

https://dspace.org/

Humour in the contemporary artwork of Tommy Motswai

Panchia, Bhavisha Laxmi

2012-02-09
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/11269

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Humour in the Contemporary Artwork of Tommy Motswai

By Bhavisha Laxmi Panchia

A Research Report to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Arts (History of Art)

Supervisor: Thembinkosi Goniwe
Date Submitted: 1 November 2011

ABSTRACT

Visual artist Tommy Motswai received much attention from the South African art world during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The attention owes to Motswai's cartoonish-style drawings that comment on human relations under both oppressive and democratic conditions in South Africa. Motswai rendered his commentary in creative yet reflective ways that are humorous. In particular in the early 1990s, his drawings reflect a country in celebration, thus they have been interpreted as being humourous by various scholars (Younge 1988; Arnold 1992; Powell 1992; Kasfir 1999). Such interpretation has been only short descriptions most often made in passing instead of sustained arguments. As a result, there are not yet substantiated scholarly accounts that engage the evident but nuanced humour in Motswai's work. This study undertakes to address this neglect, even if at an introductory level. Through an exploration of postcolonial and postmodern theories, the study examines the ways in which Motswai employs humour as a socio-political critique in his work. Underscoring this study is also the intention to insert Motswai's artworks in the field of South African art history.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in History of Art by coursework and research report in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Bhavisha Laxmi Panchia

31 October 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to extend an appreciative thank you to Thembinkosi Goniwe, my supervisor and mentor for all his support, patience and guidance throughout my postgraduate programme, not to mention whose mentorship extended beyond ordinary supervisory duties to inspired guidance. I would like to thank the National Arts Council of South Africa for financial support towards my Masters programme.

Thank you to Jo Burger from the Johannesburg Art Gallery Library for her assistance and allowing me access to the Johannesburg Art Gallery and Library Archives and the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) Archive Files.

I would also like to thank Brenda Devar and Petri du Toit for facilitating my study. Finally, a special thank you to my dearest mother for all her love and support throughout my postgraduate programme.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1
Honoré Daumier, *Ouvrier et Bourgeois* (title attributed by Loys Delteil), unpublished at the time, 1848, lithograph, 26.6 x 21.3 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 2
Cheri Samba, *Le sida ne sera guérissable que dans 10 au 20 ans,* 1997, acrylic, glitter on canvas, sequins and glued mixed medium,130 X 194 cm. Image reproduced in Magnin, A. (ed.) (2004). *J'Aime Cheri Samba*. Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain.p. 58. Pigozzi Collection.

Figure 3
Tommy Motswai, *The Tea Party,* 1987, pastel on paper, 66.5 x 103.5 cm. Image reproduced in Young, G. (1988). *Art of the South African Townships*. London: Thames and Hudson, p. 51.

Figure 4
Tommy Motswai, *The Chessman, Johannesburg,* 1988, pastel on paper, 65 x 105.1 cm. Image reproduced in Philippa Dissel (ed.) 2001. *ZEBRA Register of South African Artists and Galleries.* Sandton, p.70.

Figure 5
Peter Clarke, *The Only Way to Survive*, 1983, acrylic and ink on board. Image reproduced in Young, G. (1988). *Art of the South African Townships*. London: Thames and Hudson, pp.78-79.

Figure 6
Tommy Motswai, *Dancing competition,* 1987, pastel on paper, 64 x 94.5 cm. Image courtesy of Wits Art Museum.

Figure 7
Tommy Motswai, *Faces at New Year,* 1992, pastel on paper, 73 x 110 cm. Image reproduced in (1992). *Tommy Motswai*, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, p. 2.

Figure 8
Tommy Motswai, *Valentine's Day,* 1992, pastel on paper, 73 x 110 cm. Image reproduced in (1992). *Tommy Motswai*, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, p. 5.

Figure 9
Tommy Motswai*, Red Noses's*[sic] *Day Saturday Party*, 1992, pastel on paper, 73 x 110 cm. Image reproduced in (1992). *Tommy Motswai*, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, p. 6.

Figure 10
Tommy Motswai, *On the 8th to 9th December 1990 Married Mr T and Mrs Evelyn Motswai*, 1992, pastel on paper, 145 x 215 cm. Image reproduced in (1992). *Tommy Motswai*, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, cover image.

Figure 11
Tommy Motswai, *Zoo Animals at Pretoria*, 1992, pastel on paper, 71.5 x 107 cm. Image courtesy of Wits Art Museum.

CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Declaration	3
Acknowledgements	4
List of Illustrations	5
Introduction	8
Chapter One: Locating humour in South African art	20
Chapter Two: You never laugh alone: The social implications of humour	44
Chapter Three: Humour to light up a dark world	60
Conclusion	70
Selected Bibliography	72
Selected Images	76

INTRODUCTION

This study examines the drawings of visual artist Tommy Motswai. Its particular focus is to interrogate the ways in which humour is articulated, intended or unintended, in the drawings of Tommy Motswai. Motswai's distinct comic-style of drawing and use of bright coloured pastels has led to his work being largely read within the genre of humour. Motswai is a visual artist whose artworks have a sense of a 'bearable lightness of being' as he approaches his subject in a light hearted, fantastical way that reflects moments of joy, happiness and celebration. His drawings have a sense of playfulness whilst, at the same time, they are uncompromising in reflecting on his personal life experiences that are inextricably located within the broader South African socio-political context. The drawings tell of his travels including his utopian tales of South Africa in a state of transformation. They are his visual journals commenting on the subtleties of the social experience in urban Johannesburg. Filled with colour and smiling faces, Motswai's drawings offer viewers optimistic human relations in a society wrestling with a haunting history of inhumanity. As such, they are visual representations that foster positive dreams and pleasures in spite of social problems that have unbearable effects on the black majority. In brief, Motswai's artwork engages with sites that challenge us to open up and remain open to the lighter side of being human in a contemporary society full of challenges. His reflections of human interactions and idiosyncrasies reveal a different perspective that is not limited to criticism. In this way his artwork enables us to think in ways that foster change that is both liberating and elevating.

Tommy Motswai was born in 1963 in Soweto. Motswai has been unable to hear since birth. He completed nine years of school at the Kutlwanong School for the Deaf. Thereafter he attended classes at the Federation Union of Black Artists (FUBA), the Johannesburg Art Foundation, and also spent time at the University of Bophuthatswana (Maurice 2009: 54). Even though the art market had broadened and expanded during the 1980s and the opportunity for formal training had increased, formal art training for artists like Motswai still remained limited on the basis of race and disability. As a self-trained artist, Motswai's artistic career began during the late 1980s, when his drawings were exhibited and shortlisted at The Standard Bank National Drawing Competition in 1987. A year later Motswai gained recognition in the South African art scene after winning the Vita Art Now Merit Award[1] for the drawing *The Tea Party* (1987). His major achievement for his art was the Standard Bank Young Artist Award he received in 1992. This award marked a peak in his career, which soon after dwindled. Motswai's drawings were appreciated and recognised for his use of anecdotal representations of South Africans that were described by arts journalists (Levin 1995; Louw 1999) and writers (Younge 1987; De Jager 1992; Arnold 1996) as humorous and satirical, yet all of these accounts failed to sustainably engage with his humorous artworks.

Even though some practising South African artists have employed humorous strategies in their work during and after apartheid, there appears to be an existing, yet limited, amount of published texts that give historical and theoretical accounts of humour in the field of visual arts in South Africa. Such a lack of sustained scholarship of humour in the discipline of South African art history raises questions like: Is there

[1] The Vita Art Now annual exhibition was first conceived in 1986.Tommy Motswai, Phillipa Hobbs, Joachim Schonfeldt and David Brown were the quarterly winners in 1988. Motswai was the only black artist among the three other winners.

room for humour in South African art history? Is it problematic or questionable for artists to be anything but deadly serious? These questions seem appropriate when we consider South Africa's history. South Africa and Africa at large have been subjected to degradation, exploitation and dehumanisation. Artistic responses to the aforementioned oppressive regimes have contributed to a saturation of images that portray the spectacularly violent and traumatic. This has resulted in scant visibility of artworks that display the funny, the fantastical and the playful. This, in addition to existing stigmas that attach themselves to humour, such as 'child's play' and 'frivolity', has contributed to the disregard of a sustained analysis of such artworks. Moreover, if an artwork is light in tone, if it evokes, not reverent appreciation, but a smile or laugh, it is most often deemed unworthy of study and serious interrogation. In other words, not "art proper". These attitudes towards humour in art are noted by art philosopher R.G. Collingwood writing in the early twentieth century, in arguing that art created with the intention of arousing laughter, pleasing an audience or creating pleasurable feelings would not be proper art (Collingwood quoted in Klein 2007:5). According to Collingwood, artworks made with the intention of inducing laughter or a smile would not be considered art, and would be representative of "a society gone awry" (ibid.).

In South Africa, curators and writers alike have began looking to humour as a topic of interest. *Punch-Line: Hurt and Humour,* written by Colin Richards, was an exhibition proposal for the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007. An edited extract of this proposal, published in the art journal *Art South Africa,* explores the relationship between humour and hurt, and offers brief insights into humour's discursive definitions and functions in relation to art production on the African continent. Smaller initiatives are

marked by exhibitions such as *Poking Fun* (2009) curated by Emma Taggart at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum. *Poking Fun* explores satire, caricature, comedy, the comic strip, modern and contemporary art in South African visual arts, and features artists such as Norman Catherine, Anton Kannemeyer, Robert Hodgins, Hylton Nel and Fred Page. The exhibition failed however to have an accompanying catalogue which (visually) documents and (discursively) frames the exhibition for future reference.

Sue Williamson's, *South African Art Now* (2009a), a survey of contemporary South African art, includes a section titled *Punchline: A Grim Humour holds up a Mirror to Society* which features various artists' employment of humorous strategies in their work. Using Richards' text as her point of departure, Williamson briefly introduces six artists (Brett Murray, Conrad Botes, Anton Kannemeyer, Robin Rhode, Robert Hodgins and Norman Catherine) who employ humorous strategies in their work. Her inclusion of a section on humour attests to the growing interest in, and increased visibility, of the study of humour in South Africa. This interest can also be seen in the number of postgraduate theses, such as *A Monkey's Wedding: Carnival Impulses in the Work of Emerging South African Artists: Michael MacGarry, Nandipha Mntambo, Themba Shibase, Nina Barnett and Robyn Nesbitt* (2010) by Lucy Rayner; *On the Serious Social Implications of Humourous Art* (2007) by Anna Magrieta van Tonder; and *Conflicting Humours: race, gender and national identity in Madam & Eve* (1998) by Sarah Britten. These theses attest to a growing interest and attention to the previously under-researched topic of humour in South African art history and visual arts. *Hogarth in Johannesburg* (1990) and *UBU +- 101* (1997) are two other projects that have looked at humour as a source of interest. South African artists

William Kentridge, Deborah Bell and Robert Hodgins collaborated on both projects to produce work that engaged with the respective works of William Hogarth and Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi* (1896).

UBU +-101 is a collaborative project initially conceived of as a celebratory project of the centenary performance of Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi* in Paris. Ubu represents an archetypal figure of tyranny, cruelty and buffoonery. He is an absurd and ridiculous character, which Jarry's play mocks. Kentridge, Bell and Hodgins engaged with themes from Ubu Roi in a different way to Jarry as they attempted to locate themes of *Ubu Roi* in contemporary South Africa while reflecting on past events, and in particular, a context that has undergone and been exposed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. In the form of graphic prints, Kentridge, Bell and Hodgins created works that reflected on the problems of moral values, while maintaining the sinister antics of Ubu.

Hogarth in Johannesburg undertook to explore the relationship between Hogarth's engravings, in this case, *A Rake's Progress*, *Marriage-á-la-mode* and *Industry & Idleness,* and the artist's response to contemporary concerns of South African society. Kentridge, Bell and Hodgins developed a narrative through a series of engravings for which Hogarth provided the models.

The work of William Hogarth is widely known and appreciated as a source of inquiry and inspiration to many artists, one example being British artist Yinka Shonibare's *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998) inspired by Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress*. Hogarth mastered visual satire in ways that were able to reveal the social collapse of London

in the eighteenth century. His humour, often dark in tone, portrayed social horrors including starvation, poverty and debauchery as a metaphor for a collapsing society. Hogarth's visual satires exaggerated the plight of London to the point of visual absurdity revealing contradictions and the disjunction between horror and humour. To quote Rowson (2007), Hogarth's skill lay in his "taking the unspeakable, depicting it visually, leavening it with humour to make it digestible and, moreover, bearable."

The influence of Hogarth can be seen in central Africa in the artworks of Congolese artist Cheri Samba, who Fred Robarts (2007:118) describes as "Congo's Hogarth". Samba is one of Africa's most recognised contemporary artists, who initially started out as a sign painter. He entered the art world when he made his debut exhibit in the *Magiciens de la Terre* in 1989 at the Pompidou Centre. Samba's paintings depict the harsh realities of the world around him, specifically those of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In these representational paintings Samba, employs humorous mechanisms, such as satire to critique and reflect on social and political conditions afflicting the people of Congo. His style of drawing has developed from a combined influence of sign painting and comic strips, evident in his use of bold colour, line and text.

The study of humour in art history is increasing in South Africa, however a sustained study of humour in contemporary South African art, in the form of an exhibition or publication, is yet to be seen. This is not the case in North America and Western Europe where books, journal articles and exhibitions on the theme of humour are frequently produced. Although it is neither possible nor my intention to give a comprehensive overview of the study on humour in art history, given the scope of this

research project, it is important to acknowledge these projects as they shed light on, and offer insight to, humour while also adding to the visibility of humour in art.

The turn of the twenty-first century saw an increase of research concerning humour in contemporary art featured in books, journal articles, theses and dissertations. Contemporary art historians and scholars have recently begun to write about humour in art journals. One example is the special issue of *ARTnews* (2004) titled *What is Funny About Contemporary Art!*[sic] The entire issue is dedicated to artists who engage with parody, pun and irony in their artworks (Klein 2007:2). Linda Yablonsky (2004), writing in the special issue briefly introduces contemporary artists who employ humorous strategies in their work. Recalling artists such as James Currin, Sarah Lucas and Barbara Kruger, to name a few, Yablonsky offers her readers some insight into the different approaches and forms used by these artists to induce laughter or even a smile. The special issue was a result of limited scholarship concerning art that is deemed funny, which Yablonsky attributes to peoples' continued disregard for art that is witty. Robert Rosenbaum also wrote an article, *Hilarious Shockers,* where he discussed the works of two New York artists Steve Gianakos and William Anthony. In his article Rosenbaum delves into Gianakos' drawings and paintings that are known for their comic vulgarity and offensive nature, and Anthony's humorous attacks on the 'seriousness' of art and art history.

