest representation of South African Black women in solo exhibitions in any of the gallery programmes. There were also five group exhibitions held in the same period where South African Black women were included fifteen times, which was the highest across all seven selected galleries. Gallery Momo was second with eleven South African Black women included in sixteen group exhibitions. Momo also had 28 solo exhibitions on which two non-South African Black

women were represented in three years. This data shows smaller galleries in the top seven performing better when it comes to the representation of South African Black women. The larger galleries are likely more able to select artists from more international locales, which means when Black women are being represented by them, they are less likely to be South African especially if there is no concerted effort to correct disparities in the South African art industry.

Considering race transformation, Black men are better represented in these selected galleries than their female counterparts. In all the galleries, except for blank projects, Black men are represented at better rates than Black women. Gallery Momo has the greatest representation of Black men with 53% of their artists making up this demographic. This translates to 43% of the solo exhibitions held at Momo being by Black men, compared to the 7% held by Black women. Only 6% of Gallery Momo's artists are women. SMAC has the highest percentage of women represented at 57%, but only 13% of these are Black women. Across the larger galleries, the size of the gallery and the number of its locations appears to have little to no effect on the representation of Black women. There is also a trend of the Black women being represented being from elsewhere in the world, especially in the larger galleries. This is not necessarily a negative thing – although it does obscure the representation of South African Black women overall – however, this research is focused on the representation of Black women artists from South Africa. White women were better represented but fell between 18% and 29% in terms of solo exhibitions. Across the seven galleries two of the artists, both represented by Stevenson, identified as gender non-binary.

As a member of the arts community in Johannesburg, and an avid attendee of exhibitions, I am not surprised by the outcomes of this analysis. Of the galleries surveyed for the VANSA report, 43% indicated that exhibition openings were the most important opportunity for making sales (Hagg 2010:77). Although data on attendance for galleries is scarce, the VANSA report states that 39% of the Black population attends two or more exhibitions a year (Hagg 2010:69). This indicates a strong proportion of the Black majority engaging in art on a regular basis. Programmes such as First Thursday, an event that encompasses cultural and social spaces remaining open until much later in the evening to share a large audience, have also contributed to increased engagement with gallery and museum exhibitions.

Having discussed the complicated nature of intersectionality, and the superficiality of solutions such as *rainbowism,* I am not surprised that the bulk of Black representation in these galleries is by Black men. These galleries are a small subsect of the South African art market, but they are a leading part. Overall,

across galleries of different sizes in South Africa, 71% of Black artists practicing are men (Hagg 2010:50). Compared to White artists, women are in the majority of practicing artists with men making up only 35% (Hagg 2010:50). The lack of stability in the art industry, with value being developed through cultural capital and the perceptions of established practitioners instead of objective means such as cost of raw materials, makes entry and sustainability precarious. The further socio-economic components pose additional prohibitions (Johnston *et al* 2013:34).

I have in part chosen to analyse them based on the finding of the study by Corrigall (2019), but also after having reviewed their local and international activities. By this I not only mean their exhibition programme, as this is not international in each of their cases, but also the frequency with which they have participated in international art fairs that take place outside of South Africa. International art fair does apply to the Cape Town Art Fair as well as Art Joburg, as there are international buyers and attendees, but art fairs in Western centres such as London and New York play a crucial role in the marketing of artists. I looked at the same period between 2017 and 2019 to analyse the participation of these galleries in international art fairs, and the representation of Black women there.

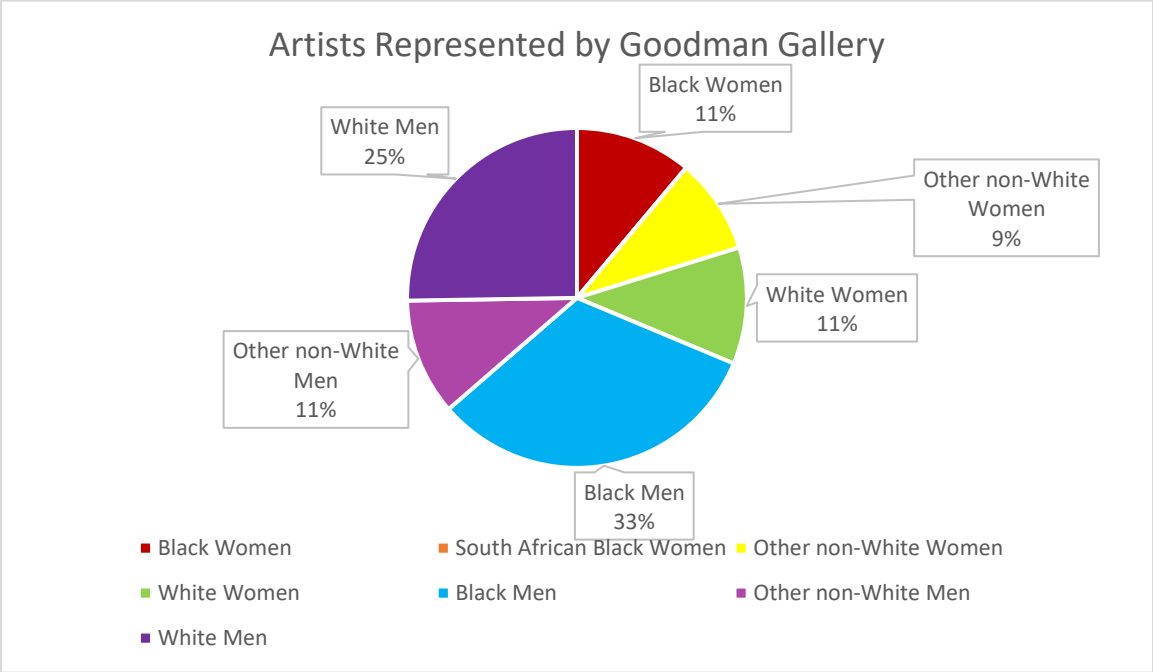


Table 2 self-collected data from the gallery website (goodman-gallery.com) as well as from selected Joburg Art Fair and Art Joburg catalogues.

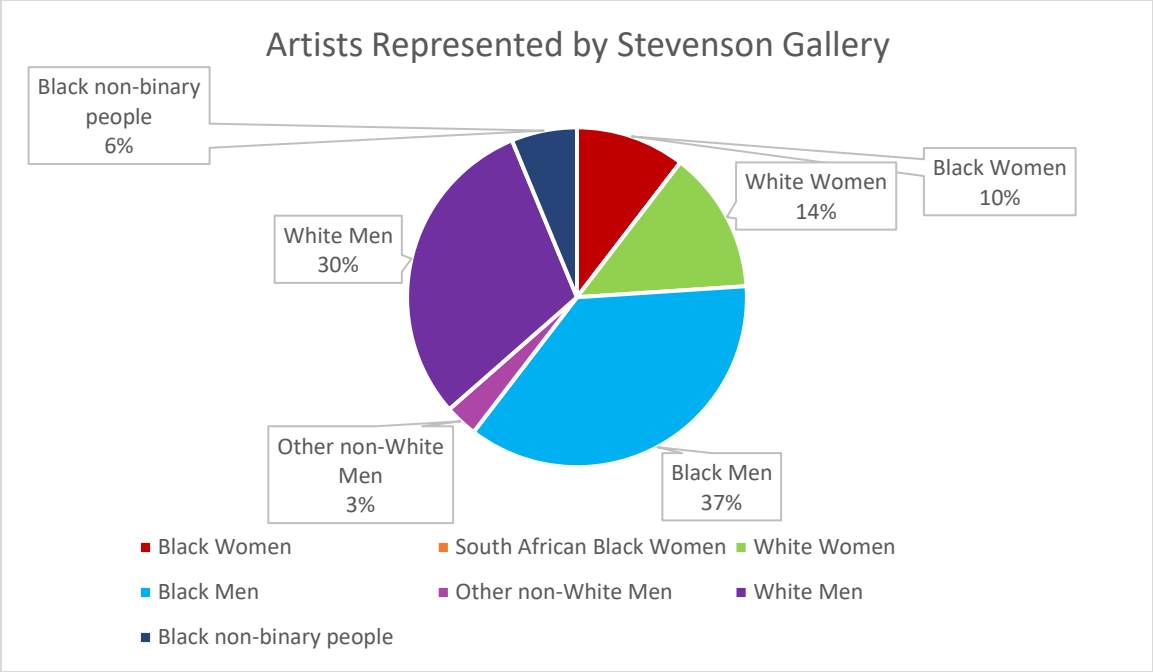


Table 3 self-collected data from the gallery website (stevenson.info) as well as from selected Joburg Art Fair and Art Joburg catalogues.

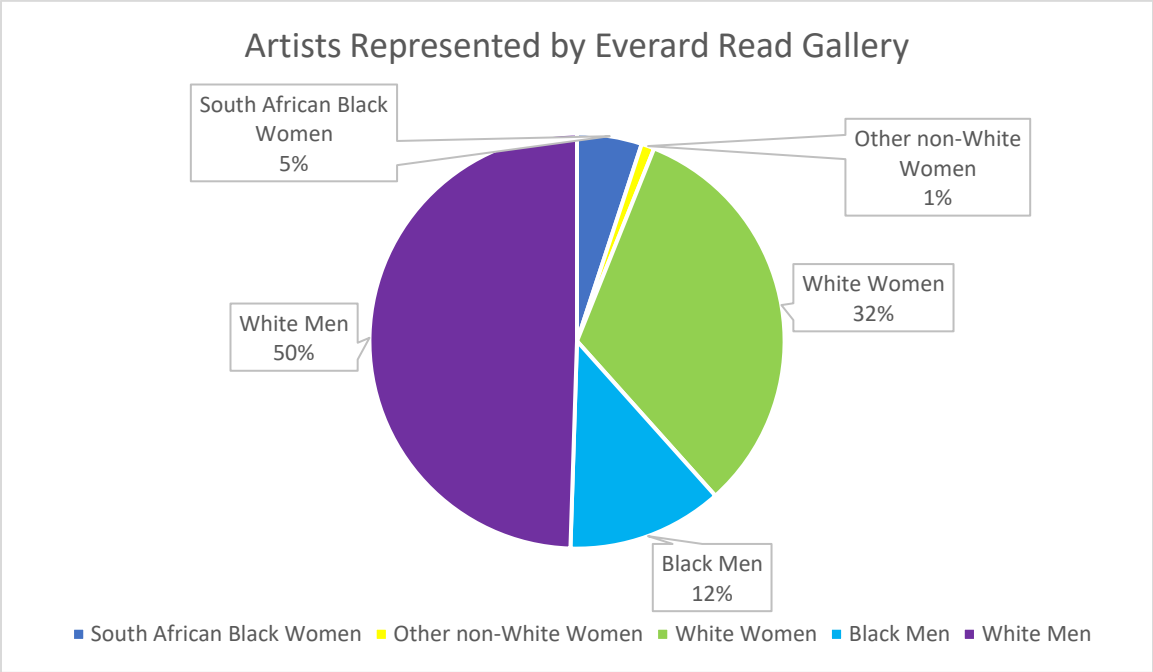


Table 4 self-collected data from the gallery website (everardlondon.com, Everard-read-capetown.co.za, Everard-read.co.za, Everard-read-franschhoek.co.za) as well as from selected Joburg Art Fair and Art Joburg catalogues.

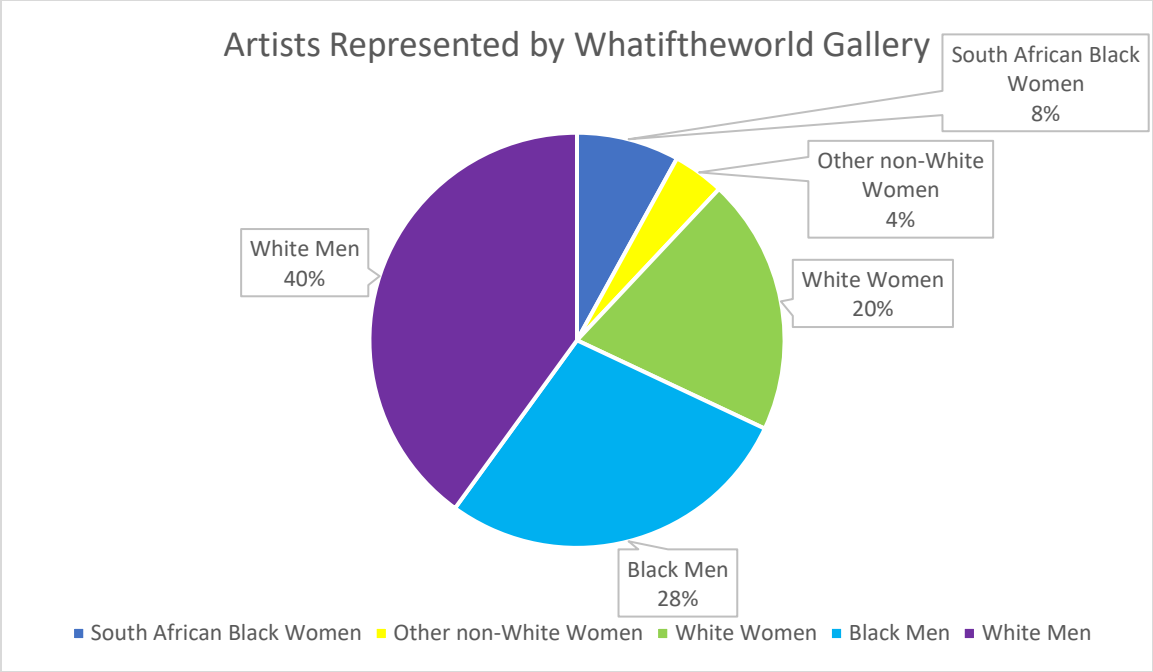


Table 5 self-collected data from the gallery website (whatiftheworld.com) as well as from selected Joburg Art Fair and Art Joburg catalogues.

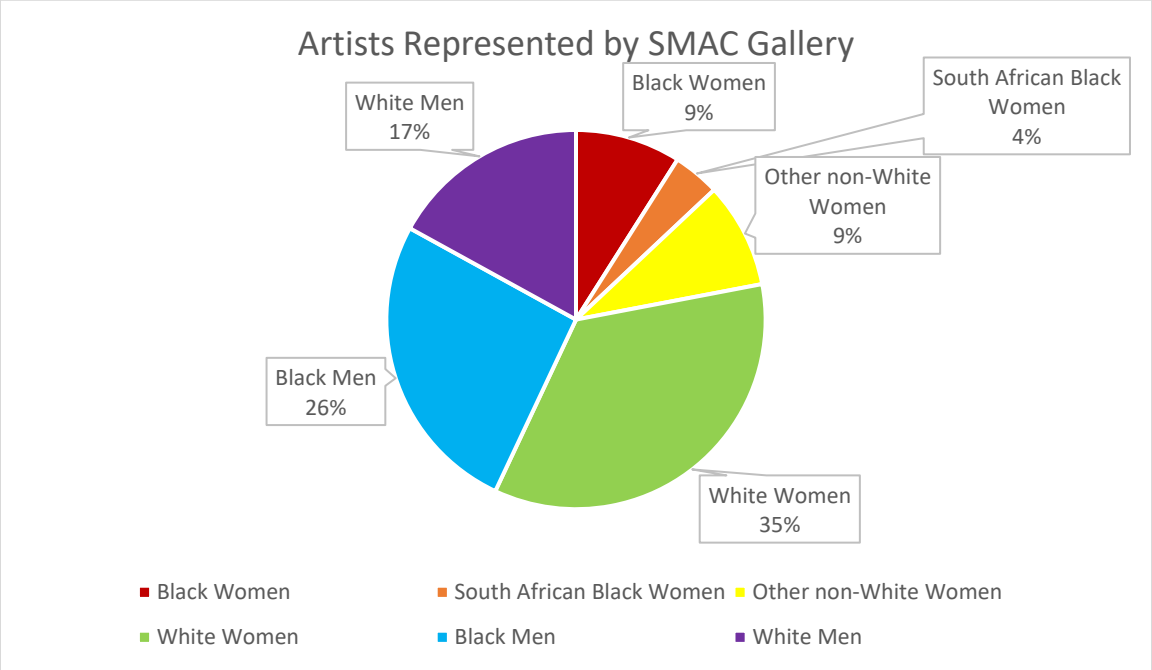


Table 6 self-collected data from the gallery website (smacgallery.com) as well as from selected Joburg Art Fair and Art Joburg catalogues.

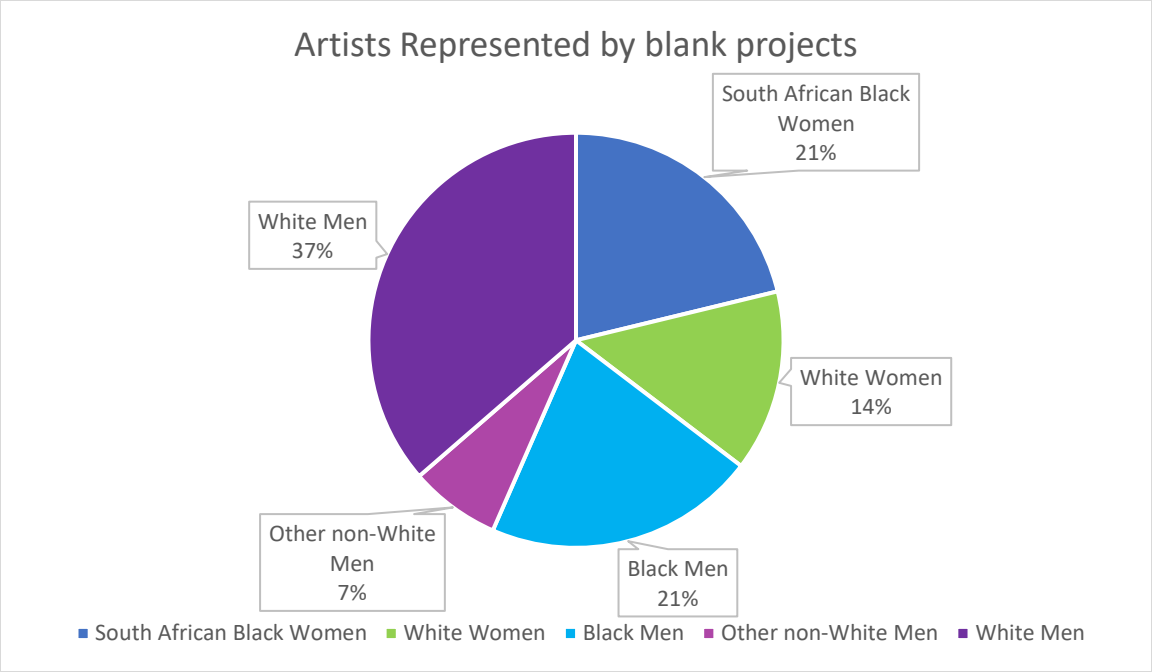


Table 7 self-collected data from the gallery website (blankprojects.com) as well as from selected Joburg Art Fair and Art Joburg catalogues.

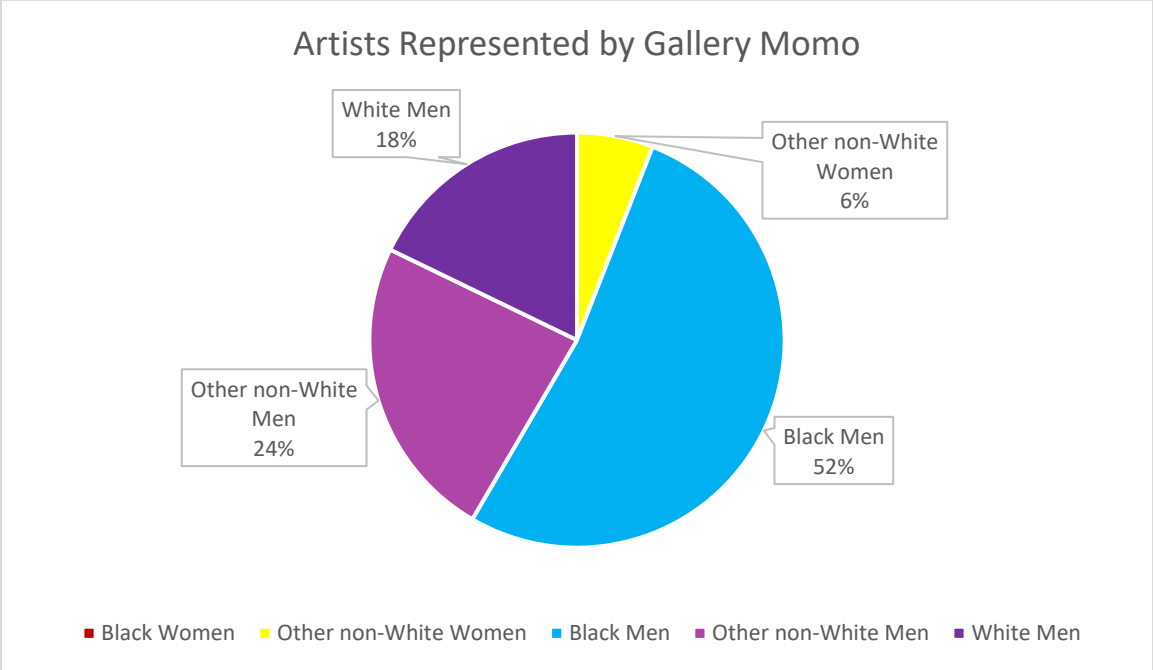


Table 8 self-collected data from the gallery website (gallerymomo.com) as well as from selected Joburg Art Fair and Art Joburg catalogues.

Black women at local & international art fairs

Access to art fairs have a direct relationship to visibility. Art fairs have become a concentrated centre for commerce. By this I mean not only that large amounts of galleries and artists are drawn together, but also that by centring collectors in one location artists that might not have been exposed to collectors now have this opportunity. Regarding the development of art fairs in order to foster commerce in peripheral areas, Christian Morgner writes: "...assembling these galleries in one place for a particular time, thus concentrating connections, putting many voices under one umbrella and thereby amplifying their outlook." (2014:34) Morgner's review of art fairs stems particularly from the establishment of Art Basel, and similar fairs, that were initiated because of their location outside of major art centres such as New York and London (2014:34). These cities already had the benefit of sharing a network commercial engagement due to the density and proximity of galleries to each other (Morgner 2014:34). I state above that this is also the case with the major galleries in South Africa, who have galleries in close proximity in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The decline of the global art market in the late 80s and early 90s saw the art fair model, as an event based concentrated network, being more widely adopted (Morgner 2014:36). This also included the development of specialist fairs that focused on specific mediums (Morgner 2014:35). The establishment of new art fairs saw a steady rise in the 90s, with a marked surge in the early 2000s (Morgner 2014:35). It was during this time that the first art fair on the African continent, Joburg Art Fair, was established.

Malcomess states that South African art primarily garners visibility in the international market by means of the Joburg Art Fair which "...associates itself strongly with the Afropolitan identity of the city of Johannesburg, as opposed to any national identity" (2012:35). This assumption becomes necessary due to the production and discourse of African contemporary art disproportionately taking place outside of the continent, by African artists living in the diaspora (Malcomess 2012:36). Malcomess goes on to say: "...while the Joburg Art Fair sets itself up to engage directly with art from the continent, its actual engagement is with African artists already operating internationally" (2012:36). She also states: "South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria are the exceptions and are almost invariably strongly linked to and sustained by a wider international market and circuit of art fairs." (Malcomess 2012:36) This relationship becomes evident when reviewing the major South African galleries with UK based locations, and later when reviewing which of the South African galleries regularly participate in art fairs taking place outside of South Africa. This internationality is disputed by Corrigall's assessment of the three art fairs in South Africa: Cape Town Art Fair, Joburg Art Fair, and Turbine Art Fair. She states that Joburg Art Fair and Turbine Art Fair are provincial in terms of participating galleries as well as their audience (Corrigall

2019). Corrigall's assessment is of the visitors to these fairs, however, if commercial engagement can and is taking place outside of the setting of the art fairs – with the work that is presented at those fairs – it is arguable that the outcome of the fairs is building a South African public, buying or not.

While Joburg Art Fair/Art Joburg and Cape Town Art Fair have foregrounded the representation of established and mid-career artists, Turbine Art Fair not only represents more emerging artists but also caters to the emerging collector. Turbine Art Fair is unique in that a prominent component of the fair is the Artist Career Development Programme. This programme provides mentorship, workshops, and professional skills to emerging artists (De Bondt 2018:6). The criteria to participate are simply that the artist is under the age of 35 and has not held a solo exhibition (Mhlanga 2018:9). This inclusive approach is in line with the overall objective of Turbine Art Fair (Rangongo 2019:43). While Turbine Art Fair does aim to be more inclusive of emerging artists, it is remains lacking in the representation of Black women. In 2018, three (Keneilwe Mokoena, Lebogang Mabusela, and Vanessa Tembane) of the eighteen artists selected to participate in the Talent Unlocked booth – a sponsored booth that represents artists curated from the Artist Career Development Programme- were Black women.

Cape Town Art Fair has a drive to incorporate increasing proportions of international galleries (Wood 2019). In 2017, 126 artists were represented at the Cape Town Art Fair. Of these artists, 30% were White men. This is only slightly above the proportion of White men included in Art Joburg in the same year. In 2019, 25% of the artists represented at Art Joburg were men. Between 2017 and 2019 at Joburg Art Fair/Art Joburg the proportion of White men represented ranged between 25% and 27%. At the Cape Town Art Fair, the proportion of White men represented remained at 30% in both 2017 and 2018. In 2019 this proportion rose to 39%. During this time the fair grew by 28%, from 75 galleries in 2017 (Kinsella 2017) to 108 galleries in 2019 (Gambade 2019). In 2019, 33% of the participating galleries were from South Africa, which was a decline from 46% the previous year (Corrigall 2019). Before this change in direction to include more international galleries, 70% of the participating galleries had been from South Africa (Corrigall 2019). The purpose of including more international galleries was to raise the level of sophistication of the fair (Wood 2019). This is quite similar to the purpose of the Art Joburg rebrand in 2019, by the owners and directors of the top tier galleries in South African. Cape Town Art Fair was able to achieve a rebrand by actually including more international galleries, whereas Art Joburg only had galleries from the continent and mostly from South Africa. This internationalisation has, however, skewed the majority demographic toward White men. This is in line with the global art market which is 77% White men (O'Toole 2019).

It is important to consider what counts as 'international" in the Cape Town Art Fair. While galleries from elsewhere on the continent do participate in Cape Town Art Fair, the interest of including more international galleries has been primarily served by galleries from Europe. This has not necessarily had much effect on the number of Black women represented, as this has consistently remained in single digits. What we see in the demographic of White men is a disproportionate import of artists that inflates the overall proportion of White men. This is not replicated amongst White women represented. The proportion of White women represented fell from 28% in 2018 to 17% in 2019. Globally, larger galleries operating in the primary market tend to represent fewer women (McAndrew 2019:18).

This data is evidence that the internalisation of art fairs – whether by inclusion as with Cape Town Art Fair, or by an exclusive approach as with Art Joburg – disproportionately benefits White men. Comparing Joburg Art Fair – before it became Art Joburg – to Cape Town Art Fair, Démon says:

> "But, you can feel that spirit more in, to compare another art fair – like Cape Town Art Fair – you feel like people are more sensitive to art, than in Joburg, in a way. Joburg is almost like a gathering at the beginning of spring, everybody goes to share a glass of wine, and it's almost like they don't care about what they see because, anyway, it's on Jan Smuts. It's there, they can go any time. And the work you see, often, it almost feels like it's what was unsold. It's always the usual suspects. It's almost, but, like: "Oh, but I already saw that like a hundred times. It's a lot of Kentridge, a lot of the big names." (2018)

In Art Joburg what was shed was mostly the emerging and mid-career artists. The director of the Cape Town Art Fair, Laura Vincenti, aspires to see the fairs internationalisation trend upward (Wood 2019). Compared to Art Joburg, Cape Town Art Fair has a far wider inclusion of galleries. There is also a section referred to as *Tomorrows/Today* that is earmarked to represent emerging artists from African and its diaspora (Kinsella 2017). While these efforts have the potential to effect transformation of the art market, the statistical analyses above show that they do not transform the market. In 2019 ten artists were included in the *Tomorrows/Today* section and only one was a Black woman.

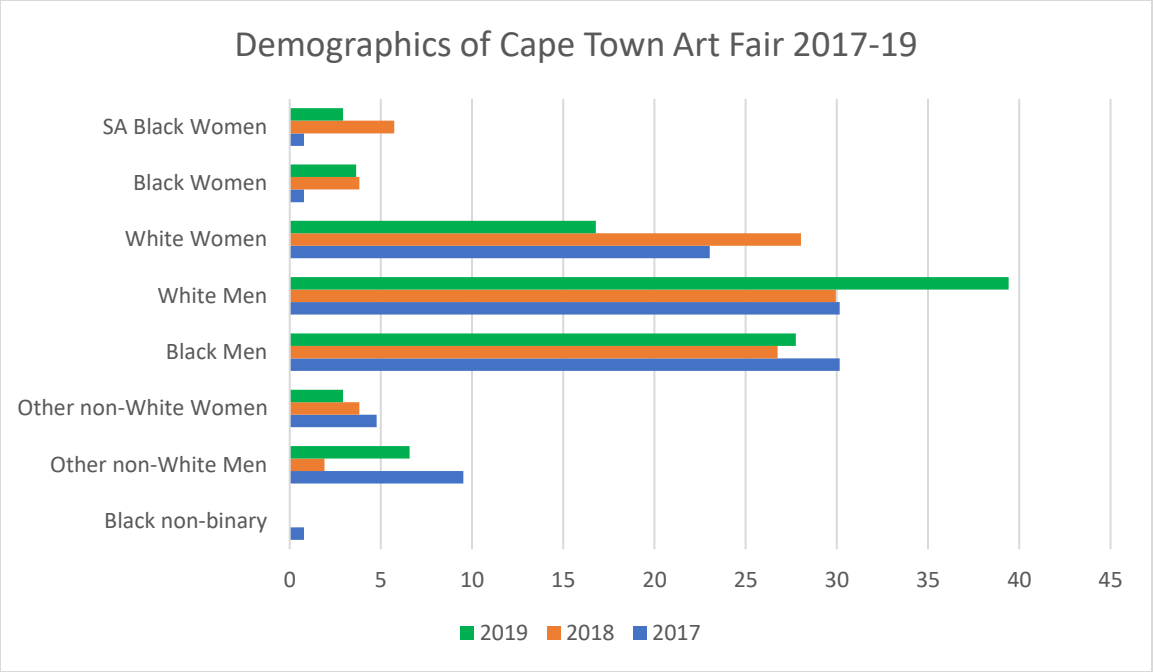


Table 9 self-collected data cross-referenced from the Artsy database, the Cape Town Art Fair website (investeccapetownartfair.co.za) and the participating gallery websites.

Accessing international art markets, however, can be immensely lucrative for artists and galleries. Especially in the context of African galleries which occupy a miniscule fraction of the Global market (McAndrew 2018:34). All the top tier galleries in South Africa have some activity in international art fairs. This is of varying scale and significance, and it may not always be consistent. The top two galleries, however, have consistently participated in multiple art fairs in Europe and America for several years now. Art Basel in Miami Beach has been an annual destination for Goodman for the past five years and Stevenson for the past three years (counting back from 2019). Although Art Basel may have had local beginnings, it now has a global network with participating galleries from every continent (Morgner 2014:36). It is generally regarded as having the most influence amongst global art fairs (Erdmann 2013:18). The art fair is a space in which the value of art is assigned and done so based on the network of that given fair (Morgner 2014:41). The more prominent the network of a fair – including the kind of galleries it admits, the media it attracts, and the concentration of other arts professionals such as curators and museum directors engaging with it – the more prestige and value it lends to the galleries and their represented artists (Morgner 2014:40).

Of the seven South African artists represented at Art Basel in Miami Beach in 2017 there were no Black women included. The following two years had eight and nine South African artists represented respectively. While no women were represented again in 2018, one woman, Thenjiwe Niki Nkosi was

represented in 2019. In 2017 the most represented demographic was White men. In the following two years the most represented demographic was Black men. Equitable representation is not the main objective of an art fair. The main objective of an art fair is to sell art (Morgner 2014:38). “Art Basel is not an art show. It’s a fair. It’s about selling...” (Bounakoff 2013:22) As I have said, the international art market can be financially significant for South African galleries. A survey of galleries in South Africa reveals that 43% of them refer to international markets as their second highest income stream (Hagg 2010:77). The South African artists represented at Art Basel in Miami Beach were established artists whose work has already been validated as high value art. By representing them at an international art fair Goodman and Stevenson were more likely to make high value sales. However, the lack of South African Black women represented at Art Basel in Miami Beach has a direct correlation to how this group is accessing commercial engagement in the primary market. I have shown this evidence by analysing the roster of artists represented by the top seven galleries in South Africa. If less than 10% of the artists given the opportunity to accrue visibility through exhibitions and representation on local art fairs are South African Black women, it is unlikely that there will be a jump in the representation of these artists elsewhere in the market.

Niche art fairs like the 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair offer a different opportunity. Following its inaugural year, 1:54 in 2014 had an increase of 65% in visitors and 60% in galleries (El Glaoui 2015:53). This shows that there is room in the international market for a specialist fair of African art. The fair has since also launched in New York, and in 2018 it launched in Marrakech. While fairs like Art Basel in Miami Beach are dominated by Western galleries, 1:54 aims to be an art fair focused on art from Africa and its diaspora (Jamal & Kouoh 2013:64). Although this has meant better representation of African artists, the majority of the galleries participating in 1:54 up to now have been from outside the continent (El Glaoui 2015:62). Nonetheless all the represented artists were of African descent, and in terms of ethnicity the only White artists represented were from South Africa. Between the six South African gallery booths eighteen artists were represented in 2017 at the London edition of 1:54, and five of these artists were South African Black women (Lungiswa Gqunta, Lebohang Kganye, Sethembile Msezane, Mary Sibande, and Buhlebezwe Siwane). In 2017 and 2018 the most represented demographics of South African artists at 1:54 London were Black men and women. In 2017 Black women made up 28% compared to men at 44%, and in 2018 this swung the other way with women making up 39% compared to men at 28%. In 2019 the most represented demographic was Black men at 36%. Black women followed at 14%.

