

MASTER OF ARTS IN FINE ARTS

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Encounters With the Controversial Teaching Philosophy of the Johannesburg Art Foundation in the Development of South African Art During 1982 - 1992

Student number 739110

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DECLARATION

I Elizabeth Castle hereby declare that all the research is my own and to my knowledge has not been done before in this format. I also declare that all the interviews with artists and Council Members of the Johannesburg Art Foundation have been conducted by me. The work on the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing* had written consent from the artists and owners. Finally the display of original archive material and the inserts in the paper have written consent from the custodian of the archive.

Signed by Candidate Elizabeth Castle

Signed by Supervisor David Andrew.....

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Abstract

The Johannesburg Art Foundation (JAF), founded in 1982 by Bill Ainslie, maintained a teaching philosophy which opposed any form of discrimination and stressed that art education should be a possibility for everyone. There was no prescribed curriculum and the programme was not dependent on an external educational authority. I argue that particularly in the decade 1982-1992, the South African apartheid government's educational policy towards cultural activities was prescriptive, stifling and potentially paralysing for many artists. Nevertheless, the teaching at the JAF sustained a flexibility and tolerance of ideas combined with an emancipatory ambition that promoted exchange. The philosophy was infused with a social justice and a political activism agenda squarely in opposition to the separatist apartheid education laws.

This study contextualizes the impact and efficacy of the teaching approach at the JAF in terms of its intellectual, social and political perspectives during the years 1982-1992. This teaching approach prompted acerbic encounters within the competing systems of formal and informal institutions. It is this controversial anomaly signifying elements of collision in the pursuit of developing modernism that are investigated to some extent.

Personal involvement as an artist and teacher, during the period 1982-1992, allowed my contribution and participation in the development of the teaching philosophy. The paucity of available literature on the subject has stimulated a comprehensive preliminary investigation of the way in which the JAF cultivated alternative educational policies.

The individual methodologies and personal experiences extracted from interviews with artists, Council Members and members of staff are documented in order to provide a detailed characterisation of the values of the JAF. In addition, original documentation representative of the genealogy of the JAF forms part of the curatorial practice for the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing* at the Bag Factory Gallery.

The JAF declined from 1992 and finally ceased to exist in 2001.

Introduction

The JAF was an informal art centre where creative endeavour was available to everyone. The centre was wholly in opposition to the racially discriminatory education laws of the country and the teaching therefore established a contentious milieu.

The process of investigating the teaching philosophy at the JAF draws out key-points of the challenges that emerged over aesthetic representation during a time of corresponding political turbulence. My vision towards mapping the flow of the narrative required revisiting memory through oral testimony and the sourcing of fragments of archival material all of which ultimately relate to the visual argument in the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*. In this way the exhibition revisits the past and supports this mutability of memory revealing individual perceptions that can be contradictory, inconsistent and nostalgic. Accordingly, while memory is elemental to the resource of oral history it poses both opportunities and dilemmas for the veracity of the interpretation. To quote historian Ronald Grele, on the importance of oral history, he maintains that, "Oral history holds great promise for the increase of our knowledge of the past and how the past lives on in the present" (Preface to the second edition *Envelopes of Sound*, xvi 1991). In this respect the oral history mined and researched, during the past years 2012-2014, increases the knowledge and history of the JAF by accessing both the past and the present. The conflicting elements are supported in the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*, where the visual narrative underpins the mutability.

During the years 1982-1992 the incapacitating apartheid system compromised cultural expression. Paradoxically the research shows how these difficult conditions made it possible for the JAF to develop amid the traumatic and destructive events of the years leading up to the state of emergency, State of Emergency (SOE) in 1960 and in the 1980's, and democratic transition.

My teaching involvement at the JAF began after graduating from the University of South Africa (UNISA) with a BAFA degree under Professor Alan Crump. During the years 1982 -1992 I had the privilege to teach with many of the protagonists in this study. Working with people from different circumstances, consistently supplemented by discussion groups and in-house seminars, broadened our mutual experiential teaching capacity. Diverse approaches were, however, centred on the premise that there was no specific or confining curriculum and the philosophy focussed on flexibility and experimentation in a non-racial space diametrically opposed to the prevailing apartheid education laws. Additionally, personal access to original archival documentation concerning the inception of the JAF contextualises the need and origin for its formation in the cultural sector during the years 1982-1992.

The intention is to initiate a critical awareness of the political and cultural manifestations that took place at the JAF. Mongane Wally Serote, now an honorary Professor at UNISA, who was born in Sophiatown and attended school in Alexandra was a political activist and close friend of Ainslie. He was exiled for his political involvement. When Serote returned from exile he was elected to the JAF Council.

In conversation, he affirmed that the importance of the space occupied by the JAF was that it managed to persevere amid extreme circumstances and that its philosophy was predicated on an “expression of the human spirit no matter what happened around it” (Serote 2013, pers. comm. 3 April).

Embracing this view Gardiner gives his considered opinion:

...[O]ur country was in exile from the greater world. Wally [Serote] and Bill [Ainslie] kept in touch across the “frontiers” and made changes to many lives. We, as a country were offered a chance to join in again. Because of people like them, changes started before 1994. They were both at the heart of working at keeping the humanness in place. (Gardiner 2013 pers. comm. 3 March. Amended 20 October)

Serote affirmed the need for a place for a humane and essentially democratic learning environment. He said,

We need to make space for people who are creative. At the present moment people were thinking of the struggle. The struggle had blood in it, has violence, has guns, has jail, has exile, that’s not all there is, there is something underneath the unbreakable spirit of human beings. (Serote 2013)

The emphasis of the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing* is on Bag Factory Studios affiliated artists and those artists who continue to work in the studios. By challenging the apartheid racist laws many of these artists were ground breaking teachers at the JAF. Accordingly, the exhibition of selected work, recorded interviews and historical documentation reflects the important connection with the JAF and the endeavours of Bill Ainslie, David Koloane and Robert Loder, who were instrumental in acquiring the Bag Factory premises for artist’s studios and gallery space. The Bag Factory Gallery is, therefore, the preferred space for the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*. The exhibition serves to make a definitive visual statement about the historical link between the JAF and the Bag Factory.

The defiant teaching philosophy at the JAF sustained an unequivocal ethos, during the years 1982-1992 and its closure was in the physical sense only. Its influence endures through many of the artists identified in this paper who have continued to pursue the values that emanated from that shared environment. Contextualizing the JAF as a centre of resistance at the time, therefore, is central to the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*. Importantly the exhibition revisits the misconceptions and criticisms directed towards the ethos and the intentions of the JAF. The archival material in the form of original correspondence and newspaper articles serves to landmark this argument. Furthermore, the exhibition indicates the narrative flow of the different trajectories of the artists who persevered despite of the controversies generated by certain detractors and the political situation.

Chapter 1: Contextualising the JAF within a dislocated society

In South Africa the origin of the apartheid government's education system—according to Horrell's publication, *A Decade of Bantu Education* (1964)—was the Eiselen Commission Report of 1951, *The Report of the Commission on Native Education* (1951), which was set up to create an "appropriate" curriculum for black students with a differentiated syllabus that seldom included the arts.

According to Serote this situation left behind “a seemingly obliterated history, a political void and cultural vacuum” (Serote 2013). It was into the void or the interstices of this disillusioned society that the JAF was established in 1982 by Ainslie.

After 1953 the missionary schools that had offered a more liberal education system were either closed down or taken over by state authorities. The Department of Bantu Education Act no 47 established in 1953 was predicated on the ideology that blacks should remain separate and serve the people in their own communities. From the 1960s, the limitation of possibilities extended to mainstream tertiary institutions where black students were progressively barred from study opportunities.

The Separate Universities Act, mooted in 1957, in a climate of general disillusionment prompted Ainslie, while editor of the NUX student newspaper at the University of Pietermaritzburg, to argue:

There is a tradition of freedom entrenched in the ideal of the University. Any curb on this freedom will lead to a degeneration of the scholarship that is fostered within the University and hinder it from serving its true purpose. (Editorial, p. 3. 1957)

Ainslie's perception was that the discriminatory requirements for entry into universities corrupted the value of learning in those institutions. Subsequently his of teaching in schools under the separate education system exacerbated his disillusionment leading him to leave South Africa for some years. On his return this he initiated a concept to establish an alternative space for an inclusive art centre where the teaching could be receptive and unpredictable, countermending any categorisation. The unpredictable, surprise element became a fundamental teaching constituent at the JAF. The tradition of freedom was pursued through the teaching philosophy of attempting to guide people into challenging areas where exploration was crucial to development.

Ainslie's vision was to create a space in which a teaching programme with unmitigated resistance to the imposed structures could invite people to become part of a community of artists within a workshop environment. People of all cultures and race groups could develop creatively together, outside of regulatory practices. This was an audacious and at times a dangerous position to take. The consequences of certain risks taken were characterised both by declamatory invectives from some academics and constant surveillance by State authorities who believed the teaching of art at the JAF was a front for something more politically sinister.

Serote, an activist and close friend of Ainslie, who had been interrogated and detained by the secret police, expresses this opinion:

...[W]e had the Immorality Act, we had the Terrorism Act Section 6 and also they [the government] believed that we [JAF] were terrorists. They believed that the whole thing about art was a smoke screen. And no matter that I tried to tell them that I was very educated by being there and experiencing art and understanding that human beings no matter their colour are the same and of course that was anathema to their ears, and I believe that at one time they were going to detain Bill [Ainslie] because they expressed utter hatred for Bill teaching us in that type of space. (Serote 2013)

Nevertheless, art classes continued and increased notwithstanding the occasional visit from the security police. There was an underlying element of risk for everyone that created an ethos that was both stimulating and unusual for most of the white students. Michael Gardiner, cultural historian, humanist, activist, author and a close friend of Ainslie became a member of the JAF Council for the period 1982-1992. In conversation, he stated, "The thing is there was no hiding, there was no furtiveness, and there was no attempt to be secretive, the gates were always open" (Gardiner, 2013 pers. comm. 20 October). This openness, while confusing to the authorities, was the crucial element that enabled the classes to continue unhindered and the space to flourish. It was in this seemingly calm exterior that a strongly alternative political element developed and was encouraged at the JAF.

Serote submits his perception of the crucial position occupied by the JAF:

It was a space of the arts, but also because we were living in a country which was not free, but it [JAF] was a space for freedom, where freedom was most cherished because it did not exist. (Serote 2013)

At *The State of Art in South Africa* Conference held in 1979 at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Ainslie delivered a paper outlining his ideals for the space occupied by his art school. Three years later after much negotiation with authorities it became the JAF. Ainslie, in his paper *An Artist's Workshop—"Flash in the pan or a stone that the builders rejected?"* stated that the art school functioned, "... between the poles of an increasingly polarised society" (1979, p. 80). It was in the space in between those poles that the JAF developed.

In conversation with Dumisani Mabaso, artist and teacher at the JAF, he claimed, "In describing the Art Foundation it was like a country within a country, that whole building was a country away from South Africa. We were in a different environment" (Mabaso 2013, pers. comm. 12 February). It was a liminal institution operating in a space that existed between one state of educational alienation and another of inclusivity of learning. Ainslie sought to consolidate a teaching principle rooted in non-conformity that straddled the liminal space that existed within South Africa's dislocated society. The notion of liminality is examined in more detail in chapter 3.

In the 1960s the repressive actions of the apartheid government had led to the banning of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress (ANC) movements and the imprisonment of their leaders. The brutality of that time continued into the 1980s, people were interrogated and detained without trial, police attacks killed hundreds in the townships and many fled into exile. During these years the predominantly white Liberal Party, inaugurated in 1953 with a franchise policy of “one man, one vote” in a democratic non-racial South Africa, was finally dissolved in 1968 when a law was passed prohibiting mixed race membership in all political parties. The country had degenerated into a position where black people had no voice and nor did the liberal whites. Gardiner states, So we [people such as Ainslie and himself] never had a political home, the

ANC didn't exist, the Communist Party didn't exist and the Liberal Party had gone. My point is that because of the absence of these political structures, the arts and the churches came to carry the burden of articulating people's concerns. (Gardiner 2013)

Paradoxically, the JAF was able, in part, to reconcile the turbulence generated by apartheid with creative activities that developed directly in opposition to the separatist education laws. How the inclusive teaching philosophy, based on non-conformity, functioned in that traumatised society is unravelled during the interviews with the artists referenced throughout this research and will further indicate the way in which the JAF emerged as a safe place where artists, political activists, poets, and writers could make contact through debate, discussion, and visual expression. Neville Dubow in his paper *Art and the Politics of Power*, presented at the UCT Conference in 1979, points out that,

Any society that deems it necessary to punish its artists for non-conformity confers on them, in effect, a kind of honour. In doing so, it acknowledges that art has the power to subvert, to undermine, to challenge the dominant power structure. In a sense it is saying to the artists: you are too important to be allowed to say what you want. (Dubow 1979, p. 11)

Contextualising the JAF within this setting as an institution with “the power to subvert” is to trace how the teaching philosophy constituted a body of ideas that were different and uncompromising with a sound understanding of the systematic constraints of the time. This controversial position initiated contradictions associated with the informal teaching approach and necessitates examination into both the positive aspects and the negative perceptions surrounding the JAF.

Site specific paradox

The JAF property situated in Saxonwold, a privileged northern suburb of Johannesburg, was dependent on white, paying students, which made it possible to allow the centre to operate and address the needs of a far wider group of people coming from the black townships. There is no doubt, however, that the beliefs and methodology provide a contradiction in terms of the space itself. One could argue that the JAF set itself up as a “grey area” situated in a white area. It presented a situation where the black student largely had to align himself within the white world. The JAF however resisted imposed demarcations and students worked in a ‘flat’ education milieu where everyone was treated as equal.

In 2014 Khwezi Gule, in his “Critical Forum” article in *Art South Africa*, writes that, “In that sense the Black subject was always becoming while the white subject remained largely inert” (Gule, p. 84). This is a valid criticism but the actual experience of conditions under apartheid shaped unnatural polemics and the JAF provided a learning environment for some. However, there was a constant struggle for legitimacy of the JAF methodology characterised by separate frames of formal and in-formal education, politics and culture.

A primary factor at the JAF was that entry required no accreditation of any kind but simply acknowledged and encouraged the creative potential in everyone. The centre offered recreational part-time art classes to adults and children and more intensive full-time classes. In order to give a fuller understanding of the diversity of the cultural activities offered at the centre, it is necessary to expand on the areas of instruction:

The part-time art programme was a more structured course offering figure drawing, water colour, and portraiture, and it had a strong perceptual and a more formal approach. These were primarily recreational classes catering to the diverse needs of students who were generating most of the income. Necessarily, the approach to the full-time students, who were principally funded by donations from outside the country, constituted a more comprehensive and experimental dimension. Taking these factors into consideration, the unconventional juxtaposition of these student groups necessitated an evolving manifestation of an alternative teaching approach with constant re-appraisal of the methodology with participation from both staff and students. The paradox lies in the diversity and randomness of the teaching that generated a philosophy that was open to new possibilities and change and despite the contradictory elements it became a collective initiative committed to the respect of individual propensities. There was no hierarchical pyramid structure, the philosophy was flat in that, teachers and students were all on the same level.

Within the political system at the time this juxtaposition of cultures in a single place of learning was contentious and audacious. Personal participation as an artist and teacher at the JAF enabled me to mine the experience of the interaction between different cultures in a school operating in an essentially white upper middle class suburb. The treed environment surrounded by opulent homes was somewhat bizarre considering the presiding premise was to ensure equal opportunities for everyone. However, despite the obvious disparity in economic standards the process of shared learning in that space that made it possible to level the differences.

Additionally, it is important to surface the uncertainties and difficulties in the teaching programme particularly when white students were introduced to the black teachers Tony Nkotsi and Mabaso in the new printmaking department. It was unusual and provocative and led to strangeness and uncertainty. The students were uneasy because apartheid conditioning had taught us that white supremacy did not consider blacks in a position of authority. Equally, it was difficult for Mabaso and Nkotsi when despite their innate ability respect was difficult to achieve. A consequence of diverse beliefs and superficial understanding of the philosophy meant that many of us were operating on the periphery of the severe oppression in the country.

Most of the white students were not politicised and were not directly involved with the actual violence and extreme repression experienced by the black students. It needed a period of considerable adjustment for all concerned. At times the reactions became patronising and condescending, the central issue being, that whites were essentially separated from the actual reality of experience. Inevitably many white students, situated in comfortable situations, could only operate on a superficial level while others were enlightened beyond the confines of art education.

To add to the complexity of components at the JAF, Eastern philosophies and contemporary philosophers were discussed in seminars, Christian church services took place in the garden and meetings with liberal thinking people and political activists were a common occurrence. These diverse components were influential in forming a distinct ethos of tolerance that enriched the development of the JAF as a safe place for people to associate and communicate.

Inevitably the teaching philosophy provoked contesting elements in academia and politically. The methodology was not without risks and Serote describes the character of the place in the following manner:

People at the JAF, comprised of blacks and whites, were like a “nomadic clan” being able to come and go with a freedom of movement both spontaneous and natural. There were artists, poets, photographers, writers, actors, film makers, and musicians who came to this space and place, to this spot, to this little village, to this liberated oasis...

Some members of this spontaneously formed clan were arrested; some detained; some went into exile, as Dumile [Feni] and many others eventually did; ...Many young art workers passed through this place having been taught to see, to hear, to smell, to touch and to taste. (Serote 2013)

Embracing this theme of cultural exchange in a safe place Annie Coombes in *History after Apartheid* (2003) implies that contemporary fine art has an effective way of communicating with society. She states:

At the same time, artists operate within a highly privileged realm that provides a certain licence (which is not to say that they do not take certain risks), and this sometimes enables them to work through taboos and contradictions in a relatively “safe” space in ways that other arenas do not permit. (2003, p. 12)

A privileged realm is a possible description of the JAF considering the site, the contradictory values that were propagated in the environment and given the number of artists who have benefitted from being part of it. The benefits are attested to in detail in the numerous interviews with artists undertaken during 2012-2014. (Appendix D) Additionally my long association with all the interviewees allowed for unhurried, reminiscent systems of remembering.

Oral testimonies

Joanna Bornat, in Chapter 35 of the publication *The Oral History Reader*, notes:

By means of the interview, oral historians are able to access personal experience, eye witness accounts and the memories of people whose perspectives might otherwise be ignored or neglected (Bornat, *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd Ed. 2006. p. 457).

Excerpts from the interviews gathered during 2012 -2014 indicate how fundamental the oral testimonies of this period are to the structure of the written research. To my knowledge the line of questioning together with my personal association with all the interviewees is unique in terms of our affiliation as friends and colleagues. We have a shared history and individual stories to relate. Commonality of the characteristic of subjectivity developed in the course of the interviews revealing both possibility and paradox in the interpretation. Some of these oral testimonies are all that survive of an era that is incomplete in the documentation from conventional sources. In the absence of definitive documentation the oral history concerning the JAF forms the “complex interplay between history, myth and ideology” (Grele, 1991, Preface p. vii). While political and sociological influences characterise much of the shared history it becomes problematic to test the veracity of the myth and the ideology that inevitably becomes part of building a shared heritage. The shared commitment and beliefs often contradict each other but the central core tends to valorise the time as important and energising for us all. We found ourselves recalling incidents that in themselves triggered further responses which became instrumental in the mining of perspectives that could only be accessed through personal experience.

In conversation with Serote, he locates himself in that time and recalls the importance of oral communication. He makes it clear that intellectuals struggled to locate themselves within South Africa's restrictive laws and he talks of his personal experience with the Black Consciousness Movement that was promoted by intellectuals during the 1960s and early 1970s. It aimed at countering the resultant negativity and inertia brought about by the constraints imposed on creative expression by the apartheid government. In his publication *On the Horizon*, Serote argues that despite government repression, he felt that writers had a role in society to represent the plight of the people through words. Through poetry he and other poets were able to find a voice to span the void in artistic expression. He says, “One of the reasons for this is because its oral nature makes it possible for writers to have dialogue with the masses” (1990, p. 8). It was in this space that artists and intellectuals managed to communicate with each other despite the surrounding circumstances.

The prominence of oral testimony is a crucial element in this investigation in an attempt to enrich the archival history of the JAF. Interviews with artists, Council Members and teachers form a significant component of the paper and the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*. While interviews may elicit different perspectives on the opportunities and limitations of the JAF, these perceptions are analysed within a framework of personal experience. By interrogating the past through the extrapolation of memory and archive material, the paper assumes a retrospective view of the ideologies of the JAF.

Verne Harris, of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, in his review essay, *Something is Happening Here and You Don't Know What it is: Jacques Derrida Unplugged* says, "[T]he archive—the good one—produces memory, but produces forgetting at the same time" (2005, p. 137). The consequence of recording thoughts in conversation with artists and teachers, therefore, reveals a considerable range of opinions and facilitates a comprehensive merging of accounts. The probable distortion exacerbated by the number of years that separate the past and the present cannot be denied and must concede to the layering or palimpsests of individual perception. In the publication *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, (Second edition 1991) Grele writes that the interview becomes a repository of data and he perceives it as an "on-going dialogue about history" (1991, p. 200). Grele continues, "*Envelopes* shows that the interview is a series of dialectical relationships embedded in language, social practice, and historical imagination" (1991, p. 200). As such, drawing on historical imagination, the narrative of this paper unfolds through imagination and dialogue, characterised by reminiscing and recalling the legacy of the JAF during 1982 -1992.

In this regard I refer to the book *Art and Trauma in Africa, Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature & Film*. Sarah Longair, in Chapter 5 of this publication, refers to the opening of the Old Fort Prison Complex, known as *Number four*, on Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, as a heritage site. (2013, p. 110) Here the importance of memory and individual testimony from the prisoners provides the text. She acknowledges the mutability of memory and suggests that all the contradictions and similarities render the historic facts relevant. Longair quotes Clive van den Berg, "I was much more interested in the absent, the fugitive, the non-material" (2013, p. 119).

Elements of the fugitive and the fragility of memory are essential to the process of interrogation and provide much of the text for my research paper. All that remains of the JAF are the memories and the continuation of its intrinsic worth through the many practising artists who identify with it. The interviews, contained in this research, mine the resources inherent in memory and provide an extensive archival view of the JAF. It is important to acknowledge, however, that my personal relationships with the interviewees and the line of questioning have distinct elements of partiality. There is a common thread throughout the interviews which recognises a shared history of remembering. While acknowledging the similarities and contradictions they are brought together in the contemporary location of the gallery space for the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*. Additionally, the oral testimonies define the paradigms inherent in the narratives of remembering and forgetting and form a procedure of peeling away the layers of individual memory giving access to hidden perspectives that are only made available through the dialogue.

Through my experience, by combining and distilling elements in the numerous shared conversations, distinctive qualities are revealed. Under discussion were: issues related to the emphasis on abstraction in the teaching philosophy, a commitment towards a political re-alignment in the country, and the search for the impulses that served to make a good painting. Using William Kentridge's interpretation in his publication *Six Drawing Lessons*, he suggests that by extracting the logical inference from the words, which he terms "the truth", that then "the rational, the good, the philosopher, the judge will prevail" (Kentridge 2014, p.14). Kentridge studied at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and then at the JAF and has received world recognition for his work in film and opera.

While acknowledging the concomitant discrepancies integral to memory there is a persistent striving to locate the truth in remembering within the dynamic dialogue. Working with the characteristics of story telling the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing* acquires a narrative shape. The recorded voices in the video form an aspect that requires involvement and participation with the public realm and also poses as a mediatory capacity between memory and history. (Video attached, Appendix F) While oral implications suggest historical reflection, they also assist in defining the way in which the JAF is represented through its political and educational stance during 1982-1992. Additionally, my retrieval and reflection on the collected material from the interviews must by necessity include both contrasting and contrary data which postulates paradoxes in the perception of the teaching at the JAF.

Comparative South African institutions

It is important at this point to refer to other art institutions and organisations with innovative teaching programmes such as the Community Arts Project in Cape Town and Durban, Ndalení Teachers' Training College in Natal, run by the Bantu Education Department, Fort Hare University, Rorke's Drift, run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and recreational centres such as Chiawelo in Soweto, Polly Street, the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA), and Funda Art Centre in Soweto existed at various times. Many experienced difficulties in continuing their cultural activities due to the conditions imposed upon them by apartheid. Sometimes teaching was irregular and informal due to limited spaces and materials. The confining laws of the country restricted free movement of people and made it increasingly difficult to attend classes. Some artists, however, refused to be suppressed and continued working under extremely difficult circumstances.

Polly Street, inaugurated in 1949 primarily as a black recreational centre, came under the guidance of Cecil Skotnes in 1952. Skotnes's academic approach to teaching contrasted with that of co-teacher Fred Schimmel's more intuitive, flexible workshop approach. Some students such as Koloane had some difficulty with a more prescriptive method of teaching and eventually moved to Ainslie's studio. A generation of artists such as Ben Arnold, Sydney Kumalo, Louis Maqhubela, Ephraim Ngatane, and Ezrom Legae were associated with Polly Street. In 1957 legislation was passed declaring the Johannesburg city centre as a "white area." Polly Street was first phased out to the Jubilee Centre and finally in 1969 to Soweto and became known as the Mofolo Art Centre. In the 2009 publication *Art and the End of Apartheid*, John Peffer quotes Steven Sack on the Polly Street artists: "...all of these artists, those who sought to entertain and those who sought to declaim, lived and worked outside of the laws that enforced petty and grand apartheid" (2009, p. 39). The JAF in its particular capacity worked defiantly outside the discriminatory laws.

The connections between the JAF and these other teaching facilities involved the exchange of similar ideas and more specifically relate to corresponding ideals in the political sense. In addition, there were some connections in the structure of the various pedagogical methodologies and criteria that are required for the educating and the making of an artist. Many of the artists trained at these other institutions became part of the evolving fabric of the JAF in the capacity of teachers, students and Council Members.

Chabane Manganye, who studied at the Jubilee Art Centre and subsequently became Head of the Fine Arts Department and co-ordinator at FUBA, became a Council Member at the JAF. He and Ainslie began to combine the Black Youth Development art students with the white students at the JAF on a weekly basis. They initiated this process with Ainslie bringing students from the JAF to FUBA. In Manganye's words, "...well, it was to break the racial barriers, basically [*sic*]" (Manganye 2013, pers. comm. 12 February).

Reference is made in the publication *Polly Street, The Story of an Art Centre*, to Kagiso Pat Mautloa, who had studied at Rorke's Drift, later became a teacher at the JAF, and had also studied under Dan Rakgoathe at the Jubilee Centre and at Mofolo. Under Rakgoathe's tutelage Mautloa discovered his own way of expression that in turn impacted his teaching approach at the JAF. Rakgoathe followed the unstructured teaching method similar to that offered at Rorke's Drift where the students were often left with questions and expected to discover for themselves, in the words of Rakgoathe, "the spirit of Africa" (Miles, E., 2004, p. 145).

JAF had strong connections with the Rorke's Drift art initiative through the teachers Tony Nkotsi, Mabaso, Mautloa, Sam Nhlengethwa, Manganye and Bongi Dhlomo, all of whom had graduated from Rorke's Drift. According to Dhlomo the Rorke's Drift initiative offered students exposure to international teachers from Sweden, America, South Africa, and Holland. These teachers had come to South Africa as Lutheran missionaries. She alludes to the disintegration of the centre that was partially due to the diminished funding when the Lutheran church in South Africa became autonomous from the mother mission in 1975 and centres had to rely on government funding. "That standing alone meant the diminishing of support funding to hospitals schools and colleges" (Dhlomo 2014, pers. comm. 15 August).

In conversation with Dhlomo, she states that although there was an entry requirement at Rorke's Drift in the form of a portfolio they did not have formal lectures and theory, the emphasis was a more practical approach similar to the teaching at FUBA and the JAF (Dhlomo 2014).

After completing his course at Rorke's Drift, Mabaso recounts that he had asked to use the facilities of the Johannesburg technicon simply because they were far superior to those at Rorke's Drift. He was refused entry, in line with the discriminatory apartheid education policy but some teachers—specifically Phillipa Hobbs, Willem Boshoff, and Susan Rosenberg—allowed Mabaso into the studios despite the imposed rules. (Mabaso 2013) Mabaso states, "... what would happen was that each time the rector came to inspect the studios and fine arts department, I would have to hide" (Mabaso 2013). The indignity of this kind of experience is articulated by Nadine Gordimer in her paper *Relevance and Commitment* at the UCT Conference in 1979:

Innate creativity can be falsified, trivialised, deflected, conditioned, stifled, deformed and even destroyed by the state, and the state of society it decrees.... It is from the daily life of South Africa that there have come the conditions of profound alienation. (Gordimer 1979, p. 4)

Despite many difficulties and intense alienation, artists Mabaso, Nhlengethwa, Mautloa, and Nkotsi, became vital innovators as printmakers in their teaching capacity at the JAF. As the first black teachers in a predominantly white institution their individual contribution as working artists and teachers was fundamental to the augmentation of the teaching programme. As specialist teachers their expertise in etching, linocut and silkscreen techniques was new to many students at the JAF.

Comparative institutions in Africa

Extended connections existed with initiatives like the Medu Art Ensemble (Medu) founded in Botswana in 1976. Medu was seen as a space where artists could be exposed to artists from other parts of Africa. Medu was radically politicised and being based outside South Africa offered the freedom to aspire to social change and allowed direct involvement with people like author Nadine Gordimer, artists Ainslie, Dhlomo and Koloane among others who gathered at the Culture and Resistance Festival in Gaborone in 1982. The purpose of the festival was to examine the role of the artist, in diverse disciplines, in the creation of a democratic South Africa. Panel discussions and seminars were held by accomplished artists in various fields. Heated debates occurred on some aspects devoted to poetry, visual arts, literature, theatre, music and dance and the term 'cultural worker' was mooted in preference to the word 'artist' which was viewed as prestigious, elitist and redolent of Western society.

Whereas Medu was an important part of the ANC's underground movement it focussed on primarily arts and culture. Serote quotes Henry Makgothi, the leader of the underground structure,

Why do you want Arts and Culture to operate from an underground position and not above board? How do you blow a trumpet or a trombone, sing or play drums underground. How does one act in a play underground?" (Serote 2013)

The important *Culture and Resistance* festival followed these invectives in Gaborone in 1982. Subsequent international exhibitions of the same work, *Culture in Another South Africa* in Amsterdam in 1987, followed by *Culture and Zabalaza* in London in 1988 and *Culture and Development* in Johannesburg in 1989, impacted on South African culture by exposing artists to Western modernism significantly broadening their understanding of art in a more global sense. Serote asserts Medu was a place "where you welded the exiled artists and the internal artists, where you looked at the whole spectrum of the arts" (Serote 2013). He continued that Medu became a platform where diverse trends in film, photography, music, dance and the visual arts resulted in interdisciplinary exchange. There was a sense that in order to function as a potent tool to initiate change in a dysfunctional society, artists should concern themselves with the human condition (Serote 2013).