Exhibitions such as, *When Humour Becomes Painful* (2005), *All About Laughter: Humour in Contemporary Art* (2007) and *Laughing in a Foreign Language* (2008), also attempt, in their different curatorial undertaking, to assemble, give a platform to, and make visible artworks that induce laughter, pleasure and play. Moreover they

undertake to read and write humour in ways that reflect on personal, social and political issues. Some of the earlier exhibitions that have engaged with the theme of humour include *No Laughing Matter* (1991-3), *Lighten up: Art with a Sense of Humour* (2001) and *State of Play* (2004).

Sheri Klein's book *Art and Laughter* (2007) and Jennifer Higgie's *The Artist's Joke* (2007) examines humour in the context of recent Western visual arts, reflecting on its practice and unlimited discourses. Both Higgie and Klein look at and trace humour's development from the early twentieth century through to artworks produced in the opening decade of the twenty-first century. Their historical accounts begin with forerunners, such as the Dadaists, who were known for their cynical yet humorous work; they also examine Surrealism, the Fluxus movement, California funk, Chicago imagists and Pop art. These artistic movements are inherent with and embody humorous approaches, be it to mock previous art movements or play jokingly on the contemporary moment. One of the revealing examples that attest to such mockery and joking is Marcel Duchamp's artwork using the pun. Take for example his *L.H.O.O.Q* (1919), a work whose title when pronounced out loud in French may be interpreted as "she's got a hot ass".

It should be noted that the history of humour, and particularly of humour in art history, precedes these artistic movements or Duchamp's interventions. For instance, early historical developments of humour, such as satire and parody, have been detected in ancient Egypt and Greece. As Ralph E. Shikes and Steven Heller (1984:9) argue, the satirical depiction of figures and situations could be traced in the creation of animals playing human roles in Egyptian papyri. Humour scholar, Nicholas Roukes

(1997:21), also traces visual humour in art to artefacts from Sumeria and Ancient Egypt, artefacts whose representational depictions included animal figures that mimic human behaviour; the reverse holds in depictions of human figures mimicking animal behaviour.

Even though there has been a sustained corpus of literature on humour in the West, Jennifer Higgie (2007:12) agrees with Sigmund Freud's 1905 comment that, "Jokes have not yet received nearly as much philosophical consideration as they deserve in view of the part they play in our mental life." Higgie goes on to assert that, despite some exceptions, very little has been written about the role of jokes, humour, word play and satire in the art of the last century. Scholarly texts that do approach humour are generally limited to comic and caricature found in graphic prints, or strategies of humour found in conceptual art movements prevalent in Europe as is evident in the large amounts of literature found on graphic artists such as Honoré Daumier and William Hogarth and conceptual artists such as Marcel Duchamp.

Although there are examples of publications dedicated to the subject of humour, such as *Greek Vase Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour* (2009) and *Humour and Humanism in the Renaissance* (2004), the limitation in scholarly engagement of humorous images may be attributed to the parochial nature of the discipline of traditional art history. Images that are considered humorous most often fall into the category of popular culture, which include cartoons, comics and advertisements. Art history, in its traditional form, was a discipline preoccupied with material culture and the fine arts of painting and sculpture that tended to exclude the study of mass produced popular images and objects. Conventionally, fine arts formed a

distinguishable canon of historical artefacts from which popular, funny and playful images were excluded.

However, the contested discipline of art history and the emergence of 'New Art History' and visual culture studies began to explore a more inclusive set of discourses and professions. 'New Art History' is a term which gained recognition in the early 1980s and came to represent methods and approaches to subjects that included feminism, semiology, structuralism and psychoanalysis. New Art History signalled a break from what has been referred to as 'traditional' art history. This shift in methodological approaches, may have contributed to an increase in the study of the humour found in popular culture and arts, and mass produced objects.

Visual culture has become a recognised methodology within the study of contemporary art. W.J.T. Mitchell's assertion of a 'pictorial turn' around the 1990s "marked the emergence of the image as 'a central topic of discussion in the human sciences in the way that language [once] did'" (Mitchell quoted in Pinney 2006:134). Mitchell states that forms of spectatorship, such as looking, were as important, complex and worthy of attention as reading and other textual references. In this case, "the move from 'art' to 'visual' culture signalled a greater inclusivity of subject matter " (Mitchell quoted in Pinney 2006:131). There was a democratising spirit associated with visual cultural studies.

My study will adopt an interdisciplinary approach to humour, and in so doing, consider ways that engender different ways of thinking about humour in the field of art history. Working across different fields of enquiry, such as sociology and

psychology, my study of humour will inform and add insight to the work of Tommy Motswai.

Following the contribution of Williamson and Richards, my study aims to address the lack of scholarship concerning humour in art history, particularly in South Africa. Even though Motswai's drawings have been the subject of some study (Younge 1988; Arnold 1992; Powell 1992; Kasfir 1999), his contribution to the South African art scene has been largely neglected. While these discussions have contributed to the study of Motswai's work, they have neglected to pay particular attention to the ways in which humour operates in his work. My study aims to revisit and investigate Motswai's humorous approach in his drawings, dating from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. As an artist whose artwork became representative of change and transformation in South Africa, locally and internationally, Motswai's work deserves scholarly attention to ensure his artistic contributions are acknowledged.

My study does not attempt to examine Motswai's entire oeuvre as this is beyond the scope of this study. Instead I have chosen to discuss a select number of pastel drawings and lithographs during a time when he received a good deal of attention from the art world.

The galleries in which Motswai has previously exhibited, such as the Association for Visual Art (AVA) Gallery in Cape Town and the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg, do not have any documentation of his works, nor have they produced any catalogues that add visibility to Motswai's contribution to South African art. As a result, a large part of my research has come to rely on reproductions of his work, which can be

found in books and catalogues such as *Art of the South African Townships* (1988) and the catalogue *Tommy Motswai- Standard Bank Young Artist* (1992). The works discussed engage the humour prevalent in the works of Tommy Motswai, but also address the neglect of a sustained art historical account of his work, even if at an introductory level. These include *The Tea Party* (1987), *Faces at New Year* (1992), *On the 8th to 9th December 1990 Married Mr T and Mrs Evelyn Motswai* (1992) and *Red Noses's* [sic] *Day Saturday Party* (1992). I have also chosen to discuss *Zoo Animals at Pretoria* (1992) and *Dancing Competition* (1987), two drawings that are housed at the Wits Art Museum. I have selected these works in particular as they offer insight into Motswai's social concerns as an artist. With the exception of *The Tea Party*, all the works I have selected portray a social scenario or event. I have only selected pastel on paper drawings, a medium for which Motswai is recognised.

The chapters of my study are organised thematically. I use chapter one to outline some general theories of humour and different forms of visual humour, to provide a theoretical framework within which to read and consider Motswai's drawings. In this chapter I will also provide a historical context in which to critically analyse Motswai's drawings. In chapter two I look at the sociological importance of humour and the impact and influence of Motswai's disability on his artwork and art production. Exploring Motswai's representation of social life in South Africa during the early 1990s, this chapter will also consider Motswai's drawings as a way to comment on social engagements in post-apartheid South Africa. An exploration of humour's productive potential in ameliorating stressful situations and adversity, paying particular attention to the role of the smile in Motswai's drawings is conducted in chapter three.

CHAPTER ONE

LOCATING HUMOUR IN SOUTH AFRICAN ART

There is an underlying sense of humour in his work and happiness is abundantly portrayed.'
(De Jager 1992:172)

Impregnated with humour and an affectionate regard for the foibles of women and men, Motswai's images are beguiling. (Arnold 1996: 149)

There is tremendous humour and satire in Mr Motswai's work… (Levin 1995:3)

Motswai's characteristic sense of humour shines through his work… (Louw 1999:4)

Artist Tommy Motswai casts a satirical eye over whites enjoying themselves in restaurants and at the races. (1994:11)

In the late 1980s, Tommy Motswai's drawings received attention from the art world for his humorous approach. An introduction to humour, its theories, forms, strategies and functions are provided in this chapter, and in so doing, an insight into reading and understanding Motswai's comic approach is given. I will also give an account of writings on Motswai within a South African art historical context, as well as frame his artistic practise, within South Africa's social and political landscape.

An Introduction to Humour

The manifestation of humour relies on ambiguities, ambivalence, uncertainties and shifts in perspective and representation. It is multi-faceted, contradictory and paradoxical, and takes on numerous forms and functions. Defining humour is a difficult task considering terms such as wit, joke, comedy and farce all share humorous characteristics and are often used interchangeably. As such, humour plays a

"myriad of roles and serves a number of quite different functions" (Chapman & Foot quoted in Erichsen 2005:28). Simon Critchley (2002:1) provides an apt definition stating that, "humour is produced by a disjunction between the way things are and the way they are represented". The power of humour lies in its capacity to expose contradictions and reveal hidden tensions. Humour also allows us to admit the unseemly, deal with disappointment and live imaginatively.

A prominent characteristic of humour is that it is paradoxical in nature. It is both universal and particular; it can be found in all societies, yet it is culturally specific. Another paradox is that humour is social and anti-social: humour can bring people together through enjoyment and exclude people through mockery (Billig 2005:188).

Humour theory can help explain the mechanisms behind humour and why people are amused, laugh and smile when they look at artworks. Furthermore, it helps explain why major forms of humour such as satire, parody, pun, paradox and irony are humorous and funny. Simon Critchley provides an early historical development of humour in his book, *On Humour* (2003). Critchley discusses three theories of humour, appropriated from John Morreall's *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour* (1987). The first theory is represented earlier by Plato and Aristotle (4th century BC) and claims that we laugh from feelings of superiority over other people. The second theory emerges in the nineteenth century in the work of Herbert Spencer, where laughter is explained as a release of pent up energy, a theory undertaken by Sigmund Freud's in his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). The third theory relates to incongruity and can be traced back to Francis Hutcheson's *Reflections Upon Laughter* from 1750, whose argument is that humour is produced by

the experience of a felt incongruity between what we know and/or expect to be the case.

The theory of incongruity can be used to help explain how the subversive quality of humour operates. Incongruity is taken to mean an arrangement of subjects or objects in ways that bring forth absurdity, and invite a sense of strangeness in the relationship between them. When subjects we expect to behave in a particular way are overturned, reversed or subverted, they are incongruous with each other. The shock destruction of expectations has long been recognised as a key ingredient to the comic effect. French philosopher Blaise Pascal first proposed the theory of incongruity in the 1600s when he said "Nothing produces laughter more than a disproportion between that which one expects, and that which one sees" (Pascal quoted in Klein 2007:10). The detection of an unexpected likeness or the ability to find similarity between dissimilar things is what defines the joke, and in turn, induces laughter.

Mimicry is another device that can be used to create humour, following the theory of incongruity. The term mimicry is most often used in post-colonial theory to describe the ambivalent relationship between coloniser and colonised. The notion of mimicry asserts that when colonial discourse encourages the colonised subject to mimic the colonisers' cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result can only be imitation. The colonised, who reproduces the coloniser's assumptions, habits and values, mimics the coloniser and in fact produces ambivalent subjects whose mimicry is never far from mockery. Mimicry is never far from mockery since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. To mimic an individual's manner in a humorous or satirical way is one method to critique, comment on and ridicule that individual.

Ambivalence may be used to describe the relationship between mimicry and mockery, as that which unsettles and destabilises the colonial discourse. As Homi Bhabha (2004:122) argues, it is through the slippage, excess and difference that ambivalence and interdeterminacy arise, resulting in colonised subjects that are "almost the same, but not quite".

Bhabha describes ambivalence as a complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. His theory disturbs and complicates the simple relationship between the coloniser and the colonised in that there is never a clear opposition between the two, suggesting that resistance and complicity exist as a fluctuating relation within the colonial subject. Bhabha argues that colonialism – and in a similar vein humour – speaks in a "tongue that is forked" (2004:122). The "figures of farce" to which Bhabha refers, articulates hegemony retained through parody, mimicry and repetition (ibid.). In other words, acts of imitation occur in the form of the impulse to follow the centre.

French philosopher, Henri Bergson's book, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic,* represents the "first real social theory of humour" (Billig 2005:11). Bergson's theory principally focuses on laughter that reforms the world (Ziv 2010:16). He argues that the disciplinary functions of ridicule are at the heart of humour. Bergson makes three observations. The first is that laughter is human: we laugh principally at humans and only laugh at animals or things that suggest human qualities. This sentiment is also addressed by Aristotle, when he states, "no animal laughs save Man" (Aristotle quoted in Critchley 2002:25). His second observation implies that there is an absence of feeling that accompanies laughter (1911:3). Bergson notes how the

comic "demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart" (1911:5). It is his third observation that is of interest in my study of humour: the observation that laughter is socially shared and thus has a collective dimension, as Bergson asserts that there is "always the laughter of a group" (1911:6). Elaborating on this social dimension of laughter, Bergson notes that, "to understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society and above all we must determine the utility of its function which is a social one" (1911:7-8). From this observation of the social dimension of laughter Bergson claims that humour must have a social signification.

In his text, *The Social Function of Humour in Interpersonal Relationships*, Avner Ziv discusses the corrective function of humour previously suggested by Bergson. Bergson's theory lays emphasis on the educational function of humour and proposes that a person or institution that "serves as the object of laughter will take care in future not to repeat the behavior that has evoked punishment" (Ziv 2010:16). To quote Bergson (1911:197) "Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must have a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed."