In 2017 White artists represented amounted to 22% of the total South African artists. In the following year this was the same share, however in 2019 this jumped to 50% of the South African artists represented being White. In 2017 two South African galleries, Whatiftheworld and Afronova, participated and represented nine artists between them. Three of these artists were South African Black women. The Nando's & Spier Arts Trust also participated, representing a further four artists of which one was a Black South African woman. The following year the South African booths at the fair had the same make up, and out of the eighteen artists represented seven were South African Black women (Lungiswa Gqunta, Lebohang Kganye, Phumzile Khanyile, Esther Mahlangu, Senzeni Marasela, Sethembile Msezane, and Buhlebezwe Siwane).

There are clear and significant shifts seen here both when compared to the Cape Town Art Fair as well as Art Basel in Miami Beach. It is slightly concerning that with the increase of South African booths at 1:54, Black women were no longer most represented amongst the selected artists. The difference between 1:54 and other international art fairs is its niche. In all other aspects it presents with all the conventions of an art fair. It has a curatorial board and galleries apply to participate. Earlier I mentioned Afronova's exclusion from Joburg Art Fair based on them not having a public facing gallery space. This is not a requirement to participate in 1:54 thus, peculiarly, Afronova does not participate in the fair in the city they are based in but rather in an art fair in London. Afronova also participates in 1:54 New York but are yet to participate in 1:54 Marrakech. Remarkably, in 2018 there were no White women represented at 1:54 New York; and in 2019 there were no White men. At 1:54 Marrakech in 2018 two Black South African men were represented, and in 2019 eight South Africans were represented. Four of them were Black men, and the rest were White. Although analysis of 1:54's representation of South African artists is favourable to South African Black women, it cannot be considered a silver bullet. South African galleries make up a small fraction of the total galleries at 1:54 annually. Further, despite it being an international fair in London that takes place in around the same time as the globally prominent Frieze London and is thus technically able to share audience, 1:54 it is still a comparably small fair.

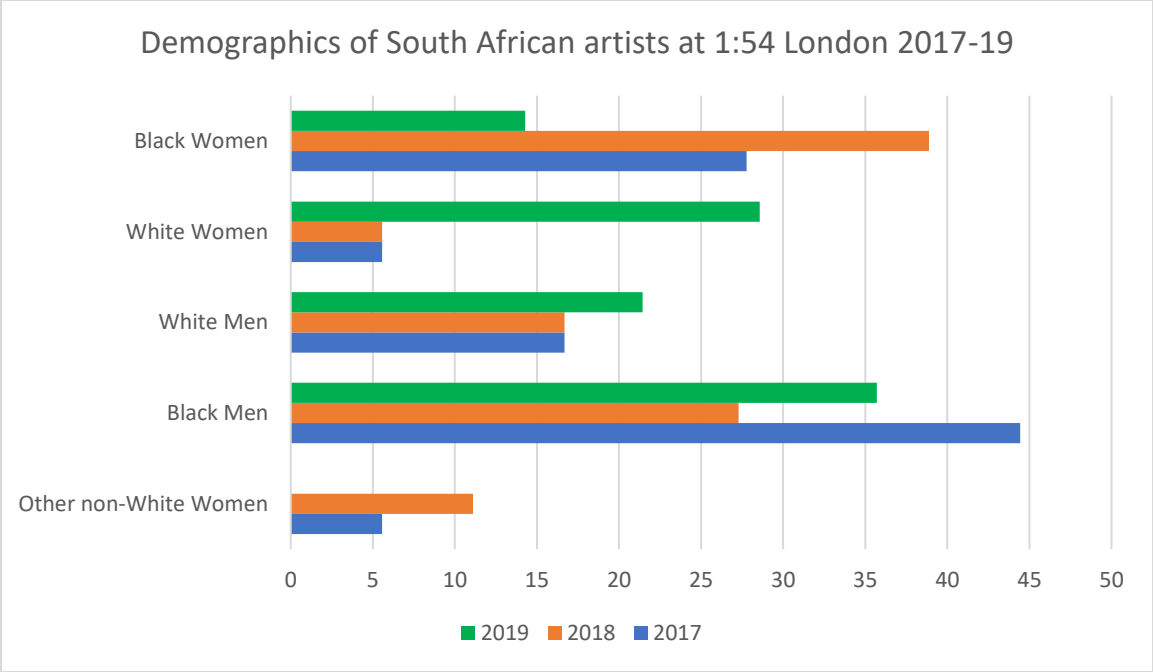


Table 10 self-collected data cross-referenced from the Artsy database, the I:54 Contemporary African Art Fair website (1-54.com) and the participating gallery websites.

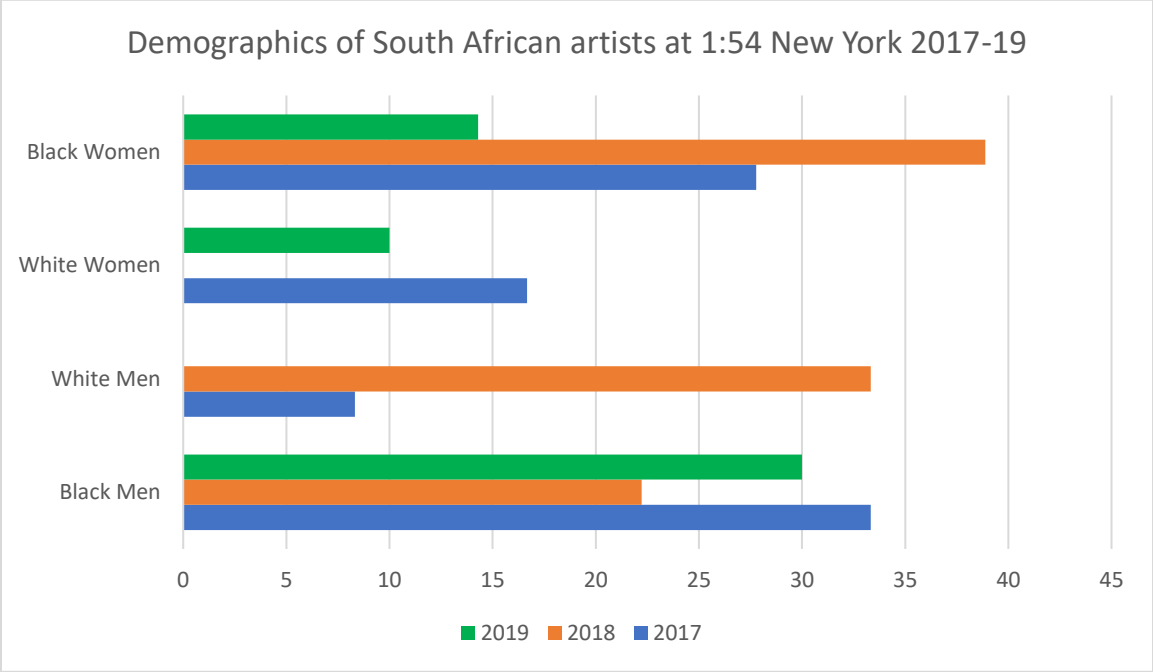


Table 11 self-collected data cross-referenced from the Artsy database, the I:54 Contemporary African Art Fair website (1-54.com) and the participating gallery websites.

The Secondary Market

The secondary market refers to the resale of artwork. In South Africa there are far fewer entities involved in this area, and a previous survey of the secondary market has put the number of entities at 4% of the total art market entities (Hagg 2010:36). This includes some galleries as well (Hagg 2010:36). A significant amount of artwork consigned to the secondary market is sourced from the storerooms of commercial galleries (Macdonald 2019:12). This further contributes to the accelerated fiscal growth of commercial galleries in Africa over the past decade (Murinik 2018:17). The relationship the secondary market, and particularly auction houses, have to the primary market is its affirmation and inflation of the value initially established at art fairs and exhibitions. There are several auction houses in South Africa, but the ones with the most prominent reputation for Fine Art consignment are Aspire Art Auction, Strauss & Co., and Stephen Welz & Co.

Stephen Welz & Co. and Strauss & Co. are both intricately related. Stephen Welz had a long and prominent career in the art business (Strauss & Co. 2021). He had previously worked for Sotheby's, a London-based auction house that was founded in 1744 (Strauss & Co. 2021). Stephen Welz & Co. was initially Sotheby Parke Bernet and changed its name to Stephen Welz & Co. in 1987 (Strauss & Co. 2021). After having spent time working under Reinhold Cassirer, who founded the company with his wife Jane Harraway, Welz took over in 1980 and headed the company until 2006 (Strauss & Co. 2021). Following his time at Stephen Welz & Co., Welz headed up the newly founded Strauss & Co. from 2008 (Strauss & Co. 2021). This is evidence of a very closed network of ownership and headship of the two leading fine art auctioneers in South Africa.

While I am admittedly enticed by Strauss & Co. holding the record for the highest price achieved at auction in South Africa – for *Two Arabs* by Irma Stern at R 21 166 000 (Kilbourn 2017:4) – I elected to review Strauss & Co. consignments instead of Stephen Welz & Co. because of better kept digital records. Strauss & Co. also awards the Cassirer Welz Award that offers recipients a ten-week Bag Factory12 residency and exhibition. Additionally, this auction house hosts several lectures and exhibitions throughout the year, showing an effort to straddle commercial and academic roles. Later I also overview a survey exhibition of women artists in South Africa that Strauss & Co. hosted in August of 2018.

12 The Bag Factory is a non-profit organisation that provides artists with affordable studios. They have an exhibition space and host an adhoc programme throughout the year. Bag Factory administers several awards include the Young Womxn Studio Bursary and the David Koloane Award. The latter is named after the late David Koloane who was one of the founders of The Bag Factory.

The art department at Strauss & Co. consists of fifteen persons. Ten of these are women but none of them are Black women. There are seven senior positions and three of them are held by women. Comparably at Aspire Art Auctions, the other auction house I will overview, there are nine staff members for the art department including two interns. The interns are both White women, and there are an additional three White women on staff with them all holding senior positions. The art specialists and cataloguers that work in these companies are directly involved in the valuation and writing on the works consigned. They do not necessarily influence the demographic of the work that ends up consigned as this is based on artwork availability and the realities of the market – that I have already shown to be biased – but it is interesting to note that the staff of both these auction houses is almost entirely White.

Aspire Art Auction is a newly established company and was founded in 2016. Unlike other auction houses that consign antiques, jewellery, and even property, Aspire is near exclusively focused on Fine Art. Although Aspire aims to have a more contemporary focus, and indeed more of their auctions have a significant inclusion of contemporary artists compared to Strauss & Co., however there is a heavy weighting of classical South African art. They average four auctions per year, distributed quarterly. Over the period between 2017 and 2019 a total twelve auctions were held. Comparably Strauss & Co. held nineteen auctions over the same period.

In 2017 Aspire had work consigned for auction from 179 artists. Of these 2% were South African Black women. In the following two years this share rose to 3%, with eight (Mmakgabo Mapula Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi, Nontsikelelo Veleko, Esther Mahlangu, Buhlebezwe Siwane, Nandipha Mntambo, Donna Kukama, Lhola Amira, and Noria Mabasa) out of 234 in 2018 and five (Mmakgabo Mapula Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi, Gladys Mgudlandlu, Noria Mabasa, Nandipha Mntambo, and Esther Mahlangu) out of 193 in 2019. In all three years the demographic with the largest representation was White men with 60% in 2017, 53% in 2018, and 52% in 2019. As has been the case in gallery representation and inclusion in art fairs, representation of White women and Black men was more equitably matched. In 2017 there was a difference of 3% between the two groups and this was closely sustained in 2018 at a difference of 2%. In 2019 however, the difference rose to 11% with Black men having a greater share than White women for the first time in the three-year period.

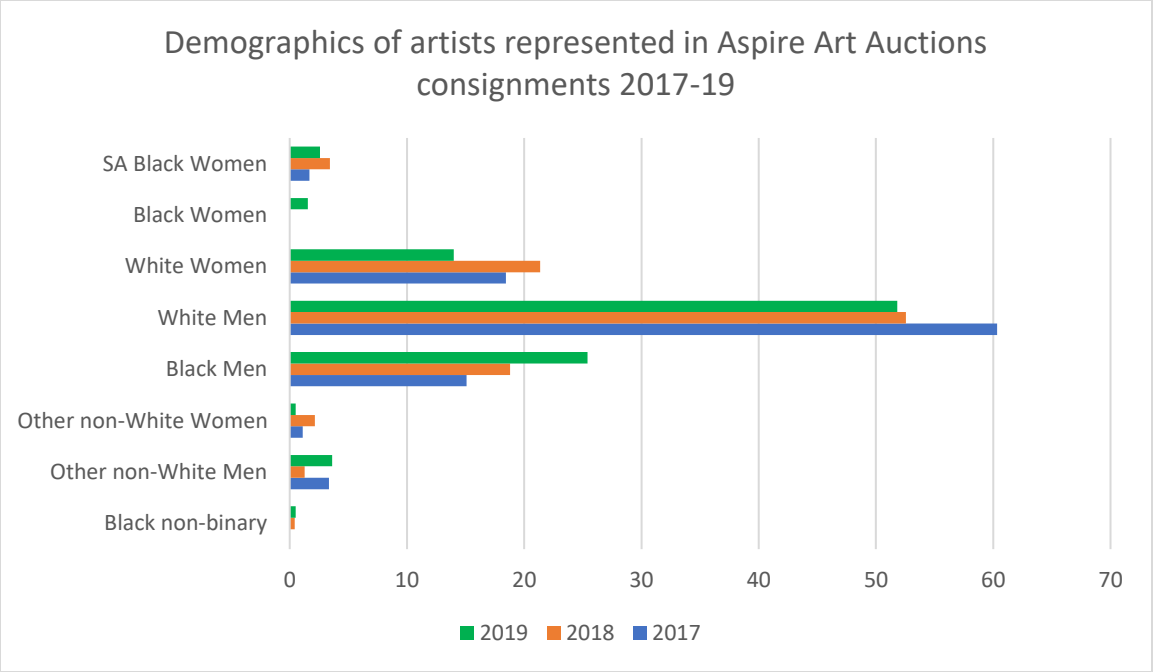


Table 12 self-collected data from the Aspire Art Auctions website (aspireart.net).

Strauss & Co. continues to steadily increase the number of artists with art consigned to them. In 2019 the number of artists increased by 21% to 370 from 293 in 2017. This increase has not been extended to the representation of Black women. The highest representation of South African Black women between 2017 and 2019 was in 2017 where twelve women had art consigned for auction (Esther Mahlangu, Judith Mkhabela, Nesta Nala, Bonnie Ntshalitshali, Noria Mabasa, Gladys Mgudlandlu, Mary Sibande, Mmakgabo Mapula Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi, Gabisile Nkosi, Josephine Ghesa, Florence Xaba, and Ntombi Nala). This decreased to five women in both 2018 (Mmakgabo Mapula Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi, Nontsikelelo Veleko, Gladys Mgudlandlu, Esther Mahlangu, and Noria Mabasa) and 2019 (Mary Sibande, Esther Mahlangu, Gladys Mgudlandlu, Nesta Nala, and Bongekile Nala), amounting to a 1% share of the artists represented those years being South African Black women. White men on the other hand maintained a share above 60% of represented artists and made up 65% of the total artists in 2017 and 2019. Black men and White women were again more equitably represented. Morgner writes: “An artist is not famous the next day; it requires careful selection of who to present the artist to in order to achieve greater continuity through positive feedback.” (2014:40) This includes the feedback that comes from the primary market. Art galleries intentionally build their reputations, and the reputations of the artists they represent, by gaining admittance to important fairs (Lena & Levin 2009:60). These reputations are built over prolonged time. Therefore, although the statistics of artists having work circulating in the secondary market is disappointing, it should not be surprising. Of the artists who have

work consigned to Aspire Art Auctions and Strauss & Co. an average of 1.5% are Black Women. As I discussed in chapters one and two South African art history has been sluggish in effecting sustainable transformation (Enwezor 1997:26; Goniwe 2018:6; Mdluli 2019b:xvi). Although the work of Black South African art *was* admitted to public and private collections in drastic increments as apartheid legislature drew to an end, it was largely focussed on traditional and struggle art (Enwezor 1997:26). The consignments from Aspire Art Auctions and Strauss & Co. reflect this.

In the three-year period nineteen auctions were held at Strauss & Co. In addition to this Strauss & Co. held an exhibition in August 2018 – women's month in South Africa – in celebration of women artists in South Africa over the last century. The exhibition was titled *Shifting Boundaries: A selection of works showcasing South African women artists of the past 100 years.* 67 women were represented in this exhibition, but only six of them were Black women. White women made up 88% of the women represented. The remaining 3% consisted of a non-Black woman of colour and a Black non-binary person. The six Black women were: Mmakgabo Mmapula Mmangankato Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi; Turiya Magadlela; Mary Sibande; Nandipha Mntambo; Esther Mahlangu; and Noria Mabasa. Except for Mntambo and Magadlela, all of these artists had been represented in a Strauss & Co. auction between 2017 and 2019. Mntambo had been represented on auctions at Aspire Art Auctions in all three years. In fact, all artists, except Magadlela, had been represented on at least two auctions in the three-year period at either Strauss & Co. or Aspire Art Auctions. The average amount of auctions that Black women were included in the 100-year exhibition was three, and the mode was five. Across all the auctions held by both houses in the three-year period Mahlangu and Mabasa were included in the most auctions at five each. Sebidi and Mgudlandlu followed with at four each. The repeated circulation of the same Black women within the secondary market is noteworthy. It evidences how the overuse of a few Black women can give the impression of more Black women participating in the market. This tokenises these women as universal representations of art practice from their demographic during their time.

It is impressive the extent to which the history of art as it pertains to White male making is covered in the secondary market. Conversely, in a three-year period at two auction houses holding 31 auctions altogether, nineteen South African Black women were represented. Five of these I can recall from curricula at tertiary level and secondary level – although it is important to note that I was privileged to attend a secondary school with an art history programme. Eleven of these have had representation in the primary market between 2017 and 2019. The repeated dissemination of a handful of South African Black women in South Africa in the secondary market is evidence of the failure of the transformation

project, and particularly how it has unfolded in the art industry. It shows that efforts being made are either not effective at all, or not sustainably effective.

The secondary market is a space in which established artists demonstrate their investment value (Hagg 2010:77). Simultaneously, "the increasing role of auction house experts in valuing art reveals what has long been the case: Markets are a part of making culture" (Lena & Levin 2009:60). In other words, the relationship between culture and commerce is circular. The naming of prominent artists in culture is conventionally done by parties outside of the market, namely academics, curators, and critics (Hagg 2010:65). Especially regarding curators – and independent curators, or curators operating in academic spaces in particular – through creating platforms in the format of non-commercial exhibitions for increased dialogue on contemporary African art the visibility of previously underrepresented artists can be elevated (Murinik 2018:3). These platforms, even when located in small/alternative spaces, have a role to play in the economy of the art industry as tastemakers and trendsetters (Hagg 2010:75). The market in turn affirms these contributions through buying power. While the final sale prices in the secondary market are highly volatile, the outline of the art prices are set by the experts operating in auction houses (Lena & Levin 2009:60). They also perform the role of gatekeeping which art is consigned to auction and which is not. These experts in South Africa are predominantly White.

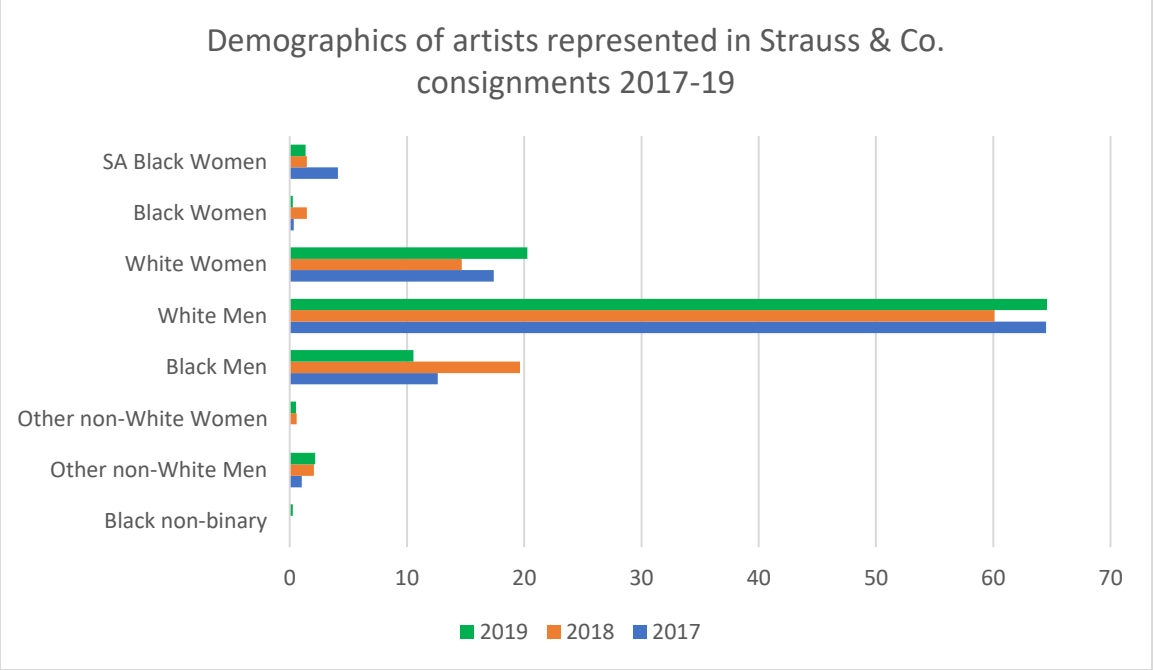


Table 13 self-collected data from the Strauss & Co. catalogues and website (straussart.co.za).

Gum & Marasela interacting with the market

For Gum the primary market has propelled her significantly in the start of her career. She has participated in prominent art fairs such as Pulse Miami Beach, where she won the Miami Beach Pulse Prize in 2017 (Mkhabela 2017), and Cape Town Art Fair. Her presentation, via Christopher Moller Gallery, at the fair was an extract of her body of work for the *Ode to She* exhibition (Mkhabela 2017). This confounded the visibility of the work. This body of work includes *Intombi,* which I discuss in a previous chapter. The prize also came with $2500 (Mkhabela 2017). Interestingly, prior to Gum joining Christopher Moller Gallery in 2015, the gallery did not have a consistent history of participating in international art fairs. Although they did participate in local art fairs, with the first recorded time being two years after their 2008 launch, these were primarily smaller fairs. The first recorded participation in Cape Town Art Fair for Christopher Moller Gallery is 2013, and for Joburg Art Fair it was 2014. They did not participate in the 2019 relaunch of Art Joburg.

Christopher Moller Gallery currently represents eighteen artists. Two of these are Black women. In addition to Tony Gum, Zanele Montle is also represented. Continuing with the trend of smaller galleries, the majority of the artists represented are Black. Atypical to smaller galleries, almost half of their represented artists are foreign nationals. Galleries like Goodman have had large contingents of foreign nationals in their stable to internationalise their offering, and likewise, Christopher Moller has increasingly represented artists from elsewhere on the continent as they increased their participation in international fairs. This representation benefits Black men though, and not Black women.

In addition to Pulse Miami Beach and the two main local art fairs, in 2017 Christopher Moller Gallery also participated in SCOPE New York. In 2017 SCOPE New York ran concurrently with The Armoury Show, taking advantage of the audience this platform with a longer history and wider renowned reputation draws. In 2019 they presented work by Gum at Photo London. The presentation was a solo exhibition summarised from her *A Portion* series from 2019. The body of work has also been referred to as *Kat'emnyama* meaning black cat.

Kat'emnyama is a series that represents a subversion of African iconography. Gum depicts the black cat in several works which is traditionally a symbol of bad luck (Morrison 2019:24). Gum composes herself in intimate proximity to this symbol and reclaims it. Art Critic Lungi Morrison writes: "During the period of significant loss, Tony Gum adopted a black cat (she named Diesel). 'Kat'emnyama became a proxy for her anticipated role as nurturer." (2019:24) Gum puts forward the black cat as an icon that symbolises the ending of a period of bad luck instead of as a marker of bad luck itself. This body of work represents

how Gum is interpreting the symbolism in her culture and how she is it evolving it for future consumption. While she operates within an African belief system, she is not depicting imagery that is intended to be menacing or barbaric. She also admixes with other cultures, and this admixture removes her from expected narratives of African authenticity and opens her up to the contemporary fixtures of hybridity. Distinctly, she depicts a Japanese *maneki neko* in the series. Also known as the beckoning cat, *maneki neko* is a fat cat figurine used to symbolise good luck (Miller 2010:76). This figure, pictured in white, contrasts with, and challenges Gum's black cat.

The presentation of this body of work at Photo London was within a month of the full solo exhibition at Christopher Moller Gallery. Again, the gallery takes advantage of the natural movement of audience, this time capitalising on the attention that was already on the body of work. This is the third body of work by Gum that Christopher Moller Gallery has used an art fair to further develop the visibility of the artist. The first instance was the *Black Coca Cola* series which was presented at Joburg Art Fair in 2015 and, subsequent to consistent representation and the complexity of the work, went viral (Alston 2019).

This shows the importance of a gallery that optimises the functions of the market and the significance of audience networks for the visibility of artists. Marasela and her relationship with Afronova is an example of this as well. On several occasions during the early part of her career, Marasela left practicing as a full-time artist due to a lack of financial sustainability (Marasela 2017). In 2013 she made a final attempt to pursue a career as a full-time artist, and shortly after she joined Afronova (Marasela 2017). She has been with the gallery since.

Marasela has been a practicing artist since the late nineties. Many of her seminal works, including *Our Mother* (1998) which I discussed earlier, where produced during this time. Marasela proceeded with her career immediately after graduating but experienced a lack of support with the art industry (2017). Talking about the start of her career she states:

> "...at the time there was a lot of so-called 'South African group shows' ... and you didn't understand how to prolong those experiences – to turn them into life-long relationships and associations for yourself. So a lot of that fell away. ... I think in *my* generation, this idea that when you're an artist you can't talk about money, money is dead." (2017)

This recollection portrays the difficulties for artists, especially those still at the emergence of their careers, in gaining sustainable access to the market that is able to drive their visibility forward. The separation of artist and commerce is a long-held convention of the industry. I have lost count of the academics and arts practitioners who have advised me against a paper that looks into commercial

engagement afforded to artists in South Africa. Jennifer Lena, an arts administration and sociology academic, and Peter Levin, an economic sociology academic, wrote on the valuation of artworks in the market. Regarding the separation of artists from the valuation and exchange of their work in the market, they write:

> "The covert marketing and private nature of sales in the primary market protect the artist from the market volatility as well as the contaminating effects pecuniary interests often have on artistic legitimacy..." (2009:60)

They go on to write: "We see this reflected in the conventional wisdom that art and artists must obtain a distance from economic markets." (Lena and Levin 2009:61) Considering the convention of artistic value being developed in non-commercial spaces (Hagg 2010:65), it is clear how art can lose the perception of its values if its makers were perceived to be independently pursuing commercial engagement. What I mean is that, as with other economic industries, profit interests can, and often do out-way socio-political and cultural interests that artistic production serves. Although this may be the case, this distinct sort of separation of duties, so to speak, obscures the operation of the market and the way artists should be accessing it in order to gain a foothold in the industry. Marasela's early career demonstrates this. Although several of her early works have been admitted into prestigious collections – *Our Mother* is part of the Apartheid Museum's permanent collection – her lack of sustainable access and knowledge of the market excluded her from it. Her subsequent lack of income from the market limited her artistic productivity.

The co-Director of Afronova states: "Our mission to support the artist is to circulate the work, to circulate the discourse that [surrounds] the work too." (Vergon 2018) Meaning that selling the work is as important in commercial engagement as who the work is sold to. In primary and secondary markets, it is not uncommon for preferential pricing to be offered to museums and academic or public collections, to ensure the work remains accessible in the context of its visibility (Lena & Levin 2009:61). Private collectors who are known to be willing to make their collections accessible to curators and institutions for exhibition and research purposes are thus arguably the ideal buyers. They have the capital with which to purchase art as well as the relationships and familiarity with art networks that build the cultural capital and visibility of artists and their work. Henri Vergon goes on to say that him and his co-director, Emilie Démon, aim to "…not lock up the work, it is to actually to get people who are in a position to show it, who are in a position to lend it, to exhibitions…" (2018). This approach is not unique amongst commercial galleries, but it becomes distinctly important for Afronova as it does not have a

regular exhibition programme. Unable to garner revenue for exhibition sales, Afronova's main commercial engagement would be art fairs and private sales. Vergon states:

> "… [we have] to transcend transactional relationship. Once again, it's not about selling – the artist we represent, I think, are pretty happy with that we generate an economy for them internationally, but most importantly we also generate critical thinking around it. We associate curators, researchers, academics, et cetera – so that they have double satisfaction. They can buy a new house but they can also expand in their approach." (2018)

Afronova made a conscious choice not to have a permanent physical gallery with an exhibition programme (Démon & Vergon 2018). This has enabled them to better integrate their approach to artist management (Démon & Vergon 2018).

Afronova is highly active at international art fairs. Although it is not counted as a top tier gallery in South Africa it is more active, and to a broader extent, in international markets. Both Démon and Vergon are European and undoubtedly benefit from their understanding and participation with western networks. In 2017 Afronova recorded on their website that they curated booths at Art Paris, and 1:54 New York and London. At Art Paris they presented a solo show of Billie Zangewa's work; and at 1:54 New York seven artists were represented, of which Lawrence Lemaoana was the only man and Jodi Bieder was the only White person (man or woman). Afronova's presence at art fairs, locally and abroad, have consistently represented a majority of Black women. Although Afronova does not participate in the larger international fairs, as Goodman and Stevenson do, they have been able to focus on building a reputation at multiple smaller fairs such as The Armory Show in New York and Paris Photo. This is important for them to do as they do not have a public exhibition gallery space, meaning their main way to access the primary market is through art fairs. The networks they build internationally also create opportunities for the artists that they represent to be curated into shows at museums and independent venues. These shows are often led by curators who have well-established reputations as holders of cultural capital (Murinik 2018:63). Murinik writes:

> "Due to the curators' high profile and the kind of events they engineer or are commissioned to execute and the nature of the venues – biennales, museum exhibitions – these artists are 'validated' via their work." (2018:63)

Two notable times that this was the case for Marasela was her inclusion by Armelle Dakouo in *Yesterday is Today's Memory* in 2019 at the Espace Commines in Paris; and her inclusion by Gary Schneider in *Highly Personal: South African Artists and Their HandPrint Portraits* in 2019 at the Stephen Daiter Gallery in Chicago. Dakouo's curatorial concept regards collective memory, particularly of African pasts (Norval

2019), and thus her inclusion of Marasela forefronts a memory of Black womanhood that is often ignored.

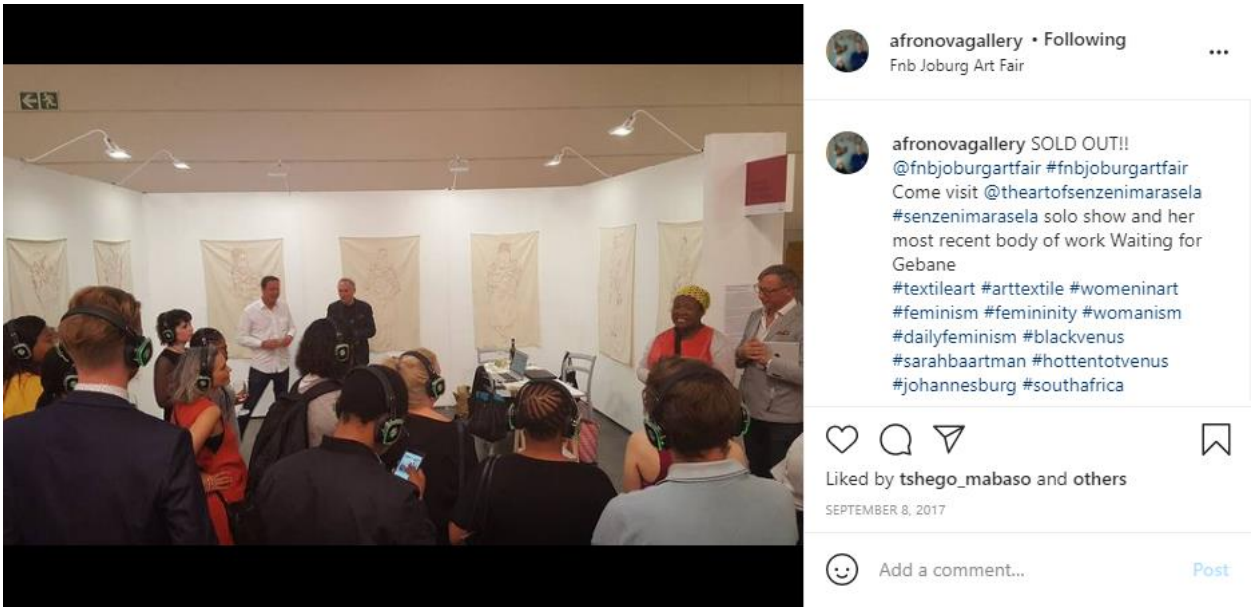


Figure 3: Screengrab from Afronova's Instagram profile picturing Marasela giving a walkabout of her solo booth at the Joburg Art Fair.

Although Afronova has been absent from Joburg Art Fair/Art Joburg for several consecutive years, in 2017 they presented a solo show of Marasela's work at Joburg Art Fair. The assumption of the booth came about quite suddenly and was due to a government supported venture falling through (Démon & Vergon 2018). According to Vergon, over the course of the fair, academics and writers visited the booth and were complimentary about the work (2018). He states:

> "For her, it was the first time she was attending an art fair, uh, first time she had a solo presentation of her work in an art fair so that was quite a number of 'firsts.' But, mostly, it was really her first time that she actually gathered so much critical acclaim from the people who are actually those gate-keepers. Uh, and it raised a lot of questions – um, why did they wait for so long to actually read what she was saying"

Both Démon and Vergon expressed concern about the paternalistic way several academics were quick to claim ownership of Marasela by proudly stating how they had taught her. It was further problematic that due to the nature of the booth being assigned short notice, Afronova was unable to follow conventional marketing steps (Démon & Vergon 2018). Although the booth was managed by the gallery, it was not named as an Afronova booth in situ as other galleries had been afforded. There was also poor media coverage of the presentation. Vergon explained:

> "…because we provide so much to the booth, there wasn't even the name of the gallery – it was like "Provincial Government" or something like that, and we were at the back. So we're playing again with no publicity, no time to inform our network of collectors, et cetera, et cetera. So, then we were putting [up] the show, and just happened to [post to] Instagram like that, and, um, and after a couple of hours we were sold out, we had to replace the works." (2018)

Vergon also confirmed that nobody from South Africa came to by any of the work on show (2018. This is interesting to note as it further evidences the effects of Démon and Vergon's international network building. It is also arguably evidence of the effect of an absence of progressive and sustainable engagement that the South African art industry has – particularly the academics as we see above – has had on commercial engagement with Marasela's work. Emphatically, though not explicitly, Vergon states: "…to get the recognition that you deserve here can take a hell of a long time, uh, if you are not part of this formerly, entitled cast of artists." (2018) This is further troubling considering the way White owned/run galleries have had substantial influence on the market.