These initiatives impacted on the teaching approach of the JAF through Serote and exiled artist Thami Mnyele with whom Ainslie had heated exchanges of ideas. In his speech at the 1982 Festival Mnyele, as quoted in Peffer, declared, "... the role of an artist is to teach others; the role of the artist is to ceaselessly search for the ways and means of achieving freedom" (2009, p. 140). Mnyele tended to wield art as a powerful weapon to drive towards freedom. In his publication *On the Horizon* Serote writes, "He (Mnyele) was always searching, in pursuit of ways and means of merging art forms into weapons of teaching, mobilizing and recording the history of our people"(1990 p.130).

The JAF philosophy did not differ, in essence, with the idea of freedom and of teaching as a means for dissent but did so in its methodology and aesthetic inclination. There was a conviction that the visual experience of a painting, the openness and flow, could evoke perceptions of freedom. For Mnyele, however, social realism should take the form of protest posters and prints that were available and easily disseminated, while Ainslie insisted on the modernist abstract path as his way of dissension. In Ainslie's opinion abstraction was a revolutionary way to paint by offering the way to freedom though the artist's honesty in relation to the medium. The colour and the mark making could express emotion and personal experience without illusion or imitative realities. Ainslie insisted that abstraction was a defiant way of working. He wrote, "We don't make art in an attempt to change people, we make it to change ourselves, and if it works it will change others by the appeal it makes" (1976, p. 81).

Teaching at the JAF was enriched by these opposing ideals and evolved from a process that drew upon the various elements. Ainslie's personal notes acknowledge and develop the premise in which he questions his teaching philosophy by writing, "I wish to get rid of some of the confusion that exists in relation to art and creativity and I wish to do it more through an experience than through words" (Transcripts of the interviews are to be found in Appendix D). His teaching was characterised by reaching out to a disillusioned society and by a re-evaluation of arts and culture in the form of a process of inclusivity totally disregarding the notion of art's exclusivity. By expanding the scope of conceptual and visual experience and shifting from socio-political and figurative expression artists began to expand their perception beyond the political and the constricted arrangements of daily living. The teaching incentive was to draw attention to art and to artists themselves and their individual creative impulses

Some parallels in the teaching methodology in other informal art institutions are worth noting here. Pierre Lods in Poto Poto in the then Belgian Congo during the 1960s spoke of his teaching philosophy when confronted by various difficulties and dilemmas with his students: "This was my first lesson in silence and respect and, afterwards, one of the key principles of my teaching" (1995).

Daniel Birnbaum in Chapter 17 of *Art School* (2009) quotes John Cage: "It is this spirit of not teaching that has been completely lost in our education system..." (2009, p. 232). Interestingly, comparison with these perceptions and those of the JAF suggest that similarities exist in the principles that formulated the teaching methodology. This unconventional approach had parallels in the JAF's teaching philosophy.

Ainslie observes in his paper, *An Artist's Workshop—“Flash in the pan or a stone that the builders rejected?”* at the UCT Conference:

One of the most difficult lessons I have had to learn as an artist and a teacher is that I do not know how to make an artwork, nor how to teach people to do it... teaching consists of leading, and being led, towards the threshold of the unconditional. (1979, p. 84)

Whereas the Zaria Art Society in Nigeria worked with the theory of “Natural Synthesis” (1995, p. 197), which postulated the amalgamation of indigenous traditions and forms combined with what they felt were useful ideas in Western art forms. Although these centres were active in the 1960s and 1970s there are prominent similarities that are pertinent in establishing the significance of the teaching philosophy of the JAF. These initiatives are viewed as comparisons of ideas rather than a direct influence on the JAF.

Nigerian artist Bruce Onobrakpeya quotes the words of fellow artist, art critic and Associate Professor at Princeton University, Chica Okeke-Agulu,

...[T]he contemporary African artist should aim at the development of the total man through creating artistic awareness, appreciation and skill, by process of natural synthesis, which combines the best of our values with those from outside.The world is getting smaller every day, and there is nothing we can do about foreign influences, which are quite formidable, entering our culture. We can, however, use these influences to our advantage and maintain our identity through determined efforts to draw from our roots and rich heritage (1995, pp. 195-196).

Okeke-Agulu stressed that values need to be revisited by accepting and amalgamating ideas from different sources. He notes that “this will guarantee life fulfilment for the present, and a march towards a progressive future” (1995, p. 196). These artists influenced the mode of expression of many artists of the younger generation culminating in the formulation of the art movement, ‘The Eye’ in Nigeria and Nsukka at the University of Nigeria. Okeke-Agulu promoted the idea of synthesising elements and influences of modernism whilst retaining indigenous, cultural roots.

Similarly Ainslie maintained:

Now what I trace is a re-invigorating momentum – one symptom of this is the acceptance of other traditions. The return, if you like, to the primitive. The re-invigoration through the acknowledgement and the recognition of the power of the art of Africa; the art of other cultures. This, I think, is terribly important. It indicates a very lively spirit. When a culture can open itself to other cultures. (Herber 1979, p. 107)

Analogously John Picton, decades later in the *NKA Roundtable II* discussion in 2010, recycles this premise in the *Journal of Contemporary African Art* in the article *Contemporary African Art History and the Scholarship*, "Equally, any consideration of art as an international phenomenon must necessarily include Africa" (Picton 2010, p. 81).). Further interrogation of these concepts is beyond the scope of this research but they do suggest areas of focus for future investigation and leave questions that surface in the contradictory notions that are considered in this paper.

Although there are similarities between Okeke-Agulu's concept of "Natural Synthesis" and the philosophy of the JAF, one of the disparities was that most of the Nigerian artists came from an academic background in contrast to many of the artists at the JAF who were unable to pursue art studies in this way. Comparably there are some connections between the political unrest in Nigeria and those in South Africa that had led to eroded values within artists themselves. The quest for revitalisation for some led them towards the West for new standards in artistic expression. As Onobrakpeya writes, it was a need for development, "... so that they could grow into modernity, taking with them the identity as a people (2010, p. 195). While retaining their identity the artists could assimilate other trends and possibilities in order ultimately to invigorate their own work.

Artist, teacher and curator Koloane compares the ethos of Zaria group artists Okeke-Agulu and Onobrakpeya with traditional Ndebele designs in terms of integrating new ideas while reaching for their traditions. He says they "do pen and ink work that draws on the Ibo traditional marks..." (Koloane 2012, pers. comm. 30 June). Koloane suggests that Ndebele mark-making was a consequence of the appropriation of the Ndebele language, infiltrated by assimilation with other tribes and with Afrikaans and that they were trying to reclaim their identity by decorating their houses in the form of bright colours and geometric designs. (Koloane, 2013) Comparably, after independence in 1960, Nigerian artists sought to reclaim an identity symbolised by a search for an authentic art form while also focusing on acceptance within modernist aesthetic criteria.

Comparative art centres abroad

Comparisons of other teaching programmes in informal art facilities in Africa, United States, Germany, and Britain signifying similarities and variances in the teaching philosophy of the JAF are briefly encountered to consider the art education practices in institutions such as the Bauhaus in Germany and Black Mountain College in the United States of America (USA).

The possible influence of the early Bauhaus teaching methodology, based on crucial elements of line, colour, and form, is implied in the formative structure of the JAF's early teaching programme.

Although artist and teacher Joseph Beuys was not a principal model for the JAF his politicised ideals combined with his teaching methodology is a consideration (Schellmann & Klüser 1977). Ainslie states at the UCT Conference, "I like Joseph Beuys for giving me the idea that the workshop is a social sculpture" (1979, p. 87). The workshop ethic became a fundamental way of teaching at the JAF.

Ainslie continues his reference to Beuys in his paper delivered at the UCT Conference:

We stand between the pole of “high art”, which challenges all taste in its quest for the unconditioned act/work, and the pole of the community—or grass roots—art, which recognises that all people are capable of authentic and vital expression. These poles are in a certain way paralleled by the demands of Ad Reinhardt for a New Academy, and the demands of Joseph Beuys that all men be recognised as essentially creative. (Ainslie 1979, p. 80)

In addition, the Bauhaus’s resolute pedagogical response to practical experiments with media, attempting to link and integrate craft with the aesthetics of fine art, as well as investigations into non-Western images and philosophies, were incorporated in the development of the teaching at the JAF. The Bauhaus *Vorkurs* (*foundation course*) was followed to some extent at the JAF by the introduction of a “foundation course”, which emphasised the method of learning how to “see” from close focus exercises in purely perceptual drawing and painting studies comprising still-life objects and life drawing. Later in the 1980s, the teaching endorsed the Bauhaus tenet of “truth to material”, where the significance lies principally on *gestalt* and instinctive responses to materials.

In order to view the JAF’s teaching philosophy in a more global sense, corresponding reference is made to education initiatives in Latin America. In Chapter 15 of the publication *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*, Luis Camnitzer notes that a transformation of conventional teaching of the arts occurred in Uruguay in 1959 at the University Reform of Córdoba. It produced reforms that remained active between the years 1959 and 1965. Through student uprisings, a new curriculum was put in place that eliminated accreditation and authority. Camnitzer states:

...[O]verall, it was assumed that art was a natural activity that could be taken up by anybody. Not unlike what Joseph Beuys would preach in Germany, everybody was considered a potential artist who was waiting to be educated as one. (2009, p. 206)

An earlier initiative for comparison is the Black Mountain College in the USA established in 1933-1957. The teaching philosophy was based on the interdisciplinary spirit that underscored the teaching at the Bauhaus. Josef Albers was associated with architect Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus and later taught at the Black Mountain College. Here the environment had the atmosphere of an art colony with teachers of the calibre of John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Robert Rauschenberg, Charles Olson, and David Tudor. Although the JAF did not necessarily base its teaching method on the Black Mountain College directly, both institutions held classes that were informal and not structured or formulated in any defined way or limited by archetypal measures. The JAF was also interactive through the workshop ethic and group activities engaged in a tradition of engaging with the divided community.

In Europe, Deliss has reviewed the option of an art facility without walls, with the principle characteristic being its 'mobility', without fixed position (2009, p. 119). She refers to the 'Future Academy' as an institution that has created 'collaborative structures' and 'experimental events' all over the world (2009, p. 119). In this account Deliss gives an overview of the Future Academy's teaching methodology, as one providing students with the potential for self-reflexive exploration.

Mobility was not specifically relevant to the JAF philosophy, but the consequences of "collaborative structures" with FUBA, Funda, Thupelo, and Alexandra Art Centre are testimony to the experimental and alternative outcomes. In addition the Thupelo workshops had no fixed position and were principally experimental and collaborative with an enduring principle of self-reflexivity, expecting the students to see and recognise elements for themselves and articulate and form an individual way of working. The underlying principle was one of being receptive to all whom had the capacity to learn without restrictions or limiting barriers.

Andre Malraux assumes his hypothesis in the publication *Museum Without Walls*, where he uses the analogy of the "frame" of a painting as a confining element that restricts and limits the progress of ideals and ideas. He contends that "...we are presently engaged in developing a world of art from which all frames have disappeared" (1967, p. 219). In some measure, by offering multi-racial facilities and eschewing accreditation procedures due to the inequitable education facilities for black and white students the JAF attempted to flout the constricting framework and surrounding imposed boundaries of segregated education. While acknowledging these boundaries the JAF deliberately moved outside of those barriers with its teaching philosophy.

During the following years, until its closure in 2001, the JAF kept ideas, culture and humanism alive through prevailing flexibility and experimentation. Although there were no clearly defined teaching principles at the JAF in the sense that it had no specific curriculum or prescribed ways of thinking, the emphasis relied on unrestrained cultural exchange. It embodied the principle of an essentially humanist teaching approach which encouraged and embraced change through its insistence on inclusivity.

Chapter 2: Anomalies in the teaching philosophy

The workshop as social sculpture (Beuys 1979, p. 87)

In his paper presented at the UCT Conference in 1979, Ainslie clearly defined the notions of the teaching philosophy at the JAF with particular reference to the workshop method of teaching, working with shared ideas in a shared environment. In some ways it could be construed as a discarding of previous norms of imposed education systems while effectively embracing the contrary possibilities inherent in modernism. By articulating his conviction in the workshop and interactive exchange method of teaching Ainslie expands a philosophy that pursues an eradication of the mechanical and the derivative, "... intended to lead to originality of attitude and execution" (Ainslie 1979, p. 85). He continues that the teaching was not didactic in the sense that people were not told how to make art but encouraged to explore and search for the authentic in individual expression. The frames of reference were so diverse within the student body at the JAF that the teaching methods had to be flexible. The conceptual framework of how information is grasped and retained was significant only to the individual and the gathering of knowledge was through actual participation. The curriculum was not designed and specified and the system of rewards was not applicable. There were no exams or certificates and evaluation focussed on the work itself and not on the individual. The workshop was an environment where this process could be implemented. Ainslie explains the comparatively new concept of the workshop method by saying:

These exercises take place within deliberately created intensive closed energy circles where both time and space are transformed and energised.... In the projects we attempt to guide people into areas which will most challenge them. (1979, p. 85)

The workshop allowed challenging experimentation to evolve spontaneously. Although it is impossible to address all possibilities, there were germinal notions acquired at the workshops by many artists who were able to explore modernist trends towards an understanding of self-expression and who later used those experiments to energise their work.

Ainslie also advanced the idea that the workshop teaching method existed partially for the protection "from the pressures of 'professionalism' and 'commercialism' so that we can get on with what we need to do" (1979, p. 83). Commercialism inherent in corporate sponsorship or sponsorship of art competitions and festivals often led to corruption of the authenticity of an art work. The fundamental component in Ainslie's way of thinking was that art making should become an integral factor of individual choice and not be directed by external authority. Ainslie believed that modernism was as crucial to the progress and development of art and conjoined with South Africa's disjointed political climate, recognised as an element of rebellion. He suggested that there was a component of defiance in that way of expression and believed that the workshop method of teaching realised "the reordering of relationships and environment" (1979, p. 83).

An added component was that while the workshop process maintained a structural base to support stability it was totally against rigidity and Ainslie stipulated that it also needed to be constantly under review, conjointly by teachers and students, in order to evolve and develop.

The unconventional and controversial workshop methodology created provocative arguments both within the centre and from outside authorities. There is no doubt that the teaching methodology and inclusive policies of the JAF disturbed both the bureaucracy and the prevailing academic institutions. It is this controversial anomaly that signifies elements of collision in the pursuit of developing modernism, at the JAF during 1982-1992. The workshop ethic promoting these ideals at the JAF was extended to initiate the Thupelo workshop in 1985.

Thupelo (South Sotho word meaning “to teach by example”)

Ainslie had maintained that the workshop was a fundamental focus of his teaching at the JAF, “The importance of the workshop is to create a way to circulate methods and ideas by engaging with other people in another place and context” (1979 p.83). The workshop was a relatively new notion as an alternative to forms of more formal instruction and learning. The intention of the workshop is to decentre the teaching immediately and to re-negotiate the relationship between learner and teacher, expertise and uncertainty, and the ways in which issues are tackled.

Discussion on the workshops, seminars, and the teaching philosophy is intended to consolidate the position of the JAF, while understanding that it is crucial to revisit the misconceptions and criticisms directed towards the ethos and the intentions at the centre.

Controversy surrounds the sponsorship and the intentions of the Thupelo workshops. For some years, the funding for Thupelo, came from the South Africa Leadership Exchange Program (USSALEP) in the USA, some of the controversy in the 1980s led to the polemic that the money may have been linked to the CIA, making it “dirty money”. Academic and art critic Colin Richards, a lecturer in Fine Arts at Wits at that time, poses the questions in his article, *Alternative, abstract art? It's all in his mind*:

Is it just coincidence that Ussalep was founded in 1958, the year “The New American Painting” travelling abstract expressionist exhibition toured Europe? This and other shows did service in the Cold War, linking the Museum of Modern Art with the CIA in executing American foreign policy abroad. Are we also beneficiaries of the remnants of this tradition?Are the considerable resources of the contributing groups being appropriately utilised in the community? Whose interests are really being served? (Richards 1987, p. 21)

Ainslie’s reply to the Weekly Mail newspaper asks,

Why he [Richards] should suggest sinister links between the latter, USSALEP and the CIA, rather than establish the facts when they are available to all, is a puzzle. (Ainslie para. 2 and 3) (n.d. Appendix B)

Gule, in his article in *Art South Africa*, likewise, refers to the issue of funding for the Thupelo workshops that came from USSALEP in the USA. In his article he challenges the validity of the funding component and its link to the JAF in this way, "As a US government agency, USALEP [sic] had a dubious role in apartheid South Africa, which was being increasingly isolated by other governments" (Gule, p. 84). Further consideration of Gule's and Richards's argument remains a controversial issue that demands additional research. A more critical view of this debate would require research into the more global politics of the time taking into consideration the Cold War and the way SA was viewed by the outside world due to apartheid.

John Pepper, in the publication *Art and the End of Apartheid*, provides a comprehensive overview of the historical influences leading up to the inception of Thupelo. His account supports the view that the founders of Triangle workshop in the USA, Tony Caro and Robert Loder, were a pivotal and motivating influence for the establishment of Thupelo (2009, pp. 141-166). Ainslie and Caro met in 1980 when Caro gave a talk on his own work at Wits. Subsequently Ainslie took Caro to visit some of surrounding art facilities including FUBA and Ainslie's own studio. Caro was interested in the shared atmosphere in Ainslie's studio and distressed by the superior facilities in white institutions and the contrasting inadequate amenities in the black institutions. Caro recognised that the need for an analogous workshop in South Africa was great in that artists were more acutely isolated with poor conditions of studio space and a paucity of art materials. Both Koloane and Ainslie had attended Triangle in the 1980s and this influenced their subsequent launching of Thupelo which was principally based on the Triangle premise of collaboration. It initiated a beginning towards the amelioration of some of the discrepancies in SA's art society. Ainslie felt that black artists had been handicapped by lack of exposure to elements of the modern movement and proposed that visiting artists would begin a transmission of Western art forms to SA in the form of Thupelo. Additionally one of the conditions associated with the funding from USSALEP was that the workshops would provide the possibility for artist exchange between SA and the USA.

As a result Thupelo explored practices of modernism through invited guests from the USA and England, and it was argued by some critics that the two-week workshop was merely a process of synthesising, emulation, and mimicking of international trends.

A retrospective view on the JAF workshop ethos is provided by interviews with participants and links the creative practices of the JAF with some contemporary initiatives in the USA. In this way, the paper adopts a reflective perception of the ideologies of the JAF, while acknowledging proposed transformative ideas for current issues faced by art education more broadly. Transformation for Ainslie relied on the assumption that the way forward was to work with the vigorous spirit in contemporary painting. Through his experience at Triangle he implemented this approach at the JAF. The workshop was a relatively new notion in SA and was pursued as an alternative to formal instruction and learning. Gardiner believes, "And it's what Bill [Ainslie] did with the workshop idea, how it was actually practised that made it very different" (Gardiner 2013).

For two weeks invited artists were motivated to explore new techniques in a quiet, focussed space. Unlimited materials made it possible for experimentation on a scale that was unfamiliar to many of the artists. Teachers and students worked, communicated and 'critted' work in a communal manner. Characteristics of flexibility and freedom were initiated which embraced the component of surprise, a significant basis for much of the teaching at the JAF. Comparably, the workshop approach practised by Barney Simon, founder and Artistic Director of the Market Theatre, advanced his attempt to articulate a response to the prevailing conditions at that time through the dramatic arts. More recently Kentridge has worked with workshop culture in both theatre and film. Koloane maintains that the following about working at the JAF and particularly at the Thupelo workshop:

I just found it happening, 'subconsciously', like a musical tune that just comes, not at your will, but sometimes when you least expect it. You can be surprised by it happening in your work. (Koloane 2012 pers. comm. 30 June 2012)

Richards continued his onslaught in his article, where he rails about on the emphasis on abstraction at the JAF, "Commitment, like pleasure, takes many forms. But is abstract imported from America one of them?" Richards continues to criticise the role of the JAF in the workshops as a presumed "missionary role" and inveighs against the practice of invited artists Peter Bradley, Kenworth Moffatt, and Graham Peacock claiming, "All three work out of an ever-narrowing post-Abstract Expressionism aesthetic tradition" (Richards 1987, p. 21).

The commitment to abstraction at the JAF was not always understood in political circles either, as Kentridge writes in the Weekly Mail after Ainslie's death in 1989:

His [Ainslie] painting and teaching had to endure periods of hostility as his teaching was outside the mainstream of art education in this country and the non-political images were bewildering to the politicians with whom he was in sympathy. (Kentridge 1989, para. 6)

Serote admits he had reservations about Ainslie's focus on abstraction and says they had long arguments when Serote was in exile in London. Serote was cognisant of the fact that art makers both literary and visual could be the voice of the people but was concerned that abstraction did not have the expectation that art makers should make work as a critique of social comment. Serote believed, at that time, that art should express social and political comment in order to be effective in the struggle for emancipation from apartheid. In conversation in 2013, he consents:

I remember '87 when Bill came to London and visited me he was telling me that he was introducing abstract art, and I was very angry with him. I was saying to him "are you hiding or what? I think we must have talked for over 24 hours, and we really didn't agree. I really believed that he was retreating from the front that he occupied which I considered the front of rebellion. (Serote 2013)

Abstraction and the workshop culture at the JAF and Thupelo provided a platform for intense debate. Artist Gail Behrmann recalls that, “A lot of that criticism was levelled directly at Bill far more than it was levelled at the Thupelo workshops and the visiting British and American artists” (Behrmann 2014 pers. comm. 7 May). The animosity towards Ainslie manifested in declamatory news items, letters and some isolation of the JAF from formal art centres’ group exhibitions (Appendix C. n.d.). Certain art critics and gallery owners actually visited the Thupelo workshop at Broederstroom and according to Helen Sebidi, who was born in Marapyana and struggled to become one of the first black women artists to be recognised in SA, they tried to persuade black artists that they should not be engaging in the abstract modernist process offered at Thupelo (Sebidi 2013 pers. comm. 12 August). Sebidi was a student at the JAF and in 1989 was awarded a Fullbright scholarship to travel and work in the USA. Furthermore, Koloane considered the contentious and provocative arguments by Kendell Geers, Alan Crump and Richards, to mention a few, to be insulting and discriminatory since they suggested that only some race groups could transcend realistic expression.

Thupelo explored practices of modernism through invited guests from the USA and England, and it was argued by some critics that the two-week workshop was merely a process of synthesising, emulation, and mimicking of international trends. Artists such as Bradley, Peacock and art critic Moffatt were invited to the Thupelo workshops and were undoubtedly influential through abstract elements in their own work. Nonetheless, the primary intention endorsed exploration and participation and promoted a point of contact between artists from Africa and the Western world. It is equally contended that while artists at Thupelo were supplied with new materials and large scale formats, they were not necessarily encouraged to use the predilection of allegory and narrative that had been their previous legacy. Alternatively, they were offered the opportunity to evoke new modes of perception, by exploring abstraction, where materials and not imagery determined the actuality of the work. The emphasis in these works relied more on expression with colour explosion and materials rather than socio-political or narrative bias.

Following the Thupelo workshop an extremely contentious general meeting was held at the JAF venue in 1987. Artist and student, Diana Hyslop describes the acerbic encounters in these terms:

It became extremely heated as all the black artists were furious and said, “Why do we have to do ‘township art’ and not be able to experiment in abstraction” (Hyslop 2014 pers. comm. 15 August).

Richards comments about his reactions at the 1987 meeting in the Weekly Mail:

The presentation featuring Peacock turned out to be like so many events in today’s artworld. Good, Bad and Ugly. The laughable the funny and the angry made for a good deal of embarrassment, misbehaviour and incoherence all round (1987 p. 21) (Appendix B n.d.).

Richards continues his provocative article by asking, “In short, is Thupelo really what Ainslie claims it to be—something more than residual Abstract Expressionism much removed but still hanging around?” (1987, p. 21)

In reply to Richards's confrontational and offensive article, Ainslie wrote to the Weekly Mail after the meeting at the JAF in 1987:

Why your newspaper should provide such a large amount of space to Colin Richards's sour vendetta against the Art Foundation, Thupelo and myself is a puzzle (Ainslie para. 2 and 3) (Appendix B n.d.).

At issue was the supposed appropriation of abstract expressionism in the work of some artists. Richards, Geers, Ivor Powell, and Gavin Younge wrote polemically on the issue. Geers, writing for *The Star* newspaper at the *Explorations* exhibition in 1990 argued that:

Koloane utilises the formal and conceptual language of a historically located movement that occurred in the United States nearly half a century ago.... The language of the abstract expressionists is appropriated wholesale, without any consideration given to either its specificity or of particular context. (1990, p. 12)

Geers continues his pointed criticism in this way:

Where Jackson Pollock's drip paintings were the product of many years of exploration and analysis of the nature of representation at that specific point in history, David Koloane merely plagiarises an existing style without engaging any of the issues involved [sic]. (1990, p. 12)

Koloane, who was born in Alexandra Township and later became head of the Fine Arts section of FUBA, studied and taught at the JAF and was one of the founding members of the Bag Factory Artist's Studios where he still works. The abstract debate about his work and the work of others provoked subsequent defensive statements. In answer to the resulting criticism of the methodology at Thupelo, Koloane emphasises that artists were “not mimicking but using modernism as a ‘vocabulary’ that we could use to explore” (Koloane 2012). In a further stern rebuttal to Geers's direct criticism Koloane emphasises, “I never said I was going to be an abstract painter, I never made those statements. I knew it was a means towards an end and not an end in itself” (Koloane 2012). In addition, this censure was also viewed as racist. As Koloane says “an unrealistic tendency of experts today is often a refusal to recognise contemporary black art for what it is...” (2012). He continues that Jackson Pollock excited him by the rhythms and lack of perspective in his work and that he was interested in the way Pollock sometimes used aboriginal Indian dances, assimilating them as rhythmic source in his drip paintings.

While taking the arguments into consideration the research investigates the role of the workshop ethos from an alternative perspective indicating a more personal viewpoint through oral interviews describing the actual experience of the Thupelo endeavour. The following excerpts from the interviews are direct and definitive in their individual assumptions of the controversial arguments. Everyone at the JAF was affected in some form by the powerful disputes. However, the varied and controversial arguments both positive and negative impacted on the JAF largely in the form of a more decisive resolve to pursue its ideals promoting artistic interaction. This resolve is reflected by the potency of innovation that emanated from the environs. The exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing* at the Bag Factory Gallery showcases some of the artists involved and challenges the questions and uncertainty concerning abstraction and figurative work.

Jill Trappler, artist and Ainslie's niece, who studied at the JAF and attended some of the Thupelo workshops argues in defence of the workshop ethic:

Thupelo is not about abstract painting. It is about experimentation and being away from distractions, giving yourself a chance to go deeper; dig deeper into what you are doing, and find skills and media through exchange and interact with a diverse group of artists during an intense time of work. (Trappler 2012, pers. comm. 15 May)

Ricky Burnett, a painter, who runs a private art studio was a former student, friend and colleague of Ainslie, gives his perspective on the controversy:

People before Colin [Richards], Alan Crump and others were very dismissive of what they thought was a lack of professionalism, lack of academic rigour. I think that was a terrible misreading because in fact it was precisely those qualities that made it [JAF] a humane and welcoming and essentially democratic learning environment. (Burnett 2012, pers. comm. 14 February)

Interestingly, Richards later counters his own reservations in the *Weekly Mail*, by suggesting that his acerbic commentary was misinterpreted:

My own criticism (Richards, 'Alternative, Abstract Art? It's All in His Mind,' *The Weekly Mail* [October 23-29 1987 p. 21]), while somewhat irritable and intemperate, was not directed at the merits or demerits of different modes of representation as has been interpreted by Koloane. Nor was it racist (a common counter-accusation). (Richards 1996, p. 86)

Some years later, Powell in conversation with Koloane, in *Seven stories about modern art in Africa*, acknowledges that he had considered the foreign artists invited to Thupelo "were involved a kind of modernist abstraction" (1995, p.265). He continues, "Abstraction was viewed by most people—and I confess I held the same view at the time—as a kind of cop-out, a buying into American cultural imperialist agendas" (1995, p. 265). Confronting these allegations, there was, nevertheless, an underlying perception that to be derivative is a kind of trap, one that conveys an artificial or superficial understanding.

Curiously, very few participants at Thupelo have pursued their careers in abstract work. In fact, the variance in their oeuvres was clearly demonstrated in the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing* at the Bag Factory Gallery. (Full catalogue, Appendix E)

Art critic, writer and former Director of the South African National Gallery Marilyn Martin gives consideration to abstraction in her paper "Abstraction in South African Art in the 1980's", where she quotes Ainslie's contradictory notion from the UCT Conference, that in his opinion artists "....needed to be able to look at and locate themselves within the modern movement if they were not to become provincial" (*Abstract South African Art from the Isolation Years*.3.2009:1). Ainslie understood that a synthesis or amalgamation of new and useful ideas in Western art forms could benefit South African artists. There was undoubtedly an ethos of a shared commitment through participation and interaction at the workshop where people of Africa could assemble and workshop together discovering and sharing new trends.

"Whose interests are really being served?" (Richards 1987, p. 21)



Thupelo Workshop participants 1987. Photograph courtesy Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa. Fig. A.

The question was raised whether students were the beneficiaries of the remnants of abstraction, or whether it merely provided a way to invent new modes of perception. The number of artists in the above photograph, who pursued their commitment to the arts and became recognised in different disciplines, serves to highlight a tacit response to this question. It was argued that the adventurous artist will create a new reality while involved in a personal quest. Koloane, Nhlengethwa, Ainslie, Jill Trappler, Mautloa, and Helen Sebidi, amongst others in the photograph, having experienced Thupelo, worked towards the most appropriate solution for themselves as individuals. They were able to extract and develop the possibilities available in abstraction into a way of working in their own context. These artists were concerned with broadening their proficiency while being involved in their own life experience. They used the encounters with abstraction, working it into their separate capacities and thereby broadening the connectivity to their individual resources. Koloane feels his exposure to modernism was “nourishment that makes you feel alive.” Asserting that, “All ideas are abstract, to a point; a figurative painter will define the marks. It’s about definition and labelling” (Koloane 2012). These artists were able to find solutions to the possibilities between abstraction and figurative work and the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing* at the Bag Factory signifies some of these individual solutions (The exhibition is examined in more detail in Chapter 4).

Martin gives further reflection on abstraction suggesting that mainstream art in SA had become a camp; if the artist’s work is not figurative, Africanist or politically ‘involved’, he or she is simply moved out of it” (2009:1). Martin continues, “For the black artist abstraction seems to be forbidden. There is a viewpoint that abstract art has no place in people’s culture” (2009:1). The distinct difference in attitude at the JAF was that trends in modern art were encouraged and new possibilities could be explored and assimilated.