Positive Functions of Humour

Despite the social and political adversity prevalent in South Africa during the 1980s, Motswai portrays celebration not desperation. He offers a positive perspective on a society haunted by traumatic history with an insupportable inhumanity. Motswai's mission seems to focus on those human experiences that tend to be neglected: moments of laughing, smiling and rejoicing. His narratives are portrayed with an

emphasis on the good, the polite and the courteous. However, his mission is at risk by being subjected to critical reflections that take to task positive humour or positive functions of humour, although the function of humour is not always positive. In offering a social critique of humour Michael Billig argues against the assumption that humour is intrinsically positive in nature. Billig's argument is that such assumptions are driven by ideology, which he refers to specifically as "ideological positivism" (2005:10). In his book, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Theory of Humour*, however, Billig's main inquiry is the search for that which has been neglected in studies of humour. He posits the argument that the negative aspects of humour, that include ridicule and mockery, tend to be sidelined for a more favourable, positive approach. Ridicule is not only considered to be a negative form of humour but also an aggressive form of humour, a means to attack; it is thought to be an undesirable effect of humour. Even though the premise of Billig's study is ridicule, he offers some insight into the positive aspects of humour, which are significant in the study of Motswai's drawings.

Billig (2005:10) argues that humour is seen in terms of 'negatives' and 'positives'. This general perspective stresses the positives of humour while it pushes aside the negative aspects. He describes "ideological positivism", as the stressing of positives, "an optimistic, can-do outlook in a society that offers its inhabitants the dream of constant, positively productive pleasures" (2005:10), which influence the individual to adapt rather than seek to change social conditions. Advice given to accentuate the positives is telling people "to make the most of things, to cope with dissatisfactions that might not be their own making" (Billig 2005:11). In this respect, accentuating the positive would mean one would have to adapt to social conditions rather than change

them. This also relates to the strategy of mimicry to adapt and fit in with the status quo while also destabilising it.

Ziv describes the desirable functions of humour: the first is to achieve group solidarity; second to reduce conflict and conceal malice; third to control, perpetuate or challenge norms and stereotypes; and fourth, to induce pleasurable experiences (Ziv quoted in Klein 2007:11). All these functions of humour are positive and helpful to society. Ziv suggests that the social function of humour can contribute to the attainment of the individual's assimilation into a group and raise the morale of group members and thus strengthen ties between them.

Social psychologist, Herbert Lefcourt, is another scholar of humour that engages with the notion of the 'positives'. He argues that the study of humour belongs to the "part of psychology that is concerned with investigating 'positive processes', particularly the study of the positive effect'' (Lefcourt quoted in Billig 2005:20). Lefcourt's research shows how humour can help "individuals maintain positive effects during encounters with negative events" (ibid.). He distinguishes 'positive humour' as that which "encourages group solidarity" from "negative or aggressive humour that separates, divides and excludes" (Lefcourt quoted in Billig 2005:22). Such humour functions "sociopositively" because it brings groups together. Klein (2007:5) also stresses the positives of the humour when she writes,

> An encounter with visual humour offers artistic, aesthetic, intellectual and psychological benefits. Humour from art, as experienced through smiling and laughing, can be a catalyst for personal and collective healing, wellbeing and improved psychological health. Laughter as a medicine for social ills and everyday problems is known to increase vital functions, relax nerves

> and aid in digestion. Looking at art that brings laughter can bring both pleasure and meaning, and allow us to extend our capacity to feel joy.

This approach to humour is discussed by Paul Lewis in his book, *Cracking Up: American Humour in a Time of Conflict* (2006). According to Lewis (2006:3), the New Age Movement was dedicated to bringing humour into our lives, not only to amuse, but to "improve learning, healing, working, and living in general". The positive humour movement is predicated on humour's therapeutic ability, of which, according to Lewis, there is no concrete scientific proof. As such, Lewis takes a sceptical approach to the positive humour movement, arguing that while American humour is relaxing and distracting, it also has its shortcomings, in that it can inform and misinform, expose and cover up.

These diametric positions of negative and positive become a point of interest when we consider humour that is politically correct. There is humour that is critical and abrasive and humour that does not offend. Politically correct humour falls under the latter category. This humour is tactful and polite and does not harm anyone, nor does it undermine community. In chapter two I briefly discuss Motswai's drawings as they speak to South African nationalism espoused with political correctness.

Humour in the Visual Arts

Visual humour is a sight-based experience. Nicholas Roukes (1997:1) describes visual humour as "aimed to providing momentary diversion from the world's absurdities". Humour in the visual arts may describe a range of visual and conceptual incongruities or disjointed concepts and images that take on a variety of different forms and approaches. Most prominent forms of humour include parody, satire, pun, paradox

and irony, which disrupt our perceptions and expectations in bold or subtle ways. Different types of humour operate in different ways. For example, parody can mock, a pun can play with words forcing associations to create new meanings, satire can ridicule and critique, and in irony we can recognise contradictions inherent in life.

Artistic devices such as association, transposition, exaggeration, juxtaposition, appropriation and mimicry can produce humour (Klein 2007:19). Artists can create associations by combining and juxtaposing words or images together – humour can arise if these are incongruous to each other. Transposition describes the relocation of a subject or image into a different or new context. In changing or distorting the object or image in ways that create a humorous effect exaggeration can be achieved.

Contradiction occurs when a paradoxical or ironic relationship is created. Appropriation can be described as borrowing forms, icons and images to alter them in ways that create a comic effect. This device is often seen in visual parodies. These devices help us to understand how humour works and its relation to forms of humour such as satire, parody and irony.

Parody and satire are two of the most common forms of humour. Parody is the imitation or repetition of a style, form, or object, but changed in such a way as to create a comic effect, often through artistic devices of incongruity such as appropriation, juxtaposition and exaggeration. Linda Hutcheon argues that parody operates on two levels – a primary surface or foreground, and a secondary surface or background. The secondary level derives its meaning from the context in which it is formed (Hutcheon 1985:34). The final meaning that parody arrives at rests on the

recognition of the "superimposition of these levels" (ibid.). In short, through appropriation and alteration, parody can mock historical and cultural icons layering them with new meanings. The parodied image is appropriated and altered in ways that critique contemporary culture, histories and the art world.

Satire ridicules and mocks its object of choice by exposing its weaknesses and faults, and in so doing, creates an awareness of prevailing social ills. Satire may be explained using the superiority theory of humour as one experiences pleasure from another's demise. Ziv (2010:16) defines satire as that which "scourges certain events, sometimes with brutality, and emphasizes their negative aspects almost entirely". Of all the forms of humour mentioned above, satire may be the most politically charged as its concerns are often social and political issues.

Irony is created by using a combination of words or images to express something different from the literal meaning of that word or the object. To recognise irony in a joke or an artwork, we need to be able to see the contradictions, subtle or obvious, between the two meanings. An example of irony can be seen in South African artist Brett Murray's installation titled *Power* (2008). This large-scale installation uses red candleholders to create a text that reads "Power to the People". Murray, to use Sue Williamson's (2009b) words, offered his audiences a "tragi-comic insight into events". This temporal work comments on the fact that very often people do not have electric power due to the lack of infrastructure and power cuts. He sets up an irony and contradiction through his combination of text and the object, the empty candleholder. The work is multi-layered as the slogan "power to the people" also refers to the struggles against oppression during apartheid. "Amandla Awethu", the

Zulu translation, was shouted at political rallies and meetings. In this way, Murray also makes a critical statement about South Africa's new political dispensation.

Writing Motswai in South African Art History

My study undertakes to explore the following questions: How is Motswai's work humorous? In what ways do his drawings suggest humour? In *Art of the South African Townships,* Gavin Younge (1988:50) writes,

> In *The Tea Party* his victims are a smiling middle-class couple who are being entertained in an excruciatingly average South African home. Whilst the image of the aproned maid bringing in the milk may be some what passé, white South African viewers should squirm with embarrassment at the accuracy of his jaundiced colour scheme and telling choice of paintings.

Younge's understanding of *The Tea Party* (Figure 3) is one possible way of reading this work, however, if we are to look at the couple's hair and skin colour which all present similar complexions and curly black hair marked by Motswai's scribbling, this visual rendering suggests they share the same indeterminate race. Thus Younge's observation that the woman carrying the tray is the maid is problematic as it shows his failure to look and pay particular attention to Motswai's drawing. Younge's statement implies that there is a difference in race and class between the guests and the hosts portrayed in Motswai's work. If Younge were to look at other artworks, for example, *The Chessman, Johannesburg* (1988) (Figure 4), he would find an evident distinction in Motswai's choice of the pastel colours used to distinguish different races. My closer reading of this artwork follows Lize van Robbroeck's argument that critiques Younge's "over politicising" of artworks. Such an "over politicisation" of black subjectivity is assisted by over-determined and "politically forced interpretations of

individual artworks" (van Robbroeck 2006:244), particularly of black artists. In demonstrating this "over politicising" of black artists' work by white writers, van Robbroeck criticises even the titles dividing Younge's chapters: i.e. *Culture within our Struggle: Township Art and Politics* and *Adequate Shelter: Township life and Art*. Using Motswai's *The Tea Party* as a case in point, van Robbroeck (2006:224) argues with Younge saying:

> Motswai is known for his light and anecdotal depictions of social events (weddings, graduation ceremonies, etc), and it is quite likely that the smiling woman serving the guests is in fact the hostess rather than the domestic servant. Certainly there is nothing to suggest that she is not of the same class or race than the other members of the tea party.

How then does *The Tea Party* reflect humorous sensibilities if not in the way as suggested by Younge? The observation that Motswai casts a satirical eye over whites, as Younge suggests, is one way of interpreting Motswai's work; there are, however, others ways in which to locate humour in this work.

The host reclines in his chair and entertains his guests as his wife offers the guests some milk. The setting for the tea party appears to be a lounge or dining room adorned by decorative pictures. The guests are dressed smartly while the hosts are casually dressed: the host wears a pair of shorts and slippers, whereas the guests are dressed immaculately – in a suit and (formal) dress. Motswai's representation of dress and gesture could be a way for him to articulate class differences, and in so doing, critique middle class aspirations, evident in the furniture, paintings and framed certificates.

The comedy of manners is a possible way to read Motswai's employment of humour in *The Tea Party* (and similar drawings). The 'comedy of manners' is a dramatic genre of comedy whose subject of concern is the portrayal of "the way people behave", "the manners they employ in a social context" and that which constitutes good taste and form (Hirst 1979:2). Found in literature, theatre and the visual arts, comedy of manners is closely related to the social conditions of the time. The genre satirises those who thought of themselves as socially superior, and is thus used to comment on the social morals of society.

Klein (2007:16) offers a different but more positive definition to that of Ziv, as she argues that a "visual satirist mimics the knowledge and behaviour of a culture or group to overemphasize and exaggerate aspects of life and its foibles with the hope of provoking laughter or a change of attitude". Here satire prompts us to re-examine our moral and social behaviours; in fact Klein helps us to pay attention to the function of satire and, by extension, humour in addressing human attitudes, of course for positive ends. In this regard, humour does not necessarily change the circumstances it illuminates, but rather brings in an attitude that is more agreeable for human relations and social interactions in a given time and place. As such, satire or humour is able to lessen the discontent and despair that given circumstances may produce. In brief, humour most often helps one to, in Speier's (1998:1358) words, to "bear better that which is unalterable".

Ziv uses the term 'comedy' to describe a form of humour that reflects the lighter side of human foibles. He argues that, as an antithesis to satire that is almost always negative, comedy is optimistic, always with a happy ending (Ziv 2010:17). Motswai's

optimism for a better and happy world is rendered visible through his manipulation of visual properties such as the use of bright colours and smiling faces which forward a visual climate that, within the realm of the picture frame as well as to the viewer, is jovial and inviting.

The classic notion of comedy, which began with Aristotle, considered the function of comedy to be a corrective "means of directing laughter at folly and vice so wrongdoers will mend their errant ways" (Roukes 2003:3). Comedy's criticism of life focuses on the human side of events and behaviour that includes good aspects as well as bad ones. According to Ziv (2010:16), satire, however, leaves no room for positive criticism. Notwithstanding, satire is explicit: in its operation, the object of attack is specific to a given society and period (Ziv 2010:16-17). Motswai's work fits more appropriately in the genre of comedy as described by Ziv than that of satire as argued by Younge (1988).

Motswai's drawings are presented as a self-conscious rendering of a modern, cosmopolitan experience of urban spaces in South Africa such as Johannesburg and Cape Town. Motswai's drawings share similar characteristics in style and subject of artists such as Honoré Daumier and Cheri Samba. Representations of humour in social interactions and gatherings can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Honoré Daumier is an example of an artist who reflects on social endeavours of the bourgeoisie while commenting on their foibles played out on the streets of Paris.

In the lithograph *Ouvrier et Bourgeois* (*Worker and Bourgeois*) (1848) (Figure 1), set on a Parisian sidewalk, the artist depicts a bourgeois outside a patisserie

contemplating a display of cakes, while a worker walks past, reading a newspaper. The bourgeois' eyes stare widely at the array of cakes. He is smartly dressed and his large gut suggests over indulgence. The worker is shabbily dressed, walks past, absorbed in his paper. Daumier sets up an irony in this lithograph to comment on class differences. The distance between these two social worlds are contrasted by their closeness in the print – they are close to each other, yet remain unaware of each other. The humorous effect is based on the contrast and juxtaposition of these two characters (Lombardo 2010:84). Motswai's drawings may not forward the same irony as Daumier in *Ouvrier et Bourgeois,* but he does exaggerate and place emphasis on indicators of class difference through dress and adornment, which may be read more as aspirational than critical.

Cheri Samba is an artist whose work, to some degree, echoes Motswai's approach to drawing. Samba's satirical paintings are reflective of the moral and socio-political crises in the Congo through his use of humour and colour. His large-scale paintings capture the moral dilemmas of Congo, dilemmas that he appeases through his use of irony and satire. He draws his subjects in everyday situations and activities to give us an account of human behaviour, good and bad. Commenting on Samba and a wider range of African artists, André Magnin says, "Colour is often predominant; I think it's associated with hope. Despite difficult living conditions, there is a lot more optimism and humour than you might expect." (Magnin quoted in Robarts 2007:120) Samba's concerns are not only articulated through a critical eye, but a compassionate one, as suggested in the painting, *Le sida ne sera guérissable que dans 10 au 20 ans* (trans. *Aids will only be curable in 10 or 20 years*) (1997) (Figure 2). In this painting Samba depicts a group of marchers who draw attention to the AIDS epidemic as they hold up

a poster of a victim of the disease and a banner. Women marchers wave their bras in the air with their fists clenched and arms raised as they march forth. The text on the banner reads: "We demand that all those who love life take life seriously. It is good to eat, work and make love, but one must only make love if one has protection…" Samba's message is didactic and moralising but softened with a playfulness. He chooses life over death, "optimism over pessimism" (Storr 2004:59). While the effects of HIV and AIDS have affected Africa on a large scale, Samba does not lose hope, but instead offers a critical response in a light and playful way.