In this chapter I have discussed the relationship between Art Joburg and the seven top galleries in South Africa. This discussion was all the more valuable considering the placement of the art fair in South Africa's at industry as a place holder for the defunct Johannesburg Biennale (Malcomess 2012:36). There is a circular relationship between commercial engagement and academic engagement with art. This relationship necessitates that each engagement offers its own different kind of value (Hagg 2010:34; Lena & Levin 2009:60; Murinik 2018:63). Thus, displacing artists from any part of this relationship disenfranchises them. The galleries covered are all notably lacking in the representation of South African Black women, and this trend continues at art fairs locally and internationally. The secondary market subsequently serves and will continue to serve as report card for this exclusion of Black women. The legacy of apartheid, and the segregation it legally and socially propped up in all industries, is evident in the secondary market now. This market has a list of Black women with art circulating that I could easily count on one hand. The inclusion of Black artists is continuously dwarfed by the inclusion of White artists, and when this seems to be remedied it consistently privileges Black men over Black women.

McAndrew notes that smaller galleries and artist platforms become a site for larger galleries to scout for new artists (2018:18). While this does ensure that small galleries stay small, there are also benefits for artists represented by small galleries. Afronova makes a case for this as they have taken advantage of the time not used in managing a permanent space and exhibition programme, to instead focus on integrating the way commercial spaces and academic spaces engage with their artists. There are of

course benefits for small galleries in growing with the careers of emerging artists. Review of Christopher Moller Gallery participation in art fairs has seen it become more consistent, starting with the presentation of Gum's work.

In this chapter the examination of the demographics of gallery representation, art fairs, and auction houses demonstrated the marginalised visibility of Black women in the South African and global art market. In the next chapter I will discuss the role of museums and surveys, as academic engagement with art. I will also contrast the programmes of a publically funded museum and a privately funded one. In the next chapter I will also discuss access, particularly in the context of a first tier of visibility.

Chapter 4: Academic Engagement

As I have mentioned, academic and commercial engagement are tied to each other and together function to manufacture the visibility of artists. This happens first through our becoming aware of them. Meaning that by attending events in these spaces we are able to notice the art and artists represented in them. Once these artists begin to habitually be represented, we grow familiar with them and, most distinctly, when the representation of artists is diverse we are not only able to recognise them due to being familiar to us, but we are also able to distinguish how they are different from each other and how they are the same.

Vergon states: "Academia is actually mixed with a group of galleries, um, and they keep the same gates closed." (2018) Referring to how the market space has become overtly involved in the running of exchanges between the market and the academy. These exchanges are crucial to the visibility of artists. The directors of Afronova foreground this aspect of their arts management by not only ensuring that sales are made, but they are made to parties that will ensure the artists is kept visibility in visual culture (Démon & Vergon 2018). This is not a new or uncommon practice (Lena & Levin 2009:62). Lena and Levin write:

> "…contemporary and non-religious artworks are most valued (both in their economic and aesthetic senses) when their aura is protected within special spaces set aside for artistic consumption like galleries, museums…" (2009:61)

While this consumption extends towards private spaces such as living rooms and offices (Lena & Levin 2009:61), these spaces reduce and even prohibit public access. To circumvent this, museums and public collections become prime locations for art to be consumed and continuously studied.

The primary complication with this preference is that of sustainability. I cited earlier how Gum grapples with this. In order for her to remain in industry her wok must sell. These sales are often made to private White owners (Bamgboye 2018:144). With Christopher Moller Gallery still being a smaller establishment, it is worth noting that: "…there is more flexibility for those at the top of contemporary art's status hierarchy to make novel claims on the rules around its production and distributions." (Lena & Levin 2009:62). However, Afronova makes use of being a small gallery to be selective about the sales they make. It is also worth noting that although Afronova is a small gallery it has a long history of operating in international networks and has established buyers that are able to offer artists academic access and engagement.

In this chapter I examine demographic data of the solo exhibitions that have taken place at public, private, and university museums in South Africa in the three-year period between 2017 and 2019. Although South Africa has close to 400 museums, many of these have few solo exhibitions for a variety of reasons. Some of these include funding and staff capacity. Government funding for the arts has been contrained in recent decades. This extends to funds for collecting new works, as well as the establishment of new museums. There have not been any new government funded museum post apartheid. Privately funded and university funded museums and collections have been able to thrive, however, and especially in the last five years. This does not guarantee that funding does not play a contributing factor, but reasons for thin programmes can also be unrelated to austerity measures. Retrospectives and other important exhibitions conventionally have extended runs of up to six months. While this may offer the opportunity for in depth engagement, there is often a lack of quality and accessible programming.

Private museums such as the Apartheid Museum in the south of Johannesburg have been able to sustain themselves through entrance fees from tourist audiences. This is a model replicated in more recently established Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art (Zeitz MOCAA), Norval Foundation, and Javett-UP Art Centre. The first two are Cape Town based, and the latter is based in Pretoria and in partnership with the University of Pretoria. The entrance fees for these museums are: R65 for Apartheid Museum; R210 for Zeitz MOCAA; R180 for Norval Foundation; and R150 for Javett-UP. There may be further costs for guided tours and educational resources. These institutions significantly support the representation of South African contemporary art in the museum sector. They are even able to offer more frequent solo exhibitions than government museums such as Museum Africa in Johannesburg or Tatham Art Gallery in

Pietermaritzburg. These privately funded museums are again in cetralised major cities. These cities can be costly to access and navigate, adding to the cost of the entrance fee.

I also discuss the South African pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The Venice Biennale is one of the most prominent international art events (Dreyer 2019). This event has significant potential to accelerate the international visibility of participants, due to its recognisability within the industry (Dreyer 2019). Although South Africa no longer holds its own biennale, its pavilion at the Venice Biennale does offer the benefits of participating in an event of this nature. For artists these include the international affirmation of being included, but also the opportunity to have their work contextualised through the curatorial concept of the appointed Biennale curator and the curator of the South African pavilion.

I also discuss the ways in which Gum could already be garnering academic engagement but has not notably been doing so yet. Shortly after graduating, Gum enjoyed tremendous commercial engagement which has provided her with an uncommon financial foothold in the industry that may prove sustainable for her in the long run if maintained. Marasela on the other hand, achieved more academic success shortly after she graduated. Although this has written Marasela into history, it did not ensure her financially sustainability and she left industry multiple times (Marasela 2018). Her academic engagement has left her with a record that makes it easy for her to return to, however it also skews the balance between the perception of where she is in her career verses her lived experience. I will discuss the implications of this as well.

Exhibitions at museums in South Africa

Art historians, Rayda Becker and Rochelle Keene compiled a guide of South African art collections that reviews museums in South Africa (Becker & Keene 2000:1). This guide only outlines a brief history of the institutions and one or two highlights from the collections. Although this guide was written two decades ago, it was an adequate departure point in deciding which museums would form part of my selection. As with Becker and Keene, I only include museums with an art focus (2000:1). However, this research is focused on the identifiable visibility of named artists and because classical African art has historically not been attributed to its makers by the recorded conventions of the institutions that collect it, I do not include museums that only collect classical African art. As I am examining the representation of Black women in exhibition programmes, I also exclude museums that do not have temporary exhibitions or had not held any in the specified period. I also add new private museum Norval Foundation, founded in 2018, and Zeitz MOCAA, founded in 2017. Javett-UP, founded in 2019, is also included. The inclusion of newer centres offers insight into the impact they are having in the representation of Black women at

museums over-all. However, as I am only looking at solo exhibitions this insight is limited. Javett-UP in particular has not had the opportunity to host solo exhibitions and dedicated its first openings – of four exhibitions across nine galleries – to highlights from various South African art collections. Group exhibitions continue to leave opportunity for Black artists to either become ignored, or to become hypervisible as I discussed in the *Innovat1ve Women* exhibition.

Of the inaugural exhibitions was the prominently discussed *All in a Day's Eye: The Politics of Innocence in the Javett Collection.* This exhibition was curated by Gabi Ngcobo (and assisted by a research team including Donna Kukama, Simnikiwe Buhlungu, and Tšhegofatšo Mabaso), and drew significant criticism for its inclusion of an artwork by the convicted murderer Zwelethu Mthethwa[13]. The exhibition sought to examine the way in which the collection had been developed. The Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) requested that Ngcobo and Javett remove Mthethwa's work from display (Zvomuya 2019 & Moosa 2019). Ngcobo's aim was to include Mthethwa in the exhibition to critique the problematic nature and inclusion of the work in the collection (Zvomuya 2019). This explanation, included when a wall text to this effect was placed alongside the work in the exhibition, was critiqued for being unnecessarily academic and even odd (Zvomuya 2019). Ngcobo had also intended to use the work to highlight the misogyny in the artist's work and bring critical attention to the sanitised manner in which these works are often discussed in the catalogues of auctioneers in order to solicit sales (Zvomuya 2019). Other works in the exhibition included artists with a lengthy privileged history of using their work to make stereotyped depictions of South African people and landscapes (Zvomuya 2019). The exhibition is almost exclusively of White artists from the early to mid-20th century that have a visual language intended to present South Africa, and especially South Africans as docile within the context of their oppression (O'Toole 2019). These are the artists dominant in the consignments of auction houses, including Strauss & Co. Stephen Welz is himself credited as playing a role in the development of the Javett collection (Zvomuya 2019). O'Toole states: "...auction houses often parrot unreformed histories of white achievement." (2019) This exhibition intended to critique this history, and in many ways did so. The titles of several works were researched and critiqued for belying histories of slavery and subjugation in South Africa (O'Toole 2019).

[13] "Zwelethu was found guilty of murdering Nokuphila Kumalo, 23, a sex worker, in Woodstock, Cape Town." (Zvomuya 2019) "In 2013, Mthethwa was caught on CCTV footage beating to death 23-year-old sex worker Nokuphila Kumalo. He was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment in 2017. He is currently serving his sentence at Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town." (Moosa 2019).

Although this exhibition mostly discusses the manner in which *White* artists sanitised South African contexts, opposite to Goniwe's discussion of Black artists making them and their work palatable (2018:6), there is also an example of Gladys Mgudlandlu employing the same tactic in her work (O'Toole 2019). A painting by Mgudlandlu that depicts a Black woman smoking a pipe, is titled *African woman smoking a pipe* and this flattening of race relations in South Africa is critiqued by Buhlungu (O'Toole 2019). These curatorial efforts and the discussions they intend to bring to the forefront of critical art history discourse are almost entirely overshadowed by the rhetoric and protest following Mthethwa's inclusion in the exhibition (O'Toole 2019). It would be too simple to conclude that the work should not have been part of the exhibition. Indeed, the frenzy would have been avoided if this had been the case, but the opportunity to discuss how the work of Mthethwa presented misogyny and in many ways can and should be discussed as a foreshadowing of the criminal events that followed would have been missed. Perhaps this discussion can also be an opportunity to identify other kinds of misogyny active in the art industry that maintains the exclusion of women and Black women in particular. However, the inclusion of Mthethwa in this case was handled in a way that was inaccessible. The curatorial wall text is an exhibition convention that can often exclude audiences. I do not want to repeat the assumptions that were made about SWEAT's ability to *understand* the purpose of the exhibition (Zvomuya 2019). The way audiences access an exhibition varies indeed, and this was not considered by the curator, however it is the fact that the wall text is not enough to contextualise and convince even an audience that can access it. Further, the exhibition was opened in the context of surveying and celebrating a century of collecting. Even though *this* exhibition had other objectives, this was the context of the inauguration of Javett-UP, and to include Mthethwa in this particular exhibition would have always included him in a celebratory moment. More work needed to be done to account for the weight the context of Javett-UP being founded would have had on the curatorial objective. Finally, more work should have been done to focus public attention on the rest of the exhibition. Instead, all discourse following the exhibition made hypervisible Mthethwa's inclusion, which was on one work in the back of the gallery. The work of other Black artists was not anywhere near as visible in the subsequent discourse. The problematic depictions of South Africans by the White artists included was not adequately critiqued, which had been the point of the exhibition. Interestingly, although I visited the exhibition twice during its run and received guided tours both times, my only engagement with Mgudlandlu's work that was included in the show was as part of this chapter.

The invisibility of Black women on group exhibitions is not a new phenomenon, and I did discuss it as part of Mdluli's reasoning around her curation of Black modernist artists (Mdluli 2019b:xvii). Museums

conventionally have permanent group exhibitions which can be prohibitive to in-depth curatorial research on the work of individual artists. Most South African museums operate in this way, and in the few instances where exhibitions are turned over the new exhibition are largely group exhibitions. South African museums that held solo exhibitions between 2017 and 2019 were: Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG); Pretoria Art Museum; Edoardo Villa Museum (Old Merensky Library); WAM; Durban Art Gallery; Norval Foundation; Zeitz MOCAA; North West University (NWU) Gallery; and Fine Art, Design and Architecture (FADA) Gallery. Across these nine institutions 58 solo exhibitions were held between 2017 and 2019. JAG, Pretoria Art Museum, and Durban Art Gallery are all publicly funded municipal museums. The Old Merensky Library, WAM, NWU Gallery, and FADA Gallery are university museums or galleries. Norval Foundation and Zeitz MOCAA are both privately funded museums.

Out of the 58 solo exhibitions held, four were by South African Black women. Lebohang Kganye held a solo exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum. Hers was the only solo exhibition by a Black woman out of six held between 2017 and 2019. Kganye's exhibition was part of her award for winning the Sasol New Signatures 2017 competition (Garner 2017). The exhibition took place in 2018 and was called *Ke Sale Teng.* Mmakgabo Mapula Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi exhibited at Norval Foundation and was the only Black women to have a solo exhibition out of seven in the three-year period. Although the exhibition, *Batlhaping Ba Re!* (2018), spanned her five-decade career, it was not referred to as a retrospective exhibition. The final two solo exhibitions by South African Black women at museums in the country were held at Zeitz MOCAA. Nobukho Nqaba had a show called *Izicwangciso* in 2019, and Nandipha Mntambo's show *Material Value* opened in 2017.

The primary benefit of museum exhibitions is that they operate without the influence of an economic outcome, they are exposed to specialised programming, and they are validated and made visible by being admitted into the exclusive programmes of museum institutions. By this I mean that the reading of art is not interfered with when the lens of commerce is removed (Lena & Levin 2009:60). One of the concerns of *All in a Day's Eye: The Politics of Innocence in the Javett Collection* was indeed the role that the way work had been written about in auction catalogues had impacted the development of the collection. The conventions in display at art galleries tend to be minimal, limiting what is placed on labels and how and where the artist statement is made available in the exhibition. Increasingly the artists' statement is either only available as a printed hand-out or is absent altogether and only recorded in press releases and for the website. Museums, on the other hand, continue to employ large vinyl wall texts that detail artists' statements and curatorial concepts, as well as detailed labels. As we have seen,

again in *All in a Day's Eye: The Politics of Innocence in the Javett Collection,* a wall text cannot be an all assuming explanation of an exhibition, but it is a commonly used mechanism to assist audiences in accessing the exhibition. Museums generally – and the ones where the solo exhibitions of Kganye, Sebidi, Nqaba, and Mntambo were held – also have some extent of a public programme. This ranges from tours pitched at various academic levels, to workshops, and panel discussions. All of these become additional access points, and thus opportunities for the work of these artists to become more visible to audiences.

In the three-year period less than 7% of the artists that benefitted from having solo exhibitions at a South African museum were Black women. Encouragingly, although not great, only 29% of the exhibition were by White men. This is notable as the history of the founding of most museums and collections in South Africa is heavily White. Early collecting practices focussed on European art (Becker & Keene 2000:5). Later this was refocussed, and museums built up collections with work by South African artists. Becker and Keene write:

> "South African art was not prominently featured in the early 20th century. As the skewed art history of this country was rewritten from the mid-1980s, museums sought to correct the imbalances in their collections, and a radical refocussing of collecting policies resulted in an emphasis on the collecting of 'traditional', historical and contemporary southern African art." (2000:5)

It is worth noting that university collections were quicker in adopting these changes, although largely in favour of White South African artists. While collection of southern African art did see this uptake, as I discussed there was a lack of criticality (Enwezor 1997:23). The choices in collecting were preferential of classical work such as beadwork and pottery, and often further marginalised it as cultural and outside of mainstream art history (Davison 1993:24). These early obstacles in collecting will continue to be seen in museums that have collections were Black women are historically marginalised.

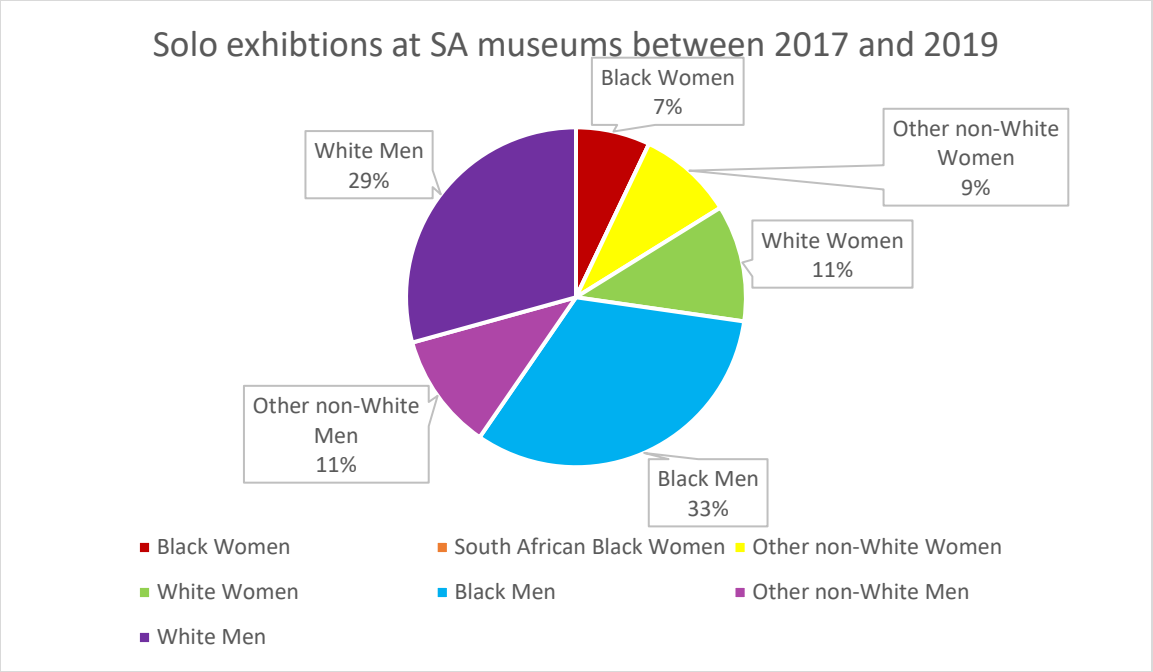


Table 14 self-collected data from museum websites and social media platforms.

Wits Art Museum was founded explicitly as a collection aimed at benefitting research and learning (Becker & Nettleton 2000:114). Collecting begun in the 1950s in the History of Art and the Architecture departments at Wits (Becker & Nettleton 2000:114). Eventually, in 1972, the Getrude Posel Gallery was established to exhibit the growing collection, as well as a programme of visiting temporary exhibitions (Becker & Nettleton 2000:114). In 2012 the gallery was re-launched as Wits Art Museum in its current location, which faces the Braamfontein district. It had previously been concealed within the university, and its new location intentionally strengthens ties between the public, the collection, and the university. Between 2017 and 2019 none of the 14 solo exhibitions held were by Black women. There were two exhibitions presented that drew directly from collections held at WAM. These were *Highlights of the WAM Holdings 2016-2018* (2018) and *A beast slouches and so forth: Robert Hodgins at WAM* (2019). The former exhibition did include a work by Noria Mabasa, however, despite there being Black women in the WAM collections they are seldom part of exhibitions.

The collections of university museums also tend to be representative of the academics that have taught at those schools over the years. This meaning representing the demographic of the academics, as well as the fact that academics tend to donate their own work to the collection. The works on the Robert Hodgins exhibition were also donated by the artist, following his retirement from Wits. NWU gallery is an example of this. It has a long history of collecting Afrikaans artists due to it previously being an

Afrikaans university. The University of South Africa (UNISA) Gallery is also an outlier. It was established slightly later than other collections, in the 1960s, and not by an art or art history academic (Hattingh 2000:109). Its initial purpose was to collect work that would be displayed in various offices across UNISA campuses (Hattingh 2000:109). Later this collection moved to the Fine Art department for teaching and research purposes, but it continued to be a contemporary art collection (Hattingh 2000:110). UNISA Gallery, unlike other university collections in South Africa, does not have an extensive collection of classical African art.

The South African pavilion at the Venice Biennale

South Africa first participated in the Venice Biennale in 1950 with six artists representing the country (Dreyer 2019). These were three White men, two White women, and one Black man. From 1968 South Africa was excluded due to apartheid related sanctions (Koloane 1996:50). The artists included in this first appearance at the Biennale are all familiar names I came across in the consignment records of South African auction houses while completing this research. These artists are still very much in the lexicon of South African art history. Walter Battiss last had a solo retrospective at WAM in 2016. Both Battiss and Irma Stern have museum in their name in the Western Cape of South Africa. The only Black artist, Sydney Kumalo, has long been referred to as a representation of Black artists practicing during his time. However, Kumalo has not been memorialised in the same manner as his White counterparts.

Global engagement with Africa, especially at the Venice Biennale, has been inconsistent (Dakin 2019:2). Dagara Dakin writes: "...it was unsurprising that African artists should have been practically non-existent in great international events until the end of the 1980s." (2019:2) Although Dakin attributes some of this absence to the gatekeeping of the West, he also problematically puts forward political instability as the reason for African artists to repeatedly have diminished visibility at the Venice Biennale (2019:2). Indeed, the political climate in most African countries was tumultuous for much of the 20th century but the art produced during this time was varied and intellectual. In South Africa exhibitions such as *A Black Aesthetic* prove that not only was practice amongst Black artists ongoing, but it did not subsume itself with the political climate. Arguably, the lack of access to biennales such as the one in Venice – that have the benefit of making visible art and artists – stunted perceptions of African art. Egypt was the first African country to have a national pavilion at the Venice Biennale, but before then, African sculpture was included in exhibitions to suplement/complement the presentation of modern painters (Dreyer 2019).

In 1993 South Africa was invited to participate in the Venice Biennale after three decades of exclusion (Koloane 1996:50). Although the government funded travel for all participating artists to attend the Biennale, Black artists declined to attend the exhibition (Cowell 1993:14). They did not explicitely cite why (Cowell 1993:14). In 1995 South Africa returned to the fair with curator and artist Malcom Payne (Dreyer 2019). In this edition Payne curated a solo exhibition of his work (Dreyer 2019). I find this clear conflict of interest surprising due to how overt it is; however, other conflicts have always been present in South Africa's participation in the Venice Biennale. In 2011 the Department of Arts and Culture secured a 20-year lease at the Venice Biennale, making it the only major international art industry event to supported by the government (Tyilo 2019). This lease came after a 16-year absence from the Venice Biennale (Dreyer 2019). Monno Mokoena, co-owner of Gallery Momo, curated an exhibition with work from Nelisiwe Xaba and Zanele Muholi (Dreyer 2019). The following edition in 2013 was curated by Brenton Maart and focused on ways in which the archive was used and relevant in art (Dreyer 2019). Interestingly, Christine Eyene referres to this exhibition as a: "...culturally diverse perspectives on South Africa's past and present." (2014:4) Six out the the 17 artists were Black and of these only one was a Black woman, Donna Kukama. It is noteworthy that beyond South Africa, the global art industry may be reading South African art as inclusive and representative of the full scope of South African artists even though this by far excludes the work of Black women.

Although the pavilion was already rented, both in 2011 and 2013 these exhibitions were embroiled with funding related controversy (Jason 2015:4). In fact, all tenders to curate the South African pavilion have been awarded late, suffered the difficulty of the money being turned over late, and had the subsequent difficulty of changes in exchange rates (Tyilo 2019).

In 2015 Christopher Till, then director of the Apartheid Museum, and Jeremy Rose, an architect at the Mashabe Rose firm, curated an exhibition of 13 artists (Jason 2015:4). The aim of the exhibition as to represent the post-apartheid political and sociological climate of South Africa (Jason 2015:4). However, the exhibition included just three Black artists: Gerald Machona, Mohau Modisakeng, and Nandipha Mntambo as the only Black woman. Even though this selection received wide criticsm, Till and Rose maintained that their selection intended to articulate the socio-political climate in South Africa at the time and the artists included had work that best did so (Jason). Writer and critic, Stephanie Jason, commented:

> "If your outlook is that of an established white male, overlooking the perspective of black female artists such as the award-winning photographer Zanele Muholi or performance artist Nelisiwe Xaba might not be that hard." (2015:5)

In 2011 Payne privileged his own work over that of the two artists (both White men) that also showed work at the South African pavilion. In 2015 Till and Rose, being in privileged positions themselves, whether or not intentionally did privilege the work of White artists. This is particularly pertinent as these artists were included to present visual disource on a context in which Black people are disproportionately underprivileged.

In response to this, Roelof Petrus van Wyk, founder of 133 Arts Foundation, managed and funded the Joburg Pavilion (Jason 2015:4). This project was established as part of the fringe at the Venice Biennale (Jason 2015:4). Although in the fringe, activities in this area are engaged with as well, and benefit from the visibility of the Biennale (Jason 2015:4). In the context of the Joburg Pavilion, being established as a response to the selection for the South African pavilion undoubtedly lent it some of the visibility in media discussions about the South Africa's participation at the Venice Biennale. Twenty-two artists were included in the Joburg Pavilion. Only film and performance artists were selected to avoid shipping and insurance costs (Jason 2015:5). There were ten Black artists included, four (Mandisa Poefficient Vundla, Senzeni Marasela, Donna Kukama, Bogosi Sekhukuni) of whom were women. This included Marasela who performed her *Waiting* series. The project was not necessarily about Johannesburg, conceptually, although it was co-funded by City of Johannesburg (Jason 2015:4). The exhibition instead was a series of happenings that took place the the fringe (Jason 2015:5). The Joburg Pavilion was also considered by the van Wyk and the artists as being in memory of the 1997 Johannesburg Biennale (Jason 2015:5). In that way it became another example of privatisation of academic spaces that are ordinarly publically funded, as we see with the Joburg Art Fair.

In the last two editions of the South African pavilion at the Venice Biennale the selections have been small. In 2017 Lucy MacGarry, who was previously the curator of the Joburg Art Fair, curated work by Mohau Modisakeng and Candice Breitz. Peculiarlily, MacGarry had an assistant curator which had not been the case before. Till and Rose were co-curators. Musha Neluheni was appointed the assistant curator (Dreyer 2019). At the time Neluheni worked as a collection's curator at the Joburg Art Gallery. Although there is little detail on the circumstance of Neluheni's appointment, it does harken to situation of Black arts professionals in South Africa that I discussed in chapter one.

In 2019 two Black women were appointed as the curators of the South African Pavilion. Nomusa Makhubu and Nkule Mabaso co-curated the work of Tracey Rose, Mawande Ka Zenzile, and Dineo Sheshee Bopape who was the only Black woman included. Makhubu, a Senior Lecturer of Art History at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and Mabaso, Curator of the Michaelis Galleries at UCT, had already worked together on various projects and with this same selection of artists (Tyilo 2019). Macdonald writes: "...the more frequently artists are selected by influential curators, the more often they will be selected by other curators..." (2019:12) Modisakeng for example, has take part in two of the last three South African Pavilions. This is not a new phenomenon, Irma Stern participated in the Venice Biennale throughout the 1950s (Dreyer 2019). With Makhubu and Mabaso, they have repeatedly returned to the same artists to continue the curatorial researh they were building through their work (Tyilo 2019). This recurring use of the same artists, whether by one curatorial team or multiple, deepens the visibility of artists. However, at a certain point this turns to overuse which begets hypervisibility as I discussed before. The measure of this is when the work of one artist eclipses the work of other in the same area or demographic. This is not an easy metric to employ, and it has taken the length of this thesis to attempt to measure visibility of Black women in the South African art industry. I argue there should be consistent evaluation of the industry.

Gum & Marasela: first steps

Gum has had an incredible commercial trajectory. She has, in her short career of just over five years, held three solo exhibitions in South African and America. Gum has, however, had virtually no academic engagement. She has not had work included in museum exhibitions, or other major non-commercial exhibitions. At this point in her career, this may not be a priority for Gum. Certainly, financial stability is just as worthwhile a goal, and indeed there is consistent commercial engagement. Her visibility has further been fostered by a steady stream of art critics and journalist writing about her work in online publications.

Marasela on the other handed begun her career with academic engagement. Her first notable visibility was as part of an exhibition curated by Rory Bester, titled *Democracy's Images* (1998), and has been credited as her first break into the art industry (Bedford 2001:7). Marasela has had work in several major exhibitions, particularly abroad and in prominent locations (Corrigall 2021). Despite this she only had her first solo exhibition at a museum in 2020/21. The exhibition was titled *Waiting for Gebane* and opened at Zeitz MOCAA (Corrigall 2021). Marasela felt she had no guidance following many of these engagements, and thus could not sustain them. Her contextualisation in this research is indeed more

pronounced and even absurd, especially contrasted with Gum, as it would appear that she has enjoyed tremendous visibility. I would not argue that Marasela's participation with academic engagement led to any hypervisibility for her, as the exhibitions she was included in tended to be spaced out and not overly recorded. The reading of Marasela's work as post-apartheid practice has also led to her practice usually being read alongside the work of other artists all being used to contextualise a particular time or moment in time. Bester writes that Marasela (and Colin Richards and Sue Williamson): "...make liberal use of mass media reportage and imagery and in many ways offer interpretations of what numerous viewers might recognise from newspapers and television news." (2004:26) Bester argues that Marasela's work plays a significant role in providing the artistic research necessary for South African publics to access the subject matter for discussion (2004:28).

The way in which Marasela has had academic engagement with her early work is also arguably why she has been able to keep coming back. Marasela notes her longest break from the industry to have been four years (2018). Each time she has returned to industry she has been able to resume a place in prestigious and rigorous academic spaces. This includes her participation in the Johannesburg Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Writing about her recent exhibition at Zeitz MOCAA, Jareh Dan first recalls encountering the artist at the Venice Biennale (2021). Vusumzi Nkomo likens Marasela's relationship to waiting detailed in her work, to her actual lived experience of waiting for recognition in her career (2021). I agree that Marasela has had to wait a long time to get to this solo exhibition, but I argue that the recognition was there. Marasela was recognised for the short – and sometime longer – bursts of work she was able to do. Her work is discussed in surveys about South African art, and in other noteworthy catalogues. The deficit of writing on Marasela's work is rather in in-depth research papers and journal articles. Marasela's work is also included in important collections such as the Apartheid Museum collection and the South African National Gallery Collection. The issue is actually that Marasela has previously lacked the support – financial and structural – to comfortably and consistently work towards the scale of an exhibition like *Waiting for Gebane* at Zeitz.

There is no record of Gum keeping a regular office job. She begun full-time art practice immediately following her education and had success right away. She was also formally represented. Black women have left art practice due to financial instability, but Gum did not have this issue. This has also contributed to her ability to produce consolidated bodies of exhibition ready works. I do not think it is worth saying that this is the better way to go. Of course, some artists prefer to focus on a career that predominantly becomes visible through commercial engagement. Historically this has been with

decorative arts, but recently socially relatable work can become highly collectable because of the conversations it creates. As I have mentioned, all kinds of engagements are interrelated. It is not possible for Gum to go her whole career without *any* academic engagement even if she does not seek it out. Aspects of South African art, such as replicas of classical African art objects sold in tourist markets have also been written about in journals (Baur 2014:8). Indeed, I am writing about Gum's work after only encountering it in commercial spaces. However, it is the combination of both kinds of engagement that accelerate visibility, and this is clearly seen in Marasela's trajectory.

This chapter discussed the approaches taken at South African museums. These approaches are important to note as they take place in prominent spaces of academic engagement. It is not surprising that the history of biased collecting continues to affect the programming of museums today. I do anticipate that this issue will remain endemic for some time to come as few collections retain funding enough to grow and become more inclusive. Museums also continue to have far fewer exhibitions in their programmes. This said, better considerations need to be taken for the academic nature in which museum exhibitions are posed. Ngcobo offers an example of what can go wrong when diverse audiences and their needs are not taken into account.

The Venice Biennale also demonstrated academic engagement as a platform with the objective of surveying the artistic output of a country's art. The visibility of an event of this scale can set an artist up to long be considered as representative of their country's discourse. This can be a negative as well if the selection of artists for this platform is not inclusive enough.

Chapter 5: Social Media Engagement

In this chapter I analyse the nature of social media engagement with the profiles of Gum, Marasela, Afronova, and Christopher Moller Gallery. I primarily make a critical case for image-based social media as a vehicle for engagement that produces visibility. I focus on Instagram as a visual medium and discuss the various iconography and layout features of the platform. Machirori considers how digital and online spaces become an aide to feminism, while paying close attention to particular issues affecting women in the global south, such as access. The aim of this section is to create an active argument for the function of Instagram in influencing contemporary visual culture, and how the potential for autonomy that the platform offers can become integral to the visibility of a Black feminist narrative.

I look at how hashtags and captions assist in the direction of a visual narrative, and their potential to derail or enhance the message. I apply the approaches of reading image as text from Panzaru, which

also inform how I develop an understanding of the methodology of captions and hashtags employed by Gum, Marasela, and the galleries associated with them.