Representing his view in 2012 and recognising abstraction’s place in the JAF, Serote stresses,

[...]I’m sure that that whole period of the abstract art laid a whole different base for people who came out of the art centre [JAF] as artists. They have a very strong spectrum of experience in terms of art. So in that we also moving away from the rebellion part of it and enter the space of freedom. They [artists] now occupy that space. (Serote 2013)

It is understood, however, that by exposing artists to modernist mediums of gel, large formats and acrylic paints, in generous supply at the sponsored Thupelo workshops, the expectations of acquiring new skills and acuties in two weeks was unrealistic. The experience of a concentrated two-week workshop in ideal conditions for experimentation with large scale work and with unfamiliar materials was too short a period to make a significant difference in the long term, but Koloane says, “... everybody learnt something” (Koloane 2012).

2009. *Abstract South African Art from the Isolation Years*. 3. Admittedly many artists continued to attend subsequent workshops for some years but the unfamiliar techniques needed to be assimilated and internalized to formulate a new vocabulary. After only two weeks of experimentation at the Thupelo workshop a rather premature exhibition, *Creative workshop*, was held in Pretoria in 1986. The exhibition exposed underdeveloped work that opened up the whole project for criticism and ridicule by Richards and others. Nonetheless the criticism was largely justified as people could not expect works of purely experimental, investigative struggles to be judged by academic parameters. Art critic, Samantha James writing on the exhibition *Creative Workshop (FUBA Gallery)*, in an article entitled *Blacks' first abstract show implies teachers are at fault* (The Star, 1986, p.10), asserts that *Creative Workshop* was "... an austere comment on the state of art education in this country"(1986, p.10). She suggested that despite the varying levels of skill, commitment and involvement by the artists, they demonstrated a "...level in which Abstract Expressionism can reveal the most profound depths of an artist's personality" (1986. p.10). In this regard she cites Marion Arnold's analysis of the Thupelo exhibition, where she says, "...at issue would seem to be the whole concept of art training, and of introducing people to the process of making visual images" (1986, p. 10). Arnold suggested that by providing the possibility of working in abstract form, artists could be introduced to a new, possibly stimulating vocabulary, which in itself contributed to the workshop's significance. (Arnold, 1986, p.10) However, in time, a more sustainable consideration became necessary so that artists were able to continue working in a permanent studio space. The Bag Factory Studios then became an addition to the sustained focus of the on-going needs of participating artists. The Bag Factory Gallery was subsequently established on the premises and due to its historical link with the JAF is the preferred space for the exhibition, *Controversial ways of seeing*.

Collisions in the development of modernism

It could be argued that the JAF triggered the notion of revitalisation in recognising both the power inherent in lively spirit of the traditions of art in Africa and vigorous acceptance of art in other traditions and cultures during a period of intense social and political flux.

There is the contention that Euro-American modern art had explored Africa for a new vitality and inspiration for the forms of abstraction, already forming the base of much African art. Koloane suggested that, "Africa offered a discarding of conscious learning for more intuitive ideas and that African artists had instinctive skills that made masks and images seem so mysterious to the western world" (Koloane 2013). Undoubtedly a deep understanding of abstraction is entrenched in the cultural authenticity of the creative arts in Africa.

Ainslie claimed that contrary to the supposition that the West had brought civilization to Africa he felt that there had been a subliminal and immeasurable invigoration by Africa in the West. He continues, "In terms of my own experience, it's the realization of the invigoration of that spirit that I sense coming through" (1979, p. 109). Ainslie goes on to clarify his recognition of the power of the spiritual component in African art and says, "Now the spirit has to do with imagery and marks have to with energy" (1979, p. 108). In the same paper he expands his sense that it was America and Europe, "that picked up some of the most important spirit that has been conveyed from Africa" (1979, p. 107).

In this regard there is an observation in the Standard Bank catalogue on *Picasso and Africa*, (2006) alluding to the influence of Africa on Western art. In the catalogue essay by Laurence Madeline, the writer discusses Picasso's work from 1907 to 1909:

The artist appears, in the first instance, to be taking as his own a certain formal and stylistic vocabulary, and then in a second stage, to be using even to the point of plagiarism, in order to see how far he can be African himself. (2006, p. 23)

Ainslie had stressed in 1979 that he was "... opposed to any simple, conceptual, ideological acceptance of an African personality. I don't believe that you make yourself African by making your pictures African" [sic] (Herber 1979, p. 108).

Serote, in agreement, was strongly opposed to the notion of African art's "difference" being the qualifying factor for South African art to be recognised as significant (Serote 2012). In particular, Koloane was acutely aware of the irony that there was a significant influence that African art had on abstraction on the Western World, which nonetheless promoted high art to the exclusion of non-western artists. He contends that abstraction came from the African continent and ought not to be viewed as an imported American concept. It was this provincial attitude to black art that Koloane objected to, and he suggested that the so-called experts at that time refused to, "recognise black art for what it is" (Koloane 2013). In addition the criticism of this appropriation of abstraction prompted a debate on hybrid expression that was supposed to be beyond the comprehension of the black artist.

In the publication *Seven stories about modern art in Africa*, Okeke-Agulu claims that to be authentic the individual personality should be revealed in the work, "That personality had to be reflected in the work of the new artist existing beyond cultural and national specificities—the global artist, making universalist art" (1995, p. 42).

Koloane asks the following questions in his contribution to the *Seven Stories* publication,

What defines a South African expression?
What paradigms would typify the expression?
What criterion to employ in a society virtually divided into two
distinct and separate worlds? (1995, p. 143)

Peffer motivates that, "thoughtful research into South Africa's earlier history ought to be a critical component of a more inclusive, global history of art" (2009, p. x). The question constituting South African art's perceived legitimacy in the Western world became a fundamental concern for Ainslie. In researching this component it became clear that it remains a question still under discussion in academia.

The *NKA Roundtable II* panellist and art historian dele jegede indicates concern with the obstacle of stereotypes influencing artists and suggests that stereotypes "... remain a ubiquitous impediment in the quest to establish any academic canon for contemporary African art" (2010, p. 82).

Embracing this theme art historian Peter Probst gives his thoughts:

...[I]t is perhaps unavoidable that we begin this discussion about contemporary African art with references to “stereotypes” and “perception” that have shaped and framed the appearance of “things” we call African art (2010, p. 83).

It is important to note that while the *NKA Roundtable II* was working within the framework of the African Continent as a whole the dilemma of stereotypes permeated the teaching at the JAF. It was severely criticised by some for using stereotypical forms of abstract expressionism in its teaching workshops. However, in contradiction of this censure Ainslie said, “I think what I would like to do here at my school is to have creativity in unlimited terms” where there is an “attempt, to almost slough off the skin of inherited ways of doing things” (Herber 1979, p.106). He too believed that any derivative way of working was a trap and that a struggle, compelling the artist to shed that derivative skin, was necessary “to actually discover where the true sources of one’s expression lie” (Herber 1979, p. 106). With reference to these noticeably unresolved concerns of stereotypes and varied perceptions, the positioning of the JAF is investigated in this research in order to unravel and establish its value and its place in archival history of the arts.

Over the period 2012 to 2014, I posed the question to the artists interviewed for the purposes of this research, “How did the experience with abstraction affect your work?” The question clearly elicited contradictory and diverse responses characterised by individual encounters. There is no doubt that the line of questioning, during the research, gave direction to the narrative and by implication assumes its own pattern. Inevitably this creates its own tension between what is perceived to be the truth and myth or even misrepresentation. (Transcripts of the interviews are to be found in Appendix D)

Koloane’s response identified his understanding of the emphasis on abstraction in the workshops as “...a creative facility rather than an Abstract Expressionist movement” (Koloane 2012). He maintained that the work evolving from the workshops allowed a certain generosity that culminated in “...vital painterly marks...” (Koloane 2012). Some artists were then able to find individual solutions to the proffered possibilities and made enriched choices by experimenting with both abstraction and figurative elements. In the foreword in the publication, *Durant Sihlali: Discovering My True Identity*, Koloane writes in the foreword, “...potential in the aspirant artist can only develop via a journey of exploration and via other cultures, techniques and self-discovery” (1989, p. iv). During the interview with Koloane, he maintained that he would never have been able to work in the way he does today if he hadn’t had the opportunity to explore large abstract work at Thupelo. He continued that the experience enabled him to communicate his ideas and meaning through colour and gesture in his work (Koloane 2012).

The perception at the JAF was that trends in modern art could be assimilated and used for individual expression and accordingly artists were encouraged to explore new possibilities. Ainslie sought to legitimise his interest in abstraction by asserting that he felt a struggle was necessary in order to find the power within the inner resources of an artist to make new discoveries.

The struggle was acknowledged as an important part of the development of an artist and was considered a valuable component of development. As Kentridge maintains, "To understand the struggle was good..." (Kentridge 2014 pers. comm. 16 July).

The question for Sebidi involved her understanding of traditional art forms that became enriched by her exposure to modernism. She maintained, "That spirit inside the art centre was not only about teaching, it's about the individual" (Sebidi 2013). Sebidi was searching for "something that would uplift my work" (Sebidi 2013). In this regard, Arnold in *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996) suggests that after Sebidi's encounter with the JAF her work changed from logical illusionist images to more confused and dislocated images:

She began tearing up work and using collage to reconstruct the forms that created compressed, disturbing works. Working in oil or pastels with strong colour, dynamic marks and compacted shapes, she expressed her responses to the dichotomy between rural and urban life, and the pace, conflict and tension of the South African city (1996, p. 140).

In conversation with Mabaso, he described his work in terms of breaking the rules from figurative images towards abstraction and how the Triangle workshop in the USA and Thupelo endorsed this ability. (Mabaso 2013) He found himself able to work confidently in either discipline, "That's what Thupelo has brought to me, that very strong confidence" (Mabaso, 2013).

Representing his view in recognising abstraction's place in the teaching at the JAF, Serote stresses:

... I'm sure that that whole period of the abstract art laid a whole different base for people who came out of the art centre [JAF] as artists. They have a very strong spectrum of experience in terms of art. So in that we are also moving away from the rebellion part of it and enter the space of freedom. They [artists] now occupy that space. (Serote 2013)

Ideological tensions at the JAF

After Ainslie's death in 1989 the JAF was precipitated into a predicament where teachers were divided in their perception of new ideas, some seemingly in direct opposition to the flexibility of Ainslie's philosophy. The disputes that ensued threatened the ideology of the JAF.

It was a disquieting time of uncertainty and upheaval in total contrast to the previous norms. Manganye recalls that some of the remaining staff members felt that they should have been considered for Ainslie's position, resulting in conflict with the newly appointed director, Steven Sack. A complex situation ensued occasioning an appeal to mediator Charles Nupen, who attempted to reconcile the protagonists through mediation. This dispute undermined the management of the JAF and Manganye said, "... to be honest I think that Steven [Sack] couldn't understand the culture of the Art Foundation and he wanted to run it his way" (Manganye 2013).

Sack was viewed as an academic and as Mabaso indicates, "...amongst the entire group there was a little bit of panic, a little bit of uncertainty" (Mabaso 2013). Mabaso goes on to suggest that the staff thought Sack was "more of an office person" (Mabaso 2013), and that according to Mabaso's understanding of Ainslie's teaching philosophy was the fundamental difference. Mabaso maintains,

...you could not take the office person into a class to teach. That's why Bill was constantly painting. In order to be able to impart knowledge to someone you need that kind of hands-on experience (Mabaso 2013).

However, Steven Sack, previously Director of Arts, Culture and Heritage in Johannesburg and currently CEO of Origins Centre, Wits, in conversation addresses some of these controversial views by acknowledging, "I was inevitably much more 'academic' in my approach having spent some time in formal teaching institutions" (Sack 2014 pers. comm. 4 August).

Sack continues that in retrospect he understands that "For many of the teachers and artists, who had worked and developed under Bill's vision and leadership, the adaptation to a new leader was extremely difficult" (Sack 2014).

Chapter 3: Visions for a divided society

This chapter assumes an examination of the personal history and experiences that led Ainslie to establish an institution that formed a network of people, developing and growing together with mutual exchanges of ideas and goals. Through its teaching ethic, the JAF sought to maintain qualities of humanism in a deficient South African society. The value of an individual was fundamental to the teaching philosophy. In the catalogue *Last Paintings by Bill Ainslie* [Pachipamwe work], Pat Williams refers to Ainslie's alternative vision to initiate a place where he said "...no restrictive attitudes have had a chance to develop" (Williams, 1990 p.2).

In order to extrapolate the source of the teaching methodology at the JAF and how it differed from the accredited education at the universities it is necessary to travel the path trodden by Ainslie. After originally studying Psychology and Theology, he subsequently attained his BAFA Honours at Pietermaritzburg University in 1958. He was elected as president of the SRC 1957/8 and became a member of the Liberal Party at that time. According to Gardiner, who was at university with Ainslie, he writes:

...the Liberal Party happened to be represented in PMB by remarkably fine people and as a student one could be exposed to the ideas and attitudes of Alan Paton, Chief Luthuli, Dr. Chota Motala of the Indian Congress in the city, there was Peter Brown who was Chair of the Liberal Party. Those sorts of people became examples or 'role models' for us as people looking for our destiny, looking for our identity, looking for our futures. Bill was drawn into that sort of society. (Gardiner 2013)

Ainslie taught at Michaelhouse, a private school located in the Natal Midlands until 1960, and then went to Cyrene Mission outside Bulawayo [then Southern Rhodesia] in 1961. At the Mission he refused to follow the constraints of a specific style of teaching which focused more on rehabilitation and craft. He made an attempt to free the students from those boundaries, by offering them large scale paper and different materials. He wanted them to explore and express themselves. Ainslie came back to South Africa in 1963 and taught briefly at King Edward VII High School. After this experience he made the decision that he would not teach children in an environment that was not representative of the whole population. He subsequently began teaching privately in 1963 (Gardiner 2013). It is significant, for his personal development, that after seeing Douglas Portway's paintings in an exhibition at the Lidchi gallery, Ainslie writes,

These paintings had something about them which I had never sensed before, something which is perhaps best described by Greenberg's term 'ineffable.' This term is the best because it alludes to that quality which is beyond analysis. (Ainslie's personal notes; n.d. Appendix D, *My debt to Portway*, p.2, c. 1975. As cited by Sophia Ainslie)

In 1970 Ainslie travelled to St. Ives to work with Portway and thereafter spent two years working in the Netherlands. The influence of these experiences resonated with Ainslie, and he felt committed to pursue them in his own school. Ainslie wrote:

The effort was not dictated by a desire to work in the political field but rather by a desire to work towards the creation of a political structure that would be taken as more just and natural, a situation where everybody's aspirations would be taken account of. (Ainslie c.1975, p. 1)

Committed to the people in Africa, Ainslie returned to South Africa to resume his private art teaching. During group discussions Ainslie would talk about the development of his own work and how certain preoccupations had changed from an inherited set of definitive ideas to making paintings that would "register a whole experience" (Herber 1979, p. 104). In a sense, he was searching for an instinctual clarity in both verbal and visual form. Ainslie felt he did not belong as a citizen in a country where "the interests of the people were not represented in parliament" (1979, p. 83). He continues that he could not conform to teaching students in an educational system "which effectively cut them off from the major realities of their lives" (1979, p. 83).

According to Williams, Ainslie's teaching focussed primarily on encouraging "the maximum human result" (Williams 1990, p.2). In the early period the teaching concentrated on careful drawing and painting of seen objects that we, the teachers, called the "screen and passage" exercises which concerned the study of how the existence of an object as we assume it to be, is an illusion. Students were encouraged to look intensely at how the light fell across the object at a particular moment. How the darkness of the background surrounding the object informed the edge of that object. How this particular relationship between the background and foreground created an edge of constant change. How the light merged and passed from one object to another in some areas and how in other areas of focus the light formed a definite border or screen creating a precise edge. Initially the prevailing emphasis was that one had to learn to see before one could learn to abstract but after Ainslie had experienced Triangle and during the Thupelo years the focus became more about the medium itself.

Ainslie himself had an academic background and his teaching followed a process towards heightened awareness of visual perception. Another focus was the positive use of the eraser as a drawing tool. The charcoal, conté and pencil could be smudged and manipulated in what we called the "push-pull" method of drawing. This process was widely used in Kentridge's work which is described in the publication, *that which is not drawn*, consisting of conversations between Kentridge and Rosalind Morris. Kentridge says of his own work, "The exposure is always achieved through erasure. There is a complex economy of showing, and of showing and hiding, and of showing and vanishing" (2014, p.31). In the same publication Kentridge talks of "...the need to erase and the need to hold on to it" (2014, p.57). This method of working, skilfully exposing the economy of disclosure, is revealed in Ainslie's *Portrait of Wally* (1973) and *Portrait of Michael* (1980) shown on the exhibition. In these works Ainslie uses drawn and erased marks giving them equal value in revealing the image and the essential elusive quality integral to portraiture (Fig. 21 and 22 in Chapter 4).

Although visual perception was a fundamental method of teaching at the JAF prior to 1982, Burnett suggests that the more Ainslie became convinced by modernism he seemed to lose the “capacity to teach broadly” (Burnett 2014). He continues, “The perceptual studies rooted in close focus seeing gave way to indiscriminate paint splashing and dripping” (Burnett 2014). Initially Ainslie insisted that one cannot work with abstraction before learning how to see but his later teaching evinced a developing conflict between formal and non-formal education. These changes worked their way through the JAF causing conflicting perceptions among the participants. However in order to generate income structured courses, particularly for part-time students, in watercolour, portraiture, pastel drawing and the like, had to be introduced and were taught by those proficient in the particular medium.

Kentridge gives his considered evaluation of that time,

But I think of the long haul of what it is to be an artist was obviously vital stuff that happened at the JAF. There was openness - even though Bill was devoted to American colour-field painting and that direction of abstraction, he was open to other people working in other ways. He was also saying, okay here is a level against which you have to measure what you are doing, a level of abstract expressionists and later, New York colour painters (Kentridge, 2014).

Gardiner elaborates on his deeper understanding of Ainslie’s trajectory, by motivating that Ainslie was interested in abstraction long before his teaching of the discipline at the JAF:

Bill was introduced to Selby Mvusi—and here’s to me the interesting part—Selby was an abstract painter, now I’m talking 1956, so that Colin Richards and all those who attacked David Koloane and other black artists in the 1970s for betraying their true nature by going into abstraction, don’t know what they’re talking about. (Gardiner 2013)

Williams quotes Ainslie’s recollection of Mvusi’s early influence in this way,

It was my first contact with a black artist and my first liberal education as a white South African....Selby alerted me to the needs of the country. He was the first person to teach me about the situation here, and through him I began to see the demand for the development of black art. The work I have done in my life was a consequence of the formative period I spent with him. (1990, p.5)

Ainslie focussed his attention on the development of black art and the acknowledgement of its rightful place in the recognition of its cultural authenticity. He recognised that there was a justifiable place where the present predicament of art could begin to be partly addressed. The struggle for legitimacy is evidenced in Ainslie’s personal notes and correspondence with Wits and the Technicon where differences in approaches between the more formal institutions and the informal teaching at the JAF become apparent (Appendix C. n.d.). Through his teaching and through the Thupelo workshops artists were exposed to trends and influences from outside the country, a methodology that was often misinterpreted.

The JAF offered alternatives for the expression of different layers of creative experience inherent in the social realities for the artists in South African society. In Ainslie's view, the way to creativity was to experiment with ways of working that individuals had not tried before in order to extend their capabilities while not allowing any former limitations to extinguish possibilities for creative enrichment. Discussions and critical analysis of the work in progress, where student participation was continuously encouraged and acknowledged, was considered a vital part of the teaching. The teachers used the conversations to teach the students to articulate and form a way of working for themselves, thereby, becoming the mediators and interlocutors in the space occupied between the student and the actual work. In this space the student was able to see and recognise elements for themselves and develop a self-critical methodology towards the work.

Ainslie was insistent about an art work being a sign or symbol that does not rely on definition or classification. Additionally, he felt that artists were no longer obliged to create illusions of varying realities. "They no longer needed to disguise the tactile, physicality of the medium or to pervert the colour" (1979, p. 84). Ainslie believed that artists were in a position to open the eyes of a fragmented society by offering "other possibilities and other realities", and he further suggested that artists' devotion to their own quest for meaning in their work may "provide the meanings by which man orders his life" (1979, p. 110).

As a result, there was no confining structure to the teaching at the JAF, but rather a sense of shared methods and ideas and an alignment towards respect and intrinsic individual values. There were no history of art lessons per se but recognition was constantly made to individual artists and other disciplines through direct involvement with materials and discussion. Ainslie had a strong loyalty to Cezanne and instilled the ethic of feeling, sensing and looking while reacting to these stimuli with uninhibited, unpredictable ways of painting and drawing. Significantly with heightened perception and often using unfamiliar materials, individuals were able to develop a way of working at their own pace and with their own focus, in Ainslie's words, "...to clarify their own areas of competence" (Herber 1979, p. 107). There was little emphasis on traditional academic techniques that Ainslie found limiting and restrictive. The emphasis was, therefore, on unlimited, lively expression yet the basic principles of design and of reaching coherence in a painting were not ignored. In this way the JAF generated a teaching position where art making developed as a particular value system based on non-prescriptive methods while providing a place where many alienated people could share similar social realities.

The nature of the seminars, poetry readings, and group discussions

Ainslie's role at the JAF was to facilitate the interaction between participating artists, students and teachers in a social and aesthetic context. The pervading philosophy meant that the JAF did not focus solely on the exchange of ideas but became absorbed in the making of artworks themselves. The art work became that which represented a non-judgemental ideology of inclusivity.

Williams identifies Ainslie's ideals,

He [Ainslie] believed that because art had been neglected in South Africa, much had been corrupted. And his vision of art was as the means of growth and communication, ultimately of reconciliation, between the races. (Williams 1990, p. 3)

As a method of communication the weekly seminars held at the JAF elicited discussions and debates on a variety of subjects from philosophy to mythology. The nature of these seminars was experimental, constituting the basic rubric of a participatory process. Ainslie's shared intellect through teaching and the weekly seminars became more complex the wider he read. Ironically, this focus formed constraints and uncertainty within himself and, by implication, through the shared teaching process, on the students and the other teachers.

Nonetheless, working as a non-formal art school the JAF could disregard many of the confining disciplines inherent in formal institutions. The school was, therefore, able to develop a teaching concept that drifted between philosophy, poetry and art practices. A consequence of the diverse components was that it formed a distinct ethos of tolerance that enriched the development of the JAF identifying it both as a learning and a gathering space. As Steven Henry Madoff in the publication *Art School* writes, "An ethics of knowledge is the foundation of any school in its essential definition as a gathering place..." (Madoff, 2009. p. ix).

In addition to Ainslie's weekly seminar where Eastern philosophies and contemporary philosophers were discussed, invited guests gave seminars on a broad range of subjects exposing students to components of study that had previously been inaccessible to many of them. Discussion groups ensued and associated literature and readings were suggested so that particular interests could be pursued.

Panel discussions and poetry readings over a wide range of topics and areas of focus provided "... students with a sense of the richness, the variety and complexities of the world of which they were part" (Gardiner 2013). Gardiner continues to suggest that this brought about a sense of awareness of the way you interacted with others and the way you lived your life (Gardiner 2013). In accord with this perception Kentridge acknowledges the diversity and the influence of these invited speakers by saying, "Rob Berold came to do poetry, Lionel Abrahams and Barney Simon being around and it definitely had to do with friends of the older artists, friends of Bill [Ainslie]" (Kentridge 2014). Ainslie's friendships with people like Simon, Gardiner, Abrahams, Serote and others enabled the JAF to enrich the visual arts programme with other creative disciplines.

In essence philosophy, poetry, and the visual arts combined to form a profound sense of awareness of the complexities of the daily politics of the time. In 1971, the poetry of Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* and, in 1972, Serote's *Yakhalinkomo* had expounded the essential concepts integral to freedom and liberation with words that were used in the propagation of political and social reform.

According to Dubow, at the UCT Conference writers and poets could be more explicit in “posing uncomfortable challenges” than the visual arts (Dubow 1979, p. 13). Poetry, however, alludes to metaphorical implications and not necessarily direct reference, nevertheless, the underlying meaning is able to pose challenges.

In my own experience the intensity and richness implicit in the exposure of students and teachers to a variety of skilled people who were able to share a combination of proficiencies was evident in their response. We were exposed to possibilities that were out of reach for many of us. The fabric of the JAF was considerably bound by Ainslie’s personal quest into mysticism and philosophy. He read philosophical works like Kant, Jung, Hillman, and the German Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the more he shared his intellect within the weekly seminars the more it infused into the teaching practice. In part it was Ainslie’s insistence that students must discover the truth for themselves which was influenced by his personal examination of mystical and philosophical ideas. The diversity and range of possibilities is emphasised by Mabaso’s words:

The other thing I enjoyed were the Wednesdays when we’d have those talks or seminars with Bill, and those were my greatest times whereby I could just sit there and listen and philosophise and think about those things that Bill would choose to read. (Mabaso 2013)

Together with art teaching, seminars and workshops the JAF provided a place where people could gather under conditions of learning with the possible prospect of enhancing the community. In the 1979 paper at the UCT Conference Ainslie communicated his conviction in the art workshop as a place where artists are able to detect the traps of “conditioned reflexes” and predictability (1979, p. 82). An added component of the workshop philosophy was that the shared skills were expected to reach into the community art centres by teacher participation. Teachers from Alexander Art Centre, the JAF, FUBA, and the Community Arts project in Cape Town were able to contribute elements of their experiences into their own learning centres. The workshop notion renegotiates and reinvigorates the teaching method by decentralising the didactic element into an activity that explores mutual uncertainty. The relationship between learner and teacher tackling new ideas and methods of perception were endorsed. One of the main characteristics of this philosophy was to challenge orthodox and conventional ideas by investigating diversity and variety and by the sharing of expertise.

Ainslie articulated his fundamental teaching ideas in his presentation at the UCT Conference, 1979:

We do not tell people how to draw or paint. We do not tell them how to handle space or colour, because we do not believe that it is possible or helpful. Everything is an exploration. We encourage what we find to be authentic and vital, and discourage what we find imitative or commonplace or dull. (Ainslie 1979, p. 85)

Kentridge endorses these ideals by stressing that for his own development it was just being at the JAF that allowed him to grow. Whilst he was never influenced by the emphasis on abstraction and the singular importance of paint and colour he was encouraged to find his own authenticity in the medium of his choice. He did, however, attempt six months at Wits but was not convinced by the teaching practice there at the time and subsequently dropped out.

In conversation Kentridge describes his personal view of the different imperatives that applied to formal and informal institutions:

The early 70's and 80's, 1973 and 1974 must have been the low point of teaching art in South Africa. Michaelis was a good school but Wits was dire. They were offering a degree that had to do with different kinds of imperatives to that of the Foundation [JAF] that offered no certification and no diploma. ... There simply was the notion that you were there not because you wanted to get a diploma or a degree but because that's what you wanted to do. (Kentridge 2014)

Sebidi corroborates these words by citing an incident where a parent asked Ainslie to give her child a certificate and according to Sebidi he said, "I don't do certificates my certificate comes from the child's hand or your hands. Go to Wits they will give you those papers that you need" (Sebidi 2013). The prevailing disparity in education between black and white students totally excluded the likelihood of an accreditation component at the JAF.

Notably, Kentridge had reservations about the teaching at the JAF and contends that the JAF largely ignored the tradition of an art history, craft and skill of the past four hundred years. He maintains that there was a lack of instruction with the new medium, acrylic paint, and that working with acrylics "was taken as a given, the most they ever said was, load your brush." He continues, "Nothing was ever said about which colours were transparent or how glazes worked or how to actually work with the material." Despite these incongruities Kentridge states, "But somehow in spite of what was ostensibly really bad teaching it was a great place to be..." (Kentridge 2014).

Burnett also suggests that there was a downside to the teaching in that Ainslie himself had great difficulty completing a painting. The resulting uncertainty contaminated the teaching which caused anxiety among the students. Uncertainty about how to complete a work was a constant problem for many who worked at the JAF. During the critique (crit) sessions, discussion about the work in progress was interactive with both students and staff. Occasionally there might be a suggested direction from Ainslie but not how to proceed towards it. It was time consuming as work on a particular painting could last for months. Searching for the intangible essence that makes a good painting burdened with more questions than answers was often discouraging. There was always the underlying struggle involved in both the teaching and making art.

Sophia Ainslie, Ainslie's daughter, describes her memories of Ainslie's teaching method, "One of my frustrations with Bill as a child was that he would never give me an answer" (Ainslie, S. 2012 pers. comm. Amended 15 June 2014). She felt that rather than give direction he would pose questions to the students to facilitate the process whereby the student would begin to question herself. Sophia Ainslie alludes to Ainslie's struggle with his own work that affected many of his students,

He was never satisfied. Constantly looking for something intangible, something that shared the boundary between the familiar and also the unfamiliar. When it presented itself, there was a sense of knowing it and yet never being able to completely grasp it, leading to a dialogue of constant learning and newness. (Ainslie, S. 2014)

Sophia Ainslie contemplates the dissatisfaction Ainslie had with his own work where he continually painted over and over creating a density of encrusted paint. She continues, "through Bill I was always critical of my own work and found it hard to know when it was finished" (Ainslie, S. 2014). Sophia Ainslie gives further consideration to advice from artist Ezrom Legae who advised:

"...you do know that you don't have to rework your work once you've given birth to it. Just let it be. The work can be finished when you walk away from it." (As quoted by Ainslie, S. 2014) Those words have stayed with me. I think I use them in my current work, but I also strive for the unexpected, something I haven't seen before that will surprise me and this comes through struggle. It's a combination of the two distinctly different voices. (Ainslie, S. 2014)

Perhaps there was always a dilemma between two different voices speaking of both formal and informal invectives that made up the ethos of the JAF. In many cases the dialectic simultaneously caused confusion and frustration as well as moments of profound understanding. There is no doubt that an entanglement of threads comprising elements of both abstraction and the figurative formed beneficial and negative components that made up the fabric of the JAF.

Ainslie maintained:

The artist today has been freed from any ideological standpoint and as a consequence, he is on his own in the sense that he must find the truth for himself. Herber 1979, p. 105)

A comparable opinion is articulated by Ann Lauterbach in the publication *Art Schools*. She holds the distinct view that artists "... move across and through the hyperbolic landscape of information, processes and materials to find what they need to know in order to make something as yet unknown, unseen" (2009, p. 88). Lauterbach then quotes Theodor Adorno's words, "In every work of art something appears that does not exist." He explains this premise: "In art, the non-existent is mediated by fragments of the existent, gathered up in an apparition" (2009, p. 88).

The emphasis at the JAF was to encourage artists to gather up components of their own potential in order to understand what it is they need to recognise and apply to their work.

Looking for something beyond and through the boundaries Mabaso reminisces about the difficult days in the township in the 1970s, where he was sitting drawing a dead dog, "...and people asked, 'Why are you drawing a dead dog?' and I said I'm not painting the dog, I'm painting the smell" (Mabaso 2013).