Both Motswai's and Samba's work operate visually in similar ways. Parallels can be drawn between their use of bright bold colours, strong use of line, and the presence of signage and text in their works. Motswai's use of line and colour are markers of his unique style as he embraces a quasi- comic mode of working. His forms are oulined neatly and coloured in with bright colours which stretch across the surface. His pictures are ostentatious in the sense that they demand to be seen. His treatment of the picture surface is uniform: everything he draws is given the same amount of attention; there is no variation in the treatment of different elements within the images. Text that appear in Motswai's drawings are found in signs, advertising billboards and popular branding in South Africa. Brands such as Telkom, OK Bazaars, Wits University, Simba Chips and South African Airways are a few brands that he has incorporated into his work, and are significant markers through which he navigates his surroundings.

Both artists also engage with their immediate surroundings, but do so in different ways. Where Motswai's approach to his subject matter is anecdotal, light and hopeful

of communal solidarity, Samba's satirical approach is used as a mechanism of critique. To quote Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu (2009:33), Samba's visual imagery explores "anxieties of modern disjunction and the displaced individual subject under post-colonial modernity". Samba admits to this when he says, "My project is a critical one…I play with humor of course, but the real point is to give a critical portrayal of the way people live" (Samba quoted in Storr 2004:59).

Writings on popular arts in Africa have informed the works of artists such as Samba and Motswai. Bogumil Jewsiewicki's writing on urban painting in Zaire provides some insight into a reading of Motswai's work. Making two observations that speak to Motswai's approach to drawing, Jewsiewicki (1994:131) writes that the urban painter has a "preoccupation with accuracy" and often its drawing structure is based on a photographic model. In this way, the artist uses the photograph as a reference to arrange and organise the picture plane, selecting details that are important for the painting or drawing. According to Jewsiewicki (ibid.), "as the work is digested it undergoes variations from one execution to the next". Motswai's *The Tea Party* (1987), *Winter Soup Party* (1992), *Happy Dance of Marriage* (1990) and *On the 8th to 9th December 1990 Married Mr T and Mrs Evelyn Motswai* (1992) are indicative of revisited themes such as the white wedding and the tea party, transformed into new drawings.

This revisitation of themes brings me to Jewsiewicki's second point: the urban painter makes numerous versions of themes that sell well (1994:130). The sale or popularity of one work generally leads to "a new version of the theme" (Jewsiewicki 1994:131). What we might call 'copies' may be considered "successive sketches" (ibid.). In this

sense, the urban painter does not attempt to shock or surprise his or her audience, but instead creates what the public already knows. *The Tea Party*, which received recognition in 1987, is an apt example of a theme that has been reproduced because of its popularity among the South African market. Jewsiewicki (1994:134) dismisses the claim that these painters' imaginations are limited, but rather argues that it is "channeled by the market toward either repetition or diversification of themes". For Jewsiewicki, such paintings are "chronicles of social and political life" as much as they are "materializations of imagination and social memory" (ibid.).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Motswai's career began to receive some scholarly attention. Art historians and critics began including his artwork in exhibitions and publications. Exhibitions like *The Neglected Tradition* (1987) and books such as *Art of the South African Townships* (1988), *Images of Man: Contemporary South African Black Art and Artists* (1992) and *Contemporary Art of Africa* (1996) included Motswai in the history of South African art. *The Neglected Tradition*, an exhibition curated by Steven Sack, attempted to historicise modern black South African artists chronologically, to re-address their historical exclusion and marginalisation from the written history of South African art. While the *Neglected Tradition* catalogue only featured biographical information on Motswai's career, it failed to discuss his work, and only a single image marks his presence in the catalogue.

Another book that makes brief reference to Motswai is *Images of Man: Contemporary South African Black Art and Artists* (1992). Written by E. J. De Jager, this book offers a historical and pictorial guide to contemporary South African black art and artists

that are part of the Collection of the University of Fort Hare. De Jager selected Motswai for his "contrasting style[s]" and because he "illustrates that …there is far greater personal sophistication and stylistic variation amongst South African Black artists than in previous decades" (De Jager 1992:172). Under the section, "The Post 1970s", De Jager frames the South African art market, distinguishing between the formal and the informal sector. He includes Motswai under this section as one of the artists who entered the formal sector and came to the notice of the art buying public, and established "fine reputations for themselves" (De Jager 1992:172). Motswai did have a relationship with the Goodman Gallery, and was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist Award, evidence that he did in fact enter the formal sector of the art world. De Jager's formal analysis values Motswai's stylistic approach for not using the "same measure of distortion and unusual perspective" (ibid.) as black artists before him, namely, 'protest' and 'resistance' artists.

Marion Arnold offers a brief introductory text to Motswai in the book *Contemporary Art of Africa* (1996) edited by A. Magnin and J. Soulillou. Here Arnold offers insight into Motswai's upbringing and education whilst also reflecting on his prominent themes. A similar undertaking is seen in *Tommy Motswai: The Standard Bank Young Artist* (1992) catalogue, wherein Raymund van Niekerk, former director of the South African National Gallery writes a brief note on Motswai, which introduces the artist, his upbringing and education. His note on Motswai however is brief and does not add much insight to Motswai's work.

One of the first books to feature and discuss Motswai's artwork is *Art of the South African Townships* (1988). Written by artist and writer Gavin Younge, the book

attempts to offer a selection of artwork from the racially segregated townships of South Africa. Many of the artist's works that feature in the book are claimed by Younge to reflect on and respond to oppression in South Africa. They are discussed in terms of cultural significance and political attribution; the latter holds more weight in framing and fixing many artists in the realm of political struggle, whereby works of many black artists suffer the burden of always being reduced to 'protest' and 'resistance' art. Thus the 'township' as subject matter developed a kind of syndrome of suffering and a rhetoric of resistance to apartheid structures. Younge uses the term 'township' to frame artists working within this limited frame as struggling against and resistant to apartheid (Younge 1988:34). These terms tend to describe the urban areas occupied by black South Africans as a space filled with minibus taxis, buses, street dwellers, music and hawkers. This is all too familiar to Motswai because of his township experience.

De Jager, Arnold, van Niekerk and Younge all make reference to the apparent humorous undertakings such as satire employed by Motswai, yet fail to explore the ways in which these humorous depictions exist and function. De Jager does not discuss how humour is portrayed but merely states it. Younge suggests Motswai's approach is satirical while Arnold points to his affectionate regard for human foibles. These texts are significant to the historical work required on Motswai and his work, but notwithstanding, all have failed to sustain a substantiated argument on his artwork, particularly regarding arguments on his uses of humour.

It can be argued that artworks that communicate hope, celebration and pleasure are sidelined and kept on the periphery of art historical scholarship. South Africa is a

country with a turbulent history and challenging present. In his essay, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa*, Njabulo Ndebele reflects on spectacle and the failed attention to detail in black South African literature. Even though Ndebele focuses on black South African literature, he notes that the representation of the spectacular is also present in visual arts, such as painting and sculpture, both of which are creative sites wherein we are most likely to see "grotesque figures in all kinds of contortions indicative of agony" (Ndebele 2006:38). Ndebele's essay is important as it discusses those human practices and experiences that tend to be neglected and repressed under hostile regimes. When Ndebele asks us to rediscover the ordinary he invites us to pay attention to unattended human tendencies such as humour – even if Ndebele does not name it as such. Ndebele's thoughts on rediscovering the ordinary are pertinent in reading and reasoning humour in Motswai's work. It is also useful to consider Ndebele's concerns and thoughts in relation to Albie Sachs's similar ideas.

At a time when Motswai was receiving attention as an artist in South Africa and internationally, former South African Constitutional Court Judge, Albie Sachs, reflected on the prevailing state of arts and culture in South Africa. This was in the late 1980s. In his text, *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom*, Sachs (1991:187) writes that, "Our artists are not pushed to improve the quality of their work; it is enough that it be politically correct. The more fists and spears and guns, the better." Speaking directly to the premise of my study, Sachs went as far as to say: "The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded." (ibid.) It is important to underscore Sachs' bemoaning the exclusion of that which is *funny* by creative producers, in this instance, visual artists.

While Sachs' argument is pointed, he however fails to acknowledge that artists such as Motswai were creating artworks that reflected moments of joy and celebration during the harsh times of apartheid. Motswai's work was already indicating a move towards a range of themes that encompass a different tone from the conventional dose of protest and resistance art. Such a change is also evident in Motswai's artistic style, more particularly, his use of solid colours and bold lines.

Motswai's drawings articulated the humorous, the light and the positive side of everyday South African experiences. In a sense, his drawings could be read as an example of the rediscovery of the ordinary, as per Ndebele's emphasis and/or Sachs's provocation to prepare ourselves for freedom.

Both arguments by Ndebele and Sachs spring from what I want to read as a lack or denial of appreciating things humorous and pleasurable in society. It is as if artists were and are working without knowledge and experience of these important human qualities and experiences. The appreciation of the beauty of the world seems to be set aside, and/or replaced with the grotesque and the abject. According to Ndebele (2006:42), dreams of love, hope, compassion, newness and justice are sacrificed to the negative spectacle in black South African literature and visual art production. Motswai arrived on the South African art scene almost two decades after 'resistance art' had been termed; as such, much of the art produced during apartheid was in some way critical of the states of racial, cultural or political policies. Colin Richards picks up on Ndebele's critique of the spectacle to reflect on South African art practices. In *Aftermath: Value and Violence in Contemporary South African Art*, Richards states that South Africa provides one form of spectacularity in the current moment. For

Richards (2008:232) displays of violence and agony can be found in a number of contemporary artworks: Alfred Thoba's *Riots* (1977), Billy Mandini's *Necklace of Death* (1986) and Jane Alexander's, *The Butcher Boys* (1985-6).

Taking into account the foregoing discussion, we can say that seriousness, and a strong emphasis on righteousness, during resistance and protest generally inhibit laughter and joy. In this light, social protest is fuelled by anger and fear, notwithstanding its consequences to leaving little room for jokes, laughter, and frivolous thoughts. The resistance period in South Africa marked a time that pushed aside the joy of laughter in favour of the fight. Steven Sack, writing in *The Neglected Tradition,* offers a fine distinction of art produced by black artists during the 1960s and 1970s. He writes,

> The art of the sixties and seventies shows two distinct orientations. One was an attempt to reflect social reality, and the repression of the 1960s. This art was often introspective and "tortured"; at its best an indictment of the social conditions caused by apartheid, at its worst, a "self pitying" and sentimental art (Sack 1988:17).

The second distinction, noted by Sack (1988:17), is held to be art that is "a site of hope rather than despair". Artists like Fikile Magadlela, Thami Mnyele and Peter Clarke who were inspired by music, literature and poetry, according to Sack, "reacted against the prevailing township imagery of hopelessness". This hope is evident in Clarke's artwork, *The Only Way to Survive* (1983) (Figure 5), which portrays three young boys as they face and read a wall with graffitti. The text on the wall reads,

> The only way to survive these days is to have a sense of humour
> So…we live
> We perform
> And we survive…

It is important to note that Clarke's statement is empowering and resistant to complacency. His message is that of perseverance and resistance to negative attitudes. Here humour is a means to overcome and survive. As Billig (2005:185) writes, "it is most certainly not the case that only societies living in happy circumstances experience humour. Joking can appear in the direst of social environments; in fact, it can provide a way of demonstrating that one has not succumbed to exigency". Even during apartheid, people who were subjugated and living in inhumane conditions found the strength to laugh, smile and experience pleasure.

CHAPTER TWO

YOU NEVER LAUGH ALONE: THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF HUMOUR

Motswai's drawings display a strong sense of community, cohesiveness and harmony. Rarely will you find a sad or lone figure in his drawing. Instead, you will find groups of smiling people interacting and socialising in Motswai's drawings. In this chapter I aim to explore the social implications of humour that are represented in Motswai's artwork; I also consider the sociological relevance of humour in the post-colonial and post-apartheid context of South Africa. My reading of social and communal dimensions in Motswai's work is premised on, and built from, Bergson's observation that "[l]aughter appears to stand in the need of an echo" (1911:5), as such laughter is social as it is "always the laughter of a group" (ibid.6).

Besides Bergson, Hans Speier also argues that the centrepiece of the comical situation almost always revolves around men and women and the world in which they live (Speier 1998:1361), be it on the street, in the office, at an exhibition opening, or on the dance floor. In other words, the comic and the humorous stand in the wake of an audience, its social counterpart. Motswai's narratives are a response, as Arnold (1996:149) explains, "to the individual, the behaviour of the individual in a group, and the social responses to the crowd".

Listening with our Eyes

Motswai's drawings are saturated with visual information: his canvases are busy, excessive and filled with people, buildings, signage, vehicles, dress and gesture. All these play a significant role in the way Motswai reads the world around him. Motswai

relies largely on what he sees to interpret his social surroundings and engagements. Scholars have argued that this heightened sense of vision contributes to his eye for detail and that his artistic consciousness and awareness are borne out of a visual engagement between himself and the world (van Niekerk 1992; Ngcobo 2006). Motswai communicates his impression of life by offering his viewer renditions of his urban experience in spectacular form, colour, movement and activity. In these environments Motswai finds a wide range of people, architecture and visual signs to draw from. He presents his viewer with an image of South Africa that is culturally diverse whilst also fashioning his characters in flamboyant dress, accessories, flashy cars and human gestures that loudly articulate their social standing and preoccupations.

Writer and curator Gabi Ngcobo (2006:302) uses a biographical approach to argue that Motswai owes much of his photographic memory to the "silences of his world", through which he has developed a strong sense of vision. Laughter often emerges in the cracks that appear when one steps back from a situation or person, and the amount of our laughter is often a result of distance we feel from the object of our humour (Kataoka 2008:9). This notion is also suggested by Bergson when he asks his reader to step aside and look upon the world as a disinterested spectator: "many a drama will turn into comedy" (Bergson 1911:5). For Bergson "it is enough for us to stop our ears to the sound of music, in a room where dancing is going on, for the dancers at once to appear ridiculous" (ibid.). Bergson's take on characteristics of humour is implicitly notable in the drawing, *Dancing Competition* (1987) (Figure 6), in which Motswai depicts a similar scene to the one Bergson describes. Unable to hear the music playing, that is the deaf Motswai, by biological condition, steps back and, willingly or

unwillingly, distances himself from the situation at hand as he depicts a group of dancers in their circle of movement on the dance floor. As the dancers are performing, rows of spectators watch with excitement and awe. Motswai's works invites us to listen with our eyes instead of only by ear.