Even though Marasela relies on social media for her work, she reaches as far back as apartheid in her artistic research. Gum, as well, reaches as far back towards Twiggy and Xhosa fashion. Both artists are using subject matter rooted in overtly White patriarchal paradigms. The particularity here is in how the work reacts in the simultaneously commercial and social space of Instagram.

I am interested in the dynamic strategies these artists employ to maintain authority over their voice and to control influence – or not – and understanding of, and conversation concerning that voice. This is pertinent because for Black women artists to significantly counter their subjugation, and escape it, there must be a progression not only in their ability to voice, but also to engage audiences in a way that impacts their autonomy in making.

Writing from a perspective formed before the age of social media, Arjun Appadurai says that globalisation at the time was: "...calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other." (1996:29) Appadurai also examines how dislocated audiences change context (1996:35). He states:

> "The lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that the farther away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if asserted by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imaged world." (Appadurai 1996:35)

Here, Appadurai has exacted the specific circumstances of cultural appropriation, which are only exemplified in social media where production and reproduction is faster, widespread, and further and easier subverted than any of the forms old media used at the time of this text.

In expanding his idea of fictional landscapes, Appadurai conceptualises various 'scapes' including the mediascape (1996:35). In this concept Appadurai deliberates how the sharing of image-based content across dislocated audiences provides brief strips of reality that, while exposing larger audiences to their experience, are subsequently scripted according to the audience's imagination of that reality (1996:35). In co-opting British model Twiggy's aesthetic for her own use and, importantly, doing so out of the time of Twiggy, Gum begins to build her new amalgamated aesthetic in the work *uTwiggy.* This piece of visual

culture bares a resemblance to its original parts, but it is not the same. It adopts a new script, and while Gum's title does allude to the original image, it does not seek to represent it. This new image, made of appropriated parts, then exists online and is open to further appropriations and even more scripts.

Marasela clings to what she terms as a plural 'I' which Khan uses after Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991), and, in so doing, seeks to make visible the ordinary Black woman's visual narrative (2014:103). While I do not dispute this, my sense is that social media tends to move between single and group identity. The opportunity to curate one's own visual culture strongly promotes individuality but, simultaneously, the use of hashtags generally functions as part of a group consensus. Through using hashtags one can join existing conversations, engaged with by searching a particular hashtag, or create new conversations for other users to join. These hashtags form the basis of how certain posted content is grouped together in search results and form a governance for how you can align your content with certain narratives and ideology.

Olga Pânzaru also considers the role of text alongside the image. She states: "...the study of signs... can assist us to become more aware of the mediating role of signs and of the roles played by ourselves and others in constructing social reality." (2012:409) As social media has developed and usage of hashtags has grown, there has been a growing and distinct difference between lived experience and a social media reality. While the content included in our social media is presented as our lived experience, it is selective, curated, and framed by directional text. Particularly in reference to the above quote from Pânzaru, I evaluate the semiotic differences in how artists articulate their practice in a social media reality, and how they may do so by conventional means such as artists statements and exhibition circulars. These two conventional texts tend to serve the same purpose: articulating and framing the artist's practice.

Pânzaru goes on to say that: "...pictures instantly evoke an emotional response, which is proven to significantly influence all decision making." (2012:410) Image sharing on Instagram is largely driven by approval systems such as liking and commenting. Content is liked by clicking on a heart shaped icon. The more an image has been liked, the easier it becomes to search it, increasing its visibility and the likelihood of it trending or going viral. Additionally, the images that have been liked by accounts that you follow are more likely to show up in your search results. I am interested in the significance of the heart icon and speech bubble (used to indicate commenting) itself, and how its appeal, coupled with the number of times others have already liked and commented on an image, influences a user to engage

with a particular image. More specifically, I identify various methods Instagram users employ to ensure a high number of likes.

In Pânzaru's conclusion, after a study of the 1964 Roland Barthes text: *Rhetoric of the Image,* that visual mediums create reality rather than portray it (2012:411). Pânzaru also proposes written text as a visual entity (2012:411). Especially when considering the significant role that the technology used to present an image plays in how it is read (Pânzaru 2012:411). Instagram is typically accessed via a smartphone application. The layout places the approval rating below the posted image, is a call and response manner, almost as an applauding audience looking up at the stage from the auditorium. These seemingly cursory designs affect the perception of the image, and I decode them as signs and language in a shared social media reality.

The media through which we consume information affects how we perceive and retain that knowledge and, especially in the case of social media, how or whether we later promulgate it. As we continue further into the digital age, the way we regard visual content is evolving (Favero 2014:166). A study of the experiences of social media for different demographic groups indicated that Black users are more likely to see (and notice) racial content regardless of how often they themselves talk about it on or offline (Anderson & Hitlin 2016:7). While the kind of content is somewhat determined by the user by them choosing to follow people who post a certain kind of content, there are also algorithms designed to improve user experience by collecting data on what the user has previously interacted with.

Within the context of social media, the issue of autonomy is governed by a myriad of factors. While the creation or selection of an image for public dissemination can be a carefully considered process, the intention of it can become obsolete after its absorption into global visual culture due to the multiplicity of contexts in which the image can be subsequently read. Meaning can also be subverted by the introduction of public comments, shown alongside the image. This is further complicated by the nature of reposting and even the screengrab, the act of making an electronic copy of what is being viewed on your screen, which can be subsequently shared as a new image with perceivably identical components of the original. There are various ways through which the public's perception of an image's intention can be choreographed, such as high or low image quality in terms of resolution and/or technical skill. The relationship of the image to text is significant and integral (Barthes 1977:159). Aside from implications of captions of the perception of the image, a hashtag of an image will also affect what search results the image will appear in, thus controlling the audience which will potentially consume the image.

Iconography & Methodology

Throughout the course of this research Instagram has undergone several major updates. The most significant of these has been the change in approach to likes. Likes are an approval mechanism for posts made on Instagram. Similar mechanisms exist on other social media platforms which offers the benefit that users are typically familiar with the function, provided they have used a social media platform before. On Instagram the icon for liking is a heart shape. On a mobile device the shape sits below the post on the left-hand side (see figure 4). The icon is a black outline until you like the post, then it is filled in red. Previously anyone could see the likes on any post. This included seeing the actual number of likes, as well as being able to click through for a list of the users that had liked the particular post. In 2019 this was changed, and the number of likes a post got was no longer visible to users other than the one who had posted. The purpose of this was to reduce the addictive nature of the platform, which had been shown to be exemplified by the liking feature, and to limit the way in which users compared themselves to other users in terms of like, which reportedly impacted on self-esteem (Fitzgerald 2019). Likes, however, form part of how engagement is measured on Instagram. Users are still able to access this information themselves to monitor social media engagement.



Figure 4: Screengrab from Christopher Moller Gallery's Instagram profile showing the hashtags used underneath the post of 'uTwiggy III'.

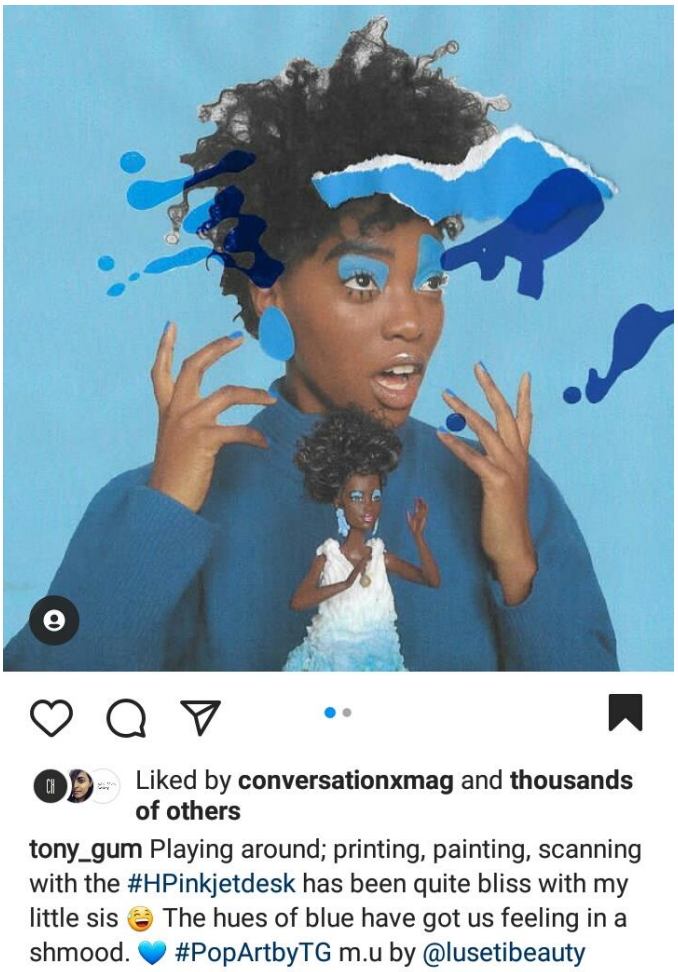


Figure 5: Screengrab from Gum's Instagram profile picturing a post made for her collaboration with HP. This image borrows from uTwiggy.

Social media engagement comes from social media users, but it can also be optimised for commercial engagement. Gum has done this in the past in a partnership with HP South Africa, a computer and printer corporate. Gum collaborated with HP to produce a series called #popartbyTG. The series revisited several works such as *uTwiggy* but also created altogether new works. In the series Gum wears brightly coloured clothing and make up. The style of the images have the quality of editorial photographs used in high fashion magazines. The series is not part of a broader body of work intended for exhibition, and has a main objective of showcasing the capabilities of the printers and scanners sold by HP. Instead of limiting herself with these meagre specifics, Gum uses the opportunity to playfully interact with her growing visual language. The body painting seen in *Ode to She* is employed for one work (see figure 5). In another she poses similarly to *uTwiggy* (see figure 6).

The mobile layout of Instagram places likes and comments below the posted image. There is also an icon to share the post in a direct message, privately with another user, and this icon is shaped like a paper

aeroplane (see figure 4). On the far right there is a bookmark icon. It is white with a black outline but is filled in black when you click it. The purpose of this button is for users to save posts. Liking a post will not save it. On a users profile you can navigate to an archive of saved posts. In this archive you can create different folders and orderly file away the posts that you have saved. This is how I have kept track of all the posts that I am studying as part of this thesis. This is also how Instagram itself has become both an area of research, and a research tool for me.



Figure 6: Screengrab from Gum's Instagram profile picturing a post from her collaboration with HP.

With all these options for engagement placed underneath the post, it becomes as though the post is on a stage and the audiences engages with it from below and looking up at it. The caption part of the post also falls directly underneath the image part of the post. This is the case in the newsfeed of the computer layout as well, however, not when you are the profile feed of a users. In the profile feed of a user, when in the computer interface, the posts show as a grid of 1:1 images. You can then click on the one you would like to see in full. Once the post expands the image part of the post is on the left side, and the caption part of the post is at the top of the right side. The likes, comments, and other options also follow underneath the caption. The fact that this layout only happens when on the profile feed is interesting as it visually insinuates that you have entered a closer dialogue with the user.

Gum tends to keep her captions short. As I mentioned earlier in my chapter on her work, she rarely uses hashtags. Marasela on the other hand uses a lengthy list of hashtags. Very often these hashtags are not necessarily related to the post but may be related to the artist or her career and network. Marasela previously called out platforms in the global art industry by tagging them in the caption of her post. For example, using #artforum when she is posting about a work that has not been written about in Art

Forum. Following her solo exhibition at Zeitz, Marasela re-curated her Instagram profile. She reduced the number of hashtags that she uses in a post by more than half. She also no longer tags platforms in her posts unless the post is related to that platform. For example, she is currently tagging Zeitz MOCAA both using hashtags and the museums handle (@zeitzmocaa). It is worth noting that this change comes directly after Marasela has made a significant jump in her career by having a solo exhibition at a prestigious museum. She no longer sees the need to call platforms to her post for social media engagement. She may also be trying to balance the different kinds of engagement with her practice. Her representation by Afronova has seen her commercial engagement become consistent, curated, and sustainable. As a result, she is able to work towards and achieve prominent academic engagement, and Afronova is also careful to interlink this with her commercial engagement (Démon & Vergon 2018). After using social media to record the repetition of her performance, it may now have become worthwhile to reflect and curate following its completion.

Afronova has a very relaxed approach to their Instagram profile. They prefer not to over curate it, and simply post what they see and enjoy (Démon & Vergon 2018). Posts showing social settings are quite common. They detail the relationships between their represented artists. The majority of their posts are about their artists and where their work is being featured, but they also post selfies at exhibitions and events that have nothing to do with the artists that they represent. Christopher Moller Gallery on the other hand has a tightly curated Instagram profile. Almost all their posts are of art, with very few with people in them clustered at the start of the profile. Instagram shows the newest posts at the start of the profile feed, and the oldest at the end. It appears Christopher Moller Gallery used to have a looser approach to Instagram, but this has changed over the years. Their approach makes their profile a good resource to review work by their represented artists. Their captions are concise and follow the formula of the conventional art label, with an artist name, title of the work, medium, and date it was completed. This part of the post is not as strict and often has flexibility, especially when new exhibitions or work is being announced. Afronova tends to have longer format captions, that are highly informative. This also becomes a strong resource, and particularly a diary of the activities of the artists that the gallery represents.

Reach & Engagement

Marasela has a lower extent of engagement than Gum, with 17 actions of engagement per post compared to Gum's 513. Marasela also has only about a tenth of Gum's following. Marasela's audience is primarily located in South Africa though, whereas Gum's is not. Although most of Gum's audience

identifies as Black, only 25% of her audience is actually in South Africa. 46% of Marasela's audience is in South Africa, which closer matches the proportion of her audience that identifies as black at 45%. This is not to say the all the South African users that follow Marasela are Black. Rather it relates to Gum's success in America that has a large Black population and may thus be skewing her statistics. Interestingly, only 52% of Marasela's audience is women compared to Gum's 64%. I find this intersting because of the marginalised nature of the woman that Marasela depicts. Also, Marasela has talked about the reaction of some men to her dress (Das 2021). She has discussed the way in which some Black men are pleased to meet her in her *seshoeshoe* dress and commend her for dressing this way (Das 2021). This is not put forward as a compliment, but rather an affirmation for adhering to the strict way in which Black women's bodies are policed in South Africa (Das 2021). It is worth considering that the cultural connotations of this dress may be deterrent to the younger or more modern women who may be on Instagram. The majority of Marasela's followers are in the 25 to 34 age group, with another large portion of them being over 45 (see figure 10).

Afronova's following reflects the art centres that it frequents. The gender distribution of their followers is even, and they are mostly middle aged. This means a good proportion of their followers are in an age group where they may be in a stronger position to buy art. 50% of their following identify as White (see figure 14), although this can arguably bring about the same considerations that Gum has had to make as an artist who makes work for Black women that ends up collected by White people. Christopher Moller and Afronova have similar instances of engagement per post at 37 (see figure 7) and 34 (see figure 12) respecively. In previous analysis, of gallery represented artists and commercial engagement, the two galleries have not consistently been on par with each other.



Figure 7: Anaytics of Christopher Moller Gallery's Instagram profile showing an average of 37 instances of engagement per post generated by the HypeAuditor application.



Figure 8: Analytics of Marasela's Instagram profile showing 17 instances of engagement per post generated by the HypeAuditor application.

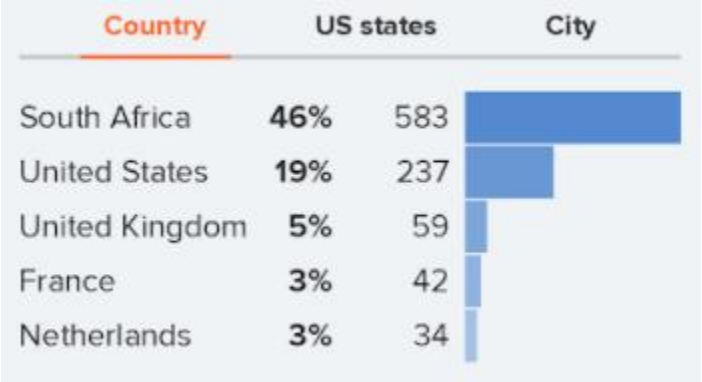


Figure 9: Analytics of the countries Marasela's followers reside in generated by the HypeAuditor application.

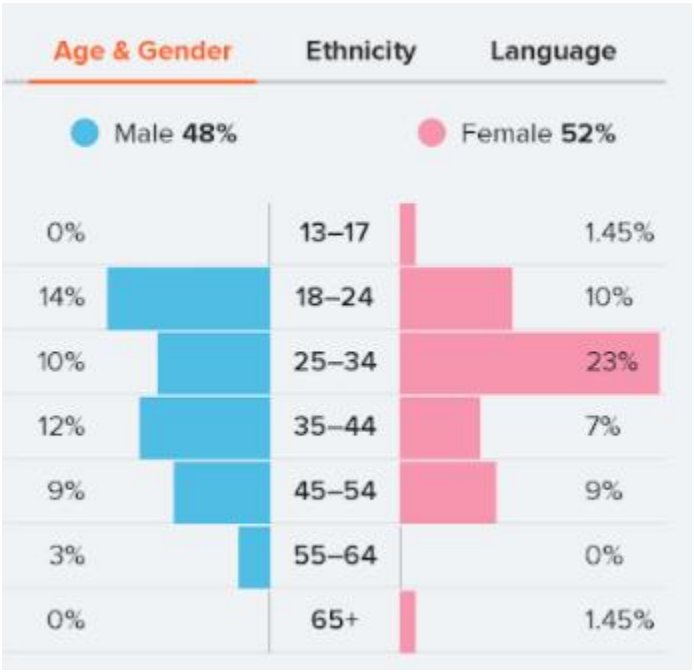


Figure 10: Analytics of the age and gender of Marasela's followers generated by the HypeAuditor application.

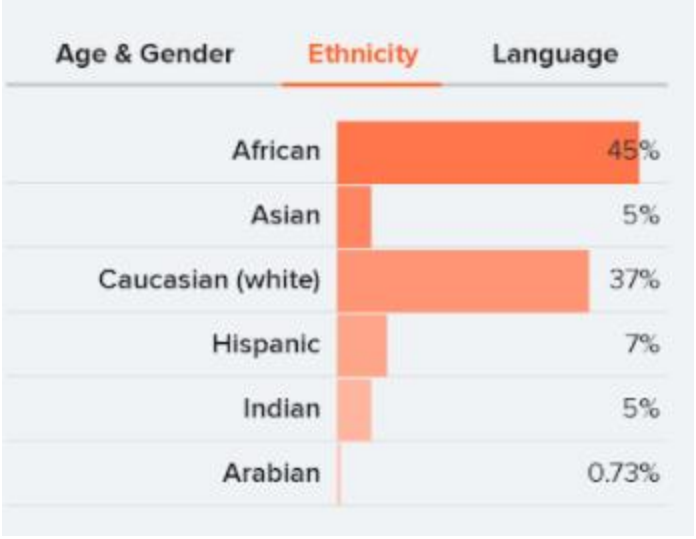


Figure 11: Analytics of the ethnicity of Marasela's followers generated by the HypeAuditor application.



Figure 12: Analytics of the average instances of engagement per post on Afronova's profile generated by the HypeAuditor application.

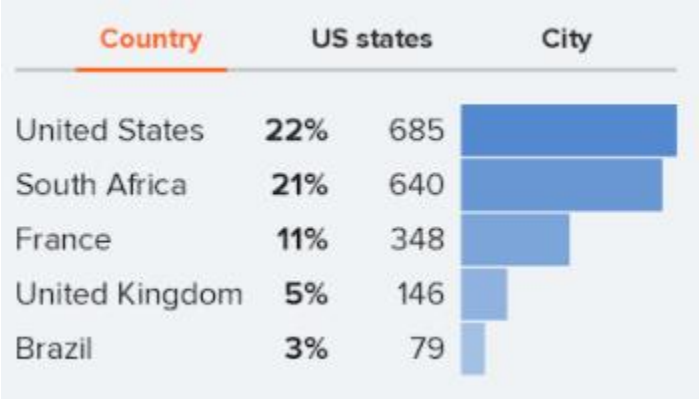


Figure 13: Analytics of the country's Afronova's followers reside in generated by the HypeAuditor application.

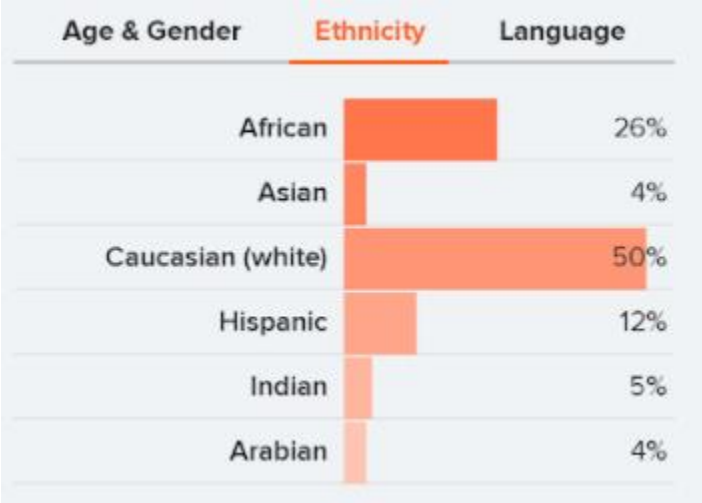


Figure 14: Analytics of the ethnicity of Afronova's followers generated by the HypeAuditor application.

Social media allows for particular display methods, often colloquially dubbed *highly curated profiles.* Such profiles employ sets (a series of related and/or themed posts made consecutively), monochromatic colour schemes, splits (one image cut to appear in parts over several different posts, or multi page images (one image cut to appear in parts over several different frames in the same post, in such a way that you swipe left to see the rest of the image). These methods are further aided by captions, hashtags, and geo-tagging, which aim to contextualise the image. The display practices do not necessarily mimic those employed in the gallery, as they are not enacted in a physical space, but they have the same objective: to establish a narrative through a particular kind of creative practice. Likewise, the captions, hashtags, and geo-tags are equivalent to the promotional paraphernalia of exhibitions such as leaflets and artists statements. This paraphernalia is being increasingly culled and moved to an online space (website and/or email) that is often echoed on social media. What is lacking is academic engagement

with spaces like Instagram in the context of visual art practice. Specifically, academic spaces becoming more operational in social media spaces.

A significant feature of social media is creative autonomy. Each of the practices mentioned above are enacted by the user. This allows the artists far more control in the initial framing of their work. However, while the creation or selection of an image for public dissemination can be a carefully considered process, the intention of it can become obsolete after its absorption into global visual culture due to the multiplicity of contexts in which the image can subsequently be read. Meaning can also be subverted by the introduction of public comments, shown alongside the online image. The relationship of the image to text is significant and integral (Barthes 1977:159). Aside from conventional implication of a caption on the perception of the image, a hashtag of an image will also affect what search results the image will appear in, thus controlling the audience which will potentially consume the image.

This is further complicated by the nature of reposting and even the screengrab, the act of making an electronic copy of what is being viewed on your screen, which can subsequently be shared as a new image with near identical visual components of the original (screengrabbing can affect the quality, look and feel of the image). There are various ways through which the public's perception of an image's intention can be choreographed, such as high or low image quality, in terms of resolution and technical skill. The assumption of visual art practice being translated online for the purpose of gaining traction in the industry may be that the image should be polished and of a publishable standard. However, a low image quality, akin to those commonly seen of family gatherings or lazy Sundays, hold intimacy. Later in this thesis I explore how Gum and Marasela have used image style and quality, as well as accompanying text to affect public perception of the work.

Social media is as linked to visibility as it is to commerce and the market. Katlego Disemelo states: "...artists use social media platforms to brand and stylise their personae in different ways..." (2019:220) In other words, social media can play an important role in situating an artist in the art market. Particular to Gum and Marasela, social media can play an important role in situating the artists and their discourse in the art market in a way that assigns value and, in turn, uses that value to further progress. Marasela has done this extensively by using hashtags to self-associate with important organisations in the industry.

Cyberfeminism in the Instagram profiles of Gum and Marasela

The reach of both artists offers them the opportunity to position their work as feminist, or have their work read in this way. Cyberfeminism especially, frames the work of feminists online using the available

tools to address the particularities of their own feminist contexts and objectives. This may happen in a variety of ways and can better be understood as a set of actions employed relative to the circumstances (Daniels 2009:102). I have already discussed the various advantages of the tools of social media. These tools can be used to direct the perceptions and receptions of online audiences. Regarding visibility, influence over perception carries significant weight. It offers the opportunity to affect whether visibility gained is negative or positive. Continuous opportunities, as is usually possible on social media with a sustained audience, means that there would be multiple instances for awareness, recognition, and even access to develop. In the instance of Gum and Marasela, I do not mean for people already following them. These users have made a choice, following their recognition of – and appreciation of – the work of these artists, to increase their access to them by following them online. Instead, I am referring to the algorithms – on all social media platforms but specifically Instagram – in searches that govern what you consume incidentally via discover pages, recommendations, and search results.

A great deal of research has been done to better understand and advance machine learning and algorithms. That is beyond the scope of this study. When I site algorithms as a contributing factor to cyberfeminism, I mean to draw it into a discussion on how Gum and Marasela might take advantage of this in cyberfeminist ways. Gum and Marasela have both demonstrated substantial mastery in hashtagging. For them it is a mode of choreography.

Machirori writes: “In the cyberfeminist utopia, modern technologies, particularly the Internet, would allow for the full expression of the fluidity of women’s identities.” (2013:86) She does refer to this as a utopia and goes on to state the ways in which this expression is limited, but I will return to that later. There is an extent to which this is happening in Gum and Marasela’s profiles. As I have stated Gum and Marasela are carefully attentive to hashtags, and this affects *who* their audience ends up being. In Marasela’s case she ensures that her audience is rooted in art industry and professionals, and art consumers (both buyers and people who frequent exhibitions and other art events). At the opposite end of this spectrum – Marasela being on one end, using a plethora of hashtags – Gum hardly ever uses hashtags. What this means is that people who encounter Gum’s posts incidentally do so because they have followed or engaged with similar users in the past. Gum’s audience is thus made up of a community of likeminded users *already* open to expanding their reading of the thematic present in her work. The fact that the technological factors that have governed these incidental interactions with Gum’s work are a background hum that may not always be obvious to the user, further enhances the

idea of a likeminded community organically coming together. This is the effect of algorithms "…contributing to the shape of our lives…" (Dourish 2016:1).

Let me explain this in a more straightforward way. If I follow on Instagram the profiles of Nandipha Mntambo and Mary Sibande, I may be recommended the profiles of Gum and Marasela. I have demonstrated to Instagram, through the profiles I am already following, that I like Black women artists and so the platform recommends more to me. This can also become very specific. If I follow Lebohang Motaung, a Black woman *print* artist, I may be recommending the profile of Lebogang Mabusela who is also a Black woman printmaker. Similarly, if I follow Roundtable Journal, a publication that highlights the work of Black women storytellers, I may be recommended the profiles of Black women that employ storytelling as a methodology in the work they do from various other creative disciplines including art.

There is a high likelihood of these recommendation being made by the platform, in varying quantities, although it is not guaranteed. I say it *may* be recommended as the algorithm can only learn what to recommend to a user by tracking user patterns (Dourish 2016:1). The more data the algorithm is given by the user the better and more accurate to the users interests the recommendations will become. This means that recommendations made to new users may not be as tightly curated as those made to long established and even regular users. This means that Instagram's recommendations to me – having been on the platform since 2014, login on daily and primarily engaging with artist and art organisation profiles – is more accurate than the recommendations of a user that joined a week ago. When users first join, Instagram recommendations are made based on what users like them have been interested in. This means that is a Black woman in her thirties who lives in Johannesburg South Africa were to join today, the posts and profiles recommended to her would be based on the average interests of a thirty-something Black woman in Johannesburg South Africa as determined by Instagram. This begins to have implications on the reach of profiles whose content deviates from the mainstream (Johnson *et al* 2017:1167)

Recommendations are also made, in the same way, by tracking the hashtags that a user interacts with. If I am more frequently interacting with posts that use the #blackfeministart, Instagram will recommend more posts to me that use this hashtag by including them in my search results and on the 'discover page'. The 'discover page' is a section on Instagram that includes posts from profiles that a user may not necessarily follow, but that Instagram's algorithm has determined they will like based on what they have liked (followed, commented one, or even looked at for longer than their average) previously.

Gum and Marasela do not produce work for a global mainstream. Even in a South African context, in a country with eleven official languages (cultures), their work is further niched to isiXhosa speaking cultures in Gum's case and cultures that use *seshoeshoe* print (Sotho, Pedi, and some Nguni speaking cultures) in Marasela's case. This means that their profiles being recommended to a new user or a user who does not frequently engage with the thematic presented in their content is not normative. I would like to discuss an instance where Gum and Marasela demonstrated an understanding of this and adapted how they shared content to correct for this.



Figure 15: Screengrab from Gum's Instagram profile picturing a post from her installation at Cape Town Art Fair.

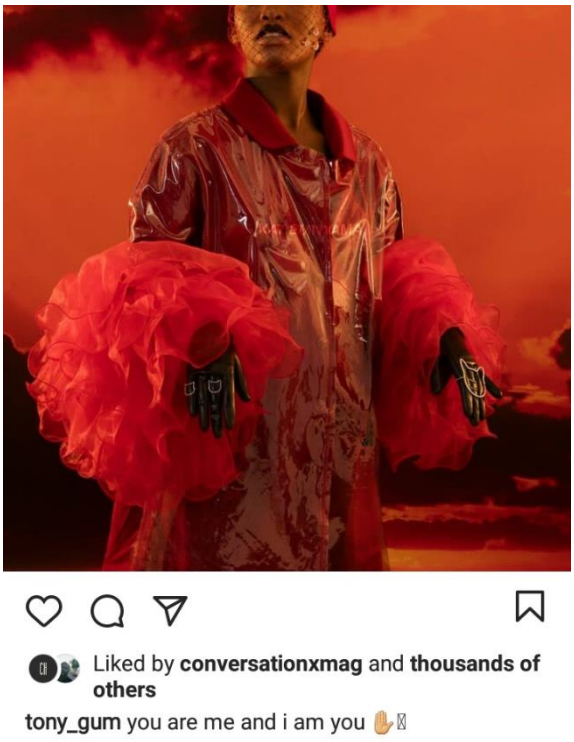


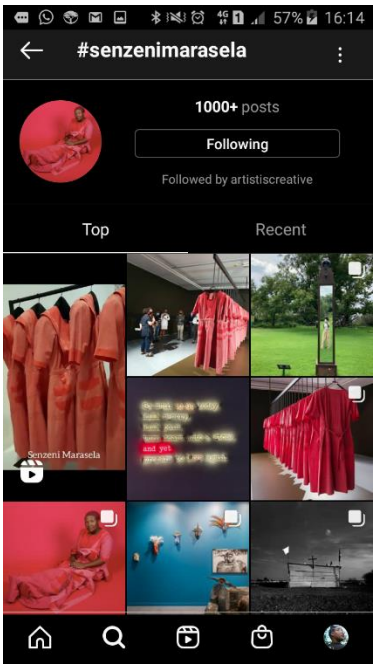
Figure 16: Screengrab from Gum's Instagram profile picturing a post of a cropped version of 'You are me and I am you' from the 'Kat'emnyama series 2019.

When showing works in progress, studio practice, and collected material (photos, videos, collages, etc.) Gum brief captions without hashtags (see figure 16). When sharing posts about the same work when show in final contexts such as at exhibitions and art fairs, she tags other profiles. In a post of her work from the *Kat'emnyama* (2019) series installed at the Cape Town Art Fair (see figure 15), Gum has tagged the Instagram profile of the art fair as well as the artist who has photographed her in front of the display. This tells the algorithm that her content relates to *this* user and increases the range of users Gum's profile may be recommended to. More importantly, by tagging Cape Town Art Fair, Gum tells the Instagram algorithm that her content relates to Cape Town Art Fair. She immediately situates the work

she creates for isiXhosa speaking South African Black women at Cape Town Art Fair, despite it being a fair that increasingly represents the visual language of White artists. This means that although the fair is skewed away from Gum's demographics in real life, online she is able to draw its audiences to her work and thus open an opportunity to increase her own visibility as a Black woman in the art market.

In a similar way, Marasela curates who she interacts with online. She is particular about who she tags and when and, unlike Gum, she tags her representing gallery in her Instagram biography. This is another tell that will influence who Marasela's profile is recommended to. Marasela has consistently sued her name as a hashtag: #senzenimarasela. Since she has been doing this for nearly a decade, and tagging organisational profiles in her posts as well, it has become normal to use the #senzenimarasela when citing her work on social media. There are (current to 12 November 2021) 442 posts on Instagram that use the #senzenimarasela (see figure 17). This does not include posts that have been removed, made private, or are currently unavailable in search results. Instagram puts the tally at 1000+. Only 84 of these are posted by Marasela. The bulk have been posted by consumers, and other artists, arts professionals, and organisations. The posts date back to August of 2014 but cover a full range of her art career.

According to Machirori, an integral aspect of understanding cyberfeminism must include assessing what



women are using social media for (2013:87). This is following her discussion of the ownership of social media platforms, mentioned earlier in this thesis, that is predominantly White and male owned (Machirori 2013:87). Machirori cites fashion as one of the areas of interest present to women by social media platforms, and critiques this as limiting (2013:87). Gum and Marasela both use fashion in their work, but the way it is employed is subversive. This on its own sets Gum and Marasela in opposition to the conforms of social media for women. However, subversive fashion and approaches to fashion are already elements in both artists' work. Even though it sets them up to act and be read in cyberfeminist ways, the manners they employ using in manipulating the functions of Instagram are far more interesting examples of cyberfeminism.

It is important to note the implications of location on access to internet connection and infrastructure (cellphones and other mobile devices or computers) for communities outside of major cities and especially in rural areas. This exclusion matches that demonstrated in the spread of major galleries,

museums, and art fairs in South Africa. It also means that when Instagram and other social media algorithms develop an understanding of an average South African Black women, it is an incomplete understanding. Machirori states that the average internet user from Africa

> "…do[es] not represent the totality of women and men on the continent – since they are very often highly educated and enjoy access to various resources (expendable income, decent Internet connectivity, social capital and others) – what they have begun to do is to create an online space to interrogate and reposition African norms and traditions, and therefore the broader discourse." (2013:88)

Gum and Marasela perform this role online. They further narratives of South African Black women online. Their understanding of the centring of more mainstream profiles, such as profiles of more popular artists and dominant art organisation, is acute and they use it to take advantage of tools such as captions and hashtags, ensuring that they have a niche but distinct audience.