Painting the smell was more about his involvement with the essence of the experience in paint and Mabaso again found that experience possible at the Triangle and Thupelo workshops, where the object was subjugated to emotions and feeling. He described his experiences at the JAF, Thupelo, and Triangle as a form of shared commitment through participation and interaction with teachers and students, which encouraged him to paint the thing unseen or the thing that does not exist. Ainslie articulated it in this way, "The unknown way. The thing that has never been tried before" (1979, p. 82).

The artist as a liminal man

Ainslie was sensitive to the qualities of alienation and rejection, and this became evident in the ethos of his teaching philosophy. No one was denied access from the place: the elderly, children, people with art experience and those with none, physically impaired or compromised, wealthy or poor and sophisticated or naïve. Anyone who expressed the need visually or verbally was taken seriously. The philosophy was predicated on the view that many South Africans were on the outer margins or the periphery of society.

Gardiner refers to Ainslie's paper, *An Artist's Workshop—"Flash in the pan or a stone that the builders rejected?"* at the UCT Conference of 1979 as "a crucial document" by noting:

[...] and that's where he [Ainslie] talks about liminality, that's where he talks about being pushed onto the margin, about being very much out of the main thing, about being lost and being happy to be with people who feel the same way. (Gardiner, 2013)

The passage Gardiner refers to reads as such:

To me, an artist in South Africa is necessarily a sort of liminal man. A person on the threshold of society or on the outskirts of society. A person who is on the frontiers of society. A person who simply cannot accept what society lays down as norms. (Herber 1979, p. 110)

The term *liminality* was used by Victor Turner, a Scottish anthropologist in the late 1940s in reference to rites of passage. Turner noted that liminality describes the transitional state between two phases, individuals were "betwixt and between the structural past and the structural future ... they did not belong to the society that they previously were a part of and they were not yet reincorporated into that society" (Turner 1986, p. 41). Liminality is further characterised by Victor Turner as "the space in between one state of being and another" (Turner 1986, p. 41).

Ainslie identified the artist's position as suspended in a state of ambiguity between two life chapters, and the teaching philosophy of the JAF became an extension of this idea. It was a liminal institution operating in the interstices between one state of educational alienation and another of inclusivity of learning.

Ainslie considered that by assisting society in finding meaning, the artist becomes liminal. He acts as a kind of intermediary in order to articulate cultural and historical positioning. The JAF was always in a state of limbo, neither adhering to the supposed norms of society nor quite able to expand its theories in a more meaningful way.

Comparably, Sarah Nuttall in her publication *Entanglement* (2009), records her understanding of intertwined connections in society by writing, "...entanglement is frequently revealed to be a process of becoming someone you were not in the beginning" (2009, p. 58). This idea suggests a transition from one state of being to another, from one space to another. According to Ainslie the artist occupies "the space between" and through his creativity he then becomes liminal (Herber 1979, p. 106).

Mabaso shared this view: that Ainslie was a teacher following Sufi ideology where the student is made aware of learning through parables and metaphor. Mabaso said:

He [Ainslie] was more like a Sufi, you know how the Sufi philosophy works; that I can only walk you to the paths and show you what is right and wrong and it will be up to you to decide which direction you want to take. (Mabaso 2013)

In particular, Ainslie studied the Classical Sufism of Idries Shah and the parables were often the centre of seminar discussions. Sufism, as in many other philosophies, emphasises the necessary connection between student and teacher in order that the student may grow. Martin Lings in, *What is Sufism?* notes that Sufi mysticism promoted continuous growth for every individual (1975 p. 23). The mutual interest shown in these seminars led to discussions and debates expanding these ideas, and sequentially had some bearing on the developing philosophy of teaching at the JAF. The message cited in a group of papers in an international seminar on Sufism reads, "they [Sufis] laid stress on the dignity of man for they thought that every individual should reach the highest goal of human life by his own effort" (1993, p. 9). Dignity and validation of a wide range of people, their perceptions and means of expression, was integral to the philosophy at the JAF.

Another motivating practice was to encourage new teachers to follow Ainslie as he moved among his students, in a semi-participatory, apprenticeship method. As a consequence of this, the sensibility of the teachers, within their own capacity, adhered to the teaching philosophy which was linked to Ainslie's ideals of learning through mutual connection. Ainslie's interest in Sufi philosophy led to this practice of apprenticeship and of teaching by example. Apprenticeship placed an emphasis on eliciting ideas from students, encouraging their opinions, which in turn encouraged individual growth.

Additionally, Ainslie invited and encouraged students to discuss his own work and Mabaso recalls how he personally benefitted from those interactions implying that the collaborative process prompted a situation where “... there was that kind of feeding each other”(Mabaso 2013).

Mabaso continues:

It was actually such a great thing that you could be on the same level with a master, or someone that you look up to. He brought himself to your level and he said “listen I’m just an artist like you and help me along as well [*sic*]” (Mabaso 2013).

Working with the notion of a participatory process, Deliss uses the term “intellectual trading post” between teachers and students, where the participants “become the editors and the beneficiaries” (2009, p. 138). It can be argued that the philosophy behind the teaching approach of the JAF was a practice, where students and teachers interacted in a way that developed the individual by reviews, questions and discussion. The teaching at the JAF attempted, in this way, to formulate a sense of value in each individual, one that was both provocative and creative. The informality, spontaneity and audacity of the JAF, while possibly reckless, promoted artistic interaction.

Sack describes Ainslie’s JAF in these words:

So these art spaces start with powerful charismatic leaders and visionary individuals and then they have to take on an institutional form and that’s incredibly complex, difficult and demanding—seemingly impossible. (Sack 2014)

Ainslie died in a car accident on his way back from the Pachipamwe art workshop in Zimbabwe in 1989 and after a rapid decline in the following years the JAF closed and ceased to exist after the sale of the house in 2001.

Sack underlines Ainslie’s legacy in the following excerpt from the interview:

Bill’s legacy is undoubtedly a whole lot of artists who are artists today because of the opportunities that were created in that institution, and I think that is probably more important than anything else. The fact that the institution didn’t survive is maybe just inevitable. (Sack 2013)

Finally, Williams in her tribute, gives an overview of Ainslie’s trajectory as an artist, humanist and teacher, stating that, “Bill’s decision was to make art, and to teach it, and to build towards a situation in which such teaching could be spread through Southern Africa” (1990, p. 5).

Chapter 4: Reflection on the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*

Mihnea Mircan in the journal article *Art History, Interrupted*, writes,

I propose to think of the exhibition as a locus where two distinct ways of imagining the future converge and are tested against each other: art's ability to figure—or fabricate—the future, and art history's capacity to do the same. (2009; 2010: p. 5)

During the investigation I became increasingly interested in giving consideration to the process of articulating a sector of art history conjoined with a sector of contemporary art production in the locus of the Bag Factory space. By showing representative works reflecting both the historical and current values the exhibition serves to present different ways seeing and interpreting the archive and equally, the contemporaneous vision.

Additionally, as the relationships that I had established during interviews developed, primarily with Bag Factory artists and former teachers at the JAF, they shaped possibilities of using the voice as an unexpected transfer of both memory and current experience. While using the language of the tradition of oral history poses both opportunities and dilemmas it constitutes a resource that can be rich and can, correspondingly, in some cases be unreliable. However the challenge is to engage with the interviewees as eye-witnesses of the specified events. Deliss in conversation with Sasa Nabergoj quotes Mladen Dolar: "...the voice may well be the key to the presence of the present" (Deliss 2007, p. 167).

Working with this statement the audio constituent of related memory introduces the possibility of historical reflection and also acts as content mediator guiding the viewers through creative moments creating a "presence of the present" (2007,p.167). In this way the metaphor of the gallery space revitalises the time and the space occupied by the JAF.

Personal involvement as a teacher at the JAF during the years 1982-1992 has allowed me to mine that shared experience through interviews with colleagues. In addition, vital original archival documentation was made available to me. The personal notes and letters by Ainslie and others have not been revealed before. Nonetheless, reflecting on the exhibition itself it became apparent that it could have been much more comprehensive. The remaining unseen wealth of archive material could offer an exhibition in itself but for the purposes of *Controversial ways of seeing* only selected texts were used. The guiding principle for me as the curator was to confine the archival choices to writings and texts that directly pertained to the teaching component of the JAF. The exhibition, therefore, acknowledges the fragmentary nature of this pursuit and cannot claim a complete representation.

As such, *Controversial ways of seeing* does not offer conclusive answers but rather supports the continuing challenge to society by proposing visual questions through newspaper articles and artists' oral and visual participation supported by original archive material. The exhibition pursues these challenges and by engaging visual evidence in diverse forms intends to ground the intentions of the JAF. Cognisant of this intention, decisions made locating the argument focused primarily on selected works from Bag Factory artists and former teachers at the JAF.

Appropriately, *Controversial ways of seeing* reflects the important link to the endeavours of Ainslie, Koloane and Loder, who were instrumental in acquiring the premises for artist's studios and gallery space in 1986. Koloane says he and Ainslie "were like-minded people" (Koloane, 2013). Together with Loder, who provided the funding, they established the studio space for artists in a 'grey area', which during apartheid was a space where blacks and whites were not totally 'banned' from integrating to some extent. Considering that blacks were unable to own property, the factory had to be purchased for artist studio space by a white person. The Bag Factory studio space allowed some artists who had experienced Thupelo the possibility of continuing that creative energy and the connection is, therefore, a crucial link to the JAF and a preferred choice of venue for the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*.

The value of the exhibition is that it gives an overview of the diversity of the period 1982-1992 re-energising the political factor and gives a critical account of the teaching philosophy both positive and negative. The exhibition also intends to initiate some awareness of the artistic surge that took place at the JAF. Accordingly, the curatorial strategy endeavours to indicate both depth and coherence without losing the distinguishing elements of individual artists. It brings together early and contemporary work both abstract and figurative which embraces the controversial components of the teaching philosophy.

With some exceptions earlier works selected for the exhibition are representative of the period 1982-1992, some of which had not been exhibited before. The more contemporary work provides a component of immediacy to the purpose of the exhibition; signifying the notion of the new and the unexpected. In this way the exhibition offers the possibility of accessing the past and advances the notion of work in progress.

Working with elements of the unexpected and the unpredictable *Controversial ways of seeing* gathered its own momentum supported by the generous and informed attitude of artists and mounting interest stimulated by the interviews. Modes of observation and strategies for installation, therefore, examines the creative practice gleaned from personal experiences representative of the years 1982-1992 and firmly bound to South Africa's political, historical and creative context. The exhibition itself energises the fundamental premise of the research and prompts the renewed connection with the JAF by tracing back towards the links with the past and the present.

In this way the strategy for the installation of *Controversial ways of seeing* does not simply focus on the group identity of the JAF but engages in a more symbolic representation of the philosophy of the teaching and how it affected the creative constituencies in South Africa.

Mapping the flow

It is fair to say that the premise at the JAF was defiant in its teaching philosophy and defiant in its political stance. Significantly, Serote's presence then and now forms the link between the activist position held by the JAF in contravening the norms of art education and politics in an independent non-racial school in 1982-1992.

In conversation with Serote early in 2013 we discussed the research processes necessary for an exhibition of this nature and he said,

It would be interesting to study the art centre [JAF] and the others to see how they were conceptualised, with the idea that once you understand, we then understand how we can conceptualise it in the current times.[...] We should do it in the spirit that we should remind everyone in the country especially Government, decision makers and art people. We must remind them this country has real talent. This country has produced incredible art, and we still can produce more art, precisely because of the experiences of South Africans. (Serote 2013)

Necessarily, my vision towards mapping the flow of the narrative begins with the portrait of Serote directing the viewer towards the ensuing challenges of the show that in part address the misconceptions of the JAF ethos. The developing narrative confronts and confirms its place in a complex society by exploring avenues of the discriminatory factors imposed by apartheid. The narrative was supported by the invitation image of the *Portrait of Serote* 1973, Fig. 2, done by Ainslie before Serote was interrogated by the security police and went into exile. At the exhibition opening Serote described his seminal involvement with the artists and political change at the JAF. He had been introduced to Ainslie by Dumile Feni and said, "...from then on we became partners in working. I think I'm conscious that we were breaking the law very deliberately in insisting on creating space for our thoughts; for our spirit for our being" (Serote 2013).

The exhibition documents both visually and in sound the depth and more importantly the determination of artists who were affected by a discriminatory system that suppressed all creative endeavour. While acknowledging the disputatious factors surrounding the idiosyncratic nature of the philosophy, it is significant to note that the JAF itself displayed tenacity in its ideology amid the surrounding instability in society.

Fig.1. Gallery space

All of the artists who agreed to participate in the exhibition were affected by apartheid's discriminatory education system which disallowed any meaningful interaction between artists of different races. The JAF defied these laws and invited artists of all races to participate and work with each other, however controversial it seemed to be.



Importantly, abstraction being one of the most contentious issues surrounding the teaching philosophy at the JAF forms a major part of the structure of the exhibition. During my conversation with Kentridge, he states:

There was a sense of saying this is bringing American modernism, importing it into Africa and saying this is what a painting should be. But there was also a strong polemic that Bill could make as a political activist, saying there was still a space, an important space, for work that worked in a completely different way to the demands of the immediate and the political, which was easier for him to have made and could have been made because of his political convictions and because of the way the studio worked, not cutting itself off from the rest of the country. (Kentridge 2014)

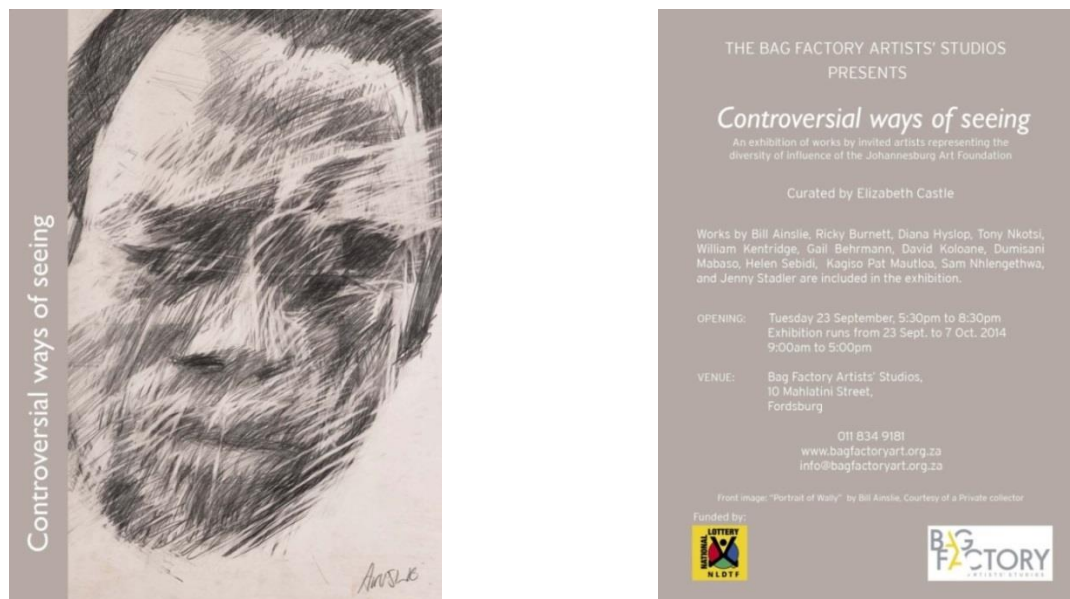


Fig.2. Invitation to *Controversial ways of seeing*, 23 September 2014



Fig.3. Serote opening *Controversial ways of seeing*, 23 September 2014

A corner of modernism

The exhibition title *Controversial ways of seeing* acknowledges John Berger—the art critic, novelist, artist, poet, and teacher—for his script written for a television series on the BBC entitled “Ways of Seeing” (Berger 1972). Berger elucidates methods of visual recognition and he suggests that the way in which a person sees things is governed by what he actually knows about them. Berger writes, “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak” (1972, p. 7). It is the emphasis on recognition that seems appropriate for this research and the fact that it is strongly rooted in oral testimony of that which was seen, experienced, and created at the JAF during the period 1982-1992. Berger maintained that one sees art in relation one’s own life experience making sense of visual language in the context of one’s individual capability. Artists at the JAF were encouraged to find individual solutions to the proffered possibilities and the subsequent narratives highlight these options. Considering this idea I refer to Kentridge in conversation with Morris saying, “Is visibility like language, with seeing being comparable to speaking?” (2014, p. 146) The exhibition is the locus where the order and syntax is examined both in visual and oral form, the consequence of which results in a dynamic dialogue rich in emotionally charged nostalgia. Additionally, the oral component weaves the narrative through systems of remembering that can be conflicting at times.

A consequence of my understanding of the word controversial, as a central focus for this research, exists on formal, political, pedagogical and experiential, levels:

Firstly, on a formal level controversies are present in those contestations evinced by writers such as Richards and Geers (see chapter two) contradicted by responses from Ainslie and others (see chapter two and Appendix C).

Furthermore, this formal argument seems to have gained purchase more recently as the notion of African modernism has been revisited at the *NKA Roundtable II* debate (convened September 4 - October 10, 2009). Making the decision to create so-called abstract work in the period of the state of emergency (SOE), when thousands of political activists were detained and many were forced into exile is in and of itself, a defiant political decision of its own kind. In the reading of the texts from the vantage point of 2015 it is clear that the space occupied by the JAF and its noncompliant teaching philosophy antagonised the prevailing authorities and the formal art institutions.

Secondly, on a political level, the fact that a space was created in opposition to apartheid's educational and spatial legislation, perhaps all apartheid legislation, suggests a particular need to engage the potential for controversy, not for the sake thereof, but as a fundamental antagonism to the injustices present in South Africa at the time.

Thirdly, on a pedagogical level, controversial refers to the tacit and at times more overt tension present between what was espoused by the JAF in opposition to apartheid education. But furthermore, it refers to the tension between what the JAF offered in relation to more formal, liberal arts programmes at the time. (Detailed documentation in Appendix C)

Lastly, on an experiential level, my participation in the developing teaching philosophy and my personal connection to all the people interviewed, gives an authenticity of purpose to the research and to the exhibition. This constituent cannot eliminate the nostalgic factor that arises from the group identity and the collective that Serote names the "clan" (Serote 2013). Politics and the creative arts unite the protagonists and the Bag Factory provides the space for the unwinding of the narrative. The dialogue heightens the story of the development of a distinctive visual culture and group ethos experienced at the JAF.

In addition, the exhibition endeavours to acknowledge both the controversial perceptions from within the JAF and those from outside. This process involved sourcing the diverse trajectories of the artists and bringing them together in a space that recognised the differences. As a consequence, the curatorial strategy signifies both the diversity and the group identity travelled by the artists.

Maintaining the concept of diversity, the unusual juxtaposition of component parts, while seemingly arbitrary, recognises the brittle uncertainty and tension during the period 1982-1992 conjoined with many unanswered questions. The unifying factor, however, relies on the humanist ethos, an appreciation of the commitment of common ideals. Significantly the exhibition pursues the separate characteristics of abstract and figurative works integral to the teaching at the JAF and the controversies that surrounded the disciplines. Individual qualities, centred on life experience, combined with essential innate ability are linked by the thread of commonality of integrity and the history of a shared time. The exhibition, therefore, focuses on the historical threads that visually constitute the essential elements of how the JAF philosophy influenced and inspired so many artists with such diverse trajectories during such provocative times.

One of the key things that emerges in this research on a critical level is the importing of American modernism into Africa by the JAF with much controversy and associated heated debate particularly in the formal tertiary art education sector. The controversies arising from the teaching philosophy at the Thupelo workshops with invited artists from England, Canada, and the USA, addressed in previous chapters, culminates in the form and content of the exhibition. Amid these opposing opinions the workshops continued to recognise the expansion of student potential by creating a collaborative environment. The JAF paradoxically occupied that cultural moment of political and educational disjuncture that allowed that specific creative space to flourish.

The exhibition concept began with interviews with artists who had been involved at the JAF and were working at the Bag Factory thus providing the compelling link with the JAF. Representative in the interviews are references to personal dimensions and aspirations with abstraction and modernism relating to key influences that shaped the visions of particular artists. In Ainslie's notes he refers to Portway's considerable influence (Ainslie's personal notes *My debt to Portway*, as quoted by Sophia Ainslie, 2014), Mabaso refers to his fascination with Larry Poons's unrestrained use of paint (Mabaso 2013) and Koloane found musical rhythms in the work of Pollock (Koloane 2012). In conversation Mabaso confirms that he was unable to resist abstraction in the following reference to a moment where he observes Poons working at the Triangle workshop in the USA in 1986. He said,

But when I went to the Triangle, I felt strongly that I couldn't resist this influence, Larry Poons was making these very thick paintings and throwing paint onto canvas. (Mabaso 2013)

Watching Poons with his expansive gestures and his lavish use of paint was an enigma for a black SA artist where his experience was often hindered by a paucity of materials and limited space. After Triangle, Mabaso said he was able to revert to these extended possibilities whenever the opportunity arose, "To be able to kind of flip over when I wished to" (Mabaso 2013).



Fig.4. Gallery space indicating Mabaso's work and Kentridge far left and the archive cabinet

The wall featuring Mabaso's abstract and figurative works reveals his ability to move easily from one discipline to the other. The Thupelo article and photograph of workshop members in 1989 continues the narrative and underlines his words, "That's what

Thupelo has brought to me, that very strong confidence" (Mabaso, 2013).

Fig.5. Dumisani Mabaso, *Livestock Shrine* (2013), Monoprint, 70x80cm.

In this particular print series *Livestock Shrine*, not exhibited before, Mabaso works with his experience and facility in printmaking and indicates his ability to work in many disciplines by commenting.

“I have always questioned things. If you look at my work from the beginning up to today, you’ll notice that I am a person that doesn’t have a specific way of working. I wander around” (Mabaso 2013).



Fig.6. Dumisani Mabaso, *For Busi* (1987), Acrylic paint and gel on canvas, 40x57cm.

In discussing this abstract work Mabaso relates the time when he received a scholarship to attend the Triangle workshop in the USA and found himself influenced by Larry Poons. He continues that at one of the talks at the Thupelo workshop, visiting artist Larry Poons spoke of Jackson Pollock and how the American Indian method of throwing sand and scraping patterns over the sand had influenced Pollock. The idea of this process resonated with Mabaso towards articulating his own understanding of abstraction, “It was kind of a new phenomenon to me and something that took me time to entirely grasp, which I haven’t yet. It’s so open-ended and so big” (Mabaso 2013). He further describes his work in terms of; breaking of the rules of figuration and embracing the abstract, and how the Triangle workshop in the USA and those at the JAF and Thupelo endorsed this ability. Mabaso’s works “*For Busi*”, undated and “*Livestock Shrine*” 2013, demonstrate this facility.

Fig.7. Gallery space showing the archive display

Investigating the archive

For the research I had privileged access to original archive material predating the evolving ideas that established the JAF, all of which gives insight into the burgeoning concepts that constituted the philosophy of the JAF. The function of the texts and letters are in two parts; firstly in the form of newspaper articles enlarged for easy access and secondly, the private notes, letters and related texts in the glass cabinet. The intention was to make these unpublished versions available to audiences divided into the general public and the art world. Critical commentary in the newspaper articles offer counter positions and add gravity to the persistence of the continuing presence of the JAF ethic. The implication of the archival display of selected material is a way of connecting the past and present in the gallery space.



In consequence, correspondence between Robert Hodgins and Ainslie concerning conflict over the content of Hodgins's lecture at the JAF indicates substantial differences of opinion in pedagogical terms was revealed. (Appendix C n.d.) In addition, there are angry letters from Ainslie to Rory Doepel and Erica Mitchell of Wits Department of Fine Arts concerning controversies about participation in exhibitions. To Mitchell he states,

My disappointment was not at having this school [JAF] excluded from the exhibition [Bok street and Wits]—it was that you and some others on the Wits staff seem too complacent—or frightened—to recognise the need for fresh challenges and exchange (Appendix C n.d.).

Mitchell replies to Ainslie and apologises but points out that the selection of works was from "... young people training in professional courses which makes it different from that of people taking refresher courses or painting part-time—in fact there is a unity of purpose in the teaching of both schools [Wits and Bok Street]" (Mitchell n.d.; Appendix C). Mitchell makes the disparaging distinction between "part-time" and "refresher courses" in the informal institution and and the "unity of purpose" in the formal sector implying a value judgement that Ainslie deemed inappropriate. The disparity between these concerns indicates the conflicting elements implicit in the the separate education institutions. Ainslie challenges these perceptions in the same letter:

You are obviously not interested in understanding what we are attempting here, which reinforces my feeling that you are also not interested in new developments in art and in art education in Europe & America either. (Ainslie n.d.; Appendix C)

This argument, supported by the research in Chapters 2, and 3, combined with oral evidence in the video, forms the strategy for the exhibition and acknowledges the critical view of the conflicting views that prevailed concerning the teaching philosophy at the JAF.

The oral material forms possibilities of observation and participation constituting a link or a kind of ritual between object and spectator. The video as a whole represents the unwinding of the dialogue by combining the printed word, voice, and relevant artworks. Embodied in the selection and editing is the accepted fact that so much is left out or unsaid either by choice, availability, or expediency.

Recognising the component of things unsaid, in the publication *Interviews* by James Hillman, the author talks of his uneasiness in doing interviews and finds that “truth” cannot be told, but has to be revealed; in other words, “...it has to appear inside the telling or through the telling”. He goes on to say, “The ‘you’ and the ‘me’ can prevent the ‘inter’. It’s not *our* views that matters [*sic*], it’s the *interstitial* [*sic*] view that comes about through discussion” (1983, p. 7). The nuances of pauses in the interviews allow both resonances and depth but are difficult to transcribe as Hillman says, “...because then there is no voice. And there is all the musical aspect of sound, the pauses. The great problem with the [transcribed] interview is that you lose the voice” (1983, pp. 7-9).

The exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*, focuses on the aural component in the video and by using the actual recorded voices of the artists in tandem with the work, some of the nuances are retained. The immediacy of the sound forms a tangible link to the history of memory.

Consideration of the Thupelo controversy

Controversial ways of seeing considers the debate surrounding the teaching of abstraction at the JAF and Thupelo which was considered, by some academics and others, inappropriate for black artists as it was not of their culture—a decidedly discriminatory and demeaning attitude evidenced in newspaper cuttings and archive material in the cabinet (fig.5). Newspaper articles by Samantha James with headlines; *What if America discovers our black artists?* and *Black’s abstracts impress US fundi* (Appendix B n.d.) where “US Fundi” Moffatt in conversation with James talks of his surprise at the creative energy shown by the black artists, “Despite the lack of background...” (Para. 6)...“That surprised me a lot. I’d expected to be doing a lot more helping and encouraging” (Para. 10). These and other articles such as *Black artists in South Africa have a remarkable gift for abstract work* (James 1986), although supportive of Thupelo and the endeavours of Ainslie, display patronising insinuations in the reading today. While, *Alternative, abstract art. It’s all in his mind*, (Appendix B n.d.), Richards’s directly hostile article on the meeting at the JAF concerning the Thupelo workshop, and towards Ainslie in particular, is unequivocal. He said the meeting was conducted like a “service” (Para.7) and continues that there was discussion on commitment and pleasure in art making, “But commitment, like pleasure, takes many forms. Ainslie’s grand abstract project suggests a limited option for both” (Richards 1987, para 16; Appendix B n.d.). The arguments in Chapter 2 on the Thupelo workshops reflect and underpin these controversial views.

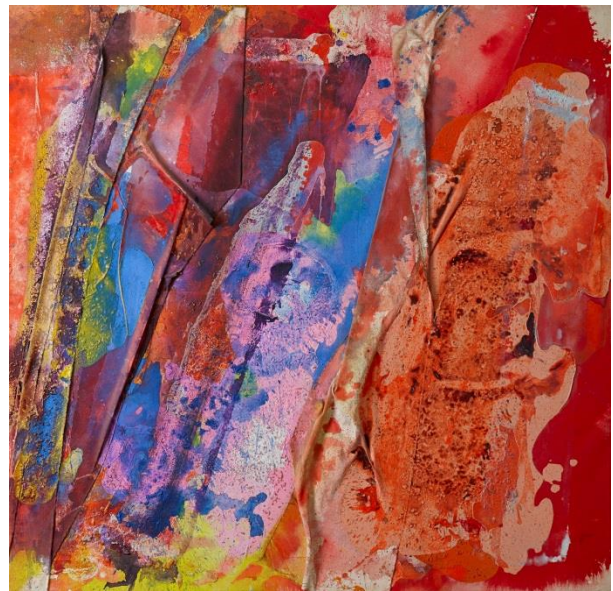
Curatorial strategy

Of significance was the hanging of Ainslie's large work *Untitled* in direct sight as viewers entered the gallery space. Its placement, scale and uncompromising colour established one of the challenges of the exhibition by underscoring his commitment to abstraction. It also acts as a foil for the adjacent works and sets the tone for the unusual grouping of works that relate both to the controversies surrounding the JAF and the unifying factor of the commitment to creative endeavour. The Ainslie work was flanked on the right by separating the vibrant Jenny Stadler works, *Axiom* and *Water Blossom* and with Burnett's subdued pastel colours in, *Composition after Giotto 3* and *Damascus Gate 14*. (Fig.9)

Fig.8. Bill Ainslie, *Untitled* (date unknown), Mixed media, Collaged strips of canvas.

Although both Williams and Gardiner make reference to the early influence of Mvusi's abstract work on Ainslie in the 50.s (Williams, 1990, p.5) and (Gardiner 2013), Ainslie himself develops his further commitment to abstraction in his personal notes (Cited in the interview with Sophia Ainslie 2012/2014; Appendix D n.d.).

In the notes Ainslie's writes of how working with Portway in St Ives in 1968 enabled him to refine his thinking. He began moving away from purely descriptive elements towards a profound understanding about the actual anatomy of the paint. Ainslie writes:



It was in the wilderness of the sixties that I first saw an exhibition of Portway's paintings. They revealed to me something of the promptings that went into the creation of great painting. The quality and the demands it makes. The significance of the personal world made manifest for others, and the care, work, patience, courage that was demanded. This clarified for me my obligations to myself as a painter. My first step as a painter was to find out as much as I could as to how Portway had come to the point which made such paintings possible—and my second step was to examine through paint the implications for myself. (Ainslie c.1975. p. 2)

Definition for Ainslie was embodied largely in Greenberg's modernism of "truth to material", but he combines these ideals with his own energy and the immediate contact with mark making and colour, manipulating the surface with vibrant layers of transparency and solidity often combined with tactile folded canvas strips. His constant search for clarity in his work is characterised by his essential sensibility in visual form. For Ainslie, examining the implications of abstraction through paint constituted a vigorous and defiant way of working.



Fig.9. Gallery space indicating Ainslie, Burnett, and Stadler works

Fig.10. Ricky Burnett, *Composition after Giotto 3* (2014), Oil on canvas, 61x75.5cm.