It is important to discuss Motswai's disability even if only briefly. His disability seems to have excluded him from the 'normal' world and thus located him in the periphery of 'normal' social practices. Motswai is unlike the disinterested spectator that Bergson refers to, a spectator with all senses including that of hearing (and uttering sounds). Rather, Motswai engages with the (artistic and cultural) world through sight. He navigates his surroundings through visual cues such as signage, billboards, gestures and dress.

Motswai invests very little, if any, effort and energy in the negative, regardless of the fact that deaf people are often socially neglected. His investment in the positive or rather joy in life is revealed in his comment that, "When we [the deaf] do get the opportunity to meet one another it's a moment of sheer joy, sheer bliss. When you see deaf people sign, you see them laugh. I try and capture those moments. We [deaf people] are a social people." (Interview with Motswai, 2010)

The quality of Motswai's rendering of visual details in his work is noted by Raymund van Niekerk. For van Niekerk, Motswai pays attention to the minutiae or the ordinary yet rich and informed details: "What marks his work most strongly is the remarkable attention to detail that contributes so much to his recording of life in contemporary Johannesburg." (van Niekerk 1992) Van Niekerk further argues that Motswai's

"extraordinarily acute" observation of contemporary urban life is a necessary ingredient of his humorous account of how we live. As such, Motswai makes visible that which we take for granted as participants of such urban social gatherings. Most significant about van Niekerk's comments is that Motswai is "a true optimist"; he shows us that the best and most positive aspects lie in the "ordinary folk in whom he believes". Motswai's commitment to the everyday can also indicate the desire to give a voice to those whose voices are seldom heard and acknowledged. Motswai reaches out to the deaf community and fights for the rights of deaf black children in an attempt to make visibly present their silent voices. Having always tried to be seen as equal to hearing people, Motswai is committed to empowering the deaf community through art, as he states:

> I have deaf children and learners and I want to educate them. I want deaf people to access tertiary education. I want to see other deaf artists. I don't want to be the only one, the only deaf person. I want to see others empowered. I want to travel across the nine provinces and empower those people that can do art so that we can bring inspiration to South Africa. If we leave them unattended, what contribution can they bring to the world...? Yes we have a Tommy but we can have so many more. (Interview with Motswai, 2010)

Motswai is dedicated to helping and educating deaf people. He not only taught drawing to deaf children at St. Vincent's School for the Deaf in Johannesburg, but his continued dedication can also be seen in his collaboration with Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA). In the form of a comic book, *Are Your Rights Respected?* (2006), was developed to help educate the deaf community about HIV/AIDS, sexuality, sexual diversity, human rights and empowerment. Illustrated by Motswai, these cartoon-like images undertake to depict life experiences of the deaf community and thus encourage discussion on important issues affecting their lives.

For Motswai and deaf people alike sign language plays an important role for their communication with the rest of the world. Sign language is Motswai's principle form of communication, which explains his representation of gesture in his drawings. Signs and gesture represent social codes; for example, the female guest in *The Tea Party*, whose gestures communicate her declining the offer of milk in her tea. Gesture is inextricably bound to social happenings; it is one form of social expression used to communicate non-verbally with others. The modern sense of the term gesture (from at least the seventeenth century onward) refers to the "expressive bodily motions" (Handler 2009:282) but may also refer to bodily movements that express inner or "mental" and "emotional" states. The representation of gesture is found in a large number of Motswai's works. Arguably Motswai comments on social engagements in a similar way that Erving Goffman does in describing individual interactions, set often in public spaces, like streets, sidewalks, hallways, and parks (Handler 2009:286). His visual descriptions focus on spaces and places of social gatherings, functions and rituals, visible in works such as *The Chessman, Johannesburg* (1988), *Valentine's Day* (1992) and *On the 8th to 9th December 1990 Married Mr T and Mrs Evelyn Motswai* (1992). Motswai communicates through gesture and thus his treatment of gestures should read as a means to understand the world around him.

Following the Centre

Motswai was one of the first black artists to portray black subjects outside of the township and also one of the first black artists to depict white subjects. His drawings depict black subjects participating in leisure activities: playing chess in the park, having dinner at a restaurant, having tea with friends and attending art exhibitions.

These black subjects wear fashionable attire and partake in modern social rituals with poise and grace. A quick glance at Motswai's Standard Bank Young Artist catalogue will reveal that these social scenes are more often than not located within white centres. In a few of Motswai's drawings, such as *Faces at New Year* (1992) and *Valentine's Day* (1992), black subjects are represented as the minority that engage with social set-ups dominated by whites. In such set-ups whites are represented as the majority. This racial dynamic could be read as the racial demographic in the field of visual arts where whites dominate over a few black practicing artists.

The demands, prejudices and ideology of the art market had a large impact on black artists' work. Ivor Powell (1993a:35) writes that "the market for black art in SA is and has always been a white one", as a result, the work of black artists "is not and never was made for the community in which it was produced". Powell's sentiments reflect Motswai's very attitudes towards his white consumers when he says, "My market is exclusively the white people who lend their support and to me it's almost like a gift of saying thank you." (Interview with Motswai, 2010) In this way, Motswai's inclusion of white subjects in his drawings is an act of appreciation and gratitude for their support of his work.

In his essay, *Cultural Production in Post-Apartheid South Africa,* Clive Kellner examines how culture plays a role in the contemporary 'rainbow nation'. Writing on the problematic of 'race' as a priority issue for most post-democratic cultural production in South Africa, Kellner argues that the dialectical opposition in which the "white manufacturer of cultural meaning is always in a privileged position above that of the black subject" (1997: 30). The continual use of black subjects by white artists is

also problematic. While white artists such as Irma Stern and Maggie Laubser could produce renditions of black subjects for a lucrative market, black artists were expected to function within a "system that prefigured dramatically the notion of 'own affairs'" (Powell 1993b:34). Two publications, *The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art* and *Images of Man: Contemporary South African Black Art and Artists*, reveal the scarcity of images of whites in the featured artworks by black artists. This was the case until the 1980s when a marked change emerged with artists, such as Tommy Motswai, Noria Mabasa and Phutuma Seoka, who produced representations of white subjects. Artists that were previously advised to "stick to representations of [their] own people in their various daily occupations" (Damant quoted in Sack 1988: 10), now pursued subject matter that, as Powell (1995:13) speculates, may have "promised to challenge, in one way or another, the inherited self-perception of the whites as a class".

In drawings such as *Faces at New Year* (1992) (Figure 7) and *Valentine's Day* (1992) (Figure 8), we find black subjects engaging in leisure activities in locations that are predominantly occupied by white subjects. Motswai does not draw the converse: white people performing leisure activities in black communities and townships. This imbalance begs the question of the centre and periphery that has been so widely tackled by post-colonial scholars. Psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon (1967:110) articulates this clearly when he writes, "For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man." Motswai depicts black subjects that adapt to social gatherings and rituals by mimicking their white counterparts and in so doing, adopting their social etiquette, manners and dress.

Faces at New Year depicts a black couple as they walk leisurely on the beach at Sea Point in Cape Town. They are the only black subjects that feature in the picture and are distinguished by their brown skin that is strongly contrasted with a lighter shade of pastel that Motswai uses to draw white subjects. As the black couple stroll along the beach, a group of young white men throw a ball around; a few children make sandcastles while a group of young women stroll past chattering amongst themselves. One young man is distracted from the game and turns his head in the opposite direction, unaware that the ball is heading in his direction. The image is ambiguous: the man is either looking at the black couple or the group of young women. Powell offers us one interpretation of this work:

> Three beach youths are playing with a ball, three [sic] beach beauties walk by. The youth to whom the ball has been thrown loses concentration and it hits him on the head. Ha ha.
> That is about all there is excepting two couples, one white and one black, also walking along the beach; but they are all smiling in pretty much the same way and there doesn't seem to be much going on there either, certainly nothing about race or about change in South Africa.
> (Powell 1992:31)

My reading of Motswai's drawing is that the young man is in fact glancing towards the black couple. Everyone in the drawing wears a smile on their faces except for the man who gazes in awe: his mouth is turned downwards, suggesting a frown. It can be argued that this drawing displays subtle humour that pokes fun at the young man who turns his head around. Motswai's representation of humour may also speak to Bergson's notion of humour as a social corrective, particularly taking into account Motswai's visual comment on the young man's attitude. In other words, it might be construed that the young man is punished for his negative attitude by being struck on the head by the ball. This is however only one interpretation of this drawing. Another

reading, as suggested by Powell, would be that the young man is turning his head in awe of the young women walking past.

In *Red Noses's* [sic] *Day Saturday Party* (Figure 9), Motswai depicts friends and family enjoying a Saturday braai; they are together in celebration of Red Nose Day. Motswai's image shows a garden full of people enjoying the festivities. The atmosphere that Motswai portrays is jovial and celebratory. A few of the children wear plastic red noses for fun, and even the cars have plastic red noses on their bonnets. The choice to draw a celebration of Red Nose Day is revealing of Motswai's concerns. The Red Nose Day campaign was initiated to help raise funds for charities and organisations by doing something funny and lighthearted, such as wearing something frivolous, like the red nose. In this case, humour is used as a means to mobilise awareness for those who are disadvantaged, physically or socio-economically.

Other works, such as *Valentine's Day* (Figure 8), display the socio-cultural centre as predominantly white and located in white dominated areas. Set in a restaurant, loving couples enjoy each other's company while the band plays in the background, celebrating and drinking champagne while wearing a smile. Motswai creates an atmosphere that is fun, lively and celebratory. The act of love is celebrated by Motswai, as is the act of giving, in *Red Noses's* [sic] *Day Saturday Party.*

It has also been argued that Motswai uses satire in his drawings to "[cast] a satirical eye over whites enjoying themselves in restaurants" (1994:11). In this case, Motswai's drawings may be interpreted as works which capture and reveal the

behaviour and attitude of white bourgeois South Africans as they enjoy themselves at the beach or in restaurants.

The black subjects that Motswai draws imitate the etiquette and manners that are required to maintain such particular social orders at the centre, reflecting a black middle class. This kind of adaptation or parody could be read in light of Fanon's discussion of Professor D. Westermann:

> The wearing of European clothes, whether rags or the most up-to-date style; using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse; adorning the native language with European expressions; using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing a European language; all these contribute to a feeling of equality with the European and his achievements. (Fanon 1967:25)

The Tea Party (1987) and *On the 8th to 9th December 1990 Married Mr T and Mrs Evelyn Motswai* (1992) are two artworks that depict the performance of western rituals. That is, the tea party and the white wedding. *On the 8th to 9th December 1990 Married Mr T and Mrs Evelyn Motswai* (Figure 10) is a pastel drawing that shows Motswai's wedding party procession. Dressed in modern western wedding attire, white suit, dress and gloves, the couple leads the procession forward. The stark whiteness of their wedding attire suggests that Motswai used a photographic source for his drawing. A dark figure who seems not to conform to this dress code wears blue overalls and gumboots. He dances wildly on the left, with his one arm raised up waving a knobkerrie in the air as he flashes a toothless grin on his face, offering a contrast to the rest of the procession. This figure does not comply with the rules of social order and appears to be comical. His disruption, as Billig (2005:132) would argue, represents the figure of "unsociability". This character may be argued to be comical by reason of his disruptions: his behaviour is removed from the company of

others; he speaks too loudly, dresses too flamboyantly and shows a general unawareness of the subtle codes of appropriate behaviour (Billig 2005:132). We can argue that this extroverted figure's lack of interest in or concern for the wedding arrangements is a critique of the wedding itself, particularly its modern Western sentiments. This argument is made according to what I observe as the figure's sense not to mimic the dress code of the wedding procession, nor does he abide to the behaviour and manners of the party. In other words, he rejects the act of mimicry, and in doing so, he is rendered an outsider.

Wallpaper for the 'New' South Africa

If humour tells us something about who we are, then it might remind us that we are perhaps not the people we would like to be. In other words, it can be argued that the very relativity of humour contains an indirect appeal that the world stands in a need of change (Critchley 2008:22). The after-effects of apartheid left South Africa greatly in need of change. Mechanisms were put into place to ensure a democratic country that is all-encompassing and embracing. A new national anthem was created and a new flag was designed to demonstrate two paths merging into one. In 1990, after the release of Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners, the unbanning of the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress among other political organisations, celebrations were staged locally and abroad. The indirect appeal of change that humour offers us is best seen and understood in relation to Motswai's re-imagining of South Africa, a re-imagining that offers his viewers an optimistic rendition of South Africa that is full of hope. It was during this transitional political moment that Motswai received a good deal of attention from the art world locally and abroad, a moment that marks the collapse of apartheid.

During the late 1980s the mood of the country indicated that radical political changes were on their way, changes that also witnessed an artistic shift away from previous political agendas. As political organisations were unbanned, political prisoners released and exiles allowed to return to their country, South Africans entered the 1990s. Possible democratic ideas became evident with the negotiations leading to the first democratic election in 1994. A revised (or rather new) democratic constitution was endorsed in 1996. This transitional moment was couched by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which sought to guide and regulate South Africa's transition in ways that were non-antagonistic, tolerable and peaceful. Disenfranchised artists like Motswai were impelled to find different ways of expressing a political voice, which was not cloaked in despair, but rather congruent and tuned with needed attitudes and tones that contributed to South Africa's aspiration to hopefulness and optimism.

Motswai represents South Africa as a progressive, colourful, diverse and vibrant country, so much so that in 1994 he was commissioned to produce a cover image for the French *Vogue* magazine to celebrate the emerging democracy. Motswai's imagery invoked a sense of unity, transformation and peace within South Africa. Filled with people of different shapes, sizes and races, Motswai's imagining of South Africa is as positive as the new South African flag. According to Kellner (1997:30), artists may possibly have found themselves "pulled between the propagandist intentions of a nationalist overview" which is arguably the case for Motswai.