In this way their profiles become a site to offer social engagement as social capital. Although I have discussed the differences in Gum and Marasela's following demographic and the distinctions of buying audiences, this is not to say that a non-buying audience cannot add to the artists mobility in other ways. Users are able to engage in discourse on the thematic of the work. They are also able to take on their own actions of cyberfeminism by re-posting the work to their own profiles, sharing it with other users on Instagram via Instagram Stories, or sharing it to other social media platforms. Engagement of this kind increases the likelihood of virality. Virality, or going viral, is when a media item (a photo, video, sound, or phrase) is shared widely and across platforms. The scale of virality can differ from a mainstream virality to an art industry one, although both have value. This was apparent at the start of Gum's career when her *Black Coca-Cola* series was widely shared. This is also apparent in the extent to which #senzenimarasela is used by users other than Marasela.

Chapter 6: Tony Gum

Gum is a Cape Town based Black woman artist, represented by the Christopher Moller Gallery. She is quickly building a reputation and has been written about in various prominent publications in favourable and trendy ways. She has been referred to as "a realisation of the twenty first century self" in *Vogue* (Carlos 2015); "thought-provoking and unabashed" in *Folklore* (Alston 2019); and as having an "easy flair for quirky" in the *Mail and Guardian* (Sosibo 2016). Of her 2015 presentation at the FNB Joburg Art Fair, cultural analyst Ashraf Jamal said:

"An instagrammer, performance artist and photographer, Gum seemed to have exorcised all demons to blithely announce a secular worldliness. Purged of anxiety, trauma and self-doubt, Gum... gave us works which effortlessly fused tradition and post-postmodernity" (2015:11).



Figure 18: Screengrab from Tony Gum's Instagram profile. The post pictures an untitled image from her 'Black Coca-Cola' series dated 8 January 2015.

While Jamal's gushing is complementary and not necessarily untrue, it flattens the function of Gum's work and implicates it in an *aesthetic of cool*[14]. What I mean by *aesthetic of cool* is the practice of falling in with what is trendy at the time and particularly because it lurks on the boundaries, and appears non-normative to the global mainstream or, in other words, the West. Much like the global south was an opportunity for adventure, enlightenment, and exploitation in a geographic sense at the turn of the eighteenth century in Europe, art at the edges of the mainstream can be a new intriguing thing to explore and contrast to its so-called art centre (Marcel 2013:53). The aim is typically to distinguish from the mainstream by incorporating aspects of periphery culture, while remaining in the mainstream by

[14] This is not to be linked with Robert Farris Thompson's definition of aesthetic of cool that he refers to as an attitude or demeanour assumed in the context of west African tradition and ancestral spirituality, usually represented in the facial expressions of participating dancers (1973:41).

retaining enough of the mainstream culture. Gum amalgamates across time and place in *uTwiggy* but maintains enough of herself – her *doek*, her body, her accessories, her hair – to exist in her mainstream. In the instances when she cites motherhood she layers it with consumerism, and critiques it by making the pronounced absence of a child more visually jarring when it is replaced by a coca cola bottle (see figure 18). Gum's work emphasises the conceptualisation of Black motherhood in activism as not being the mothering of a child. Adopted as trendy art in Western mainstreams the depth of symbolism in Gum's work is lost. It requires essentialism of some or all parts. By this I mean that in order to be distinguished from general aesthetics, an *aesthetic of cool* is hyper focused on difference even if the overall image shares more similarities with the general populace, thus othering them or making them distinct from the general mainstream. The depth of symbolism is made into exciting digestible talking points. Arjun Appadurai has referred to this as the "global culture of the hyperreal", wherein singular aspects become hypervisible and interwoven in certain audiences even though the general culture of the audience is not as interlinked with the context from whence these aspects are plucked (1996:29). While the uniqueness of these singular aspects of culture have a certain desirability that can be capitalised on, it is often short lived and whilst the desire for those aspects depletes the way it has been othered is more long lasting.

In her own practice Gum is able to subvert amalgamation to her advantage. She conjoins aspect of Western popular culture and consumerism with Xhosa culture and South African Black womanhood. In Gum's conjuncture the point of privilege does tend to privilege her Xhosa aesthetic, although she employs various visual and textual mechanisms to skew this towards the components, she admixes in. She exploits brand recognition to create a narrative that performs the function of critiquing society (Somers 2019). Gum's work does benefit from a perception of being a trendy social media practice and palatable within many contexts (Jamal 2017:388), but this is not the intent of the artist (Bamgboye 2018: 142). Her employment of amalgamation is not typically perceived as being authentic to African art by the west. Jamal refers to this as a '...refusal to reductively mainline identity politics...' (2017:388). In other words, it is Gum's rejection of what has become expected of African art that sets her apart within the art market (Jamal 2017:388). It simultaneously serves the purpose of positioning African narratives, specifically South African Black women narratives, as parallel and overlapping with western mainstream art history and visual culture.

> "Gum's work display[s] an awareness of consumerism in the age of globalisation, the need for the reclamation of imagery and the population of alternative narratives other than the usual tropes of victimhood." (Sosibo 2016)

While Gum's work may be read as trendy, a new fad of interest to mainstream markets due to its non-normative nature, amongst her own online followers it functions differently. In other words, what we see in Gum's work may be considered trendy in the mainstream of the art market as a new media collage of popular references (Jamal 2017:390), but online it becomes a far more nuanced language that is understood and exchanged between user and followers, making a far greater pronunciation of Black womanhood in South Africa. On Instagram the comment section can become a space of discourse, and hashtagging gives followers an opportunity to link images into conversations they deem relevant. Below (figure 19) is a screengrab from the comment section of a process image from *Rock Cause Analysis,* a 2018 sculpture series.



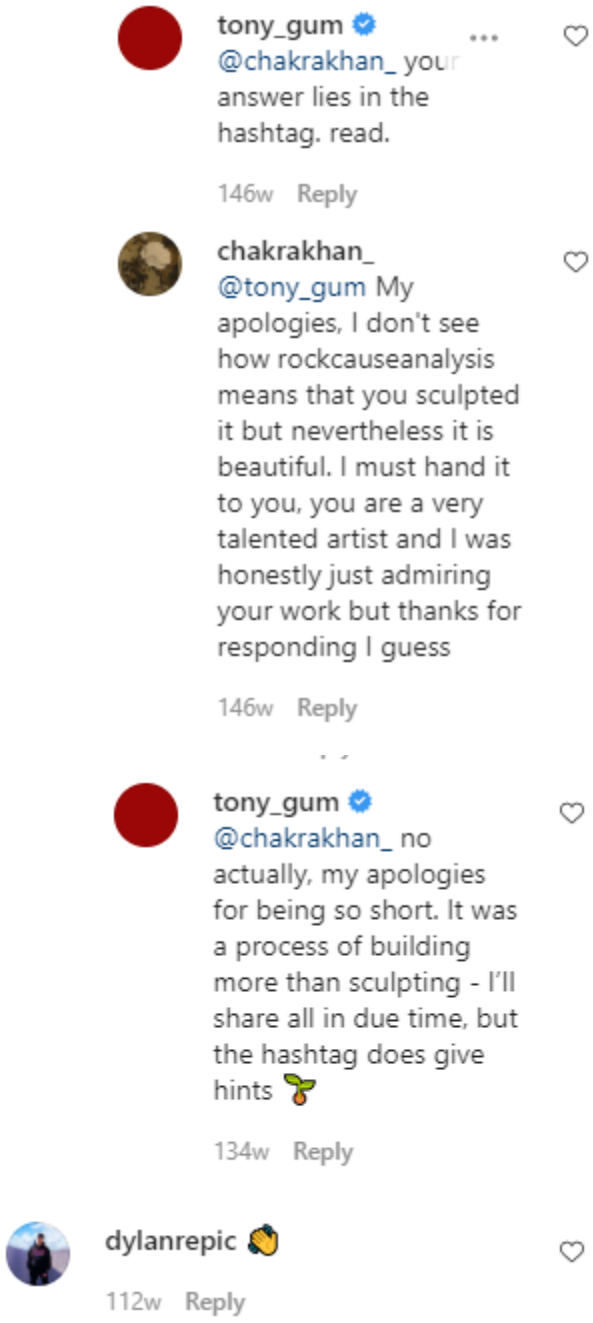


Figure 19: Screengrab of Tony Gum discussing her series 'Rock Cause Analysis' on Instagram.

Black Coca Cola

Gum creates peculiar and unique images that narrate an interaction with Coca-Cola by appropriating the compositions of historic advertising for the brand. She adopts the visibility of the brand and makes her own position hypervisible in contrast. Her pose with a crate of empty glass bottles placed on top of her head juxtaposes a stereotype of Black womanhood with the ubiquitous brand (see figure 21). In doing so

Gum sanitises the image of the Black and marginalised woman with a heavy load on her head. Instead of carrying firewood indicative of her lack of access to basic services such as electricity, or shop wares indicative of her low-level and volatile income sources[15], she is carrying the widely relatable refreshing drink. This makes the work more palatable within the market, an effort increasingly common amongst Black artists whose work focuses on Black selfhood and social issues affecting Black persons (Goniwe 2018:6). While this pandering can become problematic, for Gum, as with many Black women, it also serves to advance the dissemination of her images to wider audiences. Simultaneously Gum also demonstrates Black womanhood as complex and in opposition to pervious essentialism. This woman, in *Black Coca Cola,* is transplanted into the same evergreen background that appears in early Coca-Cola advertisements. Using the carefree American post-war aesthetic, amalgamated with her own depiction of Black women's labour, Gum smirks at the assumptions made by global consumerism and its context in



Figure 20: Screengrab of a Coca-Cola advertisement posted to Tony Gum's Instagram profile on 8 December 2014.

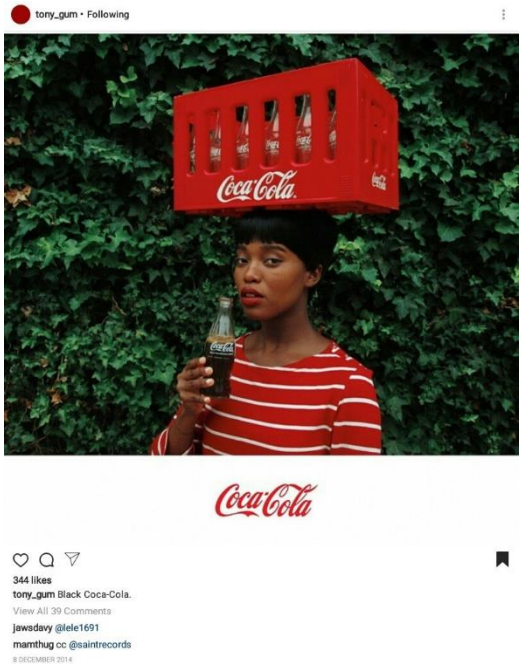


Figure 21: Screengrab on Tony Gum's Instagram profile from her 'Black Coca-Cola' series posted on 8 December 2014.

South Africa. She "...make a mockery of popular culture that suppresses women." (Somers 2019)

[15] Gum later creates work with various other items on her head, including a bundle of firewood. In *Umfazi* she sits, similarly posed to *Intombi I,* with a tied bundle of firewood balanced on her head while she is poised to do her makeup.

Ashraf Jamal contextualises Gums practice as being intimately tied to her presence on Instagram (2017:387). Much of Gum's practice is recorded online, where she turns Instagram into her studio by testing and playing with various approaches to identifying and understanding selfhood. Jamal has painted Gum's work as self-assured and even full formed (2015:11) but, rather than being a ready packaged product, the artist is constantly exploring what her work might be. Ordinarily witnessing the artists process is concealed to a general public, and open only to a select few. By sharing her work process on Instagram, thereby metaphorically/ symbolically opening her studio, Gum provides us with contextualisation of her work over which she has sole autonomy. Her Instagram profile is littered with images she encounters daily, that may or may not be included in her work again, but all form a visual bibliography. Online engagement with Gum's practice beyond fixed products is possible as she posts both her experiences while making art as well as her works in progress. Conversely work that enters the art market is generally presumed finalised, if not complete, and after it is purchased the artists' continued intervention on it is obstructed. Occasionally, Gum will post alternative versions of works that have long since entered the market, with slight alterations present. This further undermines notions of value – especially for unique work that can be exclusively collected into private collections – within the market, at the same time exploiting how much she can benefit from one work. Much of Gum's work is filled with cultural references, and by reposting her own work with these alterations, Gum is referencing her own cultural production in a way parallel to the way she references Coca-Cola.

Gum's use of the popular Coca-Cola branding complicates the integration of the American based product in a South African context. The Coca-Cola brand has become almost ubiquitous with the informal trade sector and local *spaza* shops[16]. Many have Coca-Cola sponsored signage, integrating the brand with the visual culture of townships and rural areas. In an 8 December 2014 post Gum shares a 1940 Coca-Cola advert depicting a young White woman against an evergreen flat colour background, in a blue checked dress, red lipstick on her smiling mouth, and perfectly coiffed hair (see figure 20). The picture of all-American White womanhood, she holds up a six-pack carton of coke bottles alongside the text: 'The package that gets a welcome at home'. Gum has captioned her post: 'White Coca-Cola'. In the post immediately following, Gum shares a portrait of herself in a red-and-white-striped top, holding a partially drank 340ml glass bottle of Coca-Cola. Her hair is cropped short, and she wears bright red lipstick on her parted but unsmiling mouth. On her head Gum is balancing a red branded crate filled with

[16] Spaza shop is a colloquialism for a convenience shop often found in South African township and rural areas. They vary in scale, and can sometimes be run out of a garage, bedroom window, or shack.

empty glass Coca-Cola bottles. Gum stands in front of an evergreen wall of crawling shrubbery, adding to the long list of references to the advertisement she posted previously and on the same day. Gum captions this self-portrait: 'Black Coca-Cola'. The first post of the vintage Coca-Cola advert has not been presented alongside her *Black Coca-Cola* series at the art fair or in a gallery exhibition. In her self-portrait the insertion and amalgamation of a particular visual culture is apparent, but this is emphasised in her Instagram studio when contrasted with the original advertisement. It becomes clear what Gum is challenging. As Alston points out, "with each shot, the door to conversations about consumerism, female labour, colonialism becomes wider" (Alston 2019).

These two posts create a dichotomy between the vintage advertisement and Gum's parody of it. Gum's facial expression is more knowing, and by not smiling perhaps less carefree than that of the White woman whose purpose is to provide a sense of pleasantness contrary to the political conditions of the 1940s. This also creates an interesting and insidious nature to the two images as Gum's work is intended to bring attention to the uncritiqued integration of Coca-Cola in South Africa, and particularly amongst marginalised groups. It is peculiar that Coca-Cola branded signage is not as pervasive on the convenience stores in more affluent areas. It insinuates that this pervasiveness is indicative of a lower income status. Gum signals these groups in her placement of the crate on her head, similar to the way many Black women carry parcels on their heads in South Africa. Unlike the carton of bottles in White Coca-Cola, in *Black Coca-Cola* Gum's bottles in the crate are all empty and the partially filled drink in her hand is her only remainder. This could have a variety of meaning. It could be a comment on the systemic poverty prevalent in South Africa, or symbolic of recyclers, often Black, who rely on the collection of discarded packaging such as the glass and plastic Coca-Cola bottles to make a meagre income. It is not that Coca-Cola is only associated with poverty in South Africa, but by aligning its image with that of the Black mother – whose child is tied to her back with a cloth not a baby carrier – Gum makes these connotations more pronounced. It is also a caption on the upheld consumption of visual culture from western brands like Coca-Cola in the Black community while they and the visibility of their own markets, particularly in the informal sector, remain marginalised. The composition of a parcel being carried on the head of a Black woman complicates the capitalistic insertion of the brand into South Africa visual culture (Bamgboye 2018:144).

Gum installs herself into dialogues with brands through various textual means. One of the ways she does this is by using text alongside her images. The images themselves are already in a potent discourse with the brands, in how she subverts and layers meaning. Gum is rather selective with the way she uses

captions and hashtags. The hashtag has evolved from just an indicator of a numeric unit to an icon inserted before terms and ideas so as to track them and build conversations around them (Anderson & Hitlin 2016:16). It is now synonymous with social media. Gum often limits herself to one hashtag, tightly curating the conversations in which her images participate. This also makes the singular hashtag appear more meaningful, like a poignant punctuation. Of her 805 posts Gum has used more than one hashtag on less than twenty (last checked 11 August 2020), meaning that her posts only show up in specific search results and are a carefully considered articulation of her work. In other words, instead of participating in broad discourse Gum is only interested in cultivating a voice on topics that advance her work.

Another contributing factor to the visibility of a post is the competition of hashtags. Each hashtag will have a certain number of users who have employed that hashtag on Instagram. This fluctuates over time as posts are added and deleted. As the number of users employing a hashtag grows, so does the competition for audience. While Coca-Cola branding is very prominent in *Black Coca-Cola* and several other works on Gum's profile, the artist does not rely on hashtags associated with the product. The larger the number of posts using the same hashtag the more unlikely a post is to stand out. Prior to Gum using the #blackcocacola there are two posts from two different Instagram accounts over a fifteen-month period that have used the hashtag (last checked 10 April 2021). None of these are related to race. While the hashtag has only been used ten times currently in relation to Gum's work this is still significant, especially for an emerging artist. All these occurrences were closely gathered, first in 2016 when the work was initially shown outside of Instagram at Design Indaba, and again later that year when it reappeared on the international art fair circuit beginning at Joburg Art Fair. Only two of the posts are by Gum. This shows that Gum selected the hashtags for its unique quality, and that it was adopted by an audience surrounding her work and specifically this series. It also shows that while the hashtag is unique enough to have only been used 100 times currently, it is also linked closely enough to the Coca-Cola brand – which the rest of the posts are about – for Gum to exploit its visibility and further contrast her work with the brand.

Intombi I

Gum directly targets the images that she creates at isiXhosa speaking women primarily (Bamgboye 2018:144) not only through the images she uses by also by using isiXhosa phrasing in naming her work. Gum does this in the *uTwiggy* (2015) series, making the Twiggy period of British popular culture as prominent as her own through naming. While she intends her art for a particular audience of Black

isiXhosa speaking South African Women, it is significantly consumed by White buyers (Bamgboye 2018:144). Accompanying the naming practices that Gum employs are an array of cultural signifiers. These include beaded accessories; attire; and architecture. Gum stitches together imagery that is part of her own cultural visual language as an isiXhosa speaking person, as well as imagery that shapes and influences the online and media spaces she inhabits as a young millennial.

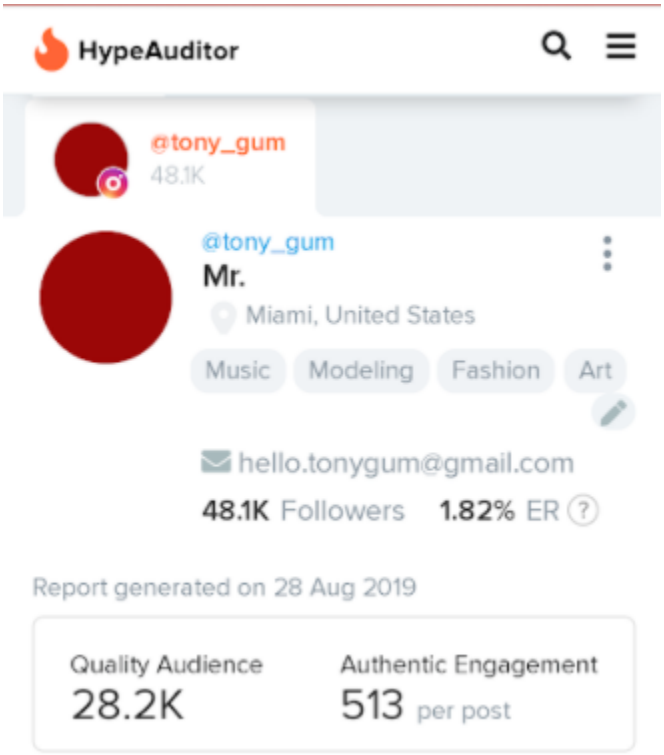


Figure 22: Analytics of Gum's Instagram profile that show the average instances of follower engagement per post on her profile generated by the HypeAuditor application.

A study of the experiences of social media for different demographic groups indicated that Black users are more likely to see (and notice) racial content regardless of how often they themselves talk about it on or offline (Anderson & Hitlin 2016:7). Of her over 48 000 followers 64% are women, 25% reside in South Africa (second only to America with 30% where the audience is likely intermixed with market related parties due to Gum's participation in the countries art fair circuit), and 55% are regular users meaning they are not using Instagram in a professional capacity. Except for the following that is commercially influenced, meaning that they follow Gum online as part of their interest in her art product as a capitalistic output, the artist's audience is largely women and persons of colour and is following her because of their shared interest. This is evidenced by her rate of engagement (see figure 22), meaning the amount of her followers that like, comment, and share her work to other platforms. Further evidencing this, 57% of Gum's audience is African and 54% are between the ages of 18 and 34. Her audience is mostly made up of young Black women. What this shows is that as much as Gum is speaking to an audience, she is also a discussant among peers on a shared topic. She stated in an interview that:

> "The first people I speak to through my work are Xhosa women, then to black African women, and black women in general. Then I can speak to black people, and finally, the world." (Bamgboye 2018:145).

Gum is aware of the importance of privileging discourse on her own culture. She also is aware that this does not happen in a vacuum and thus the way in which this discourse unfolds impacts a broader visual culture. The way she stitches various aspects together in a single composition is able to centre Xhosa culture while allowing it to interact with other influences. Gum makes use of the porous nature of culture as something that is adaptive to its environment and the lives of its members. Gum distinctly positions herself in a global discourse of contemporary art practice by developing her visual language from a diverse array of overt and subtle references (Morrison 2019:26). The visual language Gum develops contextualises her work within global discourse on gender and socio-cultural constructs (Morrison 2019:26).

In the work *Intombi I* (2017), Gum's title situates the image of a traditional Xhosa woman with contemporary global context (see figure 23). In the image Gum sits poised in a forty-five-degree portrait format, as if for a painting, while holding up an iPhone. She is wearing the attire commonly worn by young unmarried girls in Xhosa cultures, including a beige and black skirt and pastel coloured beaded arm bands. She is topless and her upper body from the belly button up is painted in brown tones that are made with visible brush strokes. The setting behind her is a *veld* with two buildings in the distance, one a hut and the other a simple four-walled structure with a corrugated roof. The image Gum posts on Instagram is cropped from the final art product just above the top of the iPhone so that her eyes are not included in it. Arguably the final art product seeks to clearly identify the work within the artist's increasingly marketable use of her own body, while on Instagram she removes her face to invite her audience to engage with an evolving aspect of culture with their own selfhood in mind. Gum's use of the term



Figure 23: Screengram from Gum's Instagram profile. The work pictured is an edited version of 'Intombi I'.

intombi, referring to a young unmarried woman, is a way of rooting the image in the context of Xhosa culture. However, her composition refuses this rooting to become limiting. In other words, the inclusion of the cellphone is not to draw Gum out of the cultural and geographical context she poses in, but rather to interlink the context with a global and digital one. This is not only achieved by the iPhone but more specifically by the way in which it is held. Gum holds the phone perpendicular to her body and the surface of the image. She could either be using the front facing camera to capture herself; capturing her reflection if it is assumed the surface of the image is a mirror or reflective in some way; or, less likely due to the way she has poised herself, is taking a picture of the viewer. The caption does suggest however that Gum is making a video call.

All these possibilities have an engaged interaction with the subjectivity of the *intombi*. Kathryn Grushka writes: '...subjectivity production is seen as connected to imaging practices.' (2009:6)
Brighenti speaks of the tension between the image we see and the symbols we can relate to (2010:32). As we know from Barthes, images are layered with not only what they visually contain but also the cultural connotations of this (1977:152). It is these cultural connotations that allow for a dynamic relationship between noticing and noticed (Brighenti 2010:39) and it is in this relationship that the currency of the visibility is established, what that visibility will mean for the noticed. Brighenti usefully proposes that: "...visibility is not homogenous... In the absence of alarm signals, the setting is transparent to the observer" (Brighenti 2010:25). Here Brighenti is drawing attention to the importance of context to visibility. These 'alarm signals' that Brighenti mentions are the social norms and symbols that help us organise what we are looking at and decide what this will mean to us. Gum strategically selects the 'alarm signals' that she employs in her work to ensure relatability with a specific audience. The function of Instagram and the way in which engagement operates, then further serves to increase Gum's visibility.

Gum is able to construct and frame her image autonomously. In doing so she is also calling – defining – an audience with whom she engages with. Unlike the image that hangs on a gallery wall, Gum's online image speaks to and with her audience. The act of looking requires agency that is not always afforded to people, and especially women, of colour (Brighenti 2010:29). What I mean is that in as much as Gum uses her own body in her work, online, there is little room for her subjugation as she participates in her own imaging and is an active and autonomous discussant in the framing of Black womanhood and selfhood. This is significant in a South African context. Same Mdluli states that: "The appearance of the black female body in the public sphere is embroiled with the visible/invisible dialectic" (2019:187). In

other words, not only is there a lack of agency for Black women, but their image is also relegated to the margins and centring it is an extreme activity that requires the disentanglement of that dialectic. There is a requirement on the image of Blackness and particularly Black womanhood to do more work to centre itself (Fleetwood 2011:9). Gum shares this workload with her audience, firstly by cropping her face – which again distinguishes this wok on online from the work that ends up circulating in the art market – and allowing the face of *Intombi I* to be interchangeable with that of her audience and by means of the interactive nature of engagement online.

The nature in which art can exist online, especially considering longevity of visibility (as works purchased privately are often kept from public view in collections for long periods of time, if they are ever loaned for exhibition at all) and cultural relevance differs distinctly to how it exists in the gallery space and after the display period. A communal commentary takes place online that accommodates for the kind of swift evolution of cultural image that Gum's work embodies (Bowler 2018:37). Particularly with regard to Gum's contemporaries, most of whom operate online, they '… long to see [them]selves. And when [they] do, it can feel like heaven and taste a little like freedom' (Bowler 2018:42). Meaning the online space can and does serve a role in terms of relatable representation of previously marginalised or undermined groups. The matter of "undermined" is important as African art and even art that relates to and/or depicts Black women is indeed circulating in local and global art markets, however it is rather that the potential for multifaceted identity and the autonomy of representation is limited.

Gum's visual language specifically, and online visual language in general, is constantly subject to change. Not in some conceptual and intellectual way only – that may alienate audiences that do not consider themselves academic or are online to avoid the weight of conventional academic spaces – but literally. Captions and hashtags can change from day to day. The types of images a user posts can evolve consistently. More importantly, as I mention in the discussion of *Intombi I,* the image online becomes altogether new and apart from the version that ends up in the gallery or at the art fair. It can be cropped, presented with filters, and further distorted.

Online, Gum's *intombi* appears twice with different filters and the structures in the background at different positions. In a 2019 post (see figure 24), the same figure has the hut almost entirely obscured in the composition. The filter gives an overall 'cool tone', and the image is less bright. The grass is also higher and there are large rocks behind the figure. The background in this post is not well trodden suggesting a low populated terrain, and the cold tone makes the composition less inviting than *Intombi I* or perhaps as if it may be dusk at the end of the day seen in *Intombi I.* In the caption Gum writes: '(your

call has been placed on hold – please wait)'. This is humorous since the earlier post used the #tonygumcalling, but it is also a poignant remark on the autonomy of Black women and the impact of their art on their own visibility. On 1 December 2017 Tony Gum makes a call to an unknown recipient and on 16 September in 2019 she is still on hold.

Gum also distinctly positions herself in a global discourse of contemporary art practice (Morrison 2019:26). She does this by contextualising her work within global discourse on gender and socio-cultural constructs (Morrison 2019:26). Additionally, as we see in *Black Coca Cola,* Gum incorporates recognisable global brands that become closely woven into her visual language. In many ways Gum *has* "captured the popular imagination" (Jamal 2017:387). A significant part of why this is can be seen in the way in which Gum deviates not from Western norms but specifically Western norms for African art. In other words, it is not that she falls in with global trends but instead that she proves that African art has trends of its own and is not stagnant in tradition.

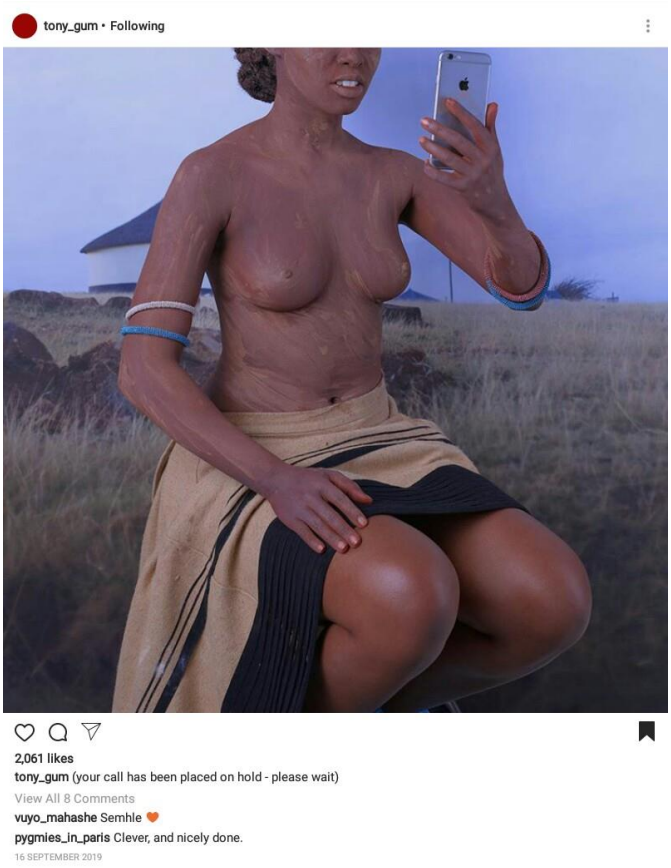


Figure 24: Screengrab from Gum's Instagram profile of an edited version of 'Intombi I'.

uTwiggy

There is significant complexity in African art practice that inevitably exists on a global timeline, and the West-centric nature of that timeline. The historical exclusion that artists from Africa have experienced equates to art markets that regard them as new with little regard for where they regard themselves. Gum's practice is not at all stuck or infantile. She makes a contemporary negotiation concerning young Xhosa woman's existence in South Africa. This intricate discussion is then distilled in a market that has not taken the time to follow a history of making – in which Gum exists. Mbembe posits that:

> "...Africa thus stands out as the supreme receptacle of the West's obsession with, and circular discourse about, the facts of "absence," "lack," and "non-being," of identity and difference, of negativeness – in short, of nothingness." (2000:4)

This tangible nothingness invites experimentation (Mbembe 2000:2). Meaning it is the West's experimentation with components of African traditionalism that warrant regard, and not vice versa (Enwezor 1994:3). This is why, although Gum's incorporative practice may be reviewed by some as new and cool, it is more important to discuss it as a distinct continuation of an existing history of making that aims to negotiate with a global world. Gum references beadwork, attire and composition in order to found her work, and she progresses it from that point of history into a lived experience of Xhosa speaking women who exist online, are exposed to various cultures, and explore the bounds of technology and ways of being.

Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu state, "…contemporary African art includes a tissue of fascinating and productive contradictions which enliven debates on what it affirms and what it contests." (2009:11) They continue and state, "…the idea of African identity we employ is not an absolute, but a malleable term." (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu 2009:11). Both statements frame contemporary African art as a moveable definition, and this fits succinctly with the conditions of Gum's chosen workspace social media. While Jamal does not expand on how Gum is superseding Western voices, I argue that in the circular debate on what constitutes contemporary African art (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu 2009) and whether it can be considered within the same contexts as a global contemporary is moot in online spaces. Not only do these spaces place the onus of its evolution on audiences and their participation (D'Souza 2018:6), but online spaces also exist in flux. The argument of Africa art's exclusion from art history timelines depends on a linear ideological – especially in South Africa, of Black people as devoid of knowledge and subjectivity (Enwezor 1997:24) – timeline (Ose 2008:98). Elvira Dyangani Ose states: "...contemporary aesthetics does not seek the new but the present." (2008:102) Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu argue that contemporary African art is also in flux (2009:12). They argue that contemporary African art is an assemblage of various times and various kinds of times over African art history (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu 2009:12). They state,

> "…we can also see the convergence of traditional styles and contemporary paradigms as occurring at the same time, but with two distinctive thrusts: one reflecting its connection to a historical past, the other establishing its separation from that past." (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu 2009:12)

Likewise, Gum's work, and *uTwiggy* particularly pulls styles and visual languages from 1960s British popular culture, historical Xhosa creative practice, and contemporary portraiture.

Gum suggests that not only is her work constantly concerned with the present, but also that the present is uniquely experienced globally and thus what is part of a British visual past can be part of an African visual present. She amalgamates the two times, and the two cultures, and situates herself seamlessly into an online context. Gum makes a seemingly benign effort in her work. By this, I mean Gum's portrayal of Western popular culture's fashion model, Twiggy (a British cultural celebrity who worked as a model, singer, and actor in the 1960s), in which she positions herself as the personality, locates Gum in a global mainstream context in the role of consumer and (re)producer. Rather than simply consuming the image, Gum has transformed it and becomes a co-contributor with Twiggy.

While many African artists work in the Western market, it is often apparent that the willingness of the West to accept these artists hinges on the artists' willingness to remain African (Anguria 2016:57). Enwezor states:

> "The most enduring myth... is the specious assertion by many in Western art establishments, that there is really, no such thing as modern art from Africa. For Africa – so the argument goes – the term modern or contemporary, is either an aberration, or oxymoronic, and necessarily disinherited from all assumptions of continuity and dynamism." (1994:3)

This polemic way in which the West relates to Africa complicates the kind of amalgamation that is typical of contemporaneity. Further, amalgamation conceives a complex power relationship between the components of culture that are combined (Anguria 2016:54). In other words, outside of the West amalgamation is not neutral (Chow 2018:118). It stands in direct challenge of a predetermined ideology of African art. Njami refers to African art as "aesthetic and political" (2007:20) and argues that while its ethnicity may be evident it is not essentially ethnic (2007:20). Simply, while contemporary African art exists in a relationship between aesthetics and politics, it is a discursive relationship between the two rather than a reaction to some political plight.