Defiance is implicit in Burnett's considered opinion about the perception of abstract art in South Africa. Burnett asserts,

We have never had a tradition or an understanding for the feeling of the stuff, whether it be in service of the message of the stuff, in service of the thought or it's never been of the stuff itself, which of course is central to modernism, the truth to material as the core idea" (Burnett 2012).



Burnett's works are unquestionably in the service of the paint and although small in scale there is implied impact in the dense monochromatic surface. They do not purport to convey anything other than the quality of the painted surface. The materiality itself is the subject matter.

In contrast, abstraction for Stadler is characterised by energetic mark-making, using fresh, clear colours in an explosion of vitality. The active surface conveys both density and openness that is distinctly celebratory. All three artists have sustained their conviction in the abstract idiom with intense individuality. The juxtaposition of these works enlivens the striking, diverse characteristics inherent in the individual pieces.

Although Ainslie's work is from the 80's and both the Burnett and Stadler work on the exhibition is more recent, they painted and taught together during the period 1982-1992, shaping their individual vision of an understanding of abstraction. "I think the Art Foundation singularly is the one place where if you had an interest in paint you could develop that literacy" (Burnett 2012). Similarly, in Stadler's words, "It was a way of painting, almost like music, where you'd play with colours and eventually build up a chord and orchestrate a whole piece with these different combinations" (Stadler, 2014 pers. comm. 15 July).

The exhibition gives recognition to the identity of their individual manifestations of abstraction, and their transcribed interview material in the catalogue gives a personalised understanding of their journey into abstraction which was influenced by Ainslie and their connection to the JAF (Appendix E).

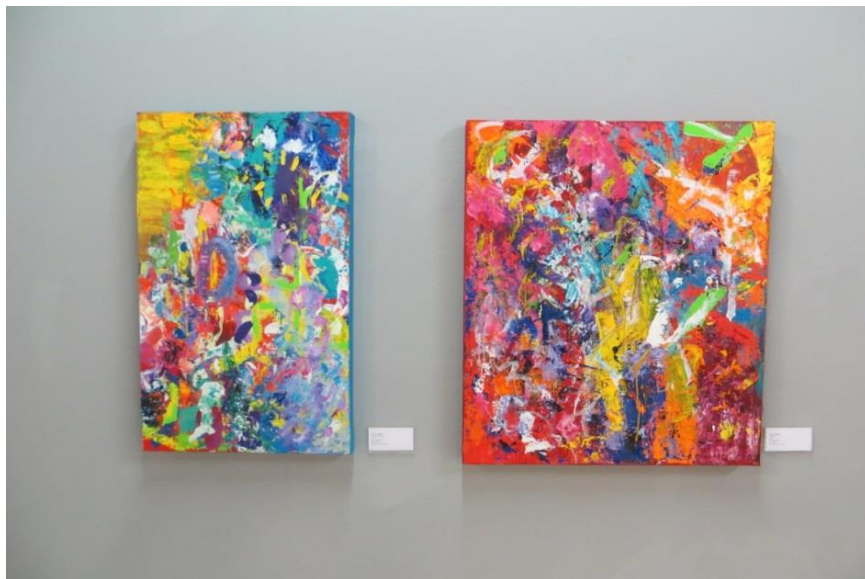


Fig.11. Jenny Stadler, *Water Blossom* (2014), Oil on canvas, 80x50cm; *Axiom* (2014), Oil on canvas, 65x80cm.



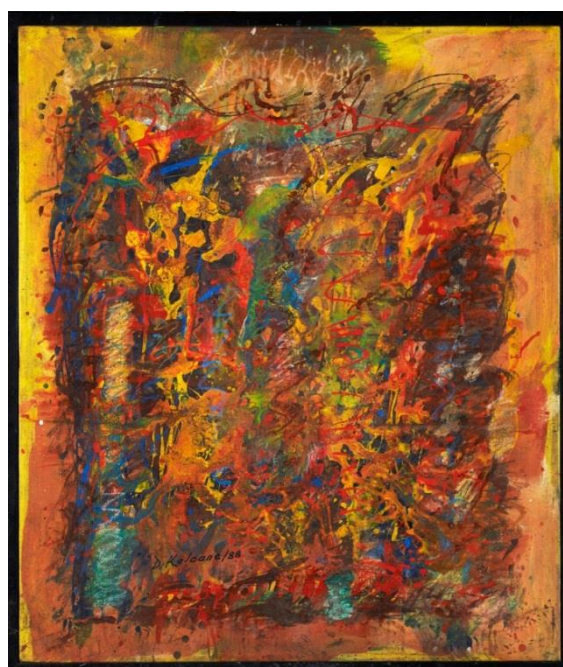
Fig.12. Gallery space 4 showing Koloane's work *Thupelo* and composite etching by Diane Victor, David Koloane, Kagiso Pat Mautloa, Nelson Mokamo, Colbert Mashile, and William Kentridge, respectively, and a section of Ainslie's work.

Visually it was necessary to separate Koloane from Ainslie with the black and white composite etching in order to moderate the forceful constituents of colour, and scale. The spacing allows Koloane's work to breathe and not be consumed by the larger Ainslie work. The grouping also acknowledges the physicality of the works, which initiates the mood of the exhibition and the emphasis on abstraction. This emphasis serves as recognition of the vigorous commitment made in contesting creative institutions and makes a stand for the values respected in that art form.

Fig.13. David Koloane, *Thupelo* (1987), Acrylic on board, 70x87cm.

Koloane describes an interest in abstraction in the interview and recalls how Pollock's work had excited him. "There is a rhythm in his work that I like." He feels that:

...[T]here has always been a yearning in artists to paint something musical in art. Few artists managed to do that. Matisse is one of them and so is Pollock. Kandinsky also felt that art emerged from within and that shapes and colours could speak to people in the same way as music does. (Koloane 2012)



Koloane had participated in the Triangle workshop in the USA and studied in London for two years. Evidence of these inspirations can be seen in the work *Thupelo* where elements of Rothko's luminous washes form the background and Pollock-like, dripped, surface marks gives credence to Koloane's assimilation of abstraction. According to Koloane, Pollock assimilated the rhythms of dance and music "refreshing and giving a new face to art while drawing from other sources and influences." (Koloane 2013)



Fig.14. David Koloane, *Twilight* (detail), (2010), Mixed media on paper, 76x27cm.

By contrast, the small scale of the work *Twilight* belies the enormity of the political implications with its line of pedestrians making their way home. The content speaks volubly as a fragment of the complex urban life of black people. This work has socio-political connotations relating to the discriminatory apartheid

laws, providing information that is representative of a state of mind rather than verisimilitude for its own sake. His work centres on examining images exposing the issues of a marginalised society enabling him to observe and generate visual testimony to these complex conditions using the investigation he had experienced with abstraction. Additionally, Koloane says that by working with landscape and cityscapes, "It was more a reclamation of that space that was previously denied to black artists during apartheid" (Koloane 2013). The work *Thupelo* endorses his assimilation of the opportunities available in the multicultural environment that Koloane found at the JAF while the work *Twilight* refers directly to the misery of apartheid. Both works endorse the ensuing narrative as researched and argued in the body of the paper.

Although artists were asked for work pertaining to the period 1982-1992, only Ainslie, Nhlengethwa, Koloane, Mabaso and Kentridge are represented by work produced in the 1970s and 1980s. It was important to show early work together with contemporary pieces to indicate the enduring oeuvre of the artists.

While abstraction was emphasised it is important to note Kentridge's alternative experience of the JAF in this way,

The JAF was open to people like me who were never stopped or belittled or looked down upon by Bill for the fact that I was working figuratively not with paint, with drawing....I mean in the years since it there has not been an equivalent space for black and white artists to work, to meet in the twenty years since apartheid that serves as a model of a working multi-racial artist's space. (Kentridge, 2014)

Fig.15. William Kentridge, *Angel Lady, Pit Series* (1979).

Kentridge's words are evidenced in his starkly black and white work *Angel Lady* from the *Pit Series* (1979). Kentridge's seminal print series is varied in their sensibility and concerns, but are inseparable from his commitment towards ideals for humanist reform. In this work Kentridge's strong reference to perspective, where the visible world is arranged in order to centre the image documenting an uncompromising scene of human dilemma.

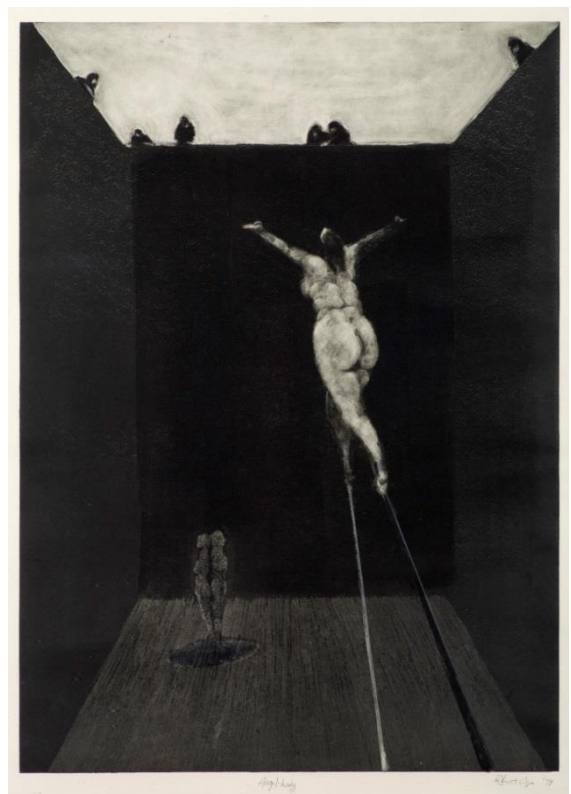




Fig.16. Gallery space showing Bill Ainslie's *Portrait of Michael*, Kagiso Pat Mautloa's *Fashion Queen* and Samantha James's newspaper article, *What if America discovers our black artists*.

The *Portrait of Michael* (1980), done by Ainslie, leads the way to the video room where recordings of the artists' voices combined with images of their work recount their understanding of the JAF (Copy of the video, Appendix F). In this darkened space the oral testimony from Gardiner, Burnett, Mabaso, Sebidi, Koloane, and Mautloa relate their own reconstruction of the history of the JAF. In this regard Grele suggests it is "...one way to recreate the history of those who have been ignored" (1991, p. 200). The medium of the voice in the video acts as interlocutor providing the link to the visual dialogue of the art works and texts in the shared gallery space.

Fig.17. Gallery space indicating the narrative path



The narrative continues with the opposite wall being dedicated to teachers at the JAF Nkotsi, Koloane, and Nhlengethwa indicating their distinct individual expression and, by implication, endorses the value of their expertise that was disseminated to students. This view gives a comprehensive impression of how Ainslie's painting holds the exhibition together on both formal and conceptual levels. Sebidi's work *Night time* forms a strong presence on this wall.



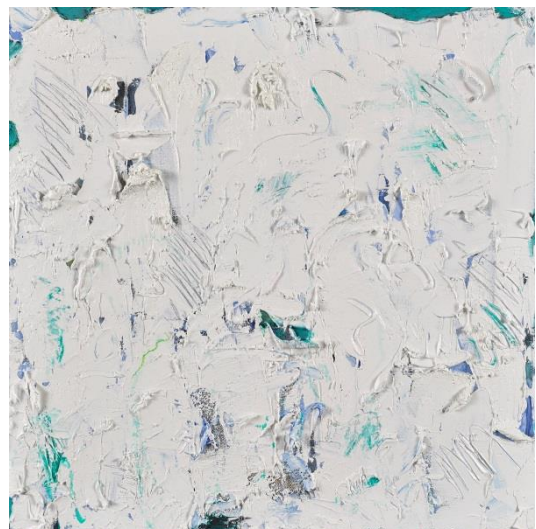
Fig.18. Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, *Night time* (2013), Monoprint, 87x69cm.

In conversation Sebidi said that she found a spirit of communication at the JAF and believes that “I came specially to find a place like that where you can communicate” (Sebidi 2013). Sebidi work, *Night time*, not exhibited before, directs the viewer to the possibilities of the liminal. This work indicates how Sebidi could be construed as an artist dealing with the liminal as she often conceives of creatures that combine two separate states of being, a liminal space between humanity and her own cultural mythology. Sebidi uses legendary, animalistic creatures from dreams, fantasy, legend, and folklore which are often combined with semi-human forms. In conversation with Sebidi she stresses that traditions, historical references, and rituals are fundamental to her creative process (Sebidi 2013). While working with Sebidi at the Artist's Press studio in April 2012, I become aware of her total commitment to her vivid imagination and cultural symbolism. When she begins a drawing, the marks are continually adjusted and reworked until the image emerges charged with disquieting energy. In this mono-print the lines are decisively incised into the dark purple pigment forming bold images from her imagination.

Fig.19. Gail Behrmann, *White Square 2* (2014), Oil on canvas, 50x50cm.

The themes of contrast and diversity in the exhibition continue with Behrmann's work *White Square*. Behrmann addresses the teaching contradictions at the JAF, reflected in chapters 2 and 3, in the following excerpt from the interview:

My time there in the 80's was actually very fulfilling because firstly Bill wouldn't let us abstract immediately, you had to learn to see first, to learn to draw.



Behrmann found herself unable to paint in conditions where:

...[E]verybody at the studio was making abstract art. People were splashing paint around and thinking they were great artists when actually the work needed form. The question is how do you make abstract art? Do you simply splash paint on? (Behrmann 2014)

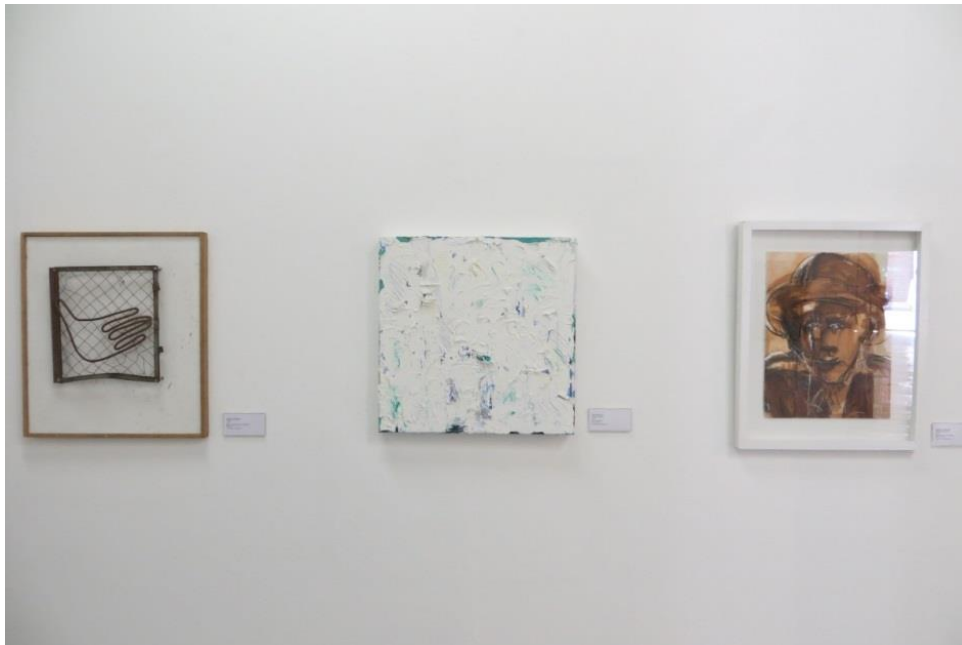


Fig.20. Gallery space showing Behrmann flanked by Mautloa's works *Usher* (2002) and *Portrait of a man* (2012)

Controversial ways of seeing offers diverse constituents of both figurative and abstract work, supported by the teaching philosophy of the JAF, but offers no value judgement to Behrmann's question which remains largely unanswered and leaves the viewers to make decisions for themselves.

The grouping of the works in Fig, 20 reinforces the ease with which the different art movements adjust to each other in the gallery space, not as competing elements but able to function on a visual and content level. Scale and muted colour contribute to their individual strengths within that shared space.

Portraiture

With regard to portraiture Behrmann continues, “It must be remembered that Bill earned money as a portrait artist and he excelled at this. He never did stop painting or drawing portraits” (Behrmann 2014).



Fig.21. Bill Ainslie, *Portrait of Wally* (1973) drawing on paper, 78x110cm.

In the publication *Ways of Seeing*, Berger states:

Images were first made to conjure up the appearance of something that was absent. Gradually it became evident that an image can outlast what it represented. It then showed how something or someone had once looked—and thus, by implication, how the subject had been seen by other people. (Berger 1972, p. 10)

Working with this observation, the portrait of Serote by Ainslie conveys that moment seen by someone else. The distance between that frozen moment allows certain access but the specific moment between Ainslie and Serote is silent. Serote was fascinated by the portrait and

described his experience in the following words:

When I arrived one day Bill very cautiously and very carefully approached me and said you know you must model today. I said you're talking nonsense, but he convinced me. He gave me a book called “Illuminations” and I sat there on this step ladder reading this book. Suddenly out of the blue I was emerging on different easels staring at myself, and I had never looked at myself in the manner in which I looked at myself then from different angles and different understandings of other people as to who I am. It was a very important moment it was a moment of self-examination. I learned then that a life that is not self-examined is not worth living. I am most thankful of that because it exposed a lot of things about me which I did not know (Serote 2013).

Serote continues,

I know it's me and I know what he saw at a certain moment, and I know what he froze.... Of course that makes you want to know, what is this, what does it mean? I was very engaged by this (Serote 2013).

Fig.22. Bill Ainslie, *Portrait of Michael* (1980), Drawing on paper, 76x61cm.

The portraits span elements of visual memory that allow reflection and connects the viewer in a participatory visual historiography. The implications of these portraits are primarily empirical but, in addition, the works of Serote and Gardiner suggest a prescient image of that period. Both Serote and Gardiner in their individual capacities were active in ways to forge and initiate change in an educational and political sense.

The *Portrait of Serote* and *Portrait of Gardiner* are descriptive not solely as individuals, to illuminate specific personality qualities, but also to express the will of the artist overriding a purely literal account. The spectator is encouraged to think about the relationships existing between sitter and artist and the time and space when it occurred.



Controversial ways of seeing brings together the concurrent threads of abstraction and figurative works travelled by the artists during 1982-1992 to the present day. It embodies the incumbent teaching philosophy of that time and embraces the surrounding controversies.

In his article in *Art South Africa*, Gule reviews and challenges premise of the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*. He acknowledges the purpose of the exhibition's narrative concerning the concept of Ainslie's legacy and the notion of the interactive group culture at the JAF by writing,

There is also the aspect of the Johannesburg Art Foundation as a collective and the legacy of the JAF as embodied in the people who studied, taught, exhibited and used the studios there. (2014, p.83)

However, Gule later questions the validity of the notion of controversy and states, "Ainsley's [sic] project could very easily have come across as patronising and infantilising" (2014, p.84). He continues, "I suppose in a stifling climate, as was the condition under apartheid, such indulgent notions of freedom could not be anything but controversial" (2014, p.84).

A rigorous critical view of the JAF could not totally dispute the notion of an element of indulgence or even the impression of a patronising approach, which is addressed, to some extent, in the body of this research paper. (Discussed in more detail on pp. 8 and 9) Mystery and misconceptions characterise the ethos of the JAF largely because it is no longer there to engage with on a purely critical level. Of necessity, therefore, this research relies on

subjective fragments that nevertheless act as a means towards the preservation of historical records of experienced reality of the past. However, the significance lies in the oral interviews of the people who were there, who attest to the undeniable fact that the JAF remained an uncompromising corner of freedom and exploration operating at that crucial time.

Transcribed statements by the participating artists recounting their personal endeavours are contained in the catalogue of *Controversial ways of seeing* (Appendix E).

Conclusion

The JAF was a complex, controversial corner of modernism with a robust polemic that created a political and artistic space for black and white artists during apartheid. The exhibition brings together juxtaposed fragments that generate the narrative of that time.

The creative practice emerging from the period 1982-1992 has historical implications through the oral discourse and the archive documentation. The manner of presenting the work is bound to South Africa's political, historical, and creative context. Combined elements of abstraction and figurative works on the exhibition are integral to the teaching philosophy and act as threads that make up the fabric of the JAF. Layers or palimpsests of memory equally admit to the teaching philosophy and to the uncertainty that prevailed through the apartheid years.

As such, the selection of diverse works serves to indicate the core teaching at the JAF; there was no fixed vision for students, they were encouraged to both generate the work and be critical of it at the same time. "Yes and feel it and experience it. Colour and association, that's one of the most important ways of teaching... teaching is about engaging people" (Moutloa 2013).

The choices of works also serve to signify the importance of teaching an element of modernism and the impact it had on participating artists. The exhibition shows, to some extent, how it was assimilated and processed by individuals who digested and used the ideas to formulate new and vital work. Moutloa gives this view, "That's what I enjoyed and it inculcated a sense of bravery into working. You could challenge yourself and continue searching for other ways of expressing oneself" (Moutloa 2014).

While it's problematic to disengage with the intensity of reflection and memory, characterised by individual experience, the points of contact remain solidly in place within the reflexive narratives of artists and Council Members of the JAF. Their testimonies with all the inflections and separate characteristics serve to exemplify and re-energise the endeavours of the JAF. Through my investigation into the available archive material and through dialogue with friends and colleagues, the recalled fragments began to bind together into a narrative of a shared history.

The JAF offered alternatives for the expression of different layers of creative experience inherent in the social realities of the artists. Kentridge says of the JAF, "It was a kind of half-way house for a real mixture of ambitions, abilities and psychic states and that's one of its virtues" (Kentridge 2014).

One of Ainslie's concerns was the question concerning African art and, by implication, South African art's legitimacy in the world. This is a question that still remains for scholars to resolve. I refer here to the words of Okeke-Agulu, who specialised in the visual cultures of Africa and the connection between modernism and politics in Africa. "Clearly, the task of outlining the contours of the field of contemporary art, using any available interpretive, analytic, or discursive tools, remains—and should be—a work in progress" (2010, p. 121).

Additionally, John Picton at *NKA Roundtable II* recalls that some years ago he was at a conference of the Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) and asked colleagues when they were going to “show material from contemporary African artists” (2010, p. 81). He continues:

The response was, “But how do we know if it’s any good or not?” I don’t think anyone can say that now: African art studies has moved on, and there is (at least some) international recognition of (at least some) modern or contemporary artists. Yet stereotypes die hard, and that’s the problem we still find ourselves dealing with. (Picton 2010, p. 81)

Discussion and contention arose at the *NKA Roundtable II* debate (convened September 4 - October 10, 2009), with panellists Okwui Enwezor, Eliabeth Harney, dele jegede, Sidney Kasfir, Dominique Malaquais, Steven Nelson, Ikem Stanley Okoye, John Pepper, John Picton, Peter Probst, Colin Richards, Frank Ugiomoh, Susan Vogel, and Jessica Winegar, moderated by Chika Okeke-Agulu and serves to indicate the relevance of the on-going questions posed by this paper and by the exhibition *Controversial ways of seeing*.

Accordingly the exhibition revisits Koloane’s questions that appear to remain unanswered:

What defines a South African expression?
What paradigms would typify the expression?
What criterion to employ in a society virtually divided into two
distinct and separate worlds? (1995, p. 143)

From the retrospective vantage point of 2015 it is clear that there are no definitive answers but the truth is that the JAF was a crucial and safe place operating in the liminal space, between external calamities and peacefulness, in a time of extreme oppression. Kentridge recalls, “In retrospect it was just a tiny corner of what modernism was and what modernism had become and what modernism was becoming in the rest of the world” (Kentridge 2013).

One may ask if it is conceivable to imagine a place like the JAF to exist in that particular capacity today. My response would be that times have changed considerably and the need for a space of that specific nature has passed. During 1982 until the closure in 2001 the juxtaposition of extraordinary, brutal politics posed a need for protest in the form of a liberated teaching philosophy. Distanced from the exigencies of that time there is nostalgia inherent in my perception that in retrospect there is no longer the same impetus or vigour that characterised that period in our history.

It became evident in my research of the archival documentation concerning the JAF that much of it is still untouched and therefore offers vast areas for further scholarship. There are many other artists who were associated with the JAF in some way but were too numerous to have participated within the capabilities of an exhibition of this nature. In the archival material there are lists of people, some who were deeply involved and some who were associated on a more periphery basis. The implications of their possible interviews could constitute a more thorough analysis and critique.

Accordingly, for a more comprehensive understanding of the trajectory of the JAF, the missing pieces could provide an avenue for further questioning and paradoxically extend the uncertainty and the controversy, redolent in the interview material which symbolises “...the need to erase and the need to hold on to it” (Kentridge 2014, p. 57).

The words of both Kentridge and Sack seem apt for this concluding section of the research:

I think that there is a real loss to the City of Johannesburg that there isn't an institution like the Johannesburg Art Foundation. Because the reality is that we know there are hundreds and hundreds of people who want to work as artists, but cannot and have no desire to pursue an academic stream (Sack, 2014).

Kentridge expresses his perception of Ainslie's values in his article in the Weekly Mail, *Ainslie—artist, teacher, but humanitarian first*, written after Ainslie's death:

He [Ainslie] argued strongly that a humanitarian art practice was different from simply making images of or illustrating any political belief. What this meant was running an art school open to all people at a time when all formal art institutions were racially restrictive; supporting both spiritually and financially, many artists who would otherwise have had to abandon their activity; opening his school to students who, through inferior school education, would have been denied access to formal art training. (Kentridge 1989, p. 21. para. 4)

Events and personal experiences are central to this paper and the outcome is about the findings of a series of shared and conflicting histories and the nature of many relationships and moments of co-operation. As such, the findings are not definitive, but more importantly, are intended to pursue the history of the JAF through oral interrogation of the “complex interplay between history, myth and ideology” (Grele, 1991, Preface p. vii). This process leaves us with more questions than answers and proposes a way forward for further research.

Planned publications covering similar areas of study are being pursued by Gardiner, Sophia Ainslie, Trappler and the Bag Factory.

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Trappler, J., 2013. Interviewed by Elizabeth Castle, Cape Town, 15 May.

Abbreviations

ANC — African National Congress

FUBA — Federated Union of Black Artists

FUNDA — Funda Art Centre

JAF — Johannesburg Art Foundation

JAG —Johannesburg Art Gallery

NYU — New York University

PAC — Pan Africanist Congress

SA — South Africa

Technicon — Witwatersrand Technical College

UCT Conference — *The State of Art in South Africa Conference* at the University of Cape Town

USA —United States of America

Unisa — University of South Africa

Wits — University of the Witwatersrand

List of Illustrations

Fig. A. Thupelo Workshop participants 1987.

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Fig.2. Invitation to *Controversial ways of seeing*, 23 September 2014

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Fig.7. Ricky Burnett, *Composition after Giotto 3*. 2014

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Fig. 16. Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi, *Night time*. 2013

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Fig. 19. Dumisani Mabaso, *For Busi*. 1987

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Fig. 21. Bill Ainslie, *Portrait of Wally*. 1973

Fig. 22. Bill Ainslie, *Portrait of Michael*. 1980

Appendix A: Questions for the interviews:

1. What in your view was the significance of the teaching philosophy at the JAF?
2. How did it affect your teaching, thinking, work, ideas, and progress?
3. How much did the political climate affect your creative practices?
4. What did Thupelo and the emphasis on abstraction mean to you?
5. What were the defining characteristics and ethos of the JAF?

Appendix B: Newspaper articles (Insert)

Geers, K. 1990. *It may be fun but it fails to 'explore'* The Star. 27 September, p. 12.
James, S. 1986. *Black's abstracts impress US fundi*. The Star. 23 October. p.16.
Richards, C. 1987. *That Authentic African Look fades into glib cliché*. The Weekly Mail. 28 August, p. 21
Richards, C. *Alternative, abstract art. It's all in his mind*. Undated
Ainslie's Letter to The Editors, The Weekly Mail, referring to Richards's article *Alternative, abstract art. It's all in his mind*. Undated
Smith, C. 1986 *Black Artists: We're fed up with political labels*. Weekly Mail October 31 – November 6. Page 18
Podbury, J. 1986. *Bill fights to get artistic voices heard*. Sunday Express. LIVING

Appendix C: Personal notes and correspondence (Insert)

- a. Consent letter from Michael Gardiner.
- b. Support letters from Alan Crump of Wits Fine Art Dept. and Willem Boshoff from the Technicon.
- c. Controversial correspondence between Ainslie and Doepel, Ainslie and Erica Mitchell, Ainslie and Robert Hodgins.
- d. A letter to the Minister of the Interior concerning a refusal of a passport for Serote.
- e. Nadine Gordimer's support letter in this regard.
- f. Ainslie's personal notes on his ideas and thoughts

Appendix D: Interview transcripts

Transcribed interviews between Elizabeth Castle and Ainslie, S., Behrmann, Maryanne Botha, Burnett, Dhlomo, Hyslop, Gardiner, Kentridge, Koloane, Manganye and Mabaso, Mautloa, Nhlengethwa, Sack, Sebidi, Serote, Anthusa Sotiriades, Stadler, and Trappler.

Interview material from Sophia Ainslie 15 June 2014

For Liz Castle

By Sophia Ainslie

One frustration I had with Bill's teaching in my late teens and early twenties was he very rarely, if ever, gave me an answer to my questions. I remember angrily saying to him after a critique, "why don't you just tell me what to do." I think my reaction was hard for him at the time, but he stood firm. He'd rather leave me with a question.

A characteristic that I admired was his ability to be completely honest with his critique without the need to fluff it up or sugar coat it. He very, very seldom praised work. In fact, I don't think I remember a time that he did. There was always more to be done. More questions, more thinking, more work. I feel this taught me to trust myself and my decision making.

I was in and out of Bill's classes and the art foundation all my life. I remember, at the age of 9, I was in an evening adult figure drawing class. I was the smallest (and youngest of course), so Bill put me on a donkey right in front of everyone, so that I could see. I had a very close up view of the nude model sitting on a stool on a stage. I was shy and felt awkward about having to focus on the naked body. Bill had given me a huge piece of paper, almost my size - plenty of space for the whole body to be incorporated. I was so self-conscious I couldn't do it. So I made an enormous drawing of the models head, making sure there was absolutely no space for any part of the body to be incorporated. Bill was very impressed and so proud.

Over and over, I went through the carefully structured still life and life drawing classes with Bill. They were thoughtfully designed exercises developed to open our eyes to the act of seeing - to acutely observe the unique moment in front of you. Witnessing, for example, how objects take on their identities through the particular context of their surroundings. How one can't be seen without the other.

At the age of 12, I remember focusing on a still life of onions, for 6 weeks. I composed, measured the proportions, and then went into the first tonal exercise - screen and passage (as he called it). The study of how the existence of an object as we assume it to be, is an illusion. I had to unlearn all that I had become accustomed to knowing an onion to be and look intensely at how the light fell across the onion in this particular moment. How the darkness of the background surrounding the onion informed the edge of the onion. How this particular relationship between this background and foreground created an edge of constant change. Every time I came to the still life it had changed because the onion was growing. Every time, he asked me to draw what I saw at that given moment. This meant constantly undoing all the careful documentation from the week before, and redoing what I now saw.