Motswai received the Standard Bank Young Artist Award in 1992. It was especially during this time that the arts became even more relevant and were used as a vehicle to represent changes in a society coming out of years of racial divisions and violent oppression. The rhetorical term the 'Rainbow Nation' became prominent in the mid 1990s and was used to project South Africa as a country with a diverse mix of cultures striving towards forgiveness, reconciliation and acceptance – the intention of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Once the cultural boycott was lifted, South African artists entered into the global art market. They received a significant amount of attention from the international art world, especially after 1994, as they and their work were exported to exhibitions in London, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Ontario, Sydney and Lisbon amongst the capital art centres around the world. Motswai's work was featured in some of these exhibitions (particularly the earlier ones) that reflected a sense of new and racially integrated South Africa. Three of these exhibitions are *New Horizons* (1995), *Tomorrow is Now* (1996) and *Image of Freedom* (1997). For Julian Liknaitzky who curated *Tomorrow is Now*, an exhibition whose title reflects the belief that for "the South African artists who struggled through the darkness of yesterday, tomorrow has finally arrived", "some of the work reflects the post-1994 election euphoria and optimism" (1996:60). Other artists featured in the exhibition were Alfred Thoba, Thomas Kgope, Speelman Mahlangu, Deborah Bell, Robert Hodgins and William Kentridge.

In *Zoo Animals at Pretoria* (1992) (Figure 11), Motswai draws a group of people visiting the zoo as they pass by a cage of baboons. The visitors appear happy as they smile. The caged baboons engage with each other within their limited spaces and watch the passing spectators. The spectators however do not seem too interested in

the animals on display. Towards the back of the carriage a black couple show off their infant child to a white family seated across from them. This informal interaction marks a moment of tolerance and hope in a country busy negotiating itself through peaceful transformation.

Artists manipulate words for aesthetic or comic effect. As Klein (2007:51) would argue, in cases where artists are purposefully misspelling words, phrases and titles, they are able to make us laugh. The signage on the trailer which reads 'King Too Too' might be a suggestive pun on Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a figure of peace and democracy in South Africa. A visual pun can be described as an image with two or more congruent meanings, which according to Klein (2007:17), result in the understanding of the images and text on more than one level. Motswai creates a new association with the Simba brand of potato chips through wordplay by playing with the relationship between text and image. The brand for Simba chips is marked by a lion wearing a crown. Simba the lion is the king of the jungle, the ruler of the land.

This play on words is a form of praise for Tutu's role in transformation of the country. Tutu introduced the rainbow as a symbol of reconciliation and unity among all diverse peoples in the nation. Similarly, post-apartheid South African art is saturated with attitudes of political correctness. The process of transformation into a country of multi-coloured diversity was furthered by the new South African flag that features significantly in Motswai's work. The new national anthem and the new flag promoted a national pride, happiness and optimism. Møller et al. (1999:245) propose that the national pride might be fused with, or work through self-esteem to fit the levels of happiness. Such happiness is evident in Motswai's smiling characters living in the

new South Africa. The study conducted by Møller et al. indicates that the majority of South Africans were proud of their country, which implied that the belief in South Africa's Rainbow Nation ideal may have assisted in boosting happiness during the transition to a state of democracy (ibid.). The study also shows that supporters of the ideal of the Rainbow Nation were more optimistic than others about the future of South Africa.

There is no doubt that Motswai is a supporter of the notion of the Rainbow Nation. As a promoter of peace and understanding, Motswai uses humour in positive ways to show his audience the possibilities of reconciliation. Motswai's drawings are inspired by the people around him: it is the laughter of a group of people that deserves remembrance for Motswai. Through his anecdotal visual descriptions of everyday life in South Africa Motswai makes visible moments that contribute to the growth of the country in solidarity and understanding.

Even though Motswai did receive significant praise by the South African and international art world, his artwork has also encountered severe criticism. Powell is one of the few writers during this time to critically engage with Motswai's style, content and subject matter. In the article titled *Wallpaper for the new South Africa*, Powell provides a dismissive evaluation of Motswai's work making up the 1992 exhibition at the Standard Bank Gallery. It is an evaluation Powell uses to deflate prevailing hype and praise of Motswai's attention to detail, vibrant imagery and drawing mode. As Powell notes, Motswai's portrayal of "good behaviour is antithetical to honesty, spontaneity and depth of feeling", as such Motswai produces "good art" whose "style is almost remarkably unremarkable...it is more or less generic

in character". For Powell, Motswai's drawing style neither "possesses the illusionistic possibilities of a more definitively naturalistic mode, nor the individually expressive possibilities of a more personalised manner"; rather "Motswai strikes me as being little more than a designer of wallpaper for the new South Africa". It is a kind of wallpaper "that will not clash with the mental furniture of your prejudices or with your historical unease". In short, Powell considers Motswai's drawings as "Paper for the psychic walls of the suburban whiteys, muzak for their souls". Thus, Powell declares that Motswai does not merit a status of "a contemporary South African artist of major significance" (1992:31).

Powell's criticism is relevant both in terms of the artistic climate and art market that occupied South Africa at the time, yet it fails to consider his drawings as renditions of the world that stretches beyond Motswai's paper or canvas. Motswai's drawings are constructed visions; thus, reading them as a form of realism would be misguided. They are subjective representations, products of Motswai's invention, imagination and selection. They have become a sustained body of work spanning more than two decades. Motswai believes that if he shows happiness, "the world too will become happy" (Interview with Motswai, 2010). Narratives of dreams and love are allowed to surface, laying bare a society emerging with hope and expectation. On the surface Motswai's renderings may seem naive and cheerfully optimistic, but they also provide a way for us to imagine a South Africa alive with possibility, not restricted to depictions, reflections and representations of pain, suffering and oppressions.

CHAPTER THREE

HUMOUR TO LIGHT UP A DARK WORLD

Humour can be seen to provide useful devices that aid certain social situations thus it is often considered to be more important in stressful situations or when members of a group are in crisis. Billig (2005:126) states that some analysts have claimed that, "joking enables commands or criticisms to be softened", in so doing "they can point to types of social interaction where the humorous down-toning of criticisms enables the interaction to proceed without rupture". Such a rhetorical device serves as a particular code of politeness, which allows for a sustainable social life.

The world has never been an ideal place full of politeness, as is suggested in Motswai's drawings and nor has it been a space where "all man's desires and dreams achieve perfect realization" (Ziv 2010:16). A quick glance at history books will reveal attempts to improve the world and make it a better place to live in. For Ziv these attempts did not always produce an ideal result as even the most beautiful theories for the advancement of justice, peace and equality have led to wars and revolutions (ibid.). South Africa and its people are no exception in desiring these human ideals; their desire is in spite of the conditions created and produced by apartheid. South African artists such as Motswai enact these ideals in their works of art.

"Humour seeks to make light of a dark world", writes Colin Richards (2007:13). It is used to cope, give hope, and live more fully. Humour, laughter and the smile offer a light (not necessarily less serious) way of looking at the world, and are considered important for the "revitalisation, transformation, and celebration of life" Roukes

(2003:4). As such, humour is considered to be a positive mechanism that enables those who have been subjugated and subordinated to look for the rainbow after the storm.

This dark world refers to the remnants and current states of worlds, nations and people that have been exploited, abused and misused. For Richards, the hurt that is inflicted is most often understood "as a consequence of colonialism and its after-effects in Africa" (2007:13). Colonialism, the forcible takeover of land and economy, not only managed to steal the wealth and riches of the colonised, but also affected their psychological well-being as Franz Fanon argues in *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968). In these books, Fanon articulates not only conditions and experiences but also responses of human subjects struggling against being degraded, despised, exploited and in short, dehumanised by the violent systematic rule of the coloniser. Such a disruption of humanness puts to question the very right to the existence of millions of people, specifically black Africans. Furthermore, Fanon emphasises the dehumanising aspect of colonialism, as he focuses on the psyche and subjectivity of colonised people, as well as of their colonisers. An inferiority complex indoctrinates the colonised mind. For Fanon, hurt in the form of psychic trauma results when the colonised subject realises that he will never attain the whiteness he has been taught to desire, or shed the blackness he has learnt to devalue. As Fanon points out, this reduction resulted not only in physical hurt through slavery, labour and war, but also through a psychological stripping of the self. The dark world that Richards refers to is an incomprehensible space where wars, xenophobic attacks, racism, hate, rape and murder, brew and manifest**.**

South Africa's history reveals a dark world filled with trauma and hurt. Apartheid, the systematic strategy to racially define, classify and exploit humans has hurt and traumatised many black South Africans who lived under apartheid rule. Stripped of human rights, dignity and respect, black South Africans were marginalised and repressed economically, psychologically and politically. The human tragedy incurred during apartheid includes the Sharpville Massacre of 1963 and the Soweto student uprising of 1976. To hurt is to suffer as well as endure pain and loss. Artists' responses to the condition of hurt as a result of colonialism and apartheid took spectacular forms, displaying human suffering and angst.

It is this other side, the lightness of the black experience that Motswai's work enables us to fathom: to consider the meaning and value of the laugh and smile on black peoples' faces. Such is the important workings of humour in artistic representations and cultural productions, where humour not simply conceals hurt and pain but rather plays it down in the sense that Mikhail Bakhtin considers humour for its subversive nature. In discussing carnivals and festivals of the late medieval and early modern period, Bakhtin points out the powerful "impact of humour in popular culture"; he holds that during such carnivals and festivities, hierarchies disappeared and allowance was given to the "articulation of the idiomatic "world turned upside down"" a witty and subversive way to play with established rules, chain of commands and traditions (Bakhtin quoted in Hart 2007:4). The occurrence of carnivals and festivities saw the disappearance of former ranks and hierarchies since participants were regarded as equal and free. As such, contact between different social classes and positions were permitted. This ritual stressed the "all-human, all-joyous characteristics of life and opened the way for playful and undefined relationships" (Hart 2007:4).

Unlike Bakhtin, Ulrike Erichsen (2005:30) turns her focus away from the subversive aspect of humour and rather stresses the "'productive potential' of humour and laughter". In this regard humour can be used as a means to defuse cultural conflicts through limiting the context for such conflict. Where cultural conflicts stem from differences in cultural values or are related to superiority or inferiority problems, humour can have a social regulatory function. Here humour provides an outlet for criticism without any aggravation and repercussions.

In post-colonial contexts, humour is often used to camouflage emotions and cover aggression, or in Erichsen's (2005:31) words to mask "the pain of being an outsider". Langston Hughes emphasises this particular aspect of humour when he writes, "Humor is laughing at what you haven't got when you ought to have it…Humor is that what you wish in your secret heart were not funny, but it is, and you must laugh" (Hughes quoted in Erichsen 2005:31). In *Black Skin, White Mask,* Frantz Fanon writes of the smile as a strategy to cope and mask his pain of being an outsider. Fanon (1967:111-112) shares his forced 'amusement' of being an outsider, when he writes:

> "Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.
> "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me.
> "Look, a Negro!" The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.
> "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.

In *Contemporary Negro Humour and Social Satir*e Nancy Levi Arnez and Clara B. Anthony reflect on the African American's strategic use of humour to counteract

many years of suffering, humiliation, victimisation and hurt in America. Arnez and Anthony argue that even though each generation of African Americans has been born with hopes and dreams, they are also born with an ability to "laugh about the disappointment and the unfulfilled dreams and promises" (Arnez & Anthony 1968:339). Writing with particular regard to African Americans, Arnez and Anthony write that the smile and grin were effective tools used by many slaves, who were defenceless, as a means to survive pain, humiliation and suffering. As such, the grin or smile often masked bitterness, anger and hurt. The slaves were able to fool their masters into believing that they were happy, content, laughing, singing buffoons – "black faced jesters" (Arnez & Anthony 1968:339). Humour for African Americans was first used as a "psychological leverage for the sake of their sanity and as a weapon for survival against the harsh treatment from their oppressors" (Arnez & Anthony 1968:341).

This type of humour consists of laughing at oneself, and in so doing, finding oneself ridiculous. Such humour is not depressing, but on the contrary gives us a sense of emancipation, consolation and elevation. Critchley explains this type of humour using psychoanalytic theory. There is a distinction between laughing at the self and laughing at the other. Freud inherits the Hobbesian theory of the superiority of humour and laughter. The basis of the superiority theory consists of laughing at another's misfortune, laughing at the other. In other words, you treat the other as a child and yourself as an adult (Critchley 2002:95). When adopting a humorous approach to yourself it is the other way around: you treat yourself as a child from an adult perspective. As such, you look at your "childlike, diminutive ego from the standpoint of the big grown up super ego" (Critchley 2002:95). Such a relationship

between the diminutive ego and the superego can be understood within a similar context as the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser. Laughing or smiling at one's own hurt, suffering and trauma can be argued to be a tool of deflection, and not resistance. Laughter, and the smile, enabled Fanon to cope with his situation in ways that are self-reflective rather that submissive. Like crying, laughter is a form of catharsis enabling the subject to cope and move on.

Smiling in the Eyes of Tommy Motswai

We wear the mask that grins and lies
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes-
This debt we pay to human guile:
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile

Paul Laurence Dunbar "We Wear the Mask"

Motswai makes light of a dark world by depicting people living life more imaginatively with hope. His rendition of smiling figures is one of the ways in which he does so. The smile is an important characteristic of Motswai's drawings. It is so pervasive that the critic Ivor Powell (1992:31) considers it is his 'trademark'. In fact, it is a non-verbal gesture that Motswai advances throughout his drawings and thus requires engagement.

The smile as it appears in Motswai's drawings varies: at times they are teeth-baring smiles, at other times polite tight-lipped smiles. They are gestures for communication and signal acceptance, joy and happiness. In *The Tea Party*, all attendees of the tea party wear teeth bearing smiles that convey a jovial yet relaxed atmosphere. The zoo visitors in *Zoo Animals at Pretoria* also wear smiles on their faces as they take a tour around the zoo. The smile can reflect and deflect emotional reactions. Motswai's

smiles are however indicative of the former, as they reflect moments of joy and celebration. It is through the smile that Motswai is able to reveal and share joy with others.