This context of contemporary African art provides a far more permitting reading of Gum's work. In this way I can, and do, consider Gum to be negotiating the influences of her aesthetics without becoming subjugated by them. Gum's work makes a case for the amalgamated character as the emerging ordinary character within contemporary African culture. Gum's work appears benign when she leans on her African identity in her hybridity. A move that certainly serves her own sustainability (Enwezor 1994:4), as by amalgamating various components she creates what *seems* new and cool to Western consumers

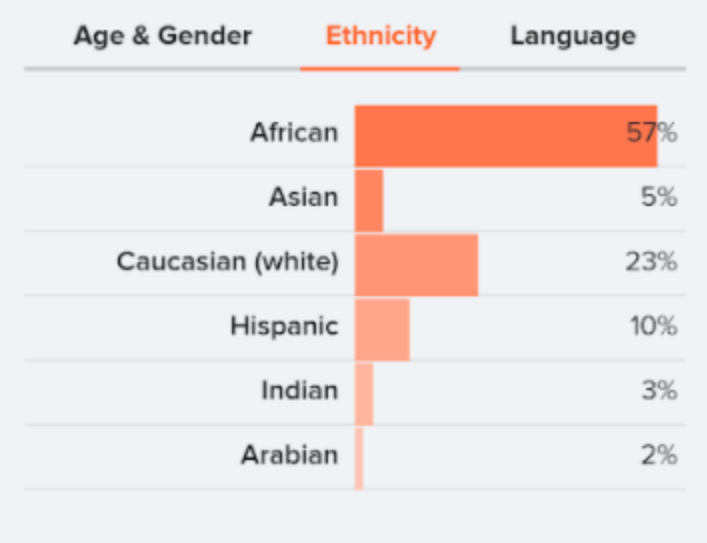


Figure 25: Anaylics of the ethnicities of Gum's followers generated by the HypeAuditor application.

thus propelling her in the market. This sustainability affords Gum the time to debate the continuation of an art historical tradition of Xhosa creativity that has arrived at a point to be moved forward. More importantly Gum announces herself to a particular audience that indeed is not only Western, in fact as the statistics show, is more than half African decent (see figure 25). Gum's work becomes less benign and more decisive, perhaps even instructive, when you realise that her portraiture is a quiet declaration; that her image, while equal to Western and conventionally centred image, exists in a paradigm of its own.

In a series of images titled *uTwiggy,* Gum styles herself as the White British model, relying on Twiggy's distinctive use of eye makeup. Staring wide-eyed, Gum paints a row of thick dark lines on her bottom lid to hyperbolise the appearance of her eyelashes. The look is bold and direct, and further accentuates her head on stare. At first glance, it is easy to assume this is an homage to the celebrity, but Gum introduces ambiguity to the three images she creates by incorporating beadwork and head wraps used by isiXhosa speaking women. She does this to draw a global mainstream closer to her South African context (Picarelli 2016) and in the process she not only takes ownership of it but cements her right to participate in the mainstream media as a Black woman artist.

In the 2015 triptych Gum makes a bold statement that goes further than a provocative participation in a long ongoing discussion on hybridity and beyond the periphery of the global art history. Gum makes a matter-of-fact statement, situating herself in the mainstream of art making. By this I mean that her exploration of the well-known British celebrity, Twiggy, in three seemingly simple images that go largely unexplained by the artist, for which she asks no permission to engage with, Gum states that the visual culture of the global mainstream is not only consumed by her, it is assumed by her as well. Gum assumes Twiggy much like one would a meme (an image, video, or phrase widely replicated and consumed digitally and particularly online that is often used to communicate *shared knowledge*, often in a parody format), by not only expecting that her audience gets it, but with the conclusion that her

audience will know that *she* gets it. Gum employs easily recognisable – especially to Xhosa speaking women – symbols to ensure participation from varied audiences.

In a 2016 Destiny Magazine article, journalist Sheena Adams refers to the artist as an Instagram-based self-portraitist who is steeped in Black Consciousness. Adams describes *uTwiggy* as "...a set of ironic, long-lashed self-portraits awash in pale pastel strokes." (2016:25) Adams goes on to say: "She tackles self-identity in a way that reclaims the black female body in a proud, often retro African aesthetic." (2016:25) Gum's work, which has gone viral online previously, does less of the exoticising of Black femininity, especially that which also expresses hybridity, but instead carves out and speaks directly to a community of likeminded Black women enabled to access and respond to this piece of visual culture. Again, this dismantles "predetermined ideas of Africa" (Ose 2008:97) and contradicts Enwezors early proclamations of Western epistemological bias eliminating the possibility of de-exoticization (1994:5). Here Enwezor states that African art has been historically considered by the West as: "…necessarily disinherited from all assumptions of continuity and dynamism." (1994:3) Gum's work presents as an evolution of Xhosa aesthetics that is open to various trajectories.

Since information online is so rapidly replicated and disseminated, the nature of knowledge consumption often seems as though by osmosis. The coercive nature of social media to participate (D'Souza 2018:6), means that we are frequently consuming visual information based on a socially implied understanding rather than original purpose and/or contextual knowledge. Classical art history memes are a good example of this. In these memes, a historic and classically styled painting is superimposed with text describing a relatable daily modern life experience. For instance, in a meme of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec *At the Moulin Rouge: The Dance* the digital copy is superimposed with the text "Grind up on it, girl show him how you ride it". This is relatable as it forms part of dance club culture, and it has layered meaning as it is also a line from the song *Countdown* by Beyoncé (2011) the American pop singer. This is similar to Gum's use of the dichotomous elements of 1960s British popular culture and traditional Xhosa aesthetics. To consume the meme a complex understanding of the social context of late nineteenth century Paris is not a requirement. While the social standing of the Moulin Rouge as a locus of adult entertainment does add a layer of meaning, it is not essential to the success and comprehension of the meme. We see the dancing women in the nightlife setting and the connection is made sans art historical training. In the same way, you do not need the intricacies of Twiggy's life and work to recognise the stylisation of her image.

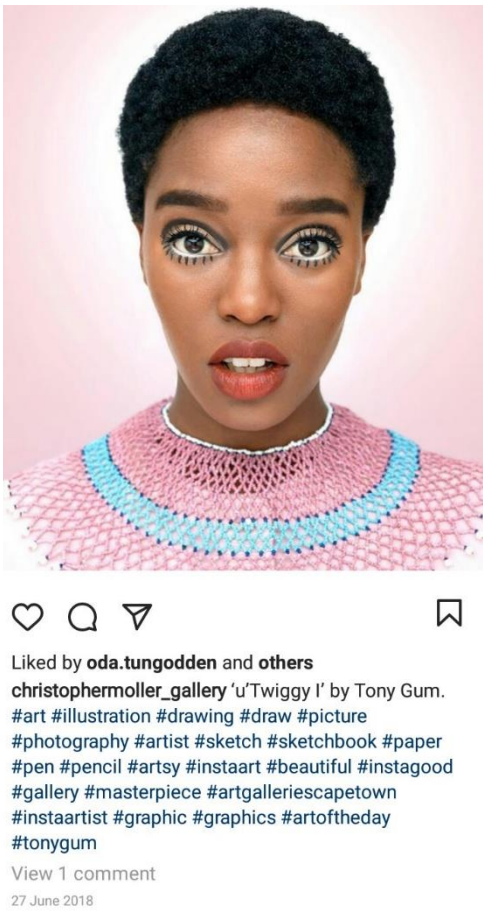


Figure 26: Screengrab from the Christopher Moller Gallery Instagram profile picturing 'uTwiggy I'.

In *uTwiggy I* Gum stands bust and head in the centre of the frame (see figure 26). Her short hair is thick, dark, and her tight coils are woolly looking. Bold eyebrows frame her even bolder eye makeup. She has white eyeliner on her lower lid that expand the size of her eyes, and black eyeliner on her upper lid. Her eyelashes are long and coated in mascara and they curl towards the light brown eyeshadow. She has eye creases that have been deepened with a darker, almost black, eyeshadow. The faux lashes frame the bottom of her eyes, drawn in with black eyeliner. The look is completed with a more subtle burnt red lipstick accentuated only by her mouth being slightly agape. Gum's foundation is natural, seamless, and almost flat without extensive highlighting and contouring done. The pale pink vignette background founds a circular composition that is slowly layered: her round afro; her wide eyes; her open mouth; and finally, her neckpiece. The round collar, worn by isiXhosa speaking men and women (Richards 2015:119), makes three wide semi circles around Gum and further centralises her. The pastel colouring and white shirt, as well as the white beads at the top of the neckpiece are distinct components of Xhosa attire (Ndabambi 1993:19 & Nyamende 1993:21), and further root the work in a Xhosa aesthetic. The colouring and style of the colour is likely from the *Thembu* or *Mpondo* tribe and is traditionally referred to as an *ithumbu* (Richards 2015:118). To date Gum has not been cited as situating herself in any one of the nine cultural groups that are isiXhosa speakers; however, she appears to employ aspects of various groups. In doing so, she tends to perpetuate a homogenised image of Xhosa identity. The collar she wears in *uTwiggy I* is styled, in terms of its colouring and design, after those worn by mature Xhosa men (Costello 1990:72 & van Wyk 2003:23). The colour pink is, however, worn by both men and women (van Wyk 2003:25). This image of Gum is reminiscent of an editorial style shoot that Twiggy did in the early years of her career. In the image, the model wears her signature makeup and poses against a pastel pink background much like the one pictured in Gum's *uTwiggy I.*

In *uTwiggy II* (see figure 27) Gum again looks straight on to the camera. Her hands are delicately positioned in front of her face as if just about to touch her chin and lips. Her makeup is identical to *uTwiggy I* except for her lips that are instead painted with a light pink tinted gloss. In this work Gum does not have any bead wear. She wears a red checked head wrap that she has tied around the perimeter of her head, crossed over at the apex of her forehead and exposing the top of her afro. Her long sleeved polar neck is almost the same bright red as her head wrap. The colour red has been strongly associated with the amaQaba tribe (a tribe closely associated with the amaThembu tribe but distinguished from them by religious difference) as holding religious significance (van Wyk 2003:16). Still worn today, coloured handkerchiefs worn on the head, like the wrap worn by Gum, came in vogue during the 1850s (van Wyk 2003:21). In the corresponding image of the model Twiggy, she wears a red hat instead of a head wrap and a cable knit sweater instead of a polar neck. The shades of red are very similar, and the reference is further emboldened by the positioning of Twiggy's hands. She holds them against the lower third of her face almost completely concealing her mouth. Her hands touch slightly with her left little finger slotted between her right little and ring fingers. As in *uTwiggy I* Gum has matched the background of the image and they are both an off-white hue.



Figure 27: Screengrab from the Christopher Moller Gallery Instagram profile picturing 'uTwiggy II'.

In *uTwiggy III* (see figure 28) Gum's body is turned at a ninety-degree angle to the image surface, and her face leans forty-five degrees. This is the first time in this series that she deviates from her straightforward stance. Her makeup is completed in the same distinctive manner as in *uTwiggy I,* but she has added a sharp side part to her afro. Brightly coloured yellow and green beads cascade down the front of her shirt from a choker style collar that has a diamond pattern. The colours green and yellow have been associated with fertility and/or new life in isiXhosa speaking cultures (Costello 1990:13). The diamond motif has been associated with stars and may be to do with ancestral and/or spiritual connection (van Wyk 2003:25). This style of bead wear has been attributed to bridegrooms (van Wyk 2003:25). *uTwiggy III* is the only image in the triptych that does not have an unambiguously corresponding image of the model Twiggy, although there are other images of the model where similarities in dress and pose can be seen with Gum's third work.

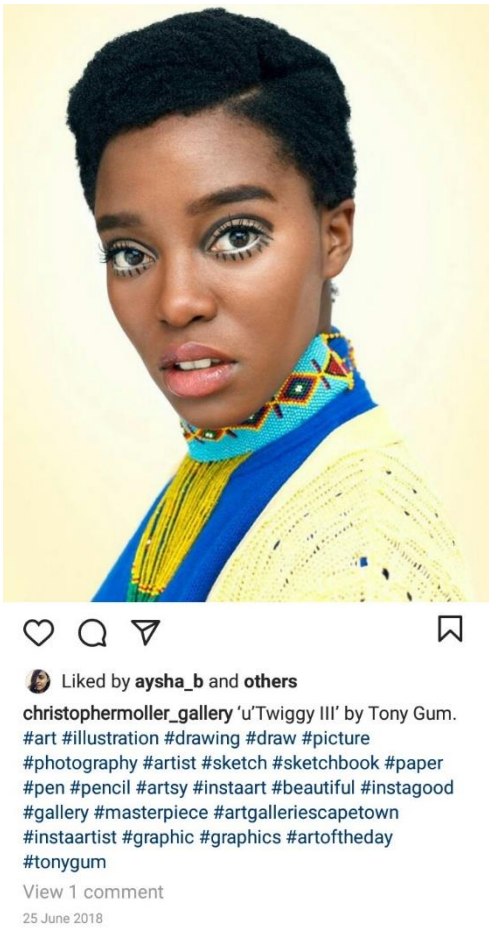


Figure 28: Screengrab from the Christopher Moller Gallery Instagram profile picturing 'uTwiggy III'.

Early (and particularly in the enduring media coverage of prominent apartheid events) popular representations of traditional Xhosa expression through dress was that of Nelson Mandela (Blason & Stone 2013). The political activist was photographed proudly in traditional attire, an outfit he returned to several times during the Rivonia and treason trials. His then wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela was also photographed in her traditional Xhosa attire (Fidler 2018). This intentional move by the well renowned political activist served several purposes, one of which was to distinguish and affirm African culture at a time when it was persecuted. Nelson Mandela was also often pictured with a side part in his close-cropped afro hair. Gum has adopted both the use of dress as well as the hairstyle, and much like with Twiggy, she claims Nelson Mandela's meaning as well. Gum is not only affirming amaXhosa culture, but she is politicising her choice to do so. She politicises her choice by aligning her use of amaXhosa culture to a prominent politician as well as one from a period in which Black activism was distinct in the formation of South African society then and now.

Arguably she does not finish at an admixture of her culture and British popular culture, but rather Gum is suggesting that this is the newest format of amaXhosa culture for her and her contemporaries. In other words, Gum is stating plainly that after the initial act of amalgamation, the act itself is erased and anything she makes claim to is, by way of claim, her heritage to affirm. I say this because of the way she leaves the work without want for explanation. She does this by systematically taking us through a narrative of her becoming this new format of her cultural image, she visually narrates her amalgamation. In *uTwiggy I* her image is simple and even stoic, with a traditional portraiture composition of concentric structure. In setting up her triptych this way she focuses the audience, rather hypnotically, and confirms that she is indeed "purged of anxiety, trauma and self-doubt" (Jamal 2015:11). *uTwiggy II* is perhaps the most like the composition of Twiggy's corroborating image. What makes her transformation more astute is the spiritual references made in the colour choice. This connotes that a religious undertaking is happening in this transformation. In the final image Gum no longer has a corresponding copy of Twiggy. Instead of trying to look like the model, she is *uTwiggy,* an embodiment of one kind of contemporary African imaging.

While Gum has not shared the *uTwiggy* triptych on Instagram as a single finished work, various iterations, and representations of it exist throughout her timeline. Since 2015 Gum has amassed several defined bodies of work, as well as several smaller projects, also collated on her timeline. In this manner, Gum's work becomes non-linear in time. Although prints exist and are operating in the market, she is at liberty to progress the discourse that takes place in this series by adding and taking away from it online. We see her do this in *Intombi I.* At any time, and in whatever the context of the time, *uTwiggy* can remain relevant and usable or, in terms of social media, shareable. In the 1996 *Visual Culture Questionnaire,* Carol Armstrong describes the then very new internet as a "...often curiously ahistorical economy of images, subjects, and other representations." (Alpers *et al* 1996:27) The nature in which art can thus exist online, especially considering longevity and cultural relevance differs distinctly to how it exists in the gallery space and after the display period. A communal commentary takes place online that accommodates for kind of swift evolution of cultural image that Gum's work embodies (Bowler 2018:37).

This chapter shows a Black woman challenging the expectations of African art. I also demonstrate the use of Instagram, which I continue later in my chapter on social media engagement. In the next chapter I discuss the misreadings of Marasela's work and how she navigates her ongoing performance of waiting.

Chapter 7: Senzeni Marasela

This chapter focuses on the artistic practice of Senzeni Marasela. In so doing, I am able to study circumstances of invisibility for Black women in South Africa. In particular, I explore how dress is used to enforce invisibility or accentuate hypervisibility. In my discussion of Marasela's use of the *seshoeshoe* I am able to make consideration for the marginalisation of traditional practices in a Westernised South Africa (Mupotsa 2015:187). I do this by examining the traditional connotations and implications of *seshoeshoe* historically and in contemporary South African visual culture. The implications of this attire, specifically when worn by a Black woman, are illustrated by responses Marasela has received in reaction to her wearing it. I also discuss the way dress is used by Marasela towards healing and understanding of her and her mother's past experiences.

For the purposes of this study, and to avoid confusion I will distinguish between the artist, her performed character, and her mother (on which the character is based). Marasela will always refer to the artist, Senzeni Marasela. Theodorah will always refer to the character Marasela performs. Theodorah has no known surname. Theodorah Marasela will always refer to Marasela's mother.

While neither Marasela or her mother were previously domestic workers, the dresses that the artist uses have been referred to in the context of domestic work and the uniform worn during domestic work. South Africa has a complex history with domestic work that is racialized and gendered (Tolla 2013:5). The association of Marasela's choice of dress with domestic worker uniform further layers the way in which the artist's representation of a particular experience of Black womanhood in South Africa is made invisible. Marasela complicates representations of a particular experience of Black womanhood by finding new ways to make it visible, particularly in online and social media. This is a significant move as women in this demographic have limited access to social media and the autonomy it provides (Machirori 2013:87). The connotations of the dress also result in it being delimited and/or denigrated in social media spaces as something belonging to a very low class.

Materiality

Marasela is a South African artist making work through the trope of caricature. By this I mean that in creating a set of distinguishable features – a red head scarf and dress printed in *seshoeshoe* material – that is constant over a prolonged period and performed publicly, Marasela exaggerates one aspect of a version of herself, through which she and her work are read. Here Marasela employs hypervisibility to emphasise her point. Although hypervisibility can "produce the overrepresentation of certain images of blacks" (Fleetwood 2011:16), Marasela's work deals with an image of Black South African womanhood

that has largely been made invisible. One of the ways this image is made invisible is through the assumption of Black Consciousness ideologies that flatten Black experience in favour of masculinity and the singularisation of femininity (Gqola 2013:18). Here I mean that once one or limited kinds of experiences are perpetuated, any tangential or deviated experiences become marginalised. With respect to Marasela's visual language, she has employed a dress that is widely recognised but also simultaneously dismissed to a particular marginalised demographic. In terms of recognition, within the three interrelated components of visibility, the *seshoeshoe* is stagnated and even though access is possible the propagation of a specific experience of the women associated with this dress delimits publics from accessing more and/or different kinds of visibility for it.

Marasela employs style and materiality of dress distinctly in her visual language. Commencing in her early work, some of the outfits Marasela has used to depict and perform Theodorah have been previously owned by her mother (Schmahmann 2020:14). The preoccupation of needlework, seen in the *Sarah Baartman Redressed* series, is linked to feminist artistic research that uses the limiting nature of activities demarcated for women to critique patriarchal society (Schmahmann 2020:3). Marasela in particular, sites needlework in her practice to link to two layers of South African society. Schmahmann writes:

> "Marasela indicates that her use of doilies and table runners, which have featured in her works since the late 1990s was inspired by a recollection from childhood of attending a wedding of a woman who employed her aunt... ... Presented to the bride as part of a trousseau, items such as doilies and table runners conveyed the idea that she "needed to continue this Afrikaner tradition of keeping home in a particular way"" (2020:8)

Of the two layers, Schmahmann addresses the likelihood of Marasela adopting a tradition that intended goodwill and generational aesthetic to restore honour on Black femininity (2020:8). The second reveals societal chasms of race in Black South African womanhood. Although it is not directly pointed out in Schmahmann's paper, which draws on an interview with the artist, employment opportunities for Black women during apartheid was limited and usually to domestic work. Further the possibilities for White women to become employers was mostly available in their own homes. Marasela's visual language is one with a vocabulary enriched with signifiers of the domestic and especially the woman in the domestic. Likewise, the *seshoeshoe* print dress is also associated with and worn by rural wives (Schmahmann 2020:12).

Fleetwood writes: “It is a strategic enactment of certain black female artists and entertainers to deploy hypervisibility as constitutive of black femaleness in dominant visual culture.” (2011:9) Likewise, Marasela’s intention is to force a particular image into visibility by means of ongoing repetition and its alignment with normative settings, or the subversion of the setting we expect to find it in. Her early work focuses on the experiences of her mother, specifically the eleven-hour journey she frequented to Johannesburg from Mvenyane (Kouoh 2015). Marasela uses dress to code her work. By wearing her mother’s yellow floral dress (prior to employing red *seshoeshoe* print); she articulates her mother’s experience, and the experience of women like her (Black women; wives; mothers; Black women who experienced apartheid; Black women who continue to experience the conditions of apartheid as its legacy persists).

In developing the body of work, Marasela creates the alter ego of Theodorah, a character that, by remaining faceless and turned away from the camera throughout this performance, assumes the experience of waiting that is – according to curator and cultural producer, Koyo Kouoh – a shared African narrative (2015). Kouoh goes on to refer to the way the apartheid government systematically disrupted the Black family structure, leaving Black women in perpetual waiting for the return of the patriarch of the family (2015). This is not abstract to Marasela who draws from the experience of her cousin whose husband abandoned the family and returned only after fifteen years (Schmahmann 2020:25). This waiting is later championed in structures like the TRC as being a symbol of strength through the continuous depiction of the Black mother who steadfastly and dutifully supported her male family members participating in the struggle (Gqola 2004:48). Instead of resolving the damage caused by this unending wait, the image of the long-suffering Black women is instead turned into a tool for nation-making (Gqola 2004:55). This has only emboldened the unresolved effects of apartheid (Gqola 2017:23). The participation in nuclear family structures, with two parents present in the family home, that was denied to Black women during apartheid gives forth to a kind of Black feminism that clings to traditional representations of Black womanhood (Magubane 2010:975). Thus, arguably, Marasela’s visual language also harkens for the option to assume traditional femininity. Magubane states,

> “The notion that when a woman fights for her rights as a mother she inevitably sacrifices standing up for herself as a woman assumes a uniformity in women’s experiences that we should open to further analysis.” (2010:1009)

Magubane indicates here that there are nuances to womanhood in South Africa that must be attended to in order to fully understand the intersection of gender and race in colonial apartheid. Specifically, the discourse of Feminism is insufficient for Black women as it employs omission in its focus of the

experience and oppression of White women that is dissimilar to that of Black women (Collins 2000:5). Particularly in Marasela's work, she is able to focus on the experiences of Black womanhood as she operates from the context of a Black women still within the binds of apartheid structures that have caused perpetual waiting. This is more helpful than ignoring the implications of this to move on to *rainbowism*. Regarding her own practice being rooted in Black feminism, Marasela says: "I believe that my own work, by using narratives of Theodora, is my contribution towards a discourse." (2018)

In *Theodorah comes to Johannesburg* (see figure 29) the dress Theodorah wears is bright yellow, and a focal point of the photographs Marasela makes as part of this series (Law-Viljoen 2008:206). It has a floral collar and three bands of floral material punctuate the yellow at the end of the sleeves, the middle of the skirt, and the hemline. The dress is an A-line cut with a bow tied at the waist. Theodorah accessorises with a headscarf, dark coloured satchel, and flat black shoes.



Figure 29: Screengrab from Marasela's Instagram profile picturing the 'Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg' series.

The outfit, that orginally belonged to Theodorah Marasela, is described as: "...a frock that would more normally be the sartorial choice of a conservative woman in a rural community than a female in an urban domain." (Schmahmann 2020:11) This out of placeness would make the wearer stand out, and in turn become hypervisible. In the photographic series Theodorah is always isolated in the composition with groups in comparatively subdued clothing to her bright yellow, and situated in or near large buildings, in empty rooms, or in front of monuments. This further entrenches her hypervisibility. This mechanism becomes instrumental in how Marasela complicates the image and experience of Black women. The style of the dress is intended to make visible its status, in order to prescribe societal limitation, and then through its repeated use make hypervisible towards an invisibility that prevents mobility from that status. In other words, by having been told repeatedly the meaning of this dress we dismiss it when we encounter it before allowing it or its wearer to mean anything else.

By this I mean that there is a way in which we allow ourselves to see or not see the Black women whose dress reads as rural and traditional. While we are aware of their presence because of their dress code, because of that same dress code we are allowed to immediately dismiss them as unimportant to our intellectual lives. Beyond their prescribed role, they serve no purpose in our daily cultural exchanges, social interactions, and knowledge pursuits. Further, under apartheid law, South African women and their movement was policed. Black women in particular had their geographical bounds drawn by the labour they performed. Magubane writes:

> "…the way in which African women engaged the question of women's emancipation can be seen as having been profoundly conditioned by the manner in which apartheid and its laws (particularly around labour and mobility) produced them as *gendered* non-citizens." (2010:987)

In other words, it is not only that Black women were rendered non-citizens in apartheid South Africa, but that they experienced additional marginalisation within their non-citizenship. This is not simply solved in a post-apartheid context that practices an uncritical inclusion. The layered and intersectional experience of invisibility experienced by Black women (Biernat & Sesko 2009:356), must be critiqued in the context of the structures and tools employed in the establishment of their multidirectional exclusion (Crenshaw 1989:149).

One of these tools is the domestic worker uniform. By wearing the uniform, the body of the domestic worker is scored with connotations related to class and race (Harisunker 2010:11). The way we consider domestic workers historically in South Africa is as cheap Black labour (Harisunker 2010:10). The uniform of the domestic worker mutes her appearance and makes her subordinate to her employer (Harisunker 2010:65). Further it ensures that while the appearance of the domestic worker should be suitable for public presence – in order to be made visible in the context of an affixed role of class and gender – it should not be smart or in any way suitable for anything other than domestic work (Harisunker 2010:64). This also ensures that any other aspects of the domestic worker are invisible in light of the hypervisibility of her uniform in mainstream South African society. This is a reiteration of the apartheid project's signifiers for Black womanhood and the White imagination of the Black domestic worker as plain, female but not feminine, and waiting on direction. In a larger essay on photographic works located in Johannesburg, Law-Viljoen alludes to the notion of apartheid-framed narratives and makes specific mention of the dress Theodorah wears in Marasela's image (2008:206). The apartheid legacy of the iconography of the style of dress employed by Marasela cannot escape its connotation. It is this predicament, though, that Marasela intends to exploit in order to subvert the visibility of Black women.

When Theodorah comes to Johannesburg she does not get straight to cleaning a White woman's home. She goes exploring, site-seeing even.

Despite this contextualisation of domestic work that Law-Viljoen, a White woman, makes on the *Theodorah comes to Joburg* series, Marasela herself does not frame her practice within the circumstances of domestic work. One of her gallerists, Henri Vergon, remarks: "I mean, you know, with her 'makoti' dresses a lot of people are still talking to her like she's a maid or something…" (2018) Here he notes the peculiar insistence for Marasela's dress to be read as domestic dress. Marasela rather considers the socio-political exclusions inflicted on Black women during apartheid and aims to validate the experiences of her mother (Khan 2014:100). This is not to say that Theodorah stands removed from the marginalisation and invisibility faced by domestic workers. Although Marasela actively rejects it by continuously appearing in situations outside of domestic work.

Waiting & Seshoeshoe

Seshoehsoe has also been associated with domestic workers particularly in Lesotho and the surrounding regions (Leeb-du Toit 2017:177). Marasela recounts through her work the brutalities of apartheid that her mother witnessed on her commute and in her time spent in Joburg (Khan 2014:100). These are stories that Marasela would have been exposed to in their re-telling (Khan 2014:100). By reliving these experiences and her own experience of the storytelling, Marasela extends her mother's pain as a Black woman in South Africa into her own womanhood. Additionally, in assuming the character of Theodorah, assumptions are made of Marasela as she moves through Johannesburg. Some of these are voiced, brazen, and indicative of the consequences for Black women who dare to challenge the parameters of their invisibility. Marasela has documented some of her accounts on social media. These range from a concerned Turbine Art Fair employee who says; "I was so worried I thought you were lost" (sourced from Marasela's Twitter page, see figure 30), to being



Figure 30: Screengrab from Marasela's Twitter profile picturing the 'Waiting' series.

harassed in up market shopping centres by security guards who had deemed her inadmissible on sight (sourced from Marasela's Twitter page, see figure 31).



Figure 31: Screengrab from Marasela's Twitter profile picturing her 'Waiting' series.

In her book on the history of blueprint cloth in South Africa Juliette Leeb-du Toit writes: "It is difficult to separate uses of *isishweshwe* [isiZulu spelling] in terms of their cultural or racial distinctiveness." (2017:179). Leeb-du Toit has extensively surveyed the history of the cloth in South Africa, which has come to be intricately related to Black womanhood in several Black South African cultures. While Leeb-du Toit goes on to elaborate how she is referring to the many overlapping traits in southern African traditions (2017:179), there has also been very limited study on the historical iconography of *seshoeshoe* as it becomes implicit to these cultures (2017:8). The image of *seshoeshoe* is hypervisible as flat and limited to the depiction of a rural married woman, even though it is used in contemporary fashion and modern-day rituals as well. This lack of a diverse visibility contributes to its marginalisation.

In her *Waiting* series, a photographic series in which she depicts a Black female character who is waiting for the return of her husband Gebane, Marasela highlights the condition of an ordinary South African woman she calls Theodorah, which is also her mother's name (Marasela 2013). While experiencing her waiting Theodorah exclusively wears the *seshoeshoe* that is now rooted in South African visual culture (Leeb-du Toit 2017:6). Although not indigenous to South Africa, having only been widely disseminated in the late 1850s in the format that we know now[17], the cloth has been adopted as part of the cultural dress of south and north Sesotho speakers in Lesotho and various parts of South Africa (Pheto-Moeti *et al* 2017:25). The cloth was originally produced in an indigo blue colour but became available in brown and red after 1982 (Pheto-Moeti *et al* 2017:25). The cloth is still produced in the Eastern Cape and is also worn by isiXhosa speaking women who refer to is as *Ujamani* after its Dutch and German origins (Pheto-Moeti *et al* 2017:26). Marasela calls her *seshoeshoe* by the title *Ijerelami* (also written as *Ijeremani Lam*)

[17] See Leeb-du Toit 2017 for a longer history on indigo dyed cloth that preceded *seshoeshoe* print.

translating to my German or, perhaps, my German style. The material was associated with the Christian church early on, as women who converted to Christianity used it to fashion modest skirts and dresses for themselves (Pheto-Moeti *et al* 2017:26). It is commonly assumed that *seshoeshoe* should not be worn during periods of mourning or used to design the clothes of widows (Pheto-Moeti *et al* 2017:33). This is significant as it bears a relation to Theodorah's search for her husband. The fact that *seshoeshoe* is not worn during mourning indicates that Gebane is believed to still be alive. Further, *seshoeshoe* dresses were often bought for wives by their husbands as a sign of financial capacity and authority (Leeb-du Toit 2017:185), meaning Gebane was at least initially a present husband in Marasela's fiction. The dress has also been adopted into contemporary Sesotho wedding party garments (Leeb-du Toit 2017:181), especially for the dress worn by a new bride. Contemporary dress designs are being adopted more and more. Early designs, however, were typically A-line and based on stereotypical understanding of Black women as culturally rural and focused on the functions of daily domestic labour (Leeb-du Toit 2017:125).

The motifs in the patterns printed on the material usually hold meaning, but it is not always known (Pheto-Moeti *et al* 2017:26). Generally, the meaning of the motifs are steeped in religion, but there are three more prominent motifs in Basotho culture: the horseman, that symbolises a traditional and trusted mode of transportation; the hitler, that commemorates the Basotho participation in World War II; and the Basotho hat, that is the conical shaped headgear worn as part of the national dress (Pheto-Moeti *et al* 2017:32). Early motifs often employed idyllic symbols of rural life intended to highlight the ethnic groups living there and these included animals, maize cobs, and tribal figures (Leeb-du Toit 2017:125). None of these motifs are used in Marasela's *seshoeshoe.* Many of these stereotypical motifs have been discontinued (Leeb-du Toit 2017:126). This has not been absolute though (Leeb-du Toit 2017:141). While Marasela employs a red *seshoeshoe* for *Waiting* there appears to



Figure 32: Screengrab from Marasela's Instagram profile picturing a close up of the pattern used in the seshoeshoe dress the wears in her 'Waiting' series.

be no significance in this as all three available colours, including brown and blue, have the same meaning of female modesty implicit in them (Pheto-Moeti *et al* 2017:33). There is however a circular motif used in Marasela's garment (see figure 32). The shading and visual texture of the circular pattern is made up of a series of closely gathered dots that are commonly used in seshoeshoe, often to imitate peacock feathers (Smart 2017:79). This circular motif is common across Sotho material culture and denotes life, fertility, and community (Gill 1993:44).