In my early twenties, he put Anthusa Sotiriades onto me, and very soon after that I did my teachers training with her (while also doing a training with Bill). She was enormously patient

and had a very keen eye for detail. It was clear she understood the depth and essence of Bill's teaching. She and I built a very strong bond. She invited me into her evening classes to team-teach with her. The classes became a huge success and were soon overflowing. We had so many interested students we had to keep creating more classes. This was where and how I started teaching on my own.

All this time, I experimented with abstraction in different ways. When working in black and white, the observed figure - distorted - was my content. But when colour came into my work, the figure disintegrated. Colour and the figure had no relationship to me and if there was no figure where was I to put the colour? What was my form, my structure? How could colour just be? I struggled to make sense of it. Bill and I talked a lot about these questions. We had different ideas. I felt the need for colour and mark to be part of an underlying structure. He believed that structure was created once a colour met another colour or mark, and visa versa. The boundary created the structure. So I suppose, I feel less like an abstract painter and more like a structuralist using observation as my starting point. This is not to say that I couldn't see abstraction. I remember when I was around 14 years old Bill introduced me to Willem De Koning. He showed me a series of his paintings of women. I remember critiquing the work with him and feeling that De Koning's work would be much stronger if he simply gave in to abstraction and sacrificed the women's heads. I felt he used the heads as a safety net when his paintings were so robust there was no need for it. Bill seemed intrigued, smiled thoughtfully while stroking his beard.

I needed to work through representation and observation in order to come out the other side.

I suppose in a way, Bill had a somewhat similar journey. Bill came to abstraction after working with the figure for many years. There came a time when he felt the figurative works were too 'thin'. They were dealing with the surface of things. He felt an essence was lacking. He wanted to get deeper into the substance of the painting, into the 'anatomy' of the painting. He was also questioning his responsibility as a human being in a country where so many people's lives were being destroyed by an increasingly oppressive conservative government. While going through the content that my mother, Fieke, so fastidiously collected about Bill, the Johannesburg Art Foundation, etc, I came across writing on his early paintings, from his personal notes. This writing was triggered by Clement Greenberg's visit to South Africa in 1975, *"The visit of Clement Greenberg to S.A. has prompted me to do something I have wanted to do for some time, and that is to summarise to the best of my ability the issues that have chiefly affected my own development as a painter. At this moment this is the best way I can find—outside of my painting—to do justice to the seriousness of the challenges facing anybody who chooses to become a painter."*

My early painting consisted of forays in various directions—some dictated by the S.A. painting I knew—especially landscape and portrait. Some more ambitious—were amalgams of influence from Goya and the Mexican Riviera, Orozco and Siquieros—with expressionism playing some part through having looked at Soutine and Kokoshka.

Ben Shahn impressed me but my turbulence was not suited to his economy of means and carefulness. Another enchantment was evoked by the paintings of the Mexican Tamayo.

These early paintings were clumsy and intermittent attempts to find a means of expression for the somewhat chaotic passions which disturbed and excited me as I slowly realised the

tragedy that was destroying the lives and hopes of so many people in this country. A tragedy brought about by the fears of those who held power over the day-to-day destinies of others. The paintings started being made at a time where I was not at all sure that my time would not be better spent working for a political re-alignment in this country. The effort was not dictated by a desire to work in the political field but rather by a desire to work towards the creation of a political structure that would be taken more just and natural, a situation where every bodies aspirations would be taken account of.” (Bills personal notes, ‘My debt to Portway’, p.1, c.1975)

He continues, “It was in the wilderness of the sixties that I first saw an exhibition of Portway’s paintings. They revealed to me something of the promptings that went into the creation of great painting. The quality and the demands it makes. The significance of the personal world made manifest for others, and the care, work, patience, courage that was demanded. This clarified for me my obligations to myself as a painter. My first step as a painter was to find out as much as I could as to how Portway had come to the point which made such paintings possible—and my second step was to examine through paint the implications for myself.” (Bills personal notes, ‘My debt to Portway’, p.2, c.1975)

Bill was absolutely connected and committed to the African soil, people and landscape. He wanted his paintings to reflect this absoluteness. To epitomize the essence of what he felt, saw, experienced, dreamt. To be wholly connected to his state of being, his consciousness and unconsciousness. How does this get expressed? What does it look like? His clarity of concept brought about a dissatisfaction and frustration in trying to find it. His search meant a working and reworking of his later paintings, over and over. At times Fieke would ‘steal’ his work out of his studio, feeling it was done. She had new enormous canvases stretched up for him so that he could start new work. He was never satisfied. Constantly looking for something intangible, something that shared the boundary between the familiar and also the unfamiliar. When it presented itself, there was a sense of knowing it and yet never being able to completely grasp it, leading to a dialogue of constant learning and newness. Of course, this unknown presented itself and once it arrived, there was nothing more to be said. It would bring with it a sense of revelation and exhilaration. But the journey was long and difficult. I could see it when it was revealed. At times, he’d bring me into the studio to hear my thoughts. I think this difficulty and earnestness in the search, brings about a very critical eye, a desire to push oneself beyond a comfort zone, and beyond complacency. There is almost a sense of responsibility combined with a sense of faith. Through Bill I learnt this critical eye for my own work. For many years, I found it hard to know when a work was finished and I would paint over and over, but not to the extent of Bill. I felt there was something about the density and the anatomy and the heaviness that needed to come into the work. Perhaps, there’s a need to go through a state of chaos in order to understand how to come to a state of ease. I remember Ezrom Legae gave me a critique when I was working in Bill’s garage studio after his death. He said, “you do know that you don’t have to rework your work once you’ve given birth to it. Just let it be. The work can be finished when you walk away from it.” Those words have stayed with me. I think I use them in my current work, but I also strive for the unexpected, something I haven’t seen before that will surprise me, and this comes through struggle. It’s a combination of the 2 distinctly different voices.

Bill’s last paintings - the Pachipamwe series, showed an ease. I believe he had reached the place he’d been striving for. The paintings reveal a sense of ‘illumination’. In his notes on

Portway's exhibition at Lidchi gallery, Bill writes about the essence of what he strove to achieve in his own work which I believe the Pachipamwe paintings attained, *"These paintings had something about them which I had never sensed before, something which is perhaps best described by Greenberg's term 'ineffable.' This term is the best because it alludes to that quality which is beyond analysis. Nothing that one knows about the mechanics of paint will even help one achieve it or analyse its quality when one is in its presence."* (Bills personal notes, 'My debt to Portway', p.2, c.1975).

Of course, it is possible he could have worked over these paintings once back in his studio, but I believe he had come full circle – back to the sense of lightness of the earlier St Ives paintings from the 60's, but with much added breadth, uniqueness and force of spirit and consciousness that only time and struggle can provide. The luxury of uninterrupted time, and presence of mind, was provided by the workshop atmosphere where he painted these last paintings. Presence of being lags behind creativity. Bill wanted to move beyond himself into another time that ran further ahead or was hidden from him and the present moment. These last paintings done while at the Pachipamwe Workshop in Zimbabwe in August 1989, encapsulate his admiration of Portway's paintings, *"It must be stressed that the paintings were not clever rearrangements of those elements that had been the stock in trade of painting since the turn of the century. The surface was unique. And the colour was not the product of a good colour sense—it spoke directly and intimately of experience that lay outside the colour of paintings and of the colour that I saw in the world and yet was true in the sense of revealing colour that I somehow had a fore-knowledge of. I thought of it as colour and surface seen on the periphery of one's experience, through the corner of one's eye in the forgotten or neglected corner of the world. And the paintings gave weight or gravity or importance to experiences that were also intimate or hidden, covered over, and that is important because these experiences were deeply personal in a world that for me had been beguiled by what seemed larger, but were in fact more abstracted issues. Issues groped with by the intellect but deeply confusing and disturbing to the intuitions. So here were paintings re-enforcing my intuitions—re-instating their greater importance as I now see it."* (Bills personal notes, 'My debt to Portway', p.3, c.1975).

Gail Behrmann interview with E Castle 7 May 2014

EC

What I wanted to know is how your experience of the JAF and the teaching with the emphasis on abstraction, just your insight.

GB

I had already left there in the 80's. I was there primarily when it started and it was Ricky Burnett and I who persuaded Bill to do full- time classes. At that time it was in Annerly Rd and it was simply called Bill Ainslie's studios and then we moved to Oxford Rd and then back to Annerly Rd and only subsequently did it go to Eastwold Way and then it was registered as the JAF.

My time there in the 80's was actually very fulfilling because firstly Bill wouldn't let us abstract immediately you had to learn to see first, to learn to draw. I always divide Bill's ideas into the time before Triangle and the time after Triangle. It was only when he came back from Triangle that he placed such an emphasis on abstraction. Before that, although he himself was an abstract artist he was very concerned that one learned how to see and one subsequently learned to abstract from that experience and so you developed an individual pattern.

At the studio we used to have a number of artists who came once a month to lecture to us. We also had a film society which I ran. I worked in the office to pay my fees and our teachers were excellent. It was such an enthusiastic group that on Saturday afternoons the students would get together and make our own drawing class. So it was quite extraordinary from that point of view.

EC

There was a lot of criticism around the Thupelo workshops about the emphasis on abstraction particularly for black artists. Acerbic criticism was levelled by the academics because of the funding from USSALEP and the fact that artists came to do the workshops from England and America.

GB

I think a lot of the criticism came from the academics at Wits because Bill didn't go according to the structures of academic teaching. The Art Foundation was a place where one was able to experience a diversity of people from all races. It was the one place to which black people were invited.

Dumile Feni was one of them. A lot of that criticism was levelled directly at Bill far more than it was levelled at the Thupelo workshops and the visiting British and American artists. Those workshops were highly instrumental in giving township artists opportunities resulting in a huge creative process. I think that's where the academics fell short in their acknowledgement and understanding of that process.

EC

The academics criticism was I suppose within the function of their situation where they weren't able to contravene the immorality act etc.

GB

They could have contravened it, there is no reason why they couldn't have offered to do workshops nor was there a reason why they couldn't have praised what Bill was doing,

EC

What about the crits what about that way of teaching?

GB

I only started painting when I left there and Bill would still come and give me crits but I couldn't paint while I was there. However, I still needed that input, to me it is a very valuable thing. You don't always have to follow it but it is necessary to have it. Painting itself is quite a lonely experience it's an isolated experience because the whole idea of being an artist is to find your own way.

EC

Do you think that his teaching changed from the early 'screen and passage' period ?

That was one of Bill's major teaching methods.

EC

I then went to UNISA to do a degree and he was not too keen on that academic approach.

GB

Bill himself had an academic background but had a problem between the two factions of formal and non-formal education. He initially insisted that one cannot abstract before learning how to see. But in 1985 when he came back from Triangle, everybody at the studio was making abstract art. People were splashing paint around and thinking they were great artists when actually the work needed form. The question is how do you make abstract art?

Do you simply splash paint on?

Perhaps Bill should have stopped teaching after '85 and just painted himself.

Interview with Maryanne Botha by E Castle April 2013

EC

What are your recollections of Bill

MB

The most memorable thing for me as a student when I first went to have painting classes with Bill when I was at school and I was about 15, because I wanted to study art for matric and I wanted some lessons. It was just wonderful, it was fabulous to be included. They lived in Parktown at the time, one of the last remaining beautiful houses that they rented. I remember the stained glass windows. Bill had a kind of biggish studio, an upstairs room where he held classes, and it was quite spare in a way. It did have still lifes against one wall, and he used to have life drawing classes, and I used to be there in the afternoon, and then he and Fieke invited me, because my parents lived in Sandton at that time, to stay and be part of the later class. So I used to hang out with them from about 4 to 6. Their interesting friends used to rock up, and phone calls, and it was just like a real education for me. Bill used to give me things to read *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin. It was kind of like different education that I got there, but also this feeling of just being accepted for who you were. I really think that was the core of his teaching. It was hard for people to have their work critted at the end of every lesson – but that's how it worked. So that you had to in some way step up, or step out, and be yourself. It wasn't so much pedagogic, it appeared to me, and even as a teacher with him later on, that there were no real principles or real fixed vision of what a painting might be. There was a kind of interest in abstraction, but that was the time of abstraction, it was post abstract expressionism it was when in England people were painting abstract paintings. This was the middle and late '60s. So that was the prevailing fashion or way of seeing what the future of painting would be. But having said that, at the same time, even though Bill invited people to step out and be themselves and talk about their work, or talk about their work as a way of presenting themselves. He wasn't really concerned about personality, this was a very kind of cool objective exercise, because what he did was he then addressed the work, he never spoke about the person. That was a fundamental lesson to me as an art teacher. What he was asking people to do was to put their work up and be themselves, but then the concentration was on the work. I remember when we had an art school as opposed to art classes, from the time of the Yugoslav Embassy building, young people who treated Bill like a guru, and he never got sucked into that because he may have closer friendships with some than others, but he wasn't interested in..... I remember the frustration of one young man who was completely devoted to him and felt he wasn't getting the right amount of attention from Bill. I think that may have been the experience of other people too. As a teacher that was a fabulous characteristic, because he wasn't a pedagogue and it wasn't a personality cult, and I really believe that, and I watched it for a years and years.

EC

What years were you involved?

MB

As a school-girl I went to classes, and then I decided to study Fine Arts, and he really encouraged me. He was really keen I went to study at university which I loved, it was the Wits classic BA Fine Arts in those years, big chunk of history of art and then it built up on the practical side. Then I did honours, and I had to do a thesis. I said I just don't think I can do this, it's too schizophrenic, to try and generate the work and be critical about it at the same time. It was an experimental honours in sort of aesthetic criticism. Heather Marthinesen

was the prof at the time and she wanted to try this. Gillian Carmen, Gillian Barry and I did this unusual honours. I said to Bill "I don't think I can do this" and he said "don't worry do the work and I'll help you think about it when you've done the work. It's interesting because in a way I'm still doing the work. It must have been about '72 that I started teaching for him. That's when a number of young people, including Ricky, and Meyer Milner and some others, I think the Johannesburg Art School at that time was a bit closed, they wanted to come and work every day, and that's when at the top of Annerley Road in the Yugoslav Embassy the Art Foundation started. Gail Behrmann was the Secretary which was her way of paying for classes. Maxine Krinsky started teaching there, and Harry started teaching there. In that very first year, I was the kind of apprentice, and there were about 12 young people, and then I worked there until Ralph was born at the end of '76, and then I moved out of Johannesburg to the Magaliesburg and I didn't teach again with Bill after '76.

EC

You taught me, and that teaching ethic was already in place, like you say, that whole process of the crit sessions and talking to the painting rather than the person, and the whole process of being his apprentice as a teacher. I went through that too, later on, I did my degree when my children were already at school. Then I went to teach for him. I used to wander around behind him and listen and watch and learn how to do it that way. Quite an extraordinary thing. You mentioned apprentice.

MB

I was his apprentice. I taught William Kentridge. He had already done his original degree at Wits, and was heading for law I think. He'd done politics and economics and probably some law subjects, and he just decided to have a year away from the next step.

EC

I haven't spoken to him. I don't know him. I don't know if he'll be interested in chatting to me.

MB

I'm sure he will. You just need to speak to his PA. She's very secretive and protective.

Interview with Ricky Burnett by E Castle 2012

EC

I am interested in the argument about abstraction in the teaching philosophy at the JAF

RB

The interesting argument from my point of view is why has a tradition of painting which has been globally so influential ... late German Expressionism grows out of it, Modern British painting grows out of it, most contemporary painting grows out of a root of some sort. The American inventions of the 40's and 50's fuelled all of that. How come we were not ideologically, aesthetically or intellectually ready to receive it in this country?

It was just pockets, Bill's attachment to abstraction was an isolated phenomenon and Kevin Atkinson equally so. But that did have impact and for some of them became very liberating. Those who can make paintings of real power without an image, where the paint is the image.

The truth is that Jenny Stadler probably stands head and shoulders above that and she may be a better conduit for you. She is the one person who has actually stayed with the programme so to speak. It is still true today that we barely begin in this country to understand the language of a good painting. A good painting is very rare.

EC

What in your opinion became the issue around abstraction at Thupelo?

An interesting sociological or cultural psychological question is: why is it in this country we are so frightened of an abstract thought or an impression of an abstract thought? One's first reaction is well because at a certain point that throwing paint around without sending a message to the world about the evils of the apartheid system seems like a self-indulgence. I am not sure that quite accounts for it. At face value that's the argument but it's not a big enough or substantial argument.

A lot of painters in this country in the 40's and 50's who didn't go to Paris, people like Larry Scully, George Boyes and Lionel Abrahams, tended to make paintings that were informed by the paintings they had seen in books. A lot of painting in general and abstract painting in particular was about look-alikes so we have never had a tradition of this calibre in this country, so when you paint look-alikes you miss the central power of it.

Abstract painting is about the manifestation of the physical reality in the paint. We have never had a tradition or an understanding for the feeling of the stuff, whether it be in the service of the stuff, in the service of the thought or it's never been of the stuff itself, which of course is central to modernism, the truth in the materials as the core idea.

EC

How did this affect your own work?

RB

It is a language I have always understood and have a deep affection for it. I think that beauty is not appearance, beauty is a kind of truth when intellect and emotion come together you get an unexpected moment when the human brain has suddenly managed to make a little bit...call it magic if you will...something that has intrinsic power to it.

I like the idea of visual things not being easily captioned a lot of painting about the world can be easily captioned. Whereas painting about the way we think or feel is hard to pin down. Once you shift from emotion and feeling it is so nuanced that you are in the poetic realm. I have always loved the way in which paint can respond to the hand and thought in paintings that are able to tell you the how intense your own feelings are. I don't respond at all

passionately to conceptual art. I get it, I think, I understand something of the cleaverness and the philosophical core of it but I don't have to love it.

EC

How did your friendship with Bill affect your work?

RB

I was personally lucky to meet Bill, I was close to him for a long time but I became rather disappointed with him, in a way, partly because as a teacher he lost the capacity to teach broadly which is what he did when I first met him. The more he got involved with Thupelo the more he felt that what they were doing with spilling paint around in a certain space was the way to go. But he didn't start that way, he offered a lot of space and a lot of respect and the more well-read he became, he became convinced of something at a certain point. When I was with him the unfortunate legacy is that he was attached to some sort of mysticism. I don't want to give it a name because I think it was free-floating and the way it affected his work and the way it affected his teaching is that he could never finish a painting and he couldn't help any of us do it either. So we all got lost in this morass that there was some great abstract statement like the burning bush or the Ten Commandments or that it was something that would suddenly arrive. You were never in the process but always grappling for that undeniable god given something that certainly crippled me and I think it crippled him.

Bill always wanted to surprise himself but I would say, but hang on you are doing the same thing you are not surprising yourself you are painting yourself into the same corner. There were a few quick things he did in Zimbabwe when there was a moment of fresh air in his thinking but for a lot of the time he was teaching or working with us, broadly speaking, he himself was quite stuck.

EC

Do you teach in much the same way?

RB

Its all about a kind of intuition and a language. The prime gift is language and you need a bit of insight to locate yourself firmly in each person's reality.

Interview with Ricky Burnett May 2014

EC

I am doing this MA on the teaching at the Art Foundation in comparison to other organisations that were happening at the same time. From the era '82 – '92, I want to emphasize the way the teaching worked and how it was established, and I think you teach in very much in the same way.

RB

Yes I think so, although there are big differences. The primary difference being that we are different people. For me that has always been at the core of what Bill was about. While he may have wandered around and about things like, Arto's Theatre of Cruelty or Sufism or whatever, in the early days at least, Bill's teaching was at its best because it was instinctive or intuitive. It was a humanism rather than a theory. When people have asked me previously about his teaching method, I kind of thought was it a method, because it never seemed to be structured or transcribed and formulated in any concrete sort of way. It was different elements of attitude that would find things to cling to, but essentially it was an attitude to persons. It's a kind of liberal humanist position that says, yes we're all different, yes, we all deserve a conversation which is particular to us at any one time. That learning

happens best, as Bill liked to say, when you're engaged. And an engagement essentially means when some important bit of you is being addressed that isn't otherwise addressed. So you have the opportunity to experience inside a teaching studio, this I suppose is the idea and the tradition that I continue with. People have often said to me why don't you go and teach at a university, or do something that is intellectually more stimulating. And the truth of the matter is I don't find the university more stimulating. I find it tribal, that young people, post teenager years, are instinctively tribal and they're not much older when they get to university. Everybody is reading the same prescribed literature, and listening to the same kind of music, and have you seen the latest show by some Bulgarian, and at the end of the day it's much more intellectually stimulating to have a variety of people, of a variety of different ages, who require from you different conversations. The key is being able to frame an idea in a language that is accessible to the person you're talking to. So it's not about simply making a philosophically defended statement. That's not important, what is important is that you are able to transmit something with meaning to someone at that moment. So you can say the same thing to five different people but you say it in five different ways. I find that very stimulating. That's what I learned about and was able to practise at the Art Foundation, because it was that inclusiveness, or the diversity of the audience that one was talking to. Whether they be 80 years old, 18 years old. Whether they be black or white, male or female, at work or out of work, post-university or without education. So the interactions are either, warm and human or they're not worth having. That's why I think that Bill's teaching at its best was predicated on that humanism which was warm and embracing of people and their diversity.

EC

It was the informal quality that was quite important it was that quality that I want to talk about.

RB

I think the important thing about what's called in America "Life Long Learning" and the absence of syllabus is that, insofar as Bill was right in that you learn best when you're engaged in something, one's engaged in different things at different times. Different people learn at different speeds, or require different input at different times, so that again I refer back to the warmth or the appropriateness of the conversation. The idea that there are prescribed steps to learning how to paint, simply has no weight to it at all. It's an inheritance from some rather uptight people of the French academies of the 1700's/1800's. Even Goya wrote a report to the academy in 1796, and he said "I don't understand the formulaic approach to teaching that you guys have". We are talking about the mystery of painting here. "On any one day how do you explain the fact that I can put a great deal of effort into a painting and it never works, and I can on another day do something very quick, without a lot of effort and it's brilliant. How do you train people systematically for that mystery?" That was in 1796. He was right.

EC

What about the collaborative sessions where Bill would elicit your point of view?

RB

It was the sort of slightly Socratic method of the dialectic of conversation. One of the elements of teaching in this manner is you become kind of interlocutor between the people and their work. They don't need necessarily to articulate consciously to themselves, but when you come in and help articulate for them, or with them, you act as a kind of mirror, and you triangulate the process, so you enable a kind of mediation to take place. You hold

the conversation. You're not putting stress on the painter to constantly consciously articulate what's going on. You do it for them. You give them a framework to relate to and they think "...ah yes that's what I might be doing, or could be doing." But at the same time, if you're going to teach anybody to paint reasonably well and reasonably well for a long period of time outside of your care and comfort and mentorship and coaching, they also need to be able to carry on a conversation in their own heads. So learning to pinpoint a sensation or an effect or a consequence, to be able to read, to develop visual literacy. To learn to read the pace, the feel, the substance of the material you're working with. All of those are an essential part. However, the important thing is that it's learning to articulate one's sensational experience of painting. Which is not the same as book learning is not the same as reading theory.

EC

You're helping them to establish a vocabulary which they can use for themselves.

RB

Yes and how to notice things because often things go unnoticed simply because they're not pinpointed. Cognition is largely language but creativity not necessarily. But there are moments when you need to sit back and engage in some cognitive assessment, and language becomes a very important part of that.

EC

What about the experimentation? What about those experimental qualities that were followed at Thupelo? What do you feel about that?

RB

I'm not sure from this distance whether it was that experimental. I think South Africa being a sort of isolated triangle, at the bottom of the Atlantic and Indian oceans, what had become kind of commonplace in American and European and British painting seemed to be new and experimental here. It gave some guys a wonderful opportunity to stretch out of picture making and start to make paintings, which are two completely different things of course especially a lot of the black guys who were associated with Thupelo and others. Putting the canvas on the floor and chucking a bucket of acrylic was enormously liberating, simply for its generosity of gesture. Its radical departure from "Paint me a picture of a grotty little street with a donkey in it", and at the same time it was also an acknowledgement that it's possible to belong to an international culture and its characteristics. It was that you don't have to feel constrained by parochialism and localism, and the narrow expectations of that. I think those are all very positive, but whether or not in and of itself one can sensibly talk about it as experimental, I don't know. It became in its own way a certain kind of orthodoxy actually. It didn't begin as such. But I think with Thupelo and after Bill went to Triangle it sort of became a thing that if you weren't doing it you weren't really serious enough. That became quite a limitation on what went on. I was there up to a point, but I'm speaking from looking in from the outside at this point.

EC

All that criticism from people like Colin Richards and so on? They were quite as acerbic about what was going on there. I missed that. I didn't quite understand what all that was about.

RB

I'm not sure that I do either. I can offer some comment, but I didn't necessarily understand it. People before Colin, Alan Crump and others were very dismissive of what they thought was a lack of professionalism, lack of academic rigour. I think that was a terrible misreading because in fact it was precisely those qualities that made it a humane and welcoming and

essentially democratic learning environment. That was what it was about. As soon as the project, after Bill's death, became formalised under Steven Sack and Ruth Sack and they started to introduce syllabus and examinations, the whole *raison d'être* went out the window. It became a poor man's version of something that other people could do better with tax payer's money. I think Colin had an argument with the abstract expressionism in general. He had a strange notion that it was some kind of large CIA plot to undermine god knows what. On the other hand Colin then went on to look at Durant Sihlali very seriously and Thupelo was very central to the growth of Durant's work. He was one case in particular where the shift from the genre painting of the grotty street and the donkey cart to something more ambitious was exactly what happened to Durant, so I'm not sure. He's not with us to remake his argument. But it seems a flimsy one to me.

EC

Kendall Geers was also quite acerbic.

RB

But Kendall Geers is acerbic about anything that isn't Kendall Geers. But why? I think the disease is the assumption that making paintings, making art, is the province of a special tribe of people who've read the right sort of books, and we do not subscribe to that sort. I am still happier working with a 50 year old lady who's never been to university, who's always wanted the opportunity, and I talk to them about poetry, I talk to them about music, and literature. I talk to them about painting, and I make a difference to their lives. The assumption that art should be dominated by university trained *avante-gardeness* is a load of rubbish. It's pretentious, it's arrogant. It essentially lacks any humanist character and has absolutely no intellectual weight at all, as far as I'm concerned.

EC

I was chatting to William Kentridge, and he said to me it was essentially a bad way of teaching. He felt that there was a wonderful quality there but it was not necessarily about the teaching.

RB

I'm not sure what he would mean by that. I think that the important thing is, let's look at the results. It's true the Johannesburg Art Foundation didn't produce over a long period of time a huge swathe of professional *avant-garde* artists. What it did produce though, as a sort of private back yard operation with absolutely no tax payers money, self-funded by and large apart from the building itself, was William Kentridge, me who has curated two of the most significant exhibitions in the history of this country, and some people who have continued to paint very seriously, Jenny Stadler, Gail Behrmann, Jill Trappier, David Koloane and rand for rand, metre per square metre, it's not a bad track record. I'm not sure what William would mean by a bad way of teaching. I tell you for me what the downside of it was, and this also refers back to Bill's temperament as a personality at that time, I think one of the elements that was quite discomforting over a long period of time was that Bill himself for nearly 10 years never finished a painting. What was he in search of? He was in search of some sort of mysterious bolt from the blue. Unfortunately that contaminated a great deal of the teaching, so there was a huge amount of anxiety about you've never finished. It's not this, it's not that. You didn't have progressive accumulations, and assessments of bodies, there was always that doesn't work, this doesn't work, this should be more. For full time people the pressure that emanated from Bill's studio was incompleteness, I don't know what the end results going to be, it was very difficult. I think that was a burden I carried for

a very long time. I do think that there was something else actually. It probably would have been better to call it a “painting foundation” rather than an “art foundation.” The fact of the matter is that it doesn’t matter whether you are teaching professionals or not, the fact is that there were a hell of a lot of lost people who gathered around, unfortunately in sort of almost quasi-religious and metaphysically sort of brave terms, the idea of saving lost souls. I think there was a pretentiousness about that too that wasn’t always healthy. But you know again rand for rand, square metre for square metre, it talks for itself. The problem with the Kendall Geers of the world and the Alan Crumps and their idea of professionalism is that they erase that actually. It’s a kind of amnesia, because a great deal of art has been made out of a kind of whimsy, eccentricity a sense of alienation. To go back to Goya how the hell do you school that? And often you school it out of existence, and in some ways it’s one of the problems with avant-gardism, is that it knows the look of everything but where’s the substance.

EC

Just getting back to William, I think what he was saying was that for him that by just being there was probably enough, that he went his own way anyway, but that he did value simply being there.

RB

No William was never persuaded by paint and never has been persuaded by paint, therefore, he was temperamentally peripheral to the central ideology of the place, probably much to his benefit.

EC

There was a lot of criticism, particularly Richards about David’s abstract work, but David feels that if he hadn’t had that experience he wouldn’t have been able to work the way he does today.

RB

Absolutely right, when have you seen from any of our so called art critics in any of the newspapers, such as they are, or *Art South Africa* today, anybody who can actually talk about painting with any intelligence. It’s just not understood, we don’t have a communal culture of knowing how to read a painting. We can read about the history of it, and the assumption that it may be something about poverty or alienation or female genitalia or god knows what else, but nobody can read paint. The Art Foundation, singularly even painters like Kevin Atkinson, Andrew Verster who dabbled in almost everything including a bit of abstraction, seemed to me not to quite have got that one thing, and the Art Foundation more than any other – there was a school of thought that they understood paint, but I’m not entirely sure of that either. I think the Art Foundation singularly is the one place where if you had in interest in paint you could develop that literacy, almost nowhere else.

EC

When we talked a couple of years ago you mentioned something about South Africa seeming to be afraid of abstraction.

RB

That’s because we expect art makers to be saying something about the world, the objective material world, the world of values and things and places and people and circumstances. Attitudes, we have this idea that we expect art to be a critique of social behaviours. I don’t get that either. Our expectation to literature is similar.

Interview with Bongi Dhlomo by E Castle August 2014

EC

You had experience of Rorke's Drift as well as Thupelo and the Art Foundation, it was the teaching that I'm really interested in. If you can explain or tell me what the teaching was about at Rorke's Drift.