The smile speaks softly; it is never too loud to offend. It is silent and subdued in ways that are inviting and seductive. In Latin, the smile is considered a diminutive of laughter: one distinguishes *ridere* from *subridere*, laughter from sub-laughter, implying a "restraint and discretion in the smile" (Critchley 2002:109) that can induce silence but also break the silence making tense and awkward situations more comfortable. Angus Trumble writes that:

> the smile is more than a chemical reaction. It is a highly sophisticated concept, an expression of the emotions, a mode of communication, a beacon for desire, a ritual, an occasion of intense psychological, anthropological and social interest, the product of acute observation, cognition and interpretation. (Quoted in Klein 2007:31-32)

The smile is corporeal. Visible to outsiders, the smile can reflect joy, happiness, satisfaction, pleasure, reassurance, amusement and ridicule. Even though the smile is a corporeal expression reflective of emotions, it is also a complex gesture that cannot always be read at face value. As Trumble suggests, it requires acute observation and interpretation. The smile is also considered to be paradoxical: while it can reflect emotions, as mentioned earlier, it can also mask, deflect, evade and conceal them. In this regard the smile or grin can beguile culture and obscure supposed reality: it can be staged and forced, or even sinister.

Simon Critchley (2002:108) describes smiling as comic relief "signifying a break in our usual flow of inhibitions". He further argues that humour is not only comic relief,

the "transient corporeal affect induced by the raising and extinguishing of tension", but also "a form of liberation or elevation that expresses something essential to what Plessner calls 'the humanity of the human' " (Plessner quoted in Critchley 2002:9). In brief, our laughter and to a lesser degree smiling, serves as a mechanism of relief and destabilisation and also, as Critchley suggests, extinguishing. Humour, laughter and the smile have a destabilising effect that challenges conventions. The relief theory is best known in the version given in Sigmund Freud's book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. Herbert Spencer, and later Freud, asserted that "laughing is a release of restrained energy associated with the repression of socially taboo or forbidden thoughts or behaviour" (Klein 2007:10). According to this theory, we hide behind our socially constructed masks. Through laughing and smiling we are able to release the tension of withholding these forbidden impulses.

With the exception of the Mona Lisa, Sheri Klein argues that images of smiling and laughter are rare in the field of visual arts. The smile became more visible through photographs, a twentieth century phenomenon that captured gestures instantaneously. With the invention of the Polaroid camera in the mid-1960s, and recently the digital camera, there has been an increase in the capturing of more smiles than ever before in history (Klein 2007:32). But the history of the smile in the visual arts extends further back and can be traced back to Egyptian, Greek and Buddhist sculpture that depict an archaic mysterious smile: a closed mouth with a slightly upward curve. Other notable smiling images in western historical painting include William Hogarth's *Miss Mary Edwards* (1742) and Jacques-Louis David's *Comtesse Daru* (1810). One of the most notable smiles in portraiture, that has been canonised and mythologised, is Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (c 1503-1506). The smile of the Mona Lisa has been one of the

more significant smiles to be recognised within the field of visual arts. This figure has become the object of appropriation by artists like Marcel Duchamp in the work *L.H.O.O.Q* (1919) whose parodied image comments on and challenges the western canon. The smile can also be found in the work of western artists, for example the drawings of cafe scenes by George Grosz, and street scenes by American artists Jacob Lawrence and Faith Ringgold depicting smiling, grinning and laughing people engaged in leisure activities (Klein 2007:35-36).

A glance at American culture dating from as early as the late nineteenth century will also reveal representations of the smile. Images of the smiling negro, including Old Uncle Tom, Uncle Remus, Mammie and Samba, were circulated and maintained via advertising cards, records and children's books. The smiling negro was fashioned as the comic fool. Sambo in particular was considered to be the national jester of America and is stereotypically presumed to be an overgrown child at heart whose abilities are centred on working and entertaining, producing and laughing, and servicing and grinning (Boskin 1988:13). These stereotyped images can be genealogically traced to the first minstrel show in the nineteenth century which featured comic negroes as focus characters. The show became popular in the 1840s, at the same time when serious political questions about slavery began to arise. Again in the 1880s and the 1890s when race relations were at their worst, the comic black figure resurfaced.

If humour is one way of relieving social tension, then turning black people into comics was one way of coping with an extreme situation. It can be argued that one of the ways that the American public attempted to cope with the socio-political upheaval

was to turn a fearsome problem into a funny one. The comic negro was rendered grotesque and burlesque by disproportionate lips and excessive grinning that were often accompanied by ostentatious hairdos. The grin dominated the negro's face and became an icon for the 'simple souls' of "happy darkies" (Petesch 1991:91).

The phenomena of the smile is not however exclusive to America. The smile in South African culture can be traced back to the Coon or Minstrel Festival which was inspired by the blackface minstrelsy in America. These exaggerated smiles reflect a subversive undertaking, whereby the working class community in Cape Town mock the established order through garish outfits, song and dance. This type of mockery is subversive while offering a form of relief to its mockers.

Smiles can also be found on the iconic faces of political leaders such as former President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Mandela's and Tutu's smile and gestures, always associated with politics of liberation and democracy, are indicative of optimism in which lies forgiveness, reconciliation and unity in post-1994 South Africa. Here the smile becomes a symbol of peace and hope, and as a supporter of these South African democratic ideals, Motswai draws them abundantly.

CONCLUSION

Humour is ambivalent in that it can simultaneously make light of a situation and be playful, while also offering critical viewpoints and judgements. It multi-faceted and can be thought about in different ways – we can be delighted or outraged by the humorous treatment of different ideas. As I have shown in this study, there are many ways to read and understand Motswai's drawings within the scope of humour, from light hearted and anecdotal to satirical.

In this study I undertook to offer a deeper reading into Motswai's drawings and his approach to humour than that of previous writers and journalists. Humour theorists such as Henri Bergson, Michael Billig and Avner Ziv have informed my research and provided different sociological ways in which to consider Motswai's drawings as comic and humorous. Highly significant to reading Motswai's drawings is the implication of his hearing disability, which resonates through his visually vivid depictions of the world around him.

Although the study of humour in art history is increasing, much work is still needed, especially in South Africa and Africa at large. Using this study I aimed to contribute to research on humour through revisiting the artwork of an artist who at one stage was acclaimed by the South African art world. My study is important to South African art history as it provides a critical reading of Motswai's work, a reading, which has up until now, not been addressed. It is also important to recognise artists like Motswai, who are on the periphery of contemporary art practices, and whose visibility, especially within the discourse of South African art history, is wanting. The case of

Motswai is peculiar and his career as one of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award is anomalous. Shortly after having won the accolade, Motswai disappeared from the contemporary art scene of South Africa. There are arguably many reasons for this, two of them being the art market and the social and political climate of the time.

Considering that much of Motswai's artistic practice operates within the margins of South African art discourse, very little is seen of and written on his work, beside those images that are reproduced in exhibition catalogues and art books. Motswai's limited inclusion into South African art history is not however without merit. His light and vivid encapsulations of South Africa were important for a country undergoing social and political transitions, and offered a different message to the people of South Africa and those abroad.

Motswai's drawings illuminate the good, the polite and the niceties of the people and world around him. His undertaking, naïve as some might interpret it, offers an alternate way of looking at what we are confronted with in our everyday human relations and social practices. This trait can neither be underestimated nor undermined in a context in which many artists are concerned with the darker and heavier aspects of life in South Africa. Motswai's work provides visual representations that remind us of how important humour is in our contemporary experiences. For humour allows us to not only enter into an atmosphere of polite social interaction but also offers us ways in which to break down prejudices and attitudes. It is these possibilities that Motswai captures in his drawings. Thus his work deserves scholarly attention which, even though at an introductory level, I have undertaken in this research report.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1992. *Tommy Motswai*. Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery.

1996. Tomorrow is Now. *House and Leisure*. July. p. 60.

1994. *New Nation*, May, p.11.

Arnez, N.L. and Anthony, C.B. 1968. Contemporary Negro Humor as Social Satire. *Phylon* [online], 29 (4), 339-346.
Available from:
http://www.jstor.org/stable/274014
[accessed 4 January 2010].

Arnold, M. 1996. Tommy Motswai. In A. Magnin and J. Soulillou (eds.) *Contemporary Art of Africa.* London: Thames & Hudson.

Bergson, H. 1911. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. London: Macmillan and Co.

Bhabha, H. 2004. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

Billig, M. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule*. London: SAGE Publications.

Boskin, J. S. 1988. *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bowen, B.C. 2004. *Humour and Humanism in the Renaissance*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Britten, S. 1998. *Conflicting Humours: race, gender and national identity in Madam and Eve*. Johannesburg:University of the Witwatersrand. MA Thesis.

Critchley, S. 2002. *On Humour*. London: Routledge.

Critchley, S. 2008. Laughing at Foreigners: A Peculiar Defence of Ethnic Humour. In *Laughing in a Foreign Language.* London: Hayward Publishing.

De Jager, E.J. 1992. *Images of Man: Contemporary South African Black Art and Artists*. Fort Hare: Fort Hare University Press in association with the Fort Hare Foundation.

Enwezor, O. and Okeke, C. (eds.) 2009. *Contemporary African Art since 1980*. New York:Damiani.

Erichsen, U. 2005. Smiling in the face of adversity. In S. Reichl and M. Stein (eds.) *Cheeky Fictions. Laughter and the Postcolonial*. New York: Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft. pp. 27-41.

Fanon, F. 1967. *Black Skin, White Masks* (trans. by Charles Lam Markmann).New York: Grove Press.

Fanon, F. 1968. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

Friedman, H. 1988. Vita shows hot stuff of '88. *The Star*. np.

Godby, M. 1990. *Hogarth in Johannesburg*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Handler, R. 2009. Erving Goffman and the Gestural Dynamics of Modern Selfhood. In M. Braddick (ed.) *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Hart, M. 2007. Humour and Social Protest: An Introduction. *International Review of Social History* [online], 52 (15), 1-20.
Available from:
home.medewerker.uva.nl/...thart/.../Introduction%20humor%20and%20social%20protest.pdf
[accessed 26 July 2009].

Heller, S. and Shikes, R.E. (eds.)1984. *The Art of Satire*. USA: Pratt Graphics Center & Horizon Press.

Higgie, J. 2007. *The Artist's Joke*. London: MIT Press.

Hirst, D. 1979. *Comedy of Manners*. London: New York Methuen.

Hutcheon, L. 1985. A *Theory of Parody: the teachings of twentieth-century art forms*. New York: Methuen

Jewsiewicki, B. 1994. Painting in Zaire: From the Invention of the West to the Representation of Social Self . In S. Vogel. (ed.) *Africa Explores.* Munich: Prestel, pp. 130- 151.

Kasfir, S. 1999. *Contemporary African Art*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Kataoka, M. 2008. Laughing in a Foreign Language. In *Laughing in a Foreign Language* London: Hayward Publishing.

Kellner, C. 1997. Cultural Production in Post-Apartheid South Africa. In O.Enwezor (ed.) *TradeRoutes: History and Geography 2nd Johannesburg Biennale*. Netherlands: Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development.

Klein, S. 2007. *Art and Laughter*. London: I B Taurus.

Levin, D. 1995. Deaf artist to exhibit his works in Canada. *Sunday Times Metro*. May 7, p. 3.

Lewis, P. 2006. *Cracking Up: American Humour in a Time of Conflict*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Louw, D. R. 1999. Fanning the creative fire. *Mail and Guardian*. July 2-8, p. 4.

Makhaya, E. 1992. Getting to know shy award winner. *Sowetan*, 4 March. np.

Maurice, E. 2009. Standard Bank Young Artist winners. In E. Maurice (ed.) *Standard Bank Young Artists: 25*. Johannesburg: Standard Bank of South Africa Limited. pp. 54-55.

Meletse, J. and Motswai, T. 2006. Are your rights respected? [online]. Johannesburg: GALA.
Available from:
http://www.irinnews.org/pdf/pn/GALA-AreYourRightsRespected.
pdf
[accessed 4 March 2010].

Minnaar, M. 2005. Visual studies from a silent world. *Cape Times.* 23 June, p.11.

Mitchell, A. G.2009. *Greek Vase Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Mokwele, L. 1999. Deaf Artist Uses His Art To Communicate. *BONA*, January, p.32.

Møller,V. , Dickow, H. and Harris, M. 1999. South Africa's "Rainbow People", National Pride and Happiness. *Social Indicators Research* [online], 47 (3), 245-280.
Available from:
http://www.jstor.org/stable/27522393
[accessed 5 January 2010].

Ndebele, N. 2006. *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*. Kwazulu- Natal: University Of Kwazulu Natal Press.

Ngcobo, G. 2006. Tommy Motswai. In H. Proud (ed.) *Revisions: Expanding the Narrative of South African Art*. Pretoria: UNISA Press.

Petesch, D. A. 1991. *A Spy in the Enemy's Country: The Emergence of Modern Black Literature.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Pinney, C. 2003. Four Types of Visual Culture. In C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands and P. Spyer (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture*. London: Sage Publications.

Powell, C. and Paton, G.E.C. (eds.) 1988. *Humour in Society: Resistance and Control*. London: Macmillan Press Limited.

Powell, I. 1992. Wallpaper for the new South Africa. *Vrye Weekblad.* 7-13 August, p. 31.

Powell, I. 1993a. The Art of Being Black. *Work in Progress,* February Issue 87, 33- 35.

Powell, I. 1993b. The Way of the White Hand. *Work in Progress,* April/May Issue 88, 33- 35.

Powell, I. 1995. Us blacks… In R. Burnett (ed.) *Persons and Pictures: the modernist eye in Africa*. Johannesburg: Newtown Galleries. pp. 12-24.

Rayner, L. 2010. *A Monkey's Wedding: Carnival Impulses in the Work of Emerging South African Artists: Michael MacGarry, Nandipha Mntambo, Themba Shibase, Nina Barnett and Robyn Nesbitt*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand. MA Thesis.

Richards, C. 2007. Humour and Hurt, *Art South Africa*, 5 (4), 13.

Richards, C. 2008. Aftermath: Value and Violence in Contemporary South African Art. In T. Smith, O. Enwezor and N. Condee (eds.) *Antinomies of Art and Culture.* Durham and London: Duke University Press. pp. 250-289.

Richter, V. 2005. Laughter and Aggression: Desire and derision in a postcolonial context. In S. Reichl and M.Stein (eds.) *Cheeky Fictions. Laughter and the Postcolonial*. New York: Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft.pp. 61-86.

Robarts, F. 2007. Cheri Samba- Congo's Hogarth. *Art Review*. June 2007, Issue 12, pp. 118-121.

Roukes, N. 1997. *Humor in Art: A Celebration of Visual Wit*. Massachusetts: Davis Publications.

Roukes, N. 2003. *Artful Jesters*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.