Marasela has also used blue *seshoeshoe* in earlier work. In a 1998 work title *Our Mother* she fashions a dress out of blue *seshoeshoe* material. The material used is recycled from a dress once worn by Theodorah Marasela (Schmahmann 2012:15). Marasela's mother suffered from schizophrenia and was absent from much of the artist's life (Khan 2014:99). She was known to wear the same outfit for prolonged periods and then burn it afterwards (Schmahmann 2012:15). Marasela rescued the dress she used in *Our Mother* before it was burned (Schmahmann 2012:15). Bester writes: "The archive of absences is what Marasela explores in *Our Mother...* The absence of a mother during much of her childhood left Marasela with memory gaps that she attempts to fill through the work." (2001:14) This early experience leads Marasela to begin her caricature – hyper focussing on singular aspects of Theodorah's lived experience to make it pronounced and even grotesque – of Theodorah in the red *seshoeshoe,* where she wears an identical dress every day for six years. The two works, *Waiting* and *Our Mother,* can be read oppositional to each other. In *Our Mother* (1999), Marasela takes a dress her mother had intended to burn, as she commonly did after wearing a single outfit for some time, uses numerous pins to stiffen two peaks in the upper bodice of the dress like a pair of stylised breasts and frames it with a baton. The baton has a very clear relationship with police brutality and the apartheid regime. The pin breasts are complex. They are the only indicator of a body that once inhabited the dress, but unlike a soft body they are sharp and hostile. Being that the body that once inhabited the



Figure 33: Screengrab from Marasela's Instagram profile picturing 'Our Mother'.

dress was Theodorah, Marasela's mother, this work comments on the relationship the artist had with her mother. *Our Mother* (see figure 33) captures the wounding effects of mental illness complicated by apartheid for Marasela's mother specifically. *Waiting* comments more generally on the experience of Black women, and in a contemporary context states that the wait is not yet over.

While Marasela is a mid-career artist and has had relative success (exhibiting internationally and at prominent local museums as well as participating in major international projects), there is little critical writing on her work. This lack is significant considering the community of Black women Marasela represents and writing on and study of her work would go a long way towards the reconciliation between Black women and the systems that have historically enacted violences against them. Marasela's project has spanned several years (Kouoh 2015), and she has been making work of this nature since the late 90s (Marasela 2013). In a 2014 interview, Marasela says the following of her work:

> "There is a reason why I decided to hold vigil for a man who does not exist in my performance. Gebane is a phantom of my imagination, but he exists in the minds of the people that understand what I am wearing." (Gresle 2014).

Here Marasela is referring to her *seshoeshoe* and its connotation of modesty and tradition. However, she implicates all the work she has produced with dress throughout her career. Marasela has consistently utilised the various ways in which dress is imbued with meaning in South African cultures. This is clear in the way she uses familial dress and cultural dress. It also becomes assigned by Law-Viljoen when the yellow dress from *Theodorah comes to Joburg* is given the complex association with domestic worker uniform (2008:206). By taking advantage of already existing connotations of dress for women, Marasela is able to widen her work to audiences she relates to and deepen the narrative she conveys. She performs *Waiting* concurrent to her everyday life and thus can engage visitors to art fairs and shopping centres alike. She also furthers her reach by posting images of herself to her social media pages. Sometimes this is done as Theodorah, the character she performs, other times she is simply participating in her everyday life involving birthdays and family.

In a series of work produced previously to *Waiting,* called *Covering Sarah* (2005-2011), Marasela again concerns herself with the complexities of dress particular to Black women. In this series Marasela and/as Theodorah cover Sarah Baartman who is depicted standing in front of a crowd. Baartman was a young Khoi San woman who was abducted and displayed as a freak in London and Paris for her physical features, specifically her breasts and buttocks (Khan 2017). In her doctoral thesis, artist and writer, Sharlene Khan says the following of the work:

"The watercolour seems to bleed into the characters and the scenes as if in warning, in shame, in humiliation. Baartman doesn't remain on the podium forever though, but this is the stage of a much more beautiful spiritual and creative story." (2017)

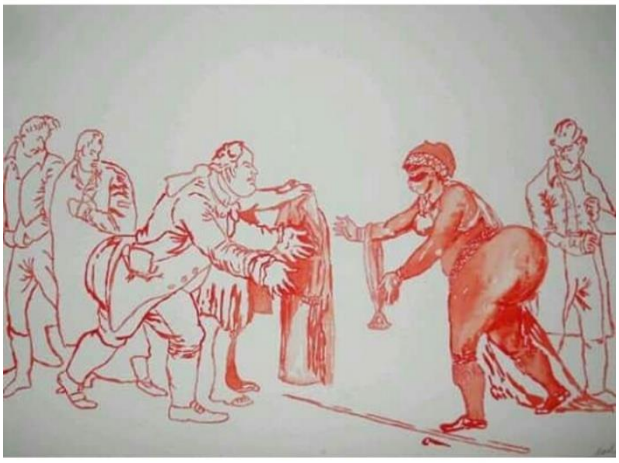


Figure 34: Screengrab from Marasela's Instagram profile picturing 'Covering Sarah'.

This work relates to dress in the sense that it considers the dignity of dress, while also alluding to the ramifications of nakedness for Black women. These ramifications did not remain with Baartman upon her death in 1816 but permeate in the politics of protest and conduct for Black women in South Africa today (Mdluli 2019a:175). This is seen throughout Marasela's work as she uses dress to extend the bounds of visibility for Black womanhood. There are various mechanisms through which she challenges that way in which she is allowed to behave and where she is allowed to play out her behaviour consistently brings to light the way the experiences of Black women in South Africa have delimited visibility. In an interview Marasela states: "I remind them of their own waiting." (Gresle 2014) In other words, while the structure that provides for this delimited visibility can be accredited to colonial apartheid and its continued legacy, it is also upheld by publics of Black persons who have or are related to those with an experience of invisibility. Marasela is viewed with concern or suspicion as she moves through spaces dressed as Theodorah. She is viewed this way because the spaces she moves through – cafes in malls, and art fairs – are not understood as being for her. Marasela also, aside from images of her needlework-based artworks, does not depict herself performing domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning while performing the role of Theodorah. This is notable because it further confirms that, although the selected dress is still associated with domestic work, the conceptualisation of Marasela's work is not linked by the artist to domestic work. This further refuses the expectation specific to Black women, and the married rural Black women assumed by *seshoeshoe*. Marasela probably cooks at least occasionally. Even if she employed a domestic worker, there would be some chores she completes herself regularly. However, instead of flattening her lived experience to domestic work she

makes visible a better-rounded version of a woman who socialises, explores, and poses for pictures. Marasela is intentional about the way she performs Theodorah online. She says: "…one needs to be very consistent when you're on Instagram, so that you're not showing people so many different things. And, every now and then you show them your more human side – your children, and you have a family – which is something that I don't like." (2018)

In *Waiting* Marasela continues with her assumption of the character Theodorah. According to the fictional account of her character's experience, Theodorah wears *seshoeshoe,* bought for her by Gebane for her welcoming ceremony to his family's house (Marasela 2013). The performance of this work is closely connected to Marasela, not only in relation to her mother, but also in the daily practice of it (Marasela 2013). In an effort to emphasise her caricature of Theodorah and remain in perpetual performance of her (Tsumele 2014), Marasela wears the same outfit every day. Through her Twitter account, Marasela further articulates how Theodorah's narrative increasingly becomes her own. She recounts comments from observers, both in an out of her social circle. While most readings of Marasela's work focuses on her choice to perform, and how she articulates the shared narrative of disrupted family and constant journey and "waiting without duration" (Tsumele 2014), I am most interested in the discourse Marasela creates around her work by placing and interacting with it on social media platforms. By use of social media Marasela structures her performance, in terms of its presentation to the public, as though it was less of a performance and more of her normal daily life. She very frequently posts pictures of herself online where she wears her *seshoeshoe* but does not comment on it at all. Similarly, she is tagged online in pictures taken by and with friends, family, and colleagues where the context of the image has nothing to do with what she is wearing. In this way, Marasela does not distinguish what is currently her largest body of work as an art product, but instead incorporates it into general social media behaviour of sharing daily-lived experience. She may as well be out to lunch with friends or enjoying a Sunday afternoon at home, which indeed she sometime is. Marasela blurs the timelines of when her art practice takes place and where her studio is located.



Figure 35: Screengrab from Marasela's Instagram profile picturing a family portrait with her parents and her son.



Figure 36: Screengrab from Afronova's Instagram profile picturing three of the artists they represent; Lebohang Kganye, Lawrence Lemaoana, and Senzeni Marasela; with Franklin Sirmans Pamm the director of the Pérez Art Museum Miami.

Collective/Individual

Khan suggests that Marasela refuses individualism (2014:101). Khan considers Marasela's work as a project for a collective that includes but is not limited to: Marasela's mother Theodorah and historical figure and symbol of the exploitation of the Black female body under colonialism, Sartjie Bartman (2014:100). Khan goes on to argue how Marasela's work aims to reclaim the narrative of the troubled and troubling Black woman (2014:100). Several discussions' on Marasela's Theodorah cite her mother's mental health difficulties and diagnosed schizophrenia (Khan 2014:99; Schmahmann 2020:11). Schmahmann argues that the experience of Theodora Marasela and particularly her use of dress – wearing the same one for a prolonged period and then burning or burying it (2020:14) – is less related to her mental health and better attributed, particularly by Marasela, to feminist action. Schmahmann argues:

> "Marasela, aware of feminist discourses of this type, probably began to view her mother's condition and conduct in relation to them. Viewed in these terms, Theodorah's burning and burying of dresses that were associated with marriage and feminine submission could perhaps be understood not as the manifestation of a condition symptomatic of incapacity but rather as the assertion of her subjectivity and the refusal of patriarchal norms." (2020:15)

This conjecture, while routed in a theoretical review of the artist's conceptual framework, is, I argue, unlikely. Studies have shown that the relationship that persons with schizophrenia experience is in line with Theodorah Marasela's behaviour[18]. Schmahmann does note that as a child Marasela and her siblings did not fully understand their mother's illness, but by this time and judging from the frequency with which it appears in literature, Marasela by now better recognises her mother illness and its symptoms (2020:11). Ascribing academic metaphor to Theodorah Marasela's behaviour glamorises a surely difficult experience. It also dismantles the artist's efforts to distinguish waiting as an experience shared by Black women in South Africa. It is also worth noting that for *Waiting* Marasela does not wear the exact same dress everyday but rather fresh dresses each day that are identical. Indicating that she enacts a deliberate performance rather than a pathology.

Marasela intends to extract and replicate the waiting aspect of her mother's life in order to indicate its significance to the lives of others in her demographic (Khan 2014:99). Later in the series this becomes more apparent when the similarities between her mother's experience travelling from Eastern Cape to Johannesburg become combined with the experience of her cousin whose husband deserts her. Marasela's work stems from the private context of her home and family life but should be more fully understood as a public and shared exposition as well (Richards 2004:230). Her artistic research deliberately explores Black womanhood collectively.

Ose states:

> "If we didn't know her name and weren't acquainted with the artist we would imagine this to be an anonymous character, any woman from the countryside or the outskirts who has just set foot in the city." (2008:100)

[18] Joel Krueger writes of the: "…experiential distance many people with schizophrenia feel from their body..." (2018:603) referring to it as "unworlding" or a failure to relate to or trust ones surroundings (2018:603). Krueger states: "...without reliable access to the material environment, possibilities for individualisation and entrenchment are lost..." (2018:605). This indicates that Theodorah Marasela wearing the same dress repeatedly likely had more to do with her illness.

In addition to the way Marasela makes her work universal by utilising existing codes in woman's dress, she also achieves anonymity through the way she poses in *Theodorah comes to Joburg.* In all the images that she creates for this series, she is either facing away from the camera or has her features obscured (Ose 2008:100). Interestingly, in posts from her son's birthday (see figure 35) as well as at Afronova Gallery (see figure 36) she is facing the camera. The way she contextualises her work (or does not) online may not provide her with anonymity, but it does inflict a veneer of ordinariness to her image.

What Marasela does in her art is akin to Magubane's examination of the effect apartheid laws had on the formation of feminist ideology in South Africa. The length of Marasela's *Waiting* on its own is already indicative of apartheid legacy in Black feminism. Theodorah is steadfast in her wait for Gebane, and while one level of analysis may consider her a victim, I would prefer to frame her – as in Theodorah the character and not Theodorah Marasela – within the context of radical Black feminism. The various laws that Magubane looks at would have been the backdrop for Theodorah's life, as Marasela sets the character up from the apartheid context (Law-Viljoen 2008:206). In other words, Theodorah's pursuit of Gebane and her desire to live alongside him as his wife is feminist activism against the White patriarchal violence of the apartheid regime.

Marasela's performances are well documented on Instagram. This makes consistent the image of Theodorah, normalising and integrating the character into her everyday life. This also allows for comparisons to be drawn between the various situations Theodorah is placed in during the *Waiting* series. The series spanned six years from October 2013 to October 2019. These situations include occasional family settings and professional contexts, and Marasela does not always delineate the two. In a 2019 image she poses with her son and her parents (see figure 35). Her son stands aloof and unsmiling behind her. Her parents are seated at a table in front of her, her father to the left of the image and her mother the right. While her mother wears a head scarf, this is one of the few images Marasela appears in without a head scarf. She leans forward against the chair her mother sits on, looks directly at the camera and smiles. The setting is intended commemoratively as two decorated cakes are placed on the table, each with an unlit candle inserted into them. Marasela wears the red *seshoeshoe* dress. She captions the image: "Our Father, My Son on the occasion of his Birthday., I and Our Mother Theodorah. 19.8.2019" Arguably, by naming her mother in the caption she indicates this as an image separate to her performance of *Theodorah.* However, the use of the phrase "Our Mother" can also refer to the work *Our Mother.* Perhaps here the inclusion is more reconciliatory when viewed in the context of her artistic practice as well as family experience. In this image her mother participates in the ordinary occasion of

family life. She is not absent. Marasela does not name her son or father aside from their relational reference.

As is established earlier, the influence her mother has on the character of Theodorah is not the full sum of the performance. While her mother spent long periods of transition in transit between her home of origin and Johannesburg, and wore the same dress for extended phases (Schmahmann 2012:15), there are aspects to Marasela's Theodorah that are more universal and not specific to one person in a South African context. Primary of these is the Black women's South African experience of family. This is particularly interesting when considered alongside the image of a family occasion. Specifically, the ideal of both parents present in one home for occasions such as the marking of a birthday was removed from Black women. Marasela's son, at the physical maturity pictured here, in an apartheid context may have already been embroiled in the complexities of politics and liberation typical to young men of his age (Gqola 2004:48). In this image Marasela joins the originating influence for *Theodorah,* a woman grossly affected by the adverse violence's of apartheid against Black women, with an image of ideal womanhood and family denied to Black women by the same regime (Magubane 2010:1009).



Figure 37: Screengrab from Marasela's Instagrma profile picturing a self portrait at the patio table at Afronova.

In another image, Marasela sits at a table of a patio (see figure 37). She holds a saucer raised at her chest in one hand, and a teacup poised at her mouth in the other hand. She is barefoot, as her shoes have been stashed away under the table, indicating that she is comfortable in her setting. She has added black tights and a green and orange headscarf to her red *seshoeshoe* outfit. The caption of this image reads: "Self Portrait @afronovagallery Cup and saucer" The location is indicated to be Afronova Gallery which is Marasela's representative gallery. This supports Marasela's relative comfort in the setting. Except for the tag, @afronovagallery, the style of the caption is much like the style of traditional self-portraits in fine art practice. The artist has indicated that this is a self-portrait and added a brief descriptive term, "Cup and saucer", to distinguish it from other self-portraits. Marasela also assumes portraiture conventions in her seated upright pose at a forty-five-degree angle.

Once again Marasela fluidly inhabits her role as caricature and artist. By adopting several conventions of fine art practice, she is articulating her role as an artist and removing any opportunity for her performance on Instagram to become passive.

In 2015 Marasela participated in the Johannesburg Biennale, an activation that took place as part of the 2015 Venice Biennale fringe. On Instagram she posted a series of images that appear to be photographs taken of a video screen (not to be mistaken for screengrabs which are electronic copies of a screen image). In one of these Marasela carries two *china bags* through a courtyard (see figure 38). She wears a red and blue checked blanket around her waist and a red head scarf. There are six *china bags* in total. The term *china bag* is colloquial and refers to large woven PVC bags that are often used as cheap luggage or to carry stock for small businesses such as the roadside vegetable stalls often run by Black women in South Africa. The women, like Theodorah, often travel long distances to sell their wares and provide for their families. Of the bags that Marasela carries five are blue and one red, complementing her attire as if carefully selected accessories. In this performance Marasela makes visible, in an international context, an experience of Black South African womanhood that often remains invisible to even the local mainstream. In the performance itself Marasela does not textually articulate the experience she is referencing but her visual articulation is rich and layered. The lattice door in the background and the colouring and texture of the walls and paving are, however, vaguely European and offer a slightly insidious argument for the lengths required for this visibility. The visual cues that this space exists outside South Africa are an echo of the long and weary travel of women like Theodorah, and her baggage is more pronounced by the numerous *china bags* that she carries.



Liked by **imba_ya_sarai** and **others**
senzenimarasela Performance Venice 2015
26 May 2015

Figure 38: Screengrab from Marasela's Instgram profile picturing her performance of 'Waiting' at the Johannesburg Pavilion, a fringe presentation at the Venice Biennale.

The art practice of Marasela has thus far looked at a particular experience of Black womanhood in South Africa that remains largely invisible. This is not to say it has no visibility. As I have discussed the *seshoeshoe* is a highly recognisable material and dress. It has an extensive history in South Africa with several ethnic groups and has been adopted into cultural dress. However, particularly as not all cultures in South Africa are considered equal in the legacy of colonial apartheid, this does not lead to positive or progressive visibility but instead a hypervisibility that tends to cause invisibility. What I mean is that while there is wide recognition of the *seshoeshoe* this does not develop into the accessing of diverse information on the histories and experiences of the women with whom the dress is associated with. In Marasela's case this resulted in her wearing of the dress, particularly in certain settings, becoming a spectacle or a threat. In many ways Marasela capitalises on this as a kind of hypervisibility that allows her to challenge the ways and places in which Black women are allowed to be in South African public spaces. One of the principal ways she does this is by integrating her portrayal of *Theodorah* into her everyday life performing common tasks such as spending time with her family, drinking tea, and going to public places like art fairs. Marasela thus makes this image of Black womanhood visible outside of the Black wife/mother. Marasela adds dimension to Black womanhood. As an unintended outcome, Marasela also adds dimension to the experience of the domestic worker. Although there is no evidence that the character that Marasela portrays is a domestic worker, because of the limited view of what her dress is, she has been written about in this way. While I concede that this is further evidence of the delimited view of Black women in South Africa, Marasela

shows a woman who is adventurous and challenging and more importantly exists beyond domestic work.

A significant mechanism that Marasela uses to add complexity to the experience of Black womanhood is to post pictures of herself in ordinary family and professional settings. In a later chapter I discuss how she extends this treatment to the retrospective exhibition of this near decade long period. This exhibition is hosted at Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa and has been extensively documented on Instagram.

Conclusion

In this thesis I intended to examine the visibility of Black women artists in South Africa. I discussed the ways in which the employment of Black South Africans has been situated in South Africa. Black arts professionals experience devaluation and being undermined in the art industry (Goniwe 2018:6). In the same industry the work of palatable aritists is made hypervisible (Goniwe 2018:6). While this hypervisibility can be optimised by Black women, and has been, as we see with Mahlangu, it can have negative effects for the artist and their counterparts.

Indeed, Mahlangu's hypervisibility has generated significant commercial engagement. This same hypervisibility has obscured the work of Ndimande as a fellow Ndebele artist. Likewise, the *Innovat1ve Women* exhibition demonstrates the downsides of hypervisibility. In both examples their hypervisibility is not of their own doing. Mahlangu enters into a market with an exisiting practice of seeking out African art that is traditional and exotic to Western practices. Her first formal exhibition of her work is literally a replica of her house. She did not create this dynamic, and although it makes static her aestheic, closer inspection shows that Mahlangu does contribute to, and engage with, the modernisation of Ndebele art (Smuts & Mahlangu 2015:132). Likewise, Muholi and Mntambo do not set out to make their work hypervisible. Muholi intends to normalise the experiences of queer Black women living in South Africa. Their work is not hypersexual, but rather demonstrates the ordinariness that takes place in homes and lives of any coupling regardless of sexual orientation. Mntambo's work, amusingly, has no connection to sexuality and instead references folklore and vanity. It is Xingwana who jumps to the conclusion (Gqola 2017:63). In her speed to police the bodies of Black women, she misses the purpose of the work.

The policing of Black women's bodies has remained pervasive. In this thesis I have demonstrated multiple times how South Africa's history and legacy of apartheid governs much of how we relate as a society today. Black women in #FeesMustFall protests used their bodies to bring attention to their

plight, but instead the media reprimanded them as obscene. While this is more extreme, it is not different to the way in which Black women were *allowed* to operate in struggle movements. Black women were limited to the role of mother, and more often not to their own children. This mothering, but also not to one's children, is a predicament made more pronounced and surely painful being that the occupation of Black women was usually to work in the homes of White women as domestic workers and mother to White children.

Joja demonstrates the quickness of Black men to police the activities of Black women. Although Mdluli's exhibition, *A Black Aesthetic,* is problematic in many ways. Joja is stern and derisive in his critique. At certain points it is unclear how much he has engaged with the exhibition as closer inspection of it disproves Joja. Joja employs academic discourse to critique and dismiss Mdluli. This is not disimilar to the way in which Schmahmann excludes Sebidi's early work from feminist reading. Access to the academy is not widespread in South Africa (Statistics SA 2016:33). Specifically in the arts, and even more specifically amongst Black artists who graduate at lower rates compared to other demographics. Exclusion from any area on the grounds of higher education forms part of the objective of institutional racism.

Although this is prevalent, highly educated artists can also suffer against ideological academic reading. The suffering Marasela's work undergoes excludes it from feminist reading as well. In this thesis I discuss the various opportunities to layer reading of Marasela's work that is missed. By reading Marasela in terms of post apartheid ideology only, the nuances of gender in her work are obscured. These nuances are in fact quite obvious. They are not hidden deep in conceptual visual symbolism. Marasela uses her material to communicate explicitly how her reading of apartheid is a Black feminist one. She uses stitching, beading, and ribbon trim. These activities are not only painstaking, but they also speak to time, particularly time that would be spent for Black women working in the homes of White women. She uses lace in several early works. This would be the type of lace gifted to new brides, or present in the homes of housewives. Marasela has built a visual language through the use of material that announces that she is making a Black feminist reading of her circumstances and the circumstances of women of her time. Yet, through the continuous and exclusive reading of her work as post apartheid, she is made invisible in Black feminist discourse.

This invisibility obscures the important contribution Marasela makes to this discourse. Black feminism, as I have discussed, cannot be thought of simply as an emancipation of women from the home. Black women in South Africa have been historically excluded from keeping their own home. They have lacked

the opportunity to raise their own children in a two-parent family structure. Instead, their partners have become migrant workers. This is not to say that they have not experienced family, motherhood, and romantic partnership at all. Rather, the obstacles to these experiences are not present in the experiences of their White counterparts. Feminism that discounts these disparities is not restorative. It not only damages Black women by being permissive of the extent of struggle that Black women should endure in order to access simple wants and needs, but it makes their lived experiences invisible. Marasela's work equalises the familial needs of the Black women with that of the White women. By performing her waiting she denounces the notion that the Black woman's struggle was resolved by the TRC (Gqola 2004:62).

The significance of Gum's work then becomes to articulated progression of Black womanhood. In as much as Marasela articulates South Africa's past and present, Gum does so for a future. Gum's work furthers this online. Her making her own work visible is intentional, and part of her artistic practice itself. Throughout Gum's Instagram profile we see the ways that she optimises the platform to build a visual language for, and alongside, her audiences. In this way, new and ephemeral works come about.

This effort is interesting when looking at my examination of the art industry and the representation of artists in it. In this context the autonomy of artists is drastically diminished. Marasela's experience led her to step away from the industry several times. She struggled to sustain visibility. It was only after she received sustained and invested representation from Afronova that she became stable and began to benefit from commercial engagement (Marasela 2018). The art market is not structured to benefit independent artists. You need to be able to access the kind of networks available to galleries that access art fairs (Morgner 2014:34). The nature of academic and commercial engagement being interrelated means that being stunted at one point makes it impossible to advance to the next step. Gum's initial success in smaller art fairs in South Africa, lead to her being successful in America. It is yet to become evident if this will lead to academic engagement for Gum, and it is unclear if she is at all interested in it.

What I do discuss regarding academic engagement is that it is easily able to be revived. The purpose of operating in the commercial market is the accrue value. This is a straightforward and incremental system. As you sell work and become more popular and sought after the value of your work increases. So far this has been suitable for Gum. Academic engagement strengthens this value by bestowing cultural capital. Although this cultural capital is not actual money, it is long lasting. This is evidenced by Marasela being able to return to the industry many times. While commercial markets are erratic and pricing unstable (Lena & Levin 2009:61), academic establishments tend to have more certain longevity.

Throughout this thesis I have discussed and examined the various ways in which visibility is manufactured. Because visibility is so dependent on exisiting systems, it has the same biases that these systems have. For example, the systemic racism in South Africa is threaded throughout the South African industry. South African Black women are more likely to come from circumstances that do not equip them to sustain themselves at the emergence of their careers. They incur cost for materials to make art, on top of their daily lived expenses. Because South African galleries are not representing Black women at the same rate as White men and women, Black women are less like to have a gallery to sell their work and gain financial stability. Without this they end up leaving the art industry to pursue other paid work. The few artists who are represented in galleries, are not exhibited at the same rate as other demographics. With gallery exhibitions being the primary way the gallery makes sales (Hagg 2010:77), the income of Black women is thus affected. Additionally, Black women are not represented at art fairs at the same rate as other demographics and this would also affect their income. While sales in the secondary market rarely go to the artist, they do affect how the artist is valued thus again affecting their income. All these layers of marginalisation lead to earning discrepancies of over 30% between White men and Black women (Hagg 2010:10). In another manner of speaking, artists that are not building awareness in the market through gallery representation and at art fairs, cannot become recognisable in the secondary market. Consistent moments of visibility for artists in their gallery's exhibition programme, and by going to fairs every year, awareness is developed. They are able to sell at auction because awareness of them has led to them being recognisable both to buyers in the secondary market *and* to the staff of auction houses. This staff is who permits their consignment and awards their value. Finally, the work of artists become accessible in academic spaces. These spaces not only do not have the limitations of financial interests at their core, but they also have the explicit objective to create opportunities for art to be engaged with.

These interelated layers of engagement are what manufactures visibility. Except with social media, this engagement cannot be fostered alone and is deeply dependent on systems. Social media offers artists autonomy in building their own visibility and communicating it to others. This can lead to commercial engagement, as with Gum, but there is not enough engagement from academic institutions for social media to lead here.

Interviews

Afronova

The following conversation took place in 2018 at the premises of Afronova. At the time of the interview Afronova operated out of the home of Emilie Démon and Henri Vergon. We sat at a table on their patio. We discussed their experiences at art fairs, their priorities when making sales, and their approach to managing and taking on new artists. The interview picks up when Démon is relaying the relationship between gallerists and dealers at art fairs. Vergon joins us later in the interview.

Anguria: Everyone wants to outdo another stall, you know? You were conscious about who's next door to you because that effects your business.

Démon: But you can do this with a smile and greeting every morning, that doesn't change a thing.

Anguria: That's true, that's true.

Démon: When you pay for a booth at 1:54 London, to be in Joburg, to fly there, to have accommodation, to transport the work, to travel with the artist, etc. it's €10,000.

Anguria: Just the booth?

Démon: Yes. Just the booth. So, plus, plus, plus, plus, plus... So, of course, it's even not a week – it's five days, maybe and you have to be sure that you sell. It's like 'Art Capitalism Extreme' for five days, but you meet so many interesting people. But, you know, so, it's a challenge, it's a– [to Henri] how do you say, 'gamble,' you know?

Anguria: Yes.

Démon: Hey, we can do it. Arrive and say "Hey! Good morning, let's do it!" You know? "Right, Zuzana? Are you going to put your artwork that close?" You can talk and say: "Look, if we can talk and maybe your artwork can be a little bit more on the right..."

Vergon: Well it's not only about the selling, even though we are a commercial entity. The artists are expecting more from us than just selling the work. For that matter it could just be to anybody – because, It doesn't mean, you've got money that you can buy, but are you going to be a good agent for an artwork. The artwork can finish, you know, in a corridor, in a toilet – what is important? Our mission to support the artist is to circulate the work, to circulate the discourse around the work too. So, meeting a PhD student or a king, is just as important as a collector. Obviously, we target a special pool of

collectors. So, we are coming to people who can actually buy the work, you know, in order to circulate it. But people who also will not be too private about it, so the idea is to not lock up the work, it is to actually to get people who are in a position to show it, who are in a position to lend it, to exhibitions, etc.

We especially consider working with a lot of emerging or 'young' artists in terms of their international career, not talking about their age, to collaborate with people who have something fresh, a new take on contemporary African society.

We engage with the artists, we engage with the audience, and the audience has many different flavours. It's really crucial that the works are being documented, are being circulated visually and intellectually. When a student in Germany's lecturer is quoting an artist in research in a written paper, it's a gratification, it's a reward.

Anguria: You were saying 1:54 is a team of all women?

Démon: Yes.

Anguria: Which I think is really exciting – and young women! I wanted to ask – is it women of colour?

Démon: Touria is from North Africa, from Morocco and then, there's French women, and there's Paula de Almeida she's Black, but she was born in Portugal – I think she's from Cape Verdi. So, the curator, invited, is a man. But, in London it's–

Vergon: We'll be apologetic about that. [laughter]

Démon: It's happened that we work with a lot of female artists but it's not a choice, it's not like: "Let's do, like, only female artists."

Vergon: Should we come back to that question? Yes, it's 99%–

Démon: White.

Vergon: It's a lot of white women in London, based in Paris. But that's also the nature of that kind of initiative in many ways. I mean, we've done art fairs in Japan, very often they are expats, you know, and very often white women. Yes, AKAA – it's the same thing, these are like, French women who started it.

Démon: Touria has a long story with art and then the team is also– one of them worked with her in Dakar for a while, and then the other one used to come to South Africa, so she travelled a lot in Africa a lot. Obviously, from a wealthy family, but travelling in Africa, and staying there.

Anguria: I think it's interesting to look at when it's organic, and when it's not. I mean, you say it is not a choice you are making which is interesting because 38% of your represented artists are Black women. I think that is exceptional – it shouldn't sound exceptional; except I've gone and counted major galleries and seen it's about 10% on average for them.

Démon: Wow, okay.

Anguria: Yes, it's really low. It's interesting when you say it's organic, because how is it so, that Afronova is able to get Black women and women into the space, whereas other galleries have not been able whether consciously or not.

Démon: Exactly! I suppose it's an argument to be said for, once you start being diverse in your own practices, and being truly interested in a person's artmaking and a person's process and people see the way you are handling artists, then other artists will follow. So, I mean, it could be argued that someone saw that: oh, you're handling the career and the work of a woman quite respectfully and quite– letting them have a lot of freedom, because there's not always a lot of freedom with gallery representation.

We do have artists approaching us to work with us, but for the most part all the artist we are working with, we did approach them.

Anguria: Oh, okay.

Démon: So, Phumzile came in, she's 26 and we went to her first solo show at the Market Photo Workshop, and it was, you know, a year end exhibition, so she was still a student. And we– we fell in love with her art.

Lebo for example. I discovered her work in Paris, for "My Joburg with Black to Fairytale". Then I met her and then she brought me the catalogue for "Ke Lefa Laka". Lawrence, the same – it's like we were friends and then, you know, he stopped working as an artist because he was very cynical about the galleries.

Vergon: Lawrence won the ABSA L'Atelier in 2008, and that kind of launched his career locally. His collaboration with the gallery, that was the first for him and it was a frustrating experience. So, he

decided to leave the market– to leave the gallery environment and actually stopped producing new works. He committed himself to his teaching career and support his partners career.

Anguria: Mary Sibande–

Vergon: Mary Sibande was rising at that time, so he decided to support her as an artist, but put his own career on the side because of this very sad experience he had with the gallery. Yes, when we met, he considered himself as a has-been and he was very surprised that we would actually approach.

Démon: And for Senzeni, it was the same. I mean, Senzeni has been in the industry as an artist, and producing as an artist for twenty years and she had different sad experiences with galleries, too. It had been a while that we were looking at her work. I went to Soweto to see her, and we talked. Then we started towards a big exhibition and publications selling the works, and there's a clear interest in showing her work – like not piece by piece but a whole body of work, because if you see only just one watercolour in one place, it doesn't really make sense. The first exhibition we organised for her was in Italy, with a big publication, including about thirteen of her watercolours next to each other – the waiting of women.

Vergon: In representing artists it has to be completely open otherwise it can lead to misunderstanding and misrepresentation, which today really is a major issue – misrepresentation.

Anguria: Yes.

Vergon: Especially for European folks living on the African continent, dealing with issues of African artists. That's why we spend so much time with the artist we work with. We meet three times a week and it happens where we spend ten hours around the table talking about a great deal of issues. I mean, it's not a crazy 'art' conversation where we only talk about academic concepts. We're talking about life; we're talking about a lot of different matters.

Anguria: I mean with Senzeni, I actually – she and Tony Gum are the main case studies of Black women and their visibility, and I got a lot of push back because the impression with my proposal was that I was looking at emerging artists. Which Tony Gum is, but Senzeni is not. I was told: "Oh, no, she's had an illustrious career." Specifically, she was important because it's easy to say she's had an illustrious career, but what kind of a career? What kind of representation? What kind of experiences has she had? Because there's been a lot of stop and start in her career.

I spoke to Senzeni about a week ago and she was talking about the importance of having a committed gallery representation. But I think that the problem is it's not a blanket definition. There's no policy governing it what good gallery representation is.

Vergon: There's no gospel in that matter. It's like we have to make our own rules and see that actually, uh, it's fitting and if we are uncomfortable again for that partner, it's not about: "Is this the way it is and is that how we must do it?".

Démon: Well, if we do have a rule – if we can call it that – the rule is really transparency. Straightforward communication – simple. By transparency I mean: if a curator is visiting, we invite all the artists to attend. If collectors are coming, we invite them. Trying to travel together, so they have access to the collectors in New York, in Paris and in London – so they can know who is buying.

Vergon: We put the stairs; they have the stage.

To give a very practical example, Thelma Golden, the head of the Studio Museum in New York–

Démon: In Harlem.

Vergon: She's, let's not mince words, she's like a living legend for most of us involved in African arts.

Démon: The list of artists she discovered, she's made, it's people like Kara Walker.

Vergon: She was visiting Joburg, and she extended her stay to meet with us. The idea was to meet her, to have coffee her because she didn't want to have an official, formal gallery environment to visit. So, we just organised a pop-up show since we were going away. We put together a group-show with five artists and then let them interact. You build a bridge and you let people meet and create their own dynamic. And it worked like a charm.