BD

Let me try and start from why I went to Rorke's Drift. In the 60's my elder sister who could not finish anything because she had epilepsy, and after Std 6 at that time, she stopped going to school because she had severe attacks. When she was in her late teens she went to Rorke's Drift. I didn't know anything about Rorke's Drift I just knew that she was going there to do Domestic Science, Home Economics in today's language. There were quite a number of women that did that. Unknown to me at that time, was it was at the same time the beginning of the Fine Art School with Mbatha and all those early students. My next contact with Rorke's Drift was when I was already working at Tongaat Sugar and I was not very happy with being a typist clerk that was not going to move anywhere else but become only that. So I saw this poster in our church centre, because my dad was in the Rorke's Drift council by virtue of being the dean in the circuit that was close to the Rorke's Drift circuit. I saw this poster calling for students for the following year's intake so applied, really out of interest just being interested in something other than what I was doing. I didn't know that I had any talent in art at all, except that I was very good at drawing. In our education you didn't know that being good at drawing means that you could be an artist, because there was no opening for that in terms of our career planning. I applied because I was working and they told us how much it was going to be and that was the kind of money I was making, so I could put myself through the school. But I went there blank about what art meant or what I could do or what I was able to do. The one thing was that because I was trained secretary, the one thing that had to go with your application was a statement of why you wanted to be an artist, and I used my skills as a report writer to actually nudge on the fact that the school was run by a church, and I wrote was that I believe that God was an artist. You had to supply five drawing, but I believe my statement got me into Rorke's Drift more than my drawings.

EC

But there was an entry requirement?

BD

Oh yes, there was a requirement you had to send in five art works of different genres. I had a stick man as my drawing, and I had a colouring with felt pen in red and green which I said was "abstract". Then I had an outline of the Drakensberg Mountains that I believe were part of the reason I went to Rorke's Drift, I grew up in Bergville and the Drakensberg mountains, and the Tugela spring I could see from the kitchen in our home. In winter I would see that white line. It was frozen over. I believe that that was one of the inspirations, because I had seen a number of white men mainly that were painting the Drakensberg range, but at that time white and black was just distanced with apartheid, and I was young. So I think I had more interest than other young people in looking at what these white people were doing with the easels and paint. I remember the one man that I saw, I was coming from our local general dealer, he was at an angle and that way he could paint the Mont Aux Sources, that long high mountain on the Drakensberg range. All these things came to me later as I was now confronted.

As I say I got to Rorke's Drift blank. There were guys from Joburg that had been to art centres like the Thobele art centre, like Azaria Mbatha and Alina Khumalo, had been to the late Anke Studios and Dumisani Mabaso had been to the Anke studios, but also to the Mofolo Art Centre. Pat had been at the Jubilee, so they already had a lot of knowledge, and some of us, and I think me more, I had no knowledge of art except for the drawings that I had seen in the Sunday School books, but all of it added on to me being able to understand when the teachers were talking.

When we got to Rorke's Drift there were 3 teachers, it was Ada van der Vyver and Jules van der Vyver who later left and went to Cape Town and they were teaching at UCT. And the Late Eric Mbatha from Soweto who had been a student. So we literally got assignments and I used whatever was inside me to do the drawings we were given. The Rorke's Drift way of teaching, we didn't have lectures, it was very practical there was very little theory, which I think was the same at and at Fuba and the Johannesburg Art Foundation. You were just given tools and pointers, and we used only one art book, except for the fact that when I decided I was going to go to Rorke's Drift my mother and I were in Durban and we were going to shop for something in the church's publishing house, but there was this art book, this African art book that my mother bought for me. I still have it. I was very excited. I still have it. When I found it recently I was so excited, because it was almost her accepting what I'd decided, because I was already working when I decided I was going to take myself back to school.

EC

So it was more than the book?

BD

It was more than the book. At that time, allowing a girl child to go and do art, which no other person had done that before was actually amazing on the side of my parents. When I got to Rorke's Drift I discovered that there were fewer girls than male students. We were 4 and they were 12. In our second year there were 2 girls and 2 boys.

It's difficult for me to speak about the teaching method rather than the workshop approach. Because even though we were in class, we would talk to each other and we would advise each other, or we would break away and if you wanted to really dig deep on your own you would then do. But every time at the end of the assignment when there was a crit by the teacher or the lecturer. We would all then contribute. So the way of teaching at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, what I noticed, was very similar. Not knowing how teaching happened at universities, it's very difficult to say what was different. At Fuba teachers I noticed were using very much the same type method of teaching, the workshop type of approach. It was a collaborative process allowing for synergies between students to be encouraged and to yield whatever the results would be. This is why it was difficult. At Rorke's Drift there was something called a two month probation. The teachers even from the entry requirements could not decide to exclude you, so you'd come in and after two months you'd be told if you were accepted. In our year Kay Hassan was excluded in 1978 and then came back in 1979. And Joe Sibeko. I think the passion made these guys come back. Having tasted the first two months of this amazing place, because even just being at Rorke's Drift was an inspiration, looking at the weavers, ladies doing the cloths, and the potters and the ladies doing their tapestry. It was a very conducive space to work. So I don't think it was like being in a lecture room with a professor giving you the assignment. It was very workshoppy generally. Because if we had done clay sculpture we would then have them baked together with the pots by the potters. So it would be this big festive night of

sitting around the kiln and talking to the potters. Even if you woke up and everything was broken, the camaraderie that was formed in this was great.

Then Ada and Jules left, that same year Prof. Karel Betsge and Gabriel came from the US, so we had these benevolent teachers with the local Eric. So for us I think that first year was very informative, because we had these teachers that were coming from different background and different understanding of how to take the thing forward. The Eliovsons came with their three daughters. Betsge was a print-making professor so he started what is known about Rorke's Drift today, their graphic art. We extended the printing workshop because he wanted us to have a separate room for printing for toxins, for inks etc. So we actually built the extension ourselves with mud. Even though we were there as art students, we did so many other things, we went to prayers with the workers every day at 10 before tea and we took turns in conducting the prayers. So even though there was a builder, we were a big part of getting the mud and cow dung. It was straw and clay and cow dung.

He then also introduced us to screen printing which had not been done before. I think was actually because we didn't have enough materials, enough screens, we would work in groups to create the initial image. Then the school bought smaller screens for individuals to make up their work, and I was paired with Pat for some strange reason and we made this screen and we only had primary colours. We had yellow, blue and red, he was actually wanting to show us how you can mix colours. How you can overlay with the continuous running of the screen on the same thing. I did sort of wild life, animals and things, and Pat was doing sort of geometrical and so we worked together on the screen, and called our art work when we signed it "Combination". They didn't even know that we would be married. I think Fort Hare University bought a copy of that print. Again that was another approach in teaching the collaborative on one art work. The book that we were using had nothing about anything but European and Egyptian art, and Greek. At that time, this is now 1978, all these guys that are coming from Joburg have just gone through the 1976 uprising, so they are very militant. And even though we are coming from church backgrounds we were put into this melting pot. You can see from their drawings that they are very militant. So all that added on to our understanding of what role art could play in society. All of these issues are layers that made the teaching of the method translatable in whatever we did.

Prof. Betsge left the following year and the Eliovsons left, and we had a local teacher, van Winkel who had been teaching at Stellenbosch. This was now a complete extreme. He came in with the South African method of "I am the teacher, you're going to do what I say. Here is your assignment." and there was a lot of angst, and a lot of "you can't do that to us". We also went along with what he was doing. He was a lecturer who told us exactly how things are done.

For me I think our period at Rorke's Drift was the most exciting of the people that came before and the people that came after us. The people that came after us had only one lecturer, German or Dutch. We actually ended up with 7 different teachers, going with whatever Rorke's Drift was understood to be, but infusing it with what they knew and where they'd come from, with their background of their own. It was very rich. I still think that the group that were at Rorke's Drift in 1978 and 1979 definitely got the best out of the institution.

EC

You actually got a certificate, so it was a proper course that you did?

BD

It was a Diploma, a 2 year Fine Arts Diploma. But it's acceptability outside of the institution was questionable because there was no working relationship between Rorke's Drift and the universities until much later. But it was a little too late, because the Rorke's Drift was closing down when the University of Natal when they decided to acknowledge the training at Rorke's Drift and the possibility of crediting a Rorke's Drift student with a year or two for them to continue. I don't think anyone took it up. I have never been able to follow it up.

EC

Why did Rorke's Drift close?

BD

There were a number of things. One of them was that the Lutheran church was not able to sustain students. Because what we paid was ridiculous, we paid R150 for the whole year, for accommodation, for all the art material for food. I don't think the church had an idea of how costly it was. But it may be other things that were happening within the changes, because Rorke's Drift had started before the withdrawal of the missionaries or missions that had come into South Africa the Swedish mission, the Norwegian mission, the German and the Americans. For all these people to come and teach it was because of the link of the missions to the Lutheran church in South Africa. All the teachers that came were Lutheran. Carol Eliovson was a pastor in Minnesota. The Lutherans that had left Germany and went to America. The missionaries ended in 1975, and the Lutheran church in Southern Africa became autonomous from the mother missions. That standing alone meant the diminishing of support funding to hospitals schools colleges etc. A lot of hospitals that had been funded by the church had to collapse into government, and that created problems for the local black people, because it didn't matter whether you were a Lutheran or not or you were poor or not had to pay. That affected funding for Rorke's Drift. It was shaky after that even for the craft section. Even now with the heritage people that took on the battlefield, the site of Rorke's Drift is divided by a fence. The school side is not catered for. It's cut off. They are two completely different. We went with the Thupelo workshop to Rorke's Drift, but it felt like a completely different place. At one point when I was doing the Thupelo gallery I was approached by the church to come and run Rorke's. But it was at the time that knowing the midlands in Natal and the racism that was still there, I just couldn't take my kids and put them through that. So I thanked them but told them I couldn't do it. I don't know what I would have done if I'd gone, whether I would have changed anything. They wanted the resuscitation of the art centre of the school. That never happened. The National Government did something and I went to one of the workshops, but it just felt like one of these superficial things that government sometimes put on.

EC

Was the training primarily for skills training? You talk a lot about the weaving and so on. The teaching was to give people skills to maintain themselves.

BD

Rorke's Drift had two. This is why it was called arts and craft centre. You know there's a very fine line between craft and fine art. But it was clear that people weaving was one of the subjects. But except for Joe Ndlovu and maybe Faith Manasa from Springs, none of us really excelled because again we thought – we are artists, we are not crafters. The sculptors were doing the same thing as the guys who were doing wood work, their work was not for sale it was for supporting the centre. The sculptors that we had were quite prolific a guy from Pretoria, he used to make beautiful sculptures from railway sleepers, so did Shilakwe,

he was using the same. The late Nkosi Zulu went into the forest to collect dead wood, so most of the sculptures were using wood and clay. There was no steel work.

It was the art section that I think supported the school. That was one of the revenue strings for the church. Even though at that time when you are a student you don't go into how is this sustained. The teachers were definitely not paid by our R150. When the elections came they now gave us this bad news that now in '79 the fees are going to increase by R100 to R250. In my second year I was called to the office and told that there was a group in Johannesburg, the Jewish Women's Benevolent Society that were going to pay for my fees. They paid for my second year. It would be nice to know who those women were. To thank them - they made me what I am.

Interview with Diana Hyslop by E Castle 2014

EC

Diana can you describe your experience of the JAF and Thupelo

DH

My experiences of Thupelo workshop have broadened my artistic practise. This is because the workshops allow for free experimentation. I think it is pointless to attend a workshop without trying something new, something adventurous. Playing around with concepts and materials gives me the opportunity to broaden my thinking and contribute to my work.

EC

What about the Thupelo debate?

DH

In the 80's the Thupelo workshops had been criticised by different academic bodies because of the experimentation with abstraction that took place there. A furious debate emerged whether black artists experimenting with abstract art were working to their natural form, or being forced into a Eurocentric style. I remember a Canadian artist, Graham Peacock, gave a talk on African art at the Johannesburg Art Foundation to prove that abstraction comes out of Africa. Using slides he showed the historical role of African artefacts and how much abstraction there was in these works. Peacock's talk was followed by a heated debate around the issue of the black artists experimenting with abstract art. The Wits academics felt that social expressionism and political art were the natural form of expression and that abstraction was alien to black artists. Many of the black artists were furious with this point of view finding it very condescending. Samson Mnisi who had been following the discourse became so upset with this limiting view that he there and then decided to only do abstract art as a statement against 'township' art.

This is significant because, through Thupelo, all artists were not restricted by academic, financial, or aesthetic demands, and were given the opportunity to really explore new ideas, new materials and new people.

Interview with Michael Gardiner by Liz Castle 3 March 2013. Amended 20 October 2013

EC

I just wanted to understand your concept of the pedagogical approach at the Art Foundation. Not as a teacher but as someone who was involved on the Board and in every avenue of the Art Foundation, and very close to Bill.

MG

You must add to that that I was involved in education, and during the '60s there was that revolution in the teaching of literature, revolution in the teaching of language, which came out of Britain, but came from a whole series of other sources as well, which created an excitement about ways in which one used literary texts in the classroom with young people. The sorts of explorations that were made possible were closely linked to my discussions with Bill about how one worked with ideas and issues in teaching situations. But the point that I want to make to you is that Bill and I came out of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and there was a strong pedagogical approach to literature, one that made strong links between literature and life. And that I think was enormously influential in the way Bill structured his interaction with learners, and certainly it was influential in the way that I functioned in the classroom. It presupposes a certain understanding of what one is doing when opening up, exposing people to a poem, for example. In similar ways Bill operated on another level, directly with peoples' implicit and overt creativity. I was less concerned with getting children to write, although that was part of it, as I was more interested in enabling them to achieve the kind of skills and the kind of abilities to explore literature for themselves, but always in relation to their circumambient society and to their circumstances, and so this question of the street and the classroom, the street and the studio was very important for both of us. And similarly Bill's sensitive and profound awareness of political issues was part of this. So that things had to start to make meaning in terms of ones understanding of what was going on at the time, and of course as one knows in the '60s and the '70s and the '80s a lot was going on in this city and in this country.

EC

That's very important, his beginning to understand who he was. He was a member of the SRC at PMB University. I don't know how far back his political awareness goes?

MG

He arrived at the University as a regular middle class white 18 year old male, macho and confused, and it's the people he met and the experiences he got between 1953 – 1955 that shifted his view of what was happening in South Africa, and shifted his view of the world. That big move happened in PMB at that time. Two crucial figures in his life then were Catherine Shallis (now Brubeck) and Selby Mvusi, an artist who opened his eyes to realities of which he had been oblivious. I've interviewed people who knew him and were close to him at that time and have spoken at length about the changes that took place in him. So that's the origin of his genuine political awareness. His parents were of another order. Both of us were exposed to lecturers, for example, in the Department of English, one of whom is still alive at the age of 100 and still in touch with us, who were very careful to give us a sense of the importance of literature as something concerned with the way one conducted one's life, so that aesthetic decisions, for example, were also moral decisions. So you encountered the literature and then you were faced with the responsibility of knowing how to translate that into the way that you chose to live. For example should we when we qualified and worked, should we pay taxes, should we do our military training, and what kind of responsibilities did we have towards an inclusive notion of South African society? Concerns

such as these were translated into the teaching mode as well. So that one in a sense was confronted with those very local but in a sense quite universal questions and one was used to talking about these kinds of things to such an extent that lecturing staff at the University of Natal in PMB have published articles saying what a wonderful intellectual ferment it was in the mid 50's at the University of Natal.

Bill was a reader of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and if you remember, Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran minister/preacher in Germany who established the Free Church, and he as a Christian argued that for a Christian it could be legitimate and morally necessary to assassinate people if necessary. Bonhoeffer was executed because he was part of the plot to assassinate Hitler. So we as students in PMB were confronted with this question of "if one is a Christian and Hendrik Verwoerd is coming to give a speech in the PMB City Hall, which he did, do we kill him, do we have a moral obligation to do so?" I'm just giving you these issues we as young people tried to confront. There's a level of absurdity but also a level of seriousness. Bill was grappling with these things. He was reading Kierkegaard, he was reading Bonhoeffer, he was reading Jung and he was reading a lot of people by this stage, because he majored in Philosophy before he went into Art and he was the only student in 3rd year of Philosophy, and in hot Natal afternoons he would have to go and sit in a lecture room and confront a professor and the two of them would work their way through important philosophical issues. So philosophy was part of Bill's intellectual background. Then there was this English Department which was the probably the best in the country at the time in terms of the quality of its staff and the way it engaged with students. But then Bill switched to painting because when he got to PMB he enrolled as a student of Agriculture and he discovered very quickly that that was not where he wanted to be. Then he came back to his mother and said "Look this is not right" and she said "Well you should go and do a general BA which will help you to find your feet", which was very smart and very wise. She sent Bill to University on a war widow's pension because Bill's father died at the very beginning of the 2nd World War. He was actually wondering at that time whether he should go into the priesthood. And that was another factor in his intellectual growth, his spiritual growth as well as his philosophical development.

The other thing was that Bill was Head Boy at school and he had a strong dimension of leadership to him which everybody recognised. I think he was already finished his first degree when he was elected as Chairman of the SRC. His political thinking had been quite firmly established because he had joined the Liberal Party by then. The Liberal Party happened to be represented in PMB by remarkably fine people and as a student one could be exposed to the ideas and attitudes of Alan Paton, Chief Luthuli, Dr Chota Matala of the Indian Congress in the city, there was Peter Brown who was Chair of the Liberal Party, who was one of the most decent human beings it was possible to meet. Those sorts of people became examples or 'role models' for us as people looking for our destiny, looking for our identity, looking for our futures. Bill was drawn into that sort of society. That leadership quality of his was evident throughout, and he used it in such a way that when, for example he was elected to the SRC he was the only non-Agricultural student on the SRC, because the Agricultural students had become impatient with left wing people and their student politics, and they said, "We're going to take over the SRC" but Bill got elected and they made him president and he persuaded most of them to join the Liberal Party, and they were furious and so they said "Well if that's student politics you can have it" and so they walked away. So he had an influential presence at many levels.

The things that you want to focus on are those forces that you think have shaped the kinds of decisions he made about how he taught. He would have done his first teaching at Michaelhouse under probably quite conventional circumstances. But when he and his new wife went in 1960 to Cyrene Mission outside Bulawayo, then Rhodesia, he found that the students had been trained in a very specific style. They were to take a small piece of paper, divide it into shapes and then fill in the shapes with colour. That was on the edge of being 'airport art'. Bill refused to follow that. He freed up people, he gave them bigger sheets of paper, he gave them different materials, he invited them to explore things that they felt were important or they wanted to express. By all accounts he was very successful. People who saw the work that students produced thought that it was quite special. There was a worker strike at that time and the young people in the area where they were living were invited to strike in sympathy and so the students at Cyrene said that they were not going to miss their classes and they were not going to disrupt the institution, but when they were not in class they would just sit silently, and in chapel they were not going to sing the hymns as a mark of our solidarity with those workers who are really striking. The people in charge of the Mission found it unacceptable and expelled 100 students but Bill spoke for and supported the students, and that's when he left. He taught in Bulawayo for a while and then he came down to Johannesburg in '63. When he was at Cyrene Mission Bill published a series of articles in the local newspaper called the Bulawayo Chronicle in the years of '61 and '62. His writing at this time it was essentially for a white Rhodesian readership which is a very interesting aspect of his public encouraging of art. For example, he refers to local black sculptors along with more established artists, treating them with equal seriousness.

But before we get off PMB perhaps one of the major influences on Bill as a painter, is - I don't know if you've come across the name of Selby Mvusi. Selby Mvusi was an art teacher in Durban (and there's a book on him as a South African painter by Elza Miles). Selby was a student at UNISA and so he had to apprentice himself to a practising artist and he apprenticed himself to Harold Strachan who had been a member of the Communist Party. Bill was introduced to Selby Mvusi, and here's to me the interesting part, Selby was an abstract painter, now I'm talking 1956 so that Colin Richards and all these who attacked David Koloane and other black artists in the 1970s for betraying their true nature by going into abstraction, don't know what they're talking about. Selby Mvusi got a scholarship to the United States. He found that after Sharpeville he didn't want to be in South Africa anymore he ended up teaching in a school outside Harare, and was killed in a motor accident in Kenya at a very young age. He and Bill corresponded in the early 1960s. So Selby is a crucial person and Bill is on record as saying that his first encounters with Selby opened his eyes, both politically and aesthetically. So there's another element in his personal development.

But to go back the pedagogical side - it's very difficult to be specific. If you look at the documents that are among the Art Foundation papers, you will see the files of the student readings, there are files of the kind of material that were used for seminars, discussion groups, panel discussions, poetry readings and discussions and a wide range of topics and areas of focus that sought to provide students with a sense of the richness, the variety and complexities of the world of which they were part. This for me is indicative of the degree to which there was this range and variety that I think was crucial to Bill's approach to teaching. Recall that students had no curriculum as such, no tests, no exams, no external markers of achievement other than their interaction with other students and the JAF teachers and themselves.

How would you describe his attitude to his students? That's a general question, because there were the fee paying bread and butter people, there were the children, the young people and then there were the full timers. Those three elements. Now my impression is that he took the part-timers very seriously, that when they said this was what they wanted to do he said fine we'll take you seriously and let you do it and see where it leads.

EC

You see that was the bread and butter for a start.

MG

It was vital, but it was also very challenging and interesting part of it. I think that that aspect, and the approach used in teaching part-timers is as important to your study as, say, the full-timers.

EC

His teaching was never didactic or forceful. He elicited response from you and me as the student more than impose his ideas on you. It was quite difficult. Being his student wasn't an easy thing. I left him to do my degree because he wasn't interested in being part of that, and then after I got my Fine Arts degree then he invited me to teach.

MG

I never sat and watched an entire session, but there are people who have and there are people who have recorded what they saw. For example Peter Anderson wrote a long article in that magazine *To the Point* where he must have spent an entire day and then recorded a crit session. It's what was said and how it was said that's relevant, and there the students disagreed strongly with Bill. Bill talked about his response to a painting and the students said "Oh no, it's not at all like that". It catches the tone of things very nicely.

Then of course there were Terence Muloon's series of lectures in 1980 and 1981 on Abstract Expressionism.

EC

Can you talk about Bill's paper at the Conference in Cape Town in 1979

MG

At the University of Cape Town conference, that's where he gave the paper, "An Artists' Workshop – Flash in the Pan or a Brick that the Builders Rejected". For me it's the strongest and most coherent statement by Bill about his approach, and that's where he talks about liminality, that's where talks about being pushed onto the margin, about being very much out of the main thing, about being lost and being happy to be with people who feel the same way. He uses the image of "the brick that the builders rejected" and he talks about why this is important and how it's important. But I think what is interesting is what Bill was doing was also happening with Barney Simon, was also happening with a number of other people, the workshop was a relatively new notion as an alternative to forms of more formal instruction and learning. And it's what Bill did with the workshop idea, how it was actually practised that made it very different, for example, from the way Barney practised it even though they both came at their art with similar intents. The notion of the workshop decentres the teaching immediately. It re-negotiates the relationship between learner and teacher, expertise and uncertainty, and the ways in which issues are tackled. But by his bringing all these kinds of people, like Robert Berold and Peter Delaporte and people of that sort, a variety of approaches and ideas, plus various ways of seeing and thinking were offered to students at the JAF. Those were there to discompose the orthodox and conventional ideas of people, including those who might have fallen into the regular routines of the Art Foundation's ways of thinking. So JAF's 'pedagogy' kept being challenged

all along the way, and that's what I mean by variety and diversity which seemed to me to be one of the main characteristics of experience at the Art Foundation. But at the same time I think you know that Wally Serote said that it was a place he could just go to and be at, making it sounds like something of a haven. To reconcile the turbulence and the peacefulness of being at a place where you can be comfortable is an extraordinary achievement. I think that Fieke had a strong influence in creating the peacefulness, fact that it was a haven where the Wally's of the world could just be. Barney used to go there as did other people, being just quietly unchallenging, just sitting in their lovely sitting room which was a very special place and space. I think that was Fieke's influence. I have strong feelings about what Fieke did eventually, after Bill's death, and I know that she could be discombobulating in committees and administration as well. But in regard to the creation of a beautiful and calming environment, she was unparalleled.

EC

She was extraordinary, her dinner parties were always carefully considered and immaculate. She really did have a big role to play.

MG

I am going to try and capture something of that in my account of family life despite all my other uneasiness.

But to come back to your focus. What Dumi said about the Art Foundation seminars in the context of the South Africa of that time, a time dominated by the autocratic, by authority figures, especially in a paternal form, where ideas were regarded as dangerous and where young people were regarded as beings to be frightened of, given all that, Dumi had the experience of being in reflective and unthreatening seminars. And these seminars were a physical haven, an emotional haven and a place of intellectual richness at the same time. There you have a key element of the 'pedagogy'.

EC

The terrible thing is that it just dissipated. All that energy, all that building, and it took a lot of people's energy to build that and put it together and the whole trust system. When did it actually close?

MG

But hang on - You talk in your proposal about this surge of creativity. That hasn't dissipated. The structure of the school went to nought. But isn't there that other dimension to it, that out of this came something. Are you going to tackle that?

EC

I've become bogged down with the pedagogical approach and that whole process. But I plan to interview as many of the artists as possible. There are people like Kentridge and Jill Trappier, and I really do want to go into that a little bit. It's so large this whole thing I've got to choose an avenue and try and stick to it if I can, because I'm diversifying so much at the moment.

MG

Did Bill, as far as you are aware, bring his reading of *The White Goddess* or Sufism as well what you don't mention in your material is the *I Ching* into the life of the Art Foundation? Did you feel as a member of the Foundation that Bill was drawing this in his wake and was it an influential nimbus around him?

EC

Not really, he would approach it through seminars and he would often have a print out of what he'd been reading and then we'd all read it and then talk about it and he would give his

approach and his understanding of it, and he would elicit it from us. I actually did the I Ching with him, because I had a huge problem. I consulted him. It was quite extraordinary that experience. He also did it with Wally.

MG

He did it with me as well. I had a crisis and so I went to Bill and said I think we need to get the *I Ching* to tell me what I should do. And the *I Ching* eventually said "Consult a wise person", so we sat for ages thinking about who would be the right wise person to consult. I didn't know that he was sitting right beside me. It was time when Clement Greenberg came out and we all went off to Rand Afrikaans University to hear Clement. The police who were following me everywhere came behind but couldn't get in to the hall because they didn't have tickets, to my joy. It turned out that this was the time when Breyten Breytenbach was here illegally and they were tracking all sorts of people who might be connected with him. But, as soon as Breytenbach was tried in court, all that stopped. But it was a moment of anxiety as you can imagine. It turned out that there were a whole lot of people going through the same experience.

EC

How do you think Bill slipped under that radar? Why wasn't he questioned? Wally was saying that the Art Foundation was viewed by the Security Police as a cell of possible disruption and that the art was just a front for what was really going on there.

MG

They must have said that to Wally when they detained him. I hadn't heard that but I'm not surprised. I don't know how Bill slipped under the radar. The same applies to Barney Simon, because they did all those plays at the Market Theatre, and Barney was once questioned in 1963 because he wrote a story called 'Dolores' which the Special Branch thought was obscene. And they raided Lionel and took away his typewriter and they called Barney in to the Grays for interrogation and it was all about this story which caused the banning of number 5 of *The Purple Renoster*. But after thatzero.

EC

You know the security police used to pitch up at the Art Foundation and Fieke used to give them coffee, and they used to pitch up at 4 o'clock in the morning and she used to say "lovely come in". They kept raiding the place

MG

Raiding is too strong a word, they visited, they kept an eye on it they parked outside, they fiddled with the post. I know that people on the run sought refuge there, many of us harboured people on the run, and not only politicians. One took a risk. Well, some people say that the police wouldn't take art very seriously, they would not take poetry very seriously, they wouldn't take the plays very seriously..... I don't have a set answer for that. Some Security Police looked at Wopko Jensma's poetry and told him that they did not have time for that "kak". But recall that stringent censorship attempted to deal with 'undesirable' literature and art.

But the point is that when Dumile was there in the '60s, Winnie Mandela dropped in, then Joe Manana dropped in, then Wally was around then James Matthews came in. Wild and woolly characters, to some. The thing is there was no hiding, there was no furtiveness, there was no attempt to be secretive. The gates were always open. If the Special Branch had their own special fantasies about what was going on in the cellar with Dumisani in the printing shop, then that was their problem. But there certainly wasn't anything substantial enough to justify any further action.

EC

It must have aggravated them thoroughly because they definitely thought that there was something subversive going on.

MG

In my version of work done in the Art Foundation, I will not be playing up the notion of political persecution of the Ainslies' or the Art Foundation. I don't feel that what Bill achieved needs added credibility because it had a particular kind of political dimension to it. I'm interested in the way that Bill linked art and teaching and politics and his awareness of what was going on. Both of us came from the Liberal Party in PMB up to the Transvaal. We didn't like the Liberals up here at all, so we withdrew. The Liberal Party dissolved in 1968 because it was a ban on multi-racial political organisations. The Progressive Party shed their black members and went on to contest parliamentary seats as an all-white party, and we said we won't touch you guys, we're simply not interested. So we never had a political home, the ANC didn't exist, the Communist Party didn't exist and the Liberal Party had gone. My point is that because of the absence of these political structures, the arts and the churches came to carry the burden of articulating peoples' concerns.

EC

Yes, Wally talks about poetry being the voice.

MG

I think it was because there were no political movements above ground, particular roles were accorded to artists and poets and so on. Then you get in 1971 Mtshali's "Sounds of a Cowhide Drum" and in 1972 Wally's first collection of poems appeared. After those publications, South African literature was never the same, it was wonderful. The centre of gravity in English language and literature just went pshoooooaway from Grahamstown and the 1820 Settlers, away from custodians like the English Academy and university academic departments. Their day was done. This is for me one of the interesting things about Barney and his theatre, Lionel and his poetry and Bill and his art. They were actually articulating in various ways through the ways in which they worked a response to the absence of political structures as well as their attitudes to the prevailing circumstances at the time, which I think put the spotlight on the arts, which is no longer there. That's the key role they played. One of Bill's interesting concerns was that in the European Dark Ages the monasteries kept culture and ideas and thought and humanism alive. However, I see a more proactive role for what the Art Foundation did in its vigorous engagement with the world around it.

EC

Wally was saying that there was a vacuum then that was filled by certain special people, but there's a vacuum now. That's what really concerns him. The cultural side of things has gone into decline. He feels that the ANC is not approaching it very well.

MG

The ANC doesn't deal with ideas. Black consciousness dealt with ideas, and that's partly why I respect them. The ANC has been a complete disappointment intellectually.

Interview with William Kentridge by E Castle July 2014

EC

William can you tell me about your experience of the JAF?

WK

The early 1970's, 1973, 1974 must have been the low point of Fine Arts teaching in South Africa. Michaelis was a good school but Wits was dire.

They were offering a degree that had to do with different kinds of imperatives to that of the Foundation that offered no certification and no diploma.

The Johannesburg Art Foundation had students of different kinds. Black students who couldn't do art anywhere else, some of them established, some of them not. People who wanted to work on their art not knowing what it was going to turn out to be - but who were doing other studies and other jobs at the same time. It was a half-way house for a real mixture of ambitions, abilities and physic states - and that was one of its virtues.

EC

How did the teaching practice affect you?