Rowson, M. 2007. *Martin Rowson on William Hogarth. Tate ETC* [online]. Issue 9 / Spring 2007.
Available from:
http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue9/hogarth.htm.
[accessed: 1 June 2011].

Sachs, A. 1991. Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines. *TDR (1988-)* [online], 35 (1), 187-193.
Available from:
http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146119
[accessed 19 January 2010].

Sack, S. (ed.) 1988. *The Neglected Tradition: Towards a New History of South African Art (1930-1988)*. Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery.

Speier, H. 1998. Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power. *The American Journal of Sociology* [online], 103 (5), 1352-1401.
Available from:
http://www.jstor.org/stable/2782843
[accessed 8 June 2009].

Stacey, L. 1998.Tommy Motswai: Deaf artist uses his extraordinary talent to teach deaf students. *PACE*, May, pp. 58-60.

Storr, R. 2004. Cheri Samba, Painter of Modern Life in A. Magnin (ed.) *J'Aime Cheri Samba*. Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'artcontemporain. pp. 52- 63.

van Niekerk, R.1992. *Tommy Motswai.* Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery.

van Robbroeck, L. 2006. Writing White on Black: Modernism as Discursive Paradigm in South African Writing on Modern Black Art. [online] Unpublished dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch.
Available from:
https://scholar.sun.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10019.1/1332/Van%20Robbroeck,%20%20L.pdf?sequence=1
[accessed 7 August 2010].

van Tonder, A. M. 2007. *On the Serious Social Implications of Humourous Art*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. MA Thesis.

Vogel, S. 1994. *Africa Explores*. New York: The Center for African Art; Munich: Prestel.

Williamson, S. 2009a. *South African Art Now.* New York: Collins Design.

Williamson, S. 2009b. Sue Williamson's Sasol Wax Award 2009 Interview. *Brett Murray* [online].
Available from
http://www.brettmurray.co.za/essays-and-texts/sue-williamsons-sasol-wax-award-2009-interview/
[accessed 30 May 2011].

Yablonsky, L. 2004. What's So Funny About Contemporary Art? *ARTnews* [online].
Available from:
http://www.artnews.com/2004/09/01/whats-so-funny-about-contemporary-art/
[accessed 13 August 2010].

Younge, G. 1988. *Art of the South African Townships*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Ziv, A. 2010. The Social Function of Humour in Interpersonal Relationships. *Society* [online], 47 (1), 11-18.
Available from:
http://www.springerlink.com/content/968013263475456j/fulltext.pdf
[accessed 17 June 2010].

SELECTED IMAGES



Figure 1
Honoré Daumier, *Ouvrier et Bourgeois* (title attributed by Loys Delteil), unpublished at the time, 1848, lithograph, 26.6 x 21.3 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 2
Cheri Samba, *Le sida ne sera guérissable que dans 10 au 20 ans*, 1997, acrylic, glitter on canvas, sequins and glued mixed medium, 130 X 194 cm. Image reproduced in Magnin, A. (ed) (2004). *J'Aime Cheri Samba.* Paris: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain.p. 58. Pigozzi Collection.

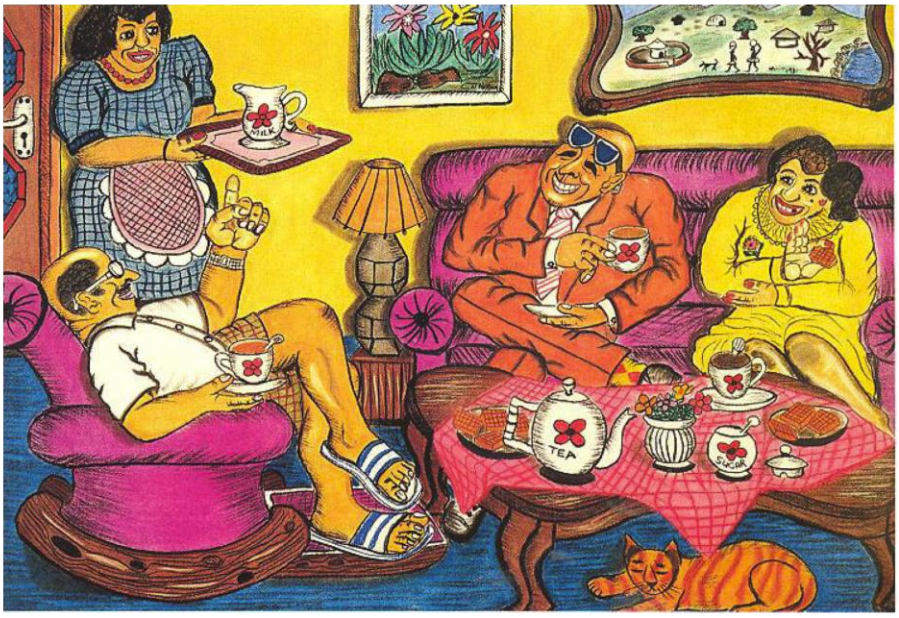

Figure 3
Tommy Motswai, *The Tea Party*, 1987, pastel on paper, 66.5 x 103.5 cm. Image reproduced in Younge, G. (1988). *Art of the South African Townships.* London: Thames and Hudson, p. 51.



Figure 4
Tommy Motswai, *The Chessman, Johannesburg*, 1988, pastel on paper, 65 x 105.1 cm. Image reproduced in Philippa Dissel (ed) 2001. *ZEBRA Register of South African Artists and Galleries*. Sandton, p.70.

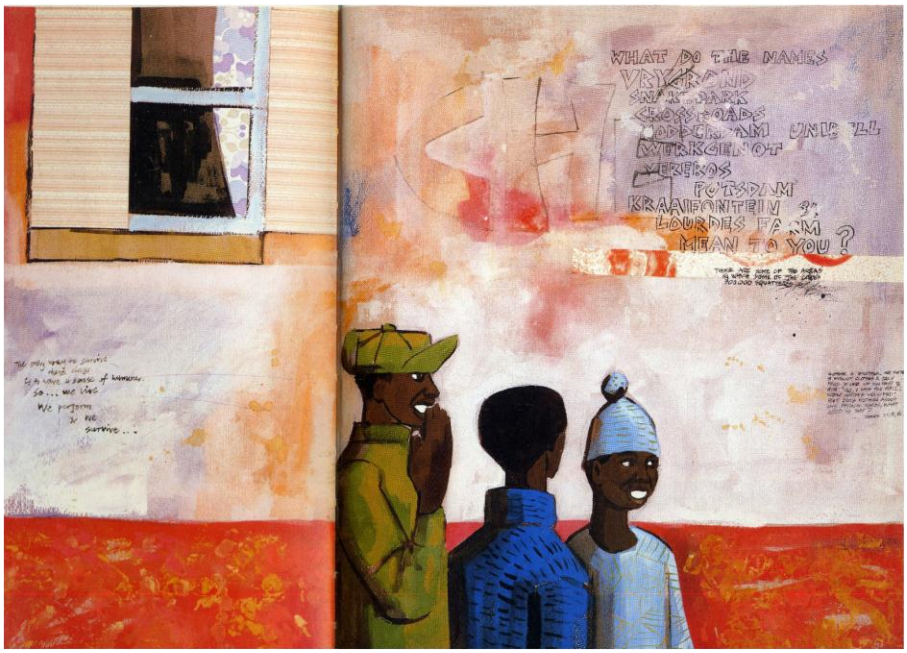

Figure 5
Peter Clarke, *The Only Way to Survive*, 1983, acrylic and ink on board. Image reproduced in Younge, G. (1988). *Art of the South African Townships*. London: Thames and Hudson, pp.78-79



Figure 6
Tommy Motswai, *Dancing competition*, 1987, pastel on paper, 64 x 94.5 cm. Image courtesy of Wits Art Museum.

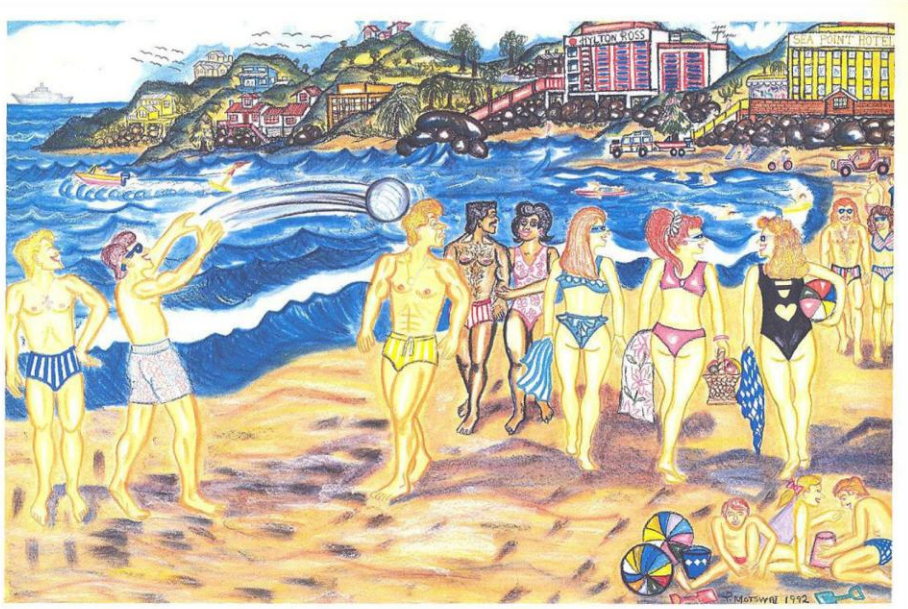

Figure 7
Tommy Motswai, *Faces at New Year*, 1992, pastel on paper, 73 x 110 cm. Image reproduced in (1992). *Tommy Motswai*, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, p. 2.

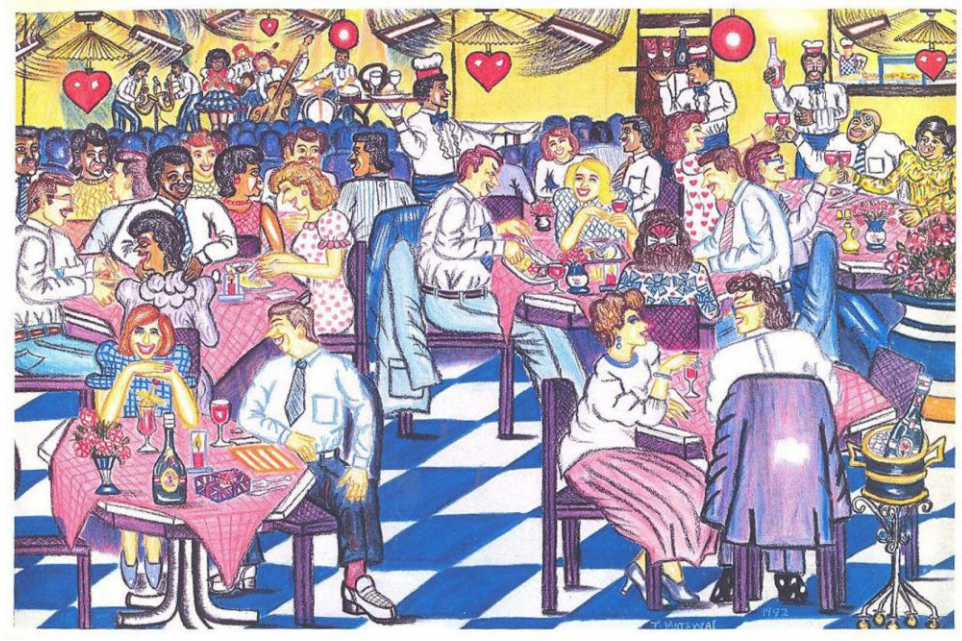

Figure 8
Tommy Motswai, *Valentine's Day*, 1992, pastel on paper, 73 x 110 cm. Image reproduced in (1992). Tommy Motswai, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, p. 5.

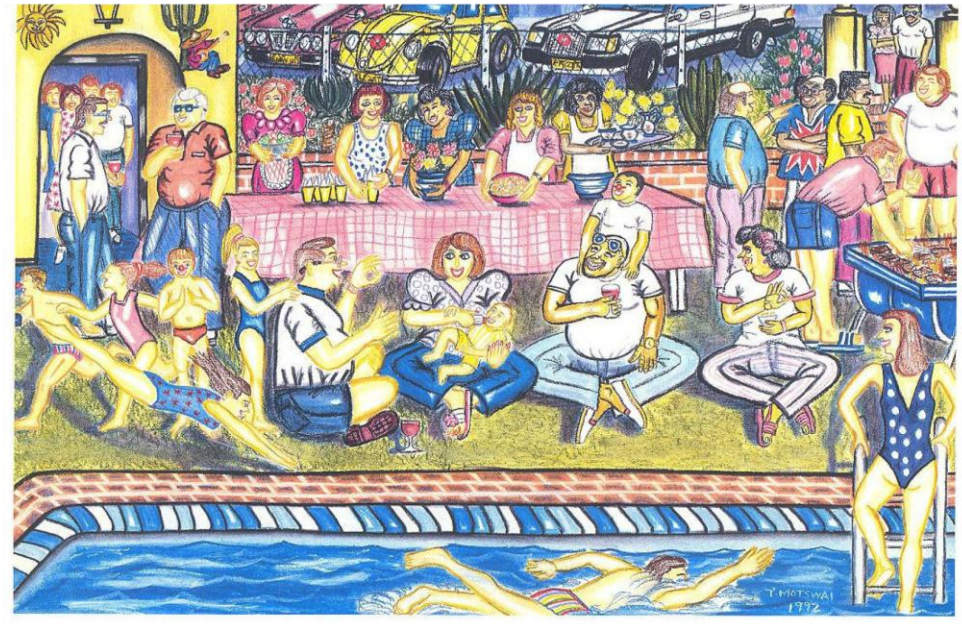

Figure 9
Tommy Motswai, *Red Noses's Day Saturday Party*, 1992, pastel on paper, 73 x 110 cm. Image reproduced in (1992). *Tommy Motswai*, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, p. 6.



Figure 10
Tommy Motswai, *On the 8th to 9th December 1990 Married Mr T and Mrs Evelyn Motswai, 1992*, pastel on paper, 145 x 215 cm. Image reproduced in (1992). *Tommy Motswai*, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, cover image.



Figure 11
Tommy Motswai, *Zoo Animals at Pretoria*, 1992, pastel on paper, 71.5 x 107 cm. Image courtesy of Wits Art Museum.