Démon: Also, because used to have a physical space and we chose to close it because it allows us to travel in the city with the artist, with the collectors, with the curators – so, they have an understanding of how Johannesburg works. With these difference in frontiers, the difference from Houghton to Hillbrow.

Vergon: The full kind of articulations.

Vergon: Which allows us, also, in turn to create new outlets for the artist. We had a collaboration with Sean Kelly gallery, in New York, which is like really one of the heavy weights in the art world. It's a fully-fledged, international gallery. They have thousands of square meters. There was a group show about

contemporary textile, with ten artists from around the world, and they selected Lawrence and Senzeni to be part of it. That's very important, because it's opening, in terms of– very new networks, to come to the works. Or in Paris, for example, we collaborated for Paris Photo last year. And Paris Photo is the most ambitious national platform for photography, and we showed–

Démon: –Phumzile.

Vergon: Phumzile. Just to give you an idea; a small booth, over there is €70000.

Démon: That is almost a million rand.

Vergon: For one weekend.

Démon: Not for such a big space.

Vergon: Uh, medium.

Anguria: [laughter] €70000!

Vergon: They dedicated an entire wall to the work of Phumzile, and they knew from the onset that they would never cover the cost from that particular wall – because there, if you count, every centimetre has a price. They knew with the kind of prices on emerging artists that they would never make a fortune out of it, but it was done as an exchange. We've been working with them for a long time so we could, for example, bring Malick Sidibé here in 2007, thanks to that collaboration. Now, they are extremely strong in patrimony of historical photography.

Phumzile, never exhibited before except for a couple of smaller things. So, for them it wasn't about exhibiting a super-star, it was about showing something brand new making it a win-win collaboration. We are now preparing a show with Lebogang Kganye in Milan with an Italian gallery. So, that's really important to have this, uh, openness – even in terms of business and creating new ventures. Um, and, again, there's not a code book, a rule book for that, you know?

Démon: But, uh, that 'code book' is the artist; what they want.

Vergon: The 'code book' is trust.

Démon: Oh, Lebo, for example, two days ago, she wants to focus on installation – but big scale. And, because she was on a residency in Switzerland in Basel, she had access to the Basel Fair and unlimited – where it's like basically the biggest installation hall in the world. And, she was like, in South Africa we

don't have this kind of structure where people would, um, would have space to create a huge, monumental installation. And she wants to do that. So, now we'll focus to make it happen. But, Lawrence, he wants to do a residency at the Smithsonian, so we'll focus on that, so we know that some curator there, we have a good friend there, so we focus on that. But Phumzile, she wants to be– she wants to travel, because she never travels – so, now, she's going in Switzerland in one hour!

Vergon: We must be attentive, listening and always open to their aspirations and–

Démon: –And that goes with meeting often, by travelling together.

Vergon: We're having a– we're having a case actually, right now. I don't know if it's relevant to what we speak about now. But our application was rejected by the Joburg Art Fair–

Anguria: Really?

Vergon: On the grounds that we don't have a physical space. It shows a measure, on their side, because, you know we were a part of it, and we stopped doing the fair, because it was very local to be honest, at the time – and it was not opening new avenues for the artist we were working with. It is a bit bizarre that the only criteria is not about the strengths of the different artists who are represented, but about the very basic condition of having a space.

Anguria: I came here to talk about Instagram and how you're using Instagram– because I think, a lot of galleries are very clinical. It's almost adopting the formula they use with the management of their artists, to how they handle Instagram – and it's very formal. Whereas Afronova, when you follow your Instagram – it feels like you're following just any other regular user. You know, because you take pictures – yes of the art and the art events – but also, "We went to an opening, and this is us at the opening!"

Démon: [laughter]

Anguria: It's really interesting and that's actually what I wanted to ask about, but I think that, if you look at the larger picture – stepping back now – it all filters down into everything. The way you handle your artists, and the way you handle your business, but also not looking at it solely as a commercial thing.

Vergon: The commercial aspect is very important. Let's not be fooled. That's what each and every artist is expecting, is to make good money–

Anguria: To be sustainable.

Vergon: Unfortunately the scene in South Africa; professionals are being more and more reactionary and over-protective of their turf instead of trying to have a progressive modus operandi

But Instagram? Yea, that's another– that's another approach. That's another way of projecting your, uh, image, I suppose.

Démon: Yea, because, you know I post on Instagram and sometime's I'm like "Maybe we're too 'this,' not enough 'that'" you know? Because it's true; it's like an artist dinner here, or we went to Market Photo Workshop and we post a picture that we like.

But, at the same time, I like the way people like it, and people compliment it when you meet them, they're like: "Oh you are Afronova, we follow you on Instagram." Even if we don't have ten thousand, it's people who are interested.

Anguria: But I think– Kim Kardashian's theory– how she continues, sustains her market, her audience – in a way that it's not always sustainable for other 'Instagrammers' and sort of, celebrities, she makes you feel like you're following your friend, because she, posts her family, you know? She posts a selfie, and "Oh, I just woke up." You know? "Look at this funny thing I found." I think in many ways– looking at and theorising how Instagram works– this can be really successful. And then also; looking at kind-of 'critique' audiences. So, you get the mass audience – that isn't always an engaged audience. I follow Beyoncé, but I can't remember the last time I checked on what she's actually posting on Instagram, but I do know that I recently saw you post about, Lebogang and the Sasol New Signatures. Boutique audiences can be more attentive to what you're posting. So, I mean, it's one thing to say, "Ten thousand followers!" but I think it's a very different thing to say; "Of that ten thousand, who is actually interested?" Instagram definitely offers a different approach to the manufacturing of visibility. But in an altogether new way that is still successful.

What is your experience of other art fairs in South Africa?

Démon: At Cape Town Art Fair you feel like people are more sensitive to art, than in Joburg, in a way. Joburg is almost like a gathering at the beginning of spring everybody goes to share a glass of wine, and it's almost like they don't care about what they see, because anyway, it's on Jan Smuts and they can go any time. And the work– the work you see, often, it almost feels like it's what was unsold. It's a lot of Kentridge, a lot of the big names. it's not very audacious in the way they curate.

Vergon: It's not stimulating.

Démon: it's very local.

Vergon: We also had the example of Senzeni, at last year's Joburg Art Fair. Where, it happened in a funny way. Local government was supposed to have a booth presentation, and the day before the opening of the fair they contacted Senzeni and said: "Look, we have this empty booth, we don't know what to do about it, can you help?" Senzeni said: "Okay, I'll think about it." She called us, and said, "Let's go for it." It was a beautiful show. We showed eight of her latest textile pieces. But it was really interesting to see how the academy – Wits, obviously, in particular – came all around the block and one, after the other one, they all came and paid their respects. For her, it was the first time she was attending an art fair, first time she had a solo presentation of her work in an art fair so that was quite a number of 'firsts.' But mostly, it was really her first time that she actually gathered so much critical acclaim from the people who are actually those gatekeepers. It raised a lot of questions – why did they wait for so long to actually read what she was saying?

Démon: And, uh, what was funny too, was that like, each one of them came and said: "Senzeni – I taught her."

Vergon: Yes.

Démon: Yes, like, you know; "I taught her how to stitch. She was having the machine next to my classroom." and "She was– she didn't know how to paint, I taught her."

Vergon: All kind of very paternalistic, patronizing, you know.

Démon: It was a funny way to give compliments.

Anguria: Yes.

Démon: But you know why? "She owes me everything."

Vergon: Lots of white women, very entitled, came and tried to say that Senzeni owed them something from like twenty years ago.

Démon: But, uh, she doesn't. Every day without exception at 03:00a.m. in the morning –

Anguria: She told me! I thought that was ridiculous. But, I mean, she rationalises it, it makes sense but still. [laughter]

Vergon: –sorry, just to finish with the art fair– there wasn't even the name of the gallery, it said "Provincial Government" or something like that, and we were at the back. So, we're playing again with no publicity, and no time to inform our network of collectors. So, then we were putting up the show, and it just happened to make the Instagram like that, and after a couple of hours we were sold out, we had to replace the works.

Anguria: I knew it was sold out, but I didn't know it was hours!

Démon: Yes, really.

Vergon: The people who bought works are very important international collections. Nobody from South Africa came to buy.

Démon: No.

Vergon: But it happens very often like that. People say: "This price is ridiculous! Senzeni is not worth that kind of money." Then you have collectors in Europe, in the US, or in Angola who decide that the work is extremely strong and that it has to be part of their collection. We are not talking private collectors, or private collections – but with the public, like people who have their own foundations, or museums. To get the recognition that you deserve here can take a hell of a long time, if you are not part of a particular cast of artists.

Just now, UCT [University of Cape Town] bought Senzeni's work, um. How much time is it going to take for Wits [University of Witwatersrand] to include her work in a significant manner.

Anguria: Wits where she is an alumnus, she is not taught in the programs.

Vergon: It's been shining a light on all these kind of issues and contradictions.

For her it's vindication, obviously. She enjoyed it, but she could see through it. It's also giving her ammunition in terms of her research, in terms of her permanent involvement in art and a reminder of who she is and how she comes across. I mean, you know, with her 'makoti' dresses a lot of people are still talking to her like she's a maid or something.

Anguria: Yes.

Vergon: A very educated and diligent one, but still. It influences the way people perceive her. She's got an extremely rich and versatile approach to her craft. So, she shouldn't be taken lightly. Recognition, obviously, is a lot. That's why we put a lot of attention into art fairs in Europe and the US. Theirs are very

full, critical and with high expectations. So, you can't just self-indulgent. You have to be always on the edge, and talking about things that are relevant and, uncomfortable a lot, because that's triggering a lot of new conversation.

Démon: And the same is with Phumzile, as another example. She was working on this series called 'Plastic Crown', which is very layered by the people, because the aesthetic is quite 'cool' with fashion. I don't know how to express it because I didn't see it like this. When we saw it we were like: "Wow, what is– she has so many things to say, you know" but, if you look quickly, it could be like about gender, sexuality, etc. So, she was a little bit fed up with the same questions, with the system. 'Plastic Crowns,' she's been working on it for four years, and then she was like; "Ugh, Plastic Crowns – I am so tired of it." And then, suddenly, you know, we exhibit her in New York and Paris, so she has requests from a lot of press who ask questions, with different contexts, with different questions and she's like: "Wow!" Now, she's in it again.

Vergon: Lebo could be working with many other galleries, and she's not. She's been approached regularly over the years, but I guess that their common point was always to tell her: "You do this, because that's the only good thing you do.

Démon: Sometimes it's only two years we've been collaborating but when you look at the different body of works, it's totally different. In the case of Lebo, it's obvious, but Lawrence now too is producing his own kanga, and he wants to do installation. Senzeni, her body of work has been always like that but, it's more the way you curate. Phumzile wants to do a movie.

Vergon: The one thing is to remove the locks. Not to circumscribe their territories.

It depends on what the artist is after as well. Some artists are after a big cash injection. Some artists are mainly focussed on having their voice heard, which can go together with making money. They want to be part of the international biennales, talks and the Smithsonian. And you see some artists who were at some point involved in the political sphere become, I would say, folk art decorators because some kind of works are working well, and then, they make a show and they sell for good prices and they can buy a new BMW. There are so many different ways to do it from the gallery side and from the artist. It has to be a mutual motivation and understanding of where we are heading.

Démon: Sometimes you find some artists whose work was very strong, but because they tasted the system, their discourse becomes very formatted.

Anguria: You said earlier that the Joburg Art Fair was previously very local. I don't think that that's a negative thing. I think that the problem with that is if the local market is stunted – the local market itself is stunted and it's not allowed to grow. That is becomes a huge problem.

Vergon: I mean, obviously having a local flavour is very important, otherwise you'll just have another one, where why people would travel ten hours to come here? So, local– this school of local flavour– definitely, but not incestuous.

Démon: It's very important to have the artists that didn't have a chance, like Phumzile, to go outside, to have access to major exhibitions.

Senzeni Marasela

This conversation took place in the WAM Cafe in 2018. Marasela and I discussed the challenges to upward mobility for Black women artists, her use of social media, and her experience in industry.

Anguria: The research that I'm doing is looking at visibility, specifically, of Black women artists. And how it works in terms of 'hypervisibility'. For example many people will say "Oh, there are lot of Black women practicing, you've got Nandipha Mntambo, Mary Sibande…, but what's happening there – not to detract from the work they're doing – is their work is hypervisible. I'm also looking at how the Black women-artists that *are* practicing, access visibility points like, galleries and academic spaces, and how they sustain their careers. I think it's also important to look at what aspects of Black feminism do you employ in your own work? Which ones and why? And if there are none, why?

Maybe, for a start, how you begun to access points of visibility, so, the arts institution and the gallery space. I believe you're represented by Afronova?

Marasela: Yes.

Okay, maybe I could just probably start now, and then try and go back because you know, memory's one thing [laughter]. The older I grow; I doubt a lot of things.

Anguria: [laughter]

Marasela: For me, social media helps on top of what Afronova does. I see what I do as complimenting what they do and as a way of moving forward. I wish a lot more artists could take Twitter and Instagram a bit more seriously as a way of making sure that work gets out, that people understand that they're still creative and they still work.

Anguria: Right.

Marasela: About Nandipha Mntambo being in all these museum collections, and plus Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi – who I guess is quite a lot more successful commercially and publicly as well, even though they don't really call themself an artist, they says their an, uh–

Anguria: –an 'activist.'

Marasela: –an 'activist', they say. But regardless, you know. I like what Zanele Muholi does, they self publishes. They post on their work two/three times a week and I think it's something that more of us need to be doing as Black women. Write a bit more, as well, about our own practices and responding to works of other artists as well. It's a pity a little– a lot less of it is happening now. All these women they graduate from undergrad degrees – you should at least be able to write some coherent or decent. A three-thousand-word essay about your own work and about your own ideas.

Anguria: Do you think the institution's role in that has been poor? Has the institution failed these graduates?

Marasela: Oh, yes, of course. You know, I think that when I graduated in the late nineties, I wanted to become this *famous artist* and I didn't know how that was going to happen, who was going to help, what I needed to do. I had all these ideas and I guess two years into it I became very frustrated. Because at that time there was a lot of so-called 'South African group shows' – where you're travelling here and there, and you didn't understand how to prolong those experiences – to turn them into, life-long relationships and associations for yourself. So, a lot of that fell away. The places that I had been to, spent three months/ four months, I wasn't able to continue those relationships once I had left those spaces. I didn't know how. I left art school with no business savvy. We are the ones that produce these artworks that feed this multi-billion-rand industry that we're in and how it changes hands and there's, certainly, I think in *my* generation, this idea that when you're an artist – you can't talk about money, money's dead. You must be creative and make more work; somebody else must worry about the money. Until you start growing a bit more and then you get more responsibilities, and you can't get money from home and then you have to work. Materials cost money for most artists, you know. And, I guess, even for the ones that perform.

Anguria: Living costs money.

Marasela: Yes! Everything costs money. You know, but we never got to a position where we now discuss this money. And it's also the reason why a lot of Black artists die poor. We're still having a bit of that across the board. I guess a lot of visual artists are much worse off because we never are eligible for state funerals and everyone coming in for sympathy like musicians.

Anguria: I think that's endemic, because even now writing this research, which is very much about sustainability, because a lot of Black women leave artmaking because they can't afford to continue it.

Marasela: Yes.

Anguria: It's not that they don't want to, or that they aren't talented enough – they just can't, they need to pay their bills, materials aside. And there's a lot of push even now to not use terms like 'marketability' in the research itself, [in order] to have it solely be an academic text – but, I think in many ways an academic text is a piece of soft capitalism.

Marasela: Yes.

Anguria: Can you recall the demographics of your graduating class and how they may have fared post school?

Marasela: Well, I guess my situation was a little bit different. I graduated and my mother and father – they're still alive. They supported me financially for I don't know how many years. I've had so many periods where I've left the whole 'art' thing – went to work. I made my decision, four years ago, and then stopped these little things on the side. I started working full time, and focused on my art. I suffered when I started – this was 2013, when wearing this dress. I suffered immensely you know. There I was, in my mid-thirties with children and with parents who are like "No" [laughter] "– we can't. "And we don't want to." "We can't be paying your children's fees and supporting you and then paying for this 'art' thing." Then, I went back to work briefly, just to collect money to do this again. I resigned after nine months of working and then I found Afronova. About a year into I was already on social media. I had already made up my mind that with whatever little money I had now with me I am going to work, regardless, until it works – whatever it is that I want. I am going to sit on social media, it doesn't matter if I don't have a gallery, and then I am going to start writing a bit more about my own work. It has taken me *years* to do that, to get that mindset – "Let me do this and let me do this and let me commit just to this" – and to not also be afraid of the lag. It helps that my children are taken care of, their fees will be paid and they go to school, they have clothes, and they eat every day. It was just me that no one was

like, “you want a camera?” “R7000?” “And then we’re paying your children’s fees?” [laughter] But I think persistence and monumental patience helps.

Anguria: So, you’ve spoken a lot about, and mentioned a lot about writing and artists writing about themselves, but I think there is something interesting happening with academic writing in those specific artists that are written about extensively. I have struggled immensely, because I’ve been doing this PhD since 2017 and I’ve been struggling to find critical academic texts on your work but at the same time Rory – who is my supervisor – Rory Bester, has been going on about how you’ve *been* in the industry for a long time. I don’t dispute that, but finding these texts becomes really tricky – and I’m looking at different access points and the academy is one of them. What do you think, the gallery’s role in that is? Your role in that is? And what’s your experience with it?

Marasela: I don’t know if you– you do know Sharlene Khan?

Anguria: Yes.

Marasela: I went to see her in May. I mean, she started a program where she’d gather information on Black artists; anything she could find. And, she’s got some footage where I’ve responded to her questions. You know, up until Sharlene started making those initiatives of consciously writing about Black women and writing critical essays, there’s been very little. You must also remember that I’ve always been this artist that has always been under the radar because for many years I didn’t have a gallery – but I was writing regardless, and I wasn’t even looking for one. That’s another thing; because it’s easy if a gallery approaches you, because they will commit if they come to you, rather than me knocking on every door saying “Hello, it’s Senzeni, do you remember me?” [laughter] “I’m here.” I think now there’s going to be a bit more writing because then Sharlene’s invested, you know. I’m doing a lot of that and plus I’ve started my website, which still needs a lot of editing, and the idea of doing that, is so that I can write on my own practice. Every body of work that I do, I will write about. Do these three-thousand-word essays, and then also write about other artists’ work. I think I’m quite a little bit disillusioned with writing in this country, because we don’t have art critics.

Anguria: [laughter] Is it perhaps what happened to Art South Africa, when it was still Art South Africa? They were an approved journal so if you’d publish in Art South Africa, you could levy that for funding and then they took it away and everyone stopped writing for them. Now, they have superficial articles, as well.

Marasela: Yes. Without critical writing you become stuck in this limited audience that really doesn't care about your work as a Black woman, and people that you'd like to read your work are out of there.

Anguria: Exactly. Which, I think, is what makes Instagram so interesting, and is also a large component of this research, because there's such a brick wall there. You're writing for the academy but also only speaking to the academy but, on Instagram, you gain a much wider audience. Anyone who comes across you can engage with your practice – even someone who is an accountant, someone who is in retail, can begin to be exposed to what you're talking about. And, in that regard, I wanted to ask about the way you use Instagram, specifically. And, maybe, the way you manufacture hashtags? And what kind of ideologies do you employ when you're putting pictures out there, is it just to put them out there or is there a system?

Marasela: I'm busy working on a system, for now. I mean, there's an artist who is based in Cape Town, Lorraine Loots – who is successful because of Instagram. She admits this in interviews – that if she had not started Instagram and putting her work out there, she would not be where she is. She does these miniature paintings – tiny, tiny ones – and she never posts anything besides those little works. I've learned a lot by looking at her work; how one needs to be very consistent when you're on Instagram, so that you're not showing people so many different things. And every now and then you show them your more human side – your children, and you have a family – which is something that I don't like. I know for a fact that I've been able to sell some work because people have found me on Instagram. They've followed through and I'd get a message saying: "No, we saw this, where is it? We'd like to talk to you about it." But it's certainly a space where I'm going to publish a lot of the work that I'm doing now. I'm busy starting on drawing the Book of Theodora, because I trained as a printmaker. So, I'm going to start publishing books, but it is going to be in prints, you know, narrating the story of Theodora in prints and publish them in books. It's a lot of work, because I have to school myself, but Instagram has given me a lot of hope. Hope that I can have some agency, hope that there is some sort of creative control, that I can have. And then, I'm certainly open for criticism from what I put there, you know? And, certainly with the website that I've started now, where I am going to write. It doesn't have to be correct – I think I'm at an age where I'm over that because I want things that I write to be open to everyone, I want people to engage, to ask questions and for me to respond. For me, there's just no better way to do it than to start writing about my own work and try put it in context of whatever else is happening around me. I think I'm in a better position to do that because I'm self-employed. As much as I want to finish my masters, I have no academic fantasies whatsoever, because, you know, a lot of my friends who are in academia, or

with PhDs and are scholars go through all these silent exclusions. When they do major projects outside of the country, the Wits magazine doesn't mention it. When they get awards outside of the country, there's no mention – there's not even an acknowledgement where they are employed, of projects that they do, as phenomenal as they are. So, I understand it's quite debilitating where you are in this circle that doesn't acknowledge any progressive work that you do.

Anguria: It is very daunting – all of what you're saying, because there is a lot of agency but with that agency it also means there is no education in how to monetise that. And that's a big issue that I'm looking at – sustainability. So, I mean, it's an important thing and it will certainly help a lot of people, your own career included. But how– how does that become monetised?

Marasela: I hope that by the time I get to essay number twenty it will be publishable somewhere.

Anguria: The website itself?

Marasela: Yes. I hope it will be a reference point.

Anguria: Well, I will reference it! [laughter]

Marasela: I hope it will be a reference point; number one. Then, number two; I have– I have personal ambitions as an artist as well. I certainly hope that my own writing will enhance my career as an artist because that's how I think will be translating into sustainability for me. If every time there's a body of work I do, I write. I cannot wait for some art critic to come from somewhere, to come and engage with my work, you know?

I mean, maybe it's quite silly to talk about William Kentridge, because there's *so* much writing on him, some of it is very repetitive as well. But, he's the only one who I know that there's– that it's so easy to access academic texts on. You know? But he has contenders, from Helen Sebidi, Noria Mabasa, Sam Nhlengethwa. You know, artists who have been immensely successful in terms of their work being collected, their work being seen – *where*? Where is the writing? And how then do we document successful careers of Black artists? Is it important?

Anguria: I think so. I think so, because what I'm facing a lot is; academics ask me why would I do this research when we already know that there is diversity in the arts industry and I'm having to do a lot of 'bean-counting' exercises. For example: Afronova has 38% of their artists being Black women. That is the highest I've found. Most of them are 10% at best, and we're talking about your big galleries. That is why

talking about hypervisibility has become really interesting because there are a lot of artists that are practicing as well, who don't have the same access. You can't Google them and find a list of critical texts, whether it be in magazines or in journals, on their work – and, also, texts that *they've* written as well, because – as you've said – that's really important because. I found a lot of articles about Nandipha Mntambo that were incredibly inaccurate, written by esteemed people, so, it then becomes really important for an artist to also have their own voice, their own articulation of what they intended – written somewhere that's accessible. When you do the 'bean-counting' exercise and count how many people participate in Turbine Art Fair, in this many years and how many were Black, and how many of those Black people were women – then you begin to see that, actually, what's happening is hypervisibility of the same artists and not actually a diverse representation of different narratives. Zanele Muholi, you've said, speaks to very important issues – but it's not everyone's issue–

Marasela: Yes.

Anguria: –and there are more things to talk about.

Marasela: Of course. You know, I'm a little bit bitter about what goes on at the FNB Joburg Art Fair, for a number of reasons. There is a lot of government money that goes in there. Well, let me just go a little bit backwards, to the public art program that was done in Joburg by Trinity Session. My standpoint is this: if you are using government money that I contribute to as a taxpayer, then everyone has to be given a chance. You have to have an equal number of Black women, men, white, Indian, and so on. You need to look at the demographics. But then, you found Trinity Session using government money, government spaces, to put up art works which was largely by white women and white artists. It's the same thing that you get at the Joburg Art Fair. There's a lot of government money in there, but then it serves white artists – the whole of the Joburg Art Fair. You know, it's white galleries – and then when you do find Black galleries, NGO's, whatever – they're at the back. They're in little spaces, like an after-thought in that whole make up. Where you have to now drag people across the whole of the hall, there – "No, we're up here!" "Hello!" "Here!" We have this government who go and put government money into spaces like the Joburg Art Fair and then they fold their hands. And those are people who are not even trained artists – who don't know what the dynamics are of the art world, and you have these select few people who use government money to narrate the taste of the day. You know, the art fair is a market – essentially – a massive market.

Anguria: Yes. It's trying *really* hard not to be– to be more than that. But yes.

Marasela: No, it's a market – it's a big shop. The Turbine Art Fair is Pick'n'Pay and FNB Joburg Art Fair is Woolworths.

Anguria: [laughter]

Marasela: Yes, that's how this whole thing operates, and now if we have a government that continuously funds initiatives that exclude Black artists, that exclude your Black curator, it excludes your Black writer, Black artists don't make money from those places. It is only a select few, and it is always the same artists that come up. You go to Everard Read – I can tell you now, they'll have Nelson Makamo and then the Phillemon Hlungwani–

Anguria: They dropped him [Nelson] after an interview!

Marasela: No, he's back!

Anguria: Oh, he's back?! They forgave him!

Marasela: You have no idea, he's back. He even had a solo show. He's back there. So, they're going to have their big sellers, their Nelson Makamo, Blessing Ngobeni and Phillemon Hlungwani – they'll be there. It's a guarantee. And then, other galleries would be like juggling whoever they deem fashionable this year. You have so few Black artists who have consisted in the rise of galleries, where you have a gallery that will consistently show the same artists.

I'm a huge fan of Billie Zangewa's work. I'm happy that she's a featured artist at the FNB Joburg Art Fair. I mean, there's what– three woman that have been featured so far? –Black women. Because there's the Zimbabwean– the painter from Stevenson Gallery.

Anguria: Then they did Esther Mahlangu one year. I think last year they–

Marasela: No, they did the *BMW* – that was not Esther Mahlangu, it was BMW.

Anguria: [laughter] So, if I could just take a few more minutes and ask about Black feminism and how it features...

Marasela: You know, I think every year I get a little more confused about what it is and what it constitutes.

And then, how do you separate Black feminism from general feminism? Because, I don't have the same struggles as a white woman, whether I'm an artist or I'm a mother – our struggles are not the same. Um, I'm certainly aware of what I think Black feminism is, and I believe that my own work, by using narratives of Theodora, is my contribution towards a discourse. Whether I'm successful or not in it – I have no answers for *that*, but I have my own brand of Black feminism which I believe I live through this continuous performance I do, and how I document the work, and the spaces that I engage in, and, beyond that – I'm lost. I don't know.

Anguria: Yea, I think that Black feminism, in order for it to actually proliferate, has to be fluid enough and it has to be what you find it as.

Marasela: Do you necessarily have to verbalise it?

Anguria: That's what I thought! "Do you have to?" But I think in many ways because it is an ideology and because it does to some extent require the rejection of certain patriarchal thought, um, then, in *that* context I think voicing it becomes a question. Because if someone subscribes to the patriarchy, are they still a Black feminist? I think it's tricky in South Africa, because I think for a long-time Black women were denied the same kind of rights to family and domesticities that white women weren't. So, wanting to be at home and to have a traditional family, is a kind of Black feminism, when for *years* apartheid disrupted families. So, I think it's very murky in terms of saying "I reject the patriarchy and I am a Black feminist". I think, simply living the narrative and a clear identity of a Black woman. I think, in many ways, becomes Black feminism.

Marasela: You know, I simply read it in the work of Nandipha Mntambo. Black feminism– and how she uses cow hide. Maybe there's a difference in us reading that in an artwork and the artist verbalising and articulating it. And also, saying what it is – because you know it's quite difficult to talk about the ideologies when you're not in an academic space. You know? And you wonder whether they're important to discuss, to have a round table– because there was an initiative– I don't know what happened to it –where creative Black women were going to be invited around the table to discuss this. Is it important for us to verbalise certain things, to participate in certain arguments? I'm thinking about Zwelethu Mthethwa and Nokuphila Kumalo and that, in other instances we're not called upon as Black women to speak in the art world. No one phones us when there are pertinent issues, when there's programs to be done. No one says anything, but then when there's an issue about Black men being violent, I mean – the case of Zwelethu Mthethwa going to jail for murder – then we're supposed to rise

and hold hands and come in this unified Black voice and condemn them. Then to do it also in the context of white feminism, because all this public outrage is driven by white female artists, who do not say to us, privately: "What do you think?" You know, it's not that we don't see what has happened or we don't understand what is going on and we haven't witnessed any Black male violence ourselves– we've lived with it! But I have a problem when we now get probed and poked to speak on platforms that we might not be comfortable speaking in, and then when there is a type of silence; then we're complicit with this patriarchy that violates Black women. White women want to speak about us and our condition, you know, and what needs to become of us as Black women. I've struggled with that, and I've certainly been quite vocal about it on Facebook. We live in a drawer as Black women, you can't just now decide "No, let me take these puppets out." "Now this is a role I am going to play." You know? [laughter] "This is a struggle." "This is your struggle." "Stay in the drawer, come out, come in, come out..."

Anguria: Yes.

Marasela: Then why is it that now they're going to select for us what should be our struggle and when we should participate? Because, in all other discourses – we're absent. Where are they when there's struggles that Black women go through? When some of them have to sleep in studios, squatting? When there are problems with access to state funding, who is helping in those circles?

Anguria: Yes.

Marasela: I did some work for the government last year for four months. I was based in Pretoria – where I was looking, consciously, for Black women, a lot of them. This is Pretoria, TUT – Tshwane University of Technology. Women who are working in stores and shops – Pick'n'Pay, Clicks, what have you. Another one who I thought was born to have a brilliant career – Roxette Malala. She works in a photo-booth! And I kept on asking her; "But, why are you doing this?" "I thought you'd graduate and be, you know..." – a lot of fears, I guess, she has. But she's not an isolated story, there's so many of them. Because, sometimes, you'd be mistaken to think there's only been me, and the Tracey Rose's and the Bernie Searle's, and whatever. You know, I think, to date – counting the Black women who have graduated... We're close to fifty already, with Fine Art degrees – whether it's a degree or diploma. There's about ten who are active. The others, where are they? Why with all this money that is there in government for programs or projects, to assist artists, why is it not helping these women?

Anguria: I have my own developing theory on that. In terms of, programs that get funded, for example, the Venice Biennale. You said it; government funding should be equal opportunity, but then you look at

who goes... And because it's: "Oh, you're all South Africans" - I understand, white people are South Africans too. But, on that basis – the international market is hungry for African art, and by that understanding South African artists are African art, and what's being pushed consistently is *white* South Africans under the guise of "This is African art". And, I'm not saying it's not, but I'm saying if you look at the proportions between white South Africans and Black South Africans benefitting from that government money, it is disproportionately white South Africans.

Marasela: Yes. Oh, no. Of course.

Anguria: The problems of the legacy of apartheid aren't being solved here, and it is affecting what gets out, it's affecting who succeeds. Those 'soft-capitalisms', knowing who to talk to because the academy itself doesn't have the skills to prepare you for outside. Also being able to do an internship for free. Being able to start your own studio, and still be able to pay rent – so you're paying rent for two places. Those little things then add up and sort of become scary, but I think in many ways they also become feasibly impossible. It's not whether or not you have the guts, it's not possible to make R3000 do what R10000 should do. If you don't have the funds to start a studio, what do you do? And if you don't have a studio, how do you get an art dealer, an art curator, or gallerist to come and look at your work? If you don't have a quality phone or camera to photograph your work, how do you then access spaces like Instagram?

The issue, with government funding, also becomes leadership. Those positions where the money is going to, it's going to white people. So, obviously they're going to, whether it be consciously or unconsciously, advantage white artists. Um, and that then creates the cycle of white artists continuing to proliferate the market – which is not a bad thing if it were equal footed. But it's not equal footed.

Marasela: No, it's not. But then, I think, also, you look at the value change in the visual art world. You know, the galleries – they're white, the curators – they're white. And there, you have this Black artist right at the bottom. And it's also a process of selection, you know? Curators tend to have preference for certain artists, and, you know– I don't apply for government funding out of principle, because there's been so many Black artists who've applied for projects and– it takes a lot of energy to put together an application and then you have to lick a stamp here, go there, go there, go there, go there, go there...

Anguria: Sometimes, even money for printing is not there.

Marasela: Yes. When you've never been taught how to do it, and there is no one immediately available to help you, and certainly the white artists, white curator, the white administrator – they're busy helping their own to do these things. Black artists that put in applications that are just below par because they don't know how to comply properly. A young militant organisation has started classes that prepare Black artists for funding. And even when those applications are put forward, they still have to fight for artists to get paid those monies.

Everyone thinks that it should be so easy for me now that the government awarded me a certificate in recognition of dedication to my work– it should be so easy for me to get government funding. I haven't attempted to apply. I have no inclination to do so. Neither do I have the time to do so. I think until we can get to a point where those Black artists that do apply, that do make the effort, start getting R15000, R1000, R2000 budgets – then maybe I'll consider applying.

I'm fortunate that I've never been destitute. I've never had to sleep in a studio.

Anguria: That's a terrible thing to have to say, because; how many white people have had to say: "I'm fortunate to never have been destitute." That it should be something for granted.

Marasela: No, I don't think they think about that. And I'm equally fortunate that I never will be destitute. You know, because, I've got sisters and my parents are still alive, they have a house which I can always stay at, even though there isn't much space.

I know that there are a lot of artists– Black artists who can't say this. Even where they come from, conditions are very desperate – so, in order for things to improve, it's reliant on them doing something. And they're not able to. I don't know what needs to happen, but I know that the government needs to be a part of this solution, because academia is not. It looks like that circle will never be broken – the academic circle, in as far as it privileges certain people. It goes through its own process of selection that makes sure that white privilege prevails, every day, and that it has no threats, as well. Because that's what academia does, it's very good at being visionary, in a sense that it's able to see in advance what may be threat to its privilege.

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