WK

It had to do with the fact that it was connected to Bill's studios, giving a sense of what a practising artist went through. That was the period where he was struggling forever with those huge black and white drawings and paintings that went on for years and years. It was both a good and a terrible model to follow. To understand the struggle was good but to think there was a virtue in spending three years on a painting was not. People used to spend months on paintings when they could have been done in a week.

Bill went through an art school training which he either resented or it was also incompetent. There were four hundred years of a tradition of history and craft and skill that was completely ignored, or even the nature of acrylic painting, when that came in, was taken as a given. The most they ever said was 'load your brush'. Nothing was ever said about which colours were transparent or how glazes worked or how to actually work with the material. Otherwise you would spend your time at the coalface doing 'screen and passage' of dreary still-lives. But somehow in spite of what is ostensibly really bad teaching it was a great place to be and that's the paradox of it all. I think it also had to do with the other people who were there. Rob Berold who came to do poetry, Lionel Abrahams and Barney Simon being around; and it definitely had to do with friends of the older black artists, friends of Bill's.

But I think of the long haul of what it is to be an artist was obviously vital stuff that happened at the JAF. There was openness - even though Bill was devoted to American colour-field painting and that direction of abstraction, he was open to other people working in other ways. He was also saying, okay here is a level against which you have to measure what you are doing, a level of abstract expressionists and later, New York colour painters.

EC

What was your understanding of the emphasis on abstraction?

WK

Tony Caro's influence became the basis of the Thupelo workshops' emphasis. At the time it seemed that's all there was. In retrospect it was just a tiny corner of what modernism was and what modernism had become and what modernism was becoming in the rest of the world.

There was a sense of saying, this is bringing American modernism, importing it into Africa, and saying this is the nature of what painting should be. But there was also a strong polemic that Bill could make as a political activist: saying there was still a space, an important space,

for work that operated in a completely different way to the demands of the immediate and the political - which was possible for him to make because of his political convictions and because of the way the studio worked, not cutting itself off from the rest of the country. In the years since it – in the twenty years since apartheid - there has not been an equivalent space for black and white artists to meet and work, that serves as a model of a working multi-racial artists' space.

EC

What is your perception of the criticism levelled at the JAF?

WK

I would defend the claim that it was a school that had a particular vision of what painting should be, but was open to people like me who were never stopped or belittled or looked down upon by Bill for the fact that I was working figuratively and not with paint, but in drawing. That was vital: his vision was bigger than his own practise.

Interview with Chabane Manganye and Dumisani Mabaso 2013

EC

When did you get involved with the JAF?

CM

I came toward the end of 1988/89 before Wally Serote was appointed as a board member because he was still in exile. Also Joe Manana from Alexandra, and a Irene Mennel, Lynda Goodman. Can't mention everybody but I still have some of the minutes of the old meetings. Even the letters of the students who got appointed I have the copies of the letters.

EC

That's important because there's very little information. I would be so grateful if I could have a look at them, because for an MA you need to document things properly.

CM

Those minutes mentioned some of the staff members when they were exhibiting, there were not only visual artists, but there was poetry.

EC

What in your opinion was the need for a place like that? Why did it happen?

CM

It happened because if you look atart centre it was part of Polly Street by then most of the ...art centres their resources were very limited it was an advantage to match the skills of the guys from the disadvantaged communities with those guys from the Art Foundation, I think it was a question of skills. Especially for the community arts projects. It was breaking the barrier between the have's and the not's basically. It made sense in the country by then.

EC

And the actual teaching, the methods, the way Bill taught. I remember when I started teaching there I had to be an apprentice to him, I had to follow him.

CM

He never believed in appointing teachers to teach which were not practising artists and exhibiting artists. He wanted artists who were hands on to train because he felt it was very important that people who teach art should be also active, they should be able to teach and also exhibit. To me that made sense because students could then learn practically.

EC

It was very interactive the teaching. It was never a didactic "you will do it this way". He learned from his students as well.

CM

He allowed students to discover themselves. If you look at the works of late Mandla Nkosi if you look at the works of Sam Nhlengethwa those are the students that he encouraged to become themselves he encouraged them to get their own research. He used to encourage them to develop on that line. If you look at the works of Dumile, a lot of his work had the influence of Picasso he allowed Dumile to work more, studying the works of Picasso and Van Gogh. It was not just stereo type teaching, he said find your line, find your artist, find your mentor and see if you can understudy them and find something out of them.

DM

He was more like a Sufi, you know how the Sufi philosophy works that I can only walk you the paths and show you what is right and wrong and it will be up to you to decide which direction you want to take. So he was kind of at the same time a more sort of easy person

to your choice. How do you want to see things and just guide you around that and try and mould you within that scope of things.

EC

Dumi how did you find your teaching experience there? You started when?

DM

He approached me in 1986 I'd just come from the Triangle artist workshop. At that time we didn't have anything to do with Thupelo but Tony and I had lost our space in Auckland Park, and we didn't know where to store our work. Durant suggested that we store the work at Fuba, and then we went and stored our work at Bill, and then Durand said there would be an exhibition it's kind of a competition whoever wins it will get an award to go to the Triangle Artist Workshop. I happened to have won that that year, I think it was the second year since its inception. I think it started in 1985. Then eventually I went to New York, I came back, and I think he was looking very much at me and Tony and eyeing us and thinking these two guys are sort of exceptional worth as teachers. And he approached me and said "Dumi you know we would like to bring in black people as teachers", I suppose we were the first black teachers to come into the Art Foundation, that was 1986 around August. At the time I was busy with a project in Hammanskraal spinning and weaving project. I said to Bill there is still a project that I'm busy with and I'll suggest a colleague of mine Tony to take over I know he can handle it quite well and Bill went and spoke to Tony. I think a year down the line Tony had to go to Britain to the Graham Peacock studios to do some print making, and then Bill asked him who do you think we should bring in to assist until you come back and the Tholiswa said me. At that time I was helping at the Funda centre, they called themselves IAA, so I went to the Art Foundation with the notion that I will only do that 6 months until Tony comes back and then he takes over. But when Tony got back Bill said it would be a shame to lose you and I think the Art Foundation needs you. I became a full time employed person in the print studio. Still under Tony of course because Tony was the head of the department so I was working under him until such time as incept?? came and things were turned around and there was that whole thing which was very difficult for us. But prior to that in 1980 and prior to 1980 I had met Bill when he was still at Annerley Road I went to see if I could get my ways there to work there. I was accepted.

EC

How did you hear about him and that there was a place where you could go

DM

I got his name from 3 women, 2 were sisters and their mother. Janet Rostofsky and Susan Rosenberg and Claire Hamman. Claire used to go there to Wednesday classes where a few ladies used to come in a do a bit of drawing and they suggested if you are not at the YWCA, because that's where I started, you can go to this place and continue with your stuff. So I went, but I found it difficult at the time, because I wasn't used to the people and the surroundings.

EC

It was a very white institution at the beginning, with people from that area. It was a very much upper middle class area

DM

It was kind of troubling to me because of my upbringing you know that white person must be treated like a god, so I was not comfortable in that space. So I left and I applied in 1977 for Rorke's Drift and I got expelled that year in June due to qualifications but I think it was some excuse or some sort. Then I came back and I went to Bill, Ricky Burnett was teaching

there, and I was given projects to draw portraits, portraits were so foreign to me. I thought I knew him at the time, but of course I didn't know a thing. I did these drawings for a couple of days and felt I'm not in the right place. I left again and 1977 I got a letter from Rorke's Drift to say come back to school. So I went back and that's when I met Sam Nhlengethwa and other artists. I finished the course and came back to Mofolo art centre, voluntarily, Cyril was there and Tony Nkotsi was teaching there and a lot of outdoor drawings and painting and stuff like that, and then later I was then approached by the South African Council of Churches to do a self-help project building macro minis??, some kind of alternative skills training, skills development so that people could have something to do in the townships and make a bit of money. That's how it started, and the word got around and I got a call from Fuba to say we are starting a school, we would like you to come and look at the school, we have heard a lot about you that was in 1980. I was employed as head of the Fine Arts Department and co-ordinator. While I was running that department I felt that it would be nice to reach people of different colour and I was lucky because Bill was on the committee and it was at one of the meetings where I suggested that and Bill said well it's a good idea, what do you think we should do? I don't know how, but even if it's two different schools fusing together once a week or something.

CM

What he did when I was at the art centre he approached us. We managed to remove some of the students to the Art Foundation especially the students that we saw we could provide with other skills like graphic design. I think we sent about 45 students.

DM

It was in 1980, that's when you came back from Rorke's Drift.

EC

You were also in Rorke's Drift

CM

Yes I was also in Rorke's Drift, in 79 – 82'

DM

So we then arranged, because most of the students from the Art Foundation would have their own transport, and black people of course did not have transport, only up to a certain point and so Bill would come with his students and everyone would draw, Bill himself as well. It was more kind of open ended projects. At times Bill would bring a model. If I remember well it could have been Sara Tabane in those days and she posed for us and we would draw. For the first time my Students came across a nude model, and the idea was also because Sikosi Pumla at that time he did not understand what I was trying to say.

EC

He was the head of after.....?

DM

And then we worked with the students at Fuba it was great, there was progress, people could actually exchange ideas, people could talk and all that once a week.

EC

And there was no trouble with the authorities?

DM

No, because it was in town, we were quite safe, and they were trying to ease the laws at that time because it was probably 9 years after June '76. So that's how I met Bill, and we worked closely together at that time, and he was also in the council of Fuba, and everything went nicely until the following year when I was asked to leave as the Head of the

Department. Someone was going to take over from me due to the fact, I think, it was Bonny Sekeng from Nigeria. She had higher qualifications than me in terms of paper of course, but teaching wise you know what happens, you could have these great papers but be unable to perform. But anyway I gave space to her and she started running the department and I worked for about 6 months then and then I took myself at Wits Technicon to improve my print making and stuff

EC

And that was no problem?

DM

How did I get introduced to Wits Technicon. Prior to that time we had a teacher Rorke's Drift, Jules van der Vijver who took us to various universities and colleges to visit to see what other artists and other students are doing, so I saw this space and I saw the teaching is different from Rorke's Drift, there is so much tape, there so many rollers, there so many presses that I cannot access in Rorke's Drift. So when I came back I always had this in mind, I have to find a way to get myself there. Firstly I went to the rector and asked him if I could come, he refused. But the second time he wrote this letter saying you can use our facilities, so I took the letter to Phillipa Hobbs, Willem Boshoff and Susan Rosenberg and the 3 of them said "will you be able to come here every day" I said "Yes" and then I was asked to come in to the class. It was a problem because I had to hide from the rector.

EC

You also studied with them?

DM

And later I discovered they were also sick of this apartheid and they didn't know how to break through so they took this risk of getting me in illegally, but what would happen was that each time the rector came to inspect the studios and fine arts department and hide there and of course I was surrounded by these beautiful students, Andrew Reis, Donnay Randle a whole lot of them actually protected me so that if the rector comes they could inform me in time. Then I would have to go and hide. Phillipa will tell you more. That's how I got my print making improved and when I got my first press I started little studio in '82 in market street, I think there were a whole lot of Rorke's Drift and Technikon people were brought in to also share this experience that they didn't have. The haves and the have nots which lead to Bill and me working together at Fuba.

EC

What was your actual experience teaching? How did you find that whole process at the Art Foundation?

DM

I was slightly intimidated, I was in a group of different people, different environment

EC

Were all the students white?

DM

No there were black students as well, but I didn't know how to penetrate I didn't know how am I going to run this thing do that it is working comfortably for me but I think because of my experience of teaching and all that it was quite easy.

EC

You had the skills you had the expertise

DM

2 months down the line I think I had it going you know it was really happening and everybody seemed to be quite confident of what I was doing, and my most exciting experience at the Art Foundation was when you came across a white student who would look down upon you because you happened to be a black teacher, and then 3 months down the line they realise that this man knows what he's doing, and they'd come to you with these tearing eyes and thank you and give you a bottle of wine, and that made me feel at least I have taken someone through one hurdle and at least they can now crawl and maybe do the next hurdle. Not educationally but politically. The other thing I enjoyed were the Wednesdays when we'd have those talks or seminars with Bill, and those were like my greatest time whereby you could just sit there and listen and philosophise think about those things that Bill would chose to read and in most cases it would be some way of motivating his staff. To keep his staff always educated and ready to do things. And asking questions and questioning everything that they do in terms of work and in terms of also working with the students. The mind was always sharp. Those are the strongest memories that live with me up to this day, such that that has led to me every year in August, I would have my own Thupelo with privately, every year I'd spend a month just painting, whether it's in Kimberley or it's here. With gel and acrylic

EC

And big canvasses, and abstract....

DM

Yes, abstract. So this is what I do every year in August. This is one way for me to remember Bill and it's on way of contributing something towards him. It has become a tradition or ritual for me. Every time when I do these things I try and imagine him being around there in a Thupelo situation. Because the last painting that he had bought from Zimbabwe. What excited me about that I knew that Bill was a very man, very careful to himself listened to his body he is cautious of everything around him. If he had fallen asleep driving there could have been something that might have excited him. He could not stop. He had to meet his staff at the Art Foundation with something very important to discuss. And if you look at those paintings you can see some new Bill, some new freshness some new things that were coming out. You can tell that there was something that has excited Bill here that he actually lost control.

EC

Have you got his paint-shoes?

CM

Yes I still have them in my house

EC

It would be nice to exhibit them. We must talk about this exhibition, because I would really like to hear how you see it happening. I think it needs to be something special, but I don't know what. So if you could think about it and if you have some ideas I'd like to hear them.

EC

When was Steven appointed?

CM

Immediately after Bill died around 1990/91 – 93.

EC

What do you attribute to the downfall of the Art Foundation?

CM

To be honest I think that Steven couldn't understand the culture of the Art Foundation and he wanted to run it his way.

EC

What do you define as the culture. He misunderstood it maybe?

CM

Bill was more on to the teaching of the workshop like hands-on, but I think Steven was too excited about doing research. What we realised as a board was Steven was more concerned about himself not the Foundation. If you look at the Foundation at first Fieke was playing a very important role on the committee and fund-raising and the culture that they had developed over so many years. Steven did initiate some good projects like at Fuba centre. But he did not fit into the culture

DM

Bill actually believed that you cannot take the office person into a class to go and teach. That's why Bill was constantly painting in order to be able to impart knowledge to someone you need that kind of hands-on experience. I've done this for a couple of years, I've got this experience and I refer to the book just to remind myself. He was a more kind of a hands-on person and he also looked at respect every culture and every change and every movement in the new South Africa, rather in the new world of art and how things are evolving, what is happening and all that. Try without using a lot of words try come up with his own comment through work. Also he had this side of the paper thing, the reading, the writing which he kept, but the most important thing to him was practicality and he believed more on that approach. If you compare him to Steven Sack who was very much of an office person. Which of course when we appointed him to the Johannesburg Art Foundation there was amongst the staff, amongst the entire group there was a little bit of panic, a little bit of unsureness.

CM

I remember some of the staff wanted to be in charge. People like Charles. Most of the staff members wanted to fight for the position. As a board we also had a problem with that.

EC

Do you remember we had to have Charles Nupen to come in to mediate. When did it actually close?

CM

I just got a call from Fieke one day. The board couldn't agree whether we should go on or not, there was not even a ballot. Other people stopped attending some meetings. Fieke said that they were closing the Foundation, I must come and take the paints from the studios etc. It was not a decent closing. After some time the building was sold. Because of democracy in the country now we were looking to some ambassador to buy the building. I have got the date in my minutes.

EC

I was at the Jo'burg Art Gallery in the archives looking up information. There was a woman there who was also doing research who said she got some wonderful books when the Art Foundation closed. You know Bill had fabulous books. Some sculptures too.

CM

Fieke was calling people to come and take things and put them into institutions. But eventually nobody wanted to get involved, we don't know what happened. It was a big mistake.

EC

It was really a sad ending to something that was really important.

DM

I always think of what Bill would be doing if he was still alive, because he died an unnatural death. Where would he be today and where would the Art Foundation be today.

EC

It was a good time. I really believe that it is important to remember it in some form or another. These talks are so important. Being able to talk to people is crucial, people's memories. Your involvement Chabane was it politically motivated. Why did you get involved?

CM

I was involved with the students at Polly Street I had to get involved with the Johannesburg Art Foundation and when Polly Street had moved to Soweto it went to the Mofolo Art Centre. I started my art at the Youth Development Art Centre. So because of my teaching and dealing with students I had to get involved in the Art Foundation

EC

The importance for you, in your mind why was it so important that the Art Foundation was established?

CM

Well it was to break the racial barriers basically. Because I think Bill always wanted to have this interaction of students. So it was his wish to have a joint art centre.

EC

He was always anti the apartheid laws, even as a young man. His whole idea must have started then when he went to PMB University.

CM

He also had problems even with the council because some of them felt that he was not doing what was expected. There were so many challenges of art and a lot of criticism from the academics.

EC

And Thupelo, there was a lot of criticism.

CM

Yes I was also on the council of Thupelo.

EC

What do you think about that whole process?

CM

It was great. If you look at Africa it could get Africa together. We got to know each other from Zimbabwe, from Botswana and America. We workshopped together as artists from all over the world and we got to know the new trends of art all over the world.

EC

It was also criticised wasn't it?

CM

Yes it was

EC

People felt that abstraction wasn't what black artists should be doing

CM

That's right. They thought that art should be characterised by black and white in the country that art is just art. There was still that belief that black artists should stick to

sketches, I had a lot of criticism of my first painting at the Johannesburg Art Gallery because it was an abstract painting.

EC

Were you involved with Steven there?

CM

As a board member, from that perspective. I actually invited him when we were having students from the art centres I called him to be adjudicator for the art students. I'm still in touch with Steven Sack. We still have a good relationship.

EC

What's he doing now?

CM

He's a director of the Arts Heritage.

We also actually have got this space through Steven Sack, but it was just one massive room.

CM

So that's what he is involved in. I think it is also politically related because when the new party comes over they appoint their new people

EC

Dumi your experience at Thupelo, how did it affect you and how were you?

DM

You know I have always questioned things. If you look at my work from the beginning up to today, you'll notice that I am a person that doesn't have a specific way of working. I wander around. I suppose this is why people don't take me seriously. In most cases you'll see art work you'll see it will be a different subject matter, but you can tell whose hand is that. When I went to Thupelo I draw really dumb things, in fact when I met the guys who have come and asked me to help with the Art Foundation they have said to me, they found me actually drawing dead dogs. I was not interested in the dog itself I was interested in the smell, to capture that smell of that dog. It was just after coming back from Rorke's Drift and I was excited by the smell. People would just run over a dog and it would be lying in the street because the municipality was not working well. That whole 70's period was not such an easy period for the people in the township and guys saw me doing this thing and they asked "why are you drawing a dead dog" and I said I'm not painting the dog I'm painting the smell. It was too above their heads at the time. But then when I went to Thupelo, my first experience was rather that that kind of painting happened in New York because in 1986 I'd won this award, so when I got back from Triangle I had seen a whole lot of things that charged me. I was ready to continue, I felt confident. Sometimes I'd wake up and paint in an abstract manner and at the same time there was this very strong thing that black people should paint and talk about their situation in the townships. Not only that politically things were changing. You have to talk about politics. The whole political situation was that artists had to start thinking of not just those little tourist attractions but to say a statement. So when that happened I was kind of already looking at other things in fact I would get fascinated by the various types of pain. You know the various types of pain in the world. There's a pain when you lose your mother, there's a pain when you lose your daughter, there are different types of pains. There's a pain when someone slaps you across the face. It's a different pain when someone embarrasses you in public. It leaves its own pain. I was exploring all these things. But when I went to the Triangle, I felt strongly couldn't resist this influence, was Larry Poons He was making these very thick paintings and throwing paint into canvas he'd go into the studio with a raincoat and throw this paint, at the bottom he'd have

buckets collecting the paint back into the bucket, the paint would mix itself, then he would take it and throw it back again. That action, that whole movement. Then when I came back one of the talks at Thupelo he spoke of Jackson Pollock And the American Indian method, throwing sand and scraping over the sand and stuff like that, and that kind of carried me through that period of abstract painting. That's one early work that sustained and stayed for a little longer than everything else that I've done, because it was kind of a new phenomenon to me and something that took me time to entirely grasp, which I haven't yet. It's so open-ended and so big. When I got to Thupelo this very clear vivid picture and I made this painting and it was my first ever really great painting that I'd made at Thupelo at that time, which got bought by the Johannesburg Art Gallery. It was very much like that but completely different from Larry Poons the paint was thinner with a bit of designing trying to kind of break away from Larry Poons and bounce up from there, and that was the most exciting time for me. And was Kenworth Moffatt who was actually a visiting critic who saw this painting and said "but you didn't paint like this at the Triangle" and he said I think it was Clement Greenberg who came to give us a crit at the Triangle. "You know Clem did not see that painting", it was a painting that I did, and eventually it became a collection of the Triangle. No-one saw that painting except for Kenworth Moffatt who came after Peter Bradley and he saw this painting and he said "the painting you did at the Triangle and this painting you seem to have found yourself now" and that helped me to build this confidence in going on painting in that sort of mould and doing a lot of research around that. Eventually it spilled into my print making and I started playing around with print making in an abstract manner. I had this perception that print making its always figurative because it lends itself quite well as a graphic medium. But then I was able to break those rules, from figurative and abstract, and being able of course to be flexible, that's what Thupelo has taught me. To be able to be kind of flip over whenever I wished to, that's how my work is at the moment, and I've been doing things sometimes abstract, sometimes figurative and they evolve and if you see them you will think that "oh that's Dumi's work" So my work still keeps and evolving just like that Thupelo tradition of changing, finding things out and try and grow and try and be self-satisfied in what you have done or what you are doing. That's what Thupelo has brought to me, that very strong confidence. If I didn't come across Thupelo, I would probably become very rooted in approach and having a specific way of working.

EC

What did you think of the criticism that was aimed at Thupelo and the whole process?

DM

I thought that was unfair. I felt that you say to somebody "Don't speak English, speak Zulu" whereas this person happens to live in a world that speaks all the languages and has a choice what language they want to speak. Most of the people were to see a black person being so articulate in a particular thing that is not really African. At the same time it left this thing in my head that maybe the galleries are feeling that somebody is taking food out of their mouth, Bill is taking food out of their mouth. They do not have a control over these artists to paint the township, because it's what the tourist want or what they want. That's how I felt, I felt so sorry for most of them, I wished they could understand, I wished I could actually put them in the shoes of an artist. Also there was something that I sensed at the time, that there were a group of people that totally did not like Bill. Who always wanted to sabotage him. I remember there was a lady by the name of Illona Anderson, she came out strongly at one of the meetings one day at the Art Foundation and that was the first time I saw Bill losing his cool, and he just lost his temper to the extent that he actually fired that

person on the spot, but in a very nice and gentle way. She was so rude and she was so misleading of the whole Thupelo project. Those were some of the things that I have seen most people doing, you know a subtle sabotage. There were a whole bunch of people from Wits who were kind of anti-Art Foundation, anti the approach of the Art Foundation. I don't know what caused it. I don't know what caused that.

EC

Wasn't it a type of jealousy, because in formal institutions like that, to motivate for change takes a long time. I think they were stuck in a tradition, and they saw this amazing thing evolving and they weren't able to do it themselves.

DM

Especially if you look at William Kentridge's work at that time he was doing those small actions he had a small action press and I went to visit and put up a couple of things there. I saw these things and the comments that he is making up to this day. You can see Bill's kind of influence and formation, because Bill will never be satisfied, Bill will always come with something that pushes to even further. He would not pat you on the back and say "wow good work" he would try and not stifle you but help you to even grow further. Makes you feel that you can continue to find new things within that choice of things that you do. He would always want to see people climbing and climbing. I remember at some stage I had a problem with a painting and I was complaining because I can't get this painting right and he said to me "I thought this painting was finished but it was a good thing that you pushed it further"

EC

He also pushed himself and he was never sure when his paintings were finished.

DM

He would also ask you individually or as a group what do you think of this and explain his problems with a particular painting. It was actually such a great thing that you could be in the same par with a master, or someone that you look up to and he brought himself to your level and he said "listen I'm just an artist like you and help me along as well" So there was that kind of feeding each other. A give and take situation which I really enjoyed with Bill. In describing the Art Foundation it was like a country within a country, that whole building it was a country away from South Africa. We were in a different environment.

EC

It was such a small portion of modernism. It's such a pity it never got any further. We don't know what would have happened if he hadn't died, it might have been something quite big today.

DM

I think, not because of the Wally's and other guys, but because of his performance he would have had a very strong say in the Arts and Culture department in the government and I'm maybe to assist as an adviser to the minister.

EC

But you're exhibiting and painting – Where do you normally show?

DM

I've done 2 shows at the William Humphries Gallery, I've just been approached by a couple from Switzerland who want to take my work across and exhibit it there. The 2nd exhibition at the William Humphries Gallery was called "40 Years of Friendship" I have this friend who introduced me to the gallery who is in Kimberley. We became friends because I used to love water colours. We used to climb mountains and paint together. He was my senior in Rorke's

Drift, he was my senior at that time and we have kept in touch. After the show, I was looking for a place to rent, because I thought it would be nice to set up elsewhere away from the big city and all that, but before I could speak to them they had asked me to do a workshop with the local artists including the bushmen, the koi people, the Nkunu people, which I did and it was successful. Which I think raised the galleries kudos. When they heard that I was trying to find a place to rent they showed me a flat behind the gallery and they offered me the flat and said I could pay for the flat by a work, a print every month. So I said I would take it and they said okay they would buy a press and the materials. So I have 2 studios one based here and one based in Kimberley and I could still retain the Skuzu. Name so it's called Skuzu work Press and this one is called Skuzu Soweto Press. I also went there to do a workshop and set up a studio and someone suggested that I take my work to this gallery. This guy liked my work so much that he decided to have a number of shows of mine. A had a show in New Bethesda, and another one that we did in Kimberley in a place called Vlakfontein. This is where the whole Bushman community is.

EC

Do you think I should exhibit at the Bag Factory. For me it's the link with Bill.

DM

Yes Bill played an important role in setting up the Bag Factory studios and David Koloane and Robert Loder.

EC

I would like to put a catalogue together and I would like each artist to maybe write something for the catalogue about his experiences. Have you got images that you can send me?

Interview with David Koloane by E Castle 2012

EC

How did modernism affect your work?

DK

I think it was a quest that I had for a long time. First one has to learn and keep on learning and secondly one has to acknowledge influence. You have to accept it and not resist it. To learn to make one humble, to allow these influences even if they are conflicting in a sense. To allow those conflicting ideas to happen within you because out of that something is going to come out.

Pollock used aboriginal Indian dances as source in his drip paintings, the rhythms of dance, music there is a rhythm in his work that I like. Refreshing and giving a new face to art while drawing from other sources and influences. This is 'nourishment' that makes you feel alive. There has always been a yearning in an artist to paint something musical in his art. Few artists managed to do that. Matisse is one of them and so is Pollock.

EC

How did that manifest in your own work.

DK

At a Thupelo workshop 'I just found it happening, subconsciously' Like a musical tune that just comes not at your will but sometimes when you least expect it. One is often surprised by it happening in your work

EC

How did you assimilate all that and make it your own?

DK

The JAF brought in the scope of new possibilities that were not possible for black artists at that time. It was an amazing school to have at that time and I think its influence really impacted on those people who were there. It was an unusual institution and everybody who was involved learnt something. The Thupelo workshops run by the JAF emphasised the experimental aspect of South African art and were used as a creative facility rather than an abstract expressionist movement. Association with Bill and the JAF allowed and created the emancipation from 'township art' and made it possible to see beyond the narrow confines previously imposed on black artists. Not mimicking but using modernism as a vocabulary that we could use to explore. All ideas are abstract to a point; a figurative painter will define the marks. It's all about definition and labelling.

Africa offered Western artists a discarding of conscious learning for more intuitive ideas. African masks and images seem so mysterious to the Western world.

I never said I am going to be an abstract painter, I never made those statements. I knew it was a means towards an end and not an end in itself. I knew I would be learning until I am 90 or over 90 and that you learn every day. So you have to humble yourself to whatever influences occur. That is the way I understand art making for me that was how I grew and developed. Because if you feel you have reached the end then you must say no I must start again. I firmly believe this the only way to grow. We got a lot of flak from academics that we had been brainwashed to do abstract expressionism. I think the idea of our continuing to do abstraction during the time of political turmoil was in a sense to say, 'we don't want to be dictated to as artists, we know what we want to do and it's not for people outside to tell what to do, what kind of expression we need to employ'. Thupelo became a challenge to the academics.

Interview with Kagiso Pat Mautloa by E Castle May 2014

EC

You weren't actually a teacher were you?

PM

I became a teacher in a way, because I started at Polly Street and then later moved to Mofolo Art Centre and after that I worked for a period, because Mofolo Art Centre and Jubilee Centre I was still in high school and on completing my high school I worked in a bank. But working in a bank I felt like I'm getting detached from my ambition of becoming an artist, because of my school years my extra mural occupation mainly was doing art. So after for seven years for a bank I decided, I want to be an artist. That's when I moved to Rorke's Drift because I had a scholarship, so that helped me make my decision. After Rorke's Drift that's when I worked for a little bit for OK Bazaars but it became like that bank job. When I was working there I felt it like I'm lost to art, I'm earning, but I needed something to consolidate my ambition of becoming an artist, but still being able to earn, because I was one of the older kids in the family. So when I quite OK Bazaars I went to SABC, that was in '81. In '81 I got in touch with Bill because the likes of Sam and David and other people had always been going there. That was the time when before the Thupelo art project started which took off in 1985. But within that it was like going there and associating with artists, so what it helped me with was to connect with other people who I wouldn't have connected with if I had stuck on to the township and stuck to the job. Then later Bill discovered that I'm good at graphic design and also that I'm a painter. There was now a gap at the Art Foundation he felt instead of being a painting school, or sculpture then they could bring in graphic design then possibly that would help because I'm pretty much an artist but I'm actually earning through graphic design. And that can actually help to encourage people to develop a career in that line. So that's when I started the graphic design section of the Art Foundation. When I started it wasn't like sort of an extra job that you can be paid for etc. The passion was about starting something and then having people who are wanting to do it. So what I was doing was I'd go to work and then when a knock off I'd go and teach for two to three hours, and then during my time of leave then I engaged into the workshop thing. That's when we started the Thupelo workshop which was in 1985, and it was in Hunters Rest. The person from overseas was Peter Bradley. Also now I think the connection of artists on my side expanded in the sense we happened to know people from Cape Town, people from Botswana. So each and every year there were people from other parts of the continent that were coming to work with us.

EC

Then you were all connected with the different creative ideas coming from the Western World, from the rest of the continent, and that people like you and Tony and Dumisani brought to the JAF with your teaching.

PM

Yes, but also what I contend is that you can have borrowings from other places, but you will also have something of yourself which is fetched from where you spend most of your time and most of your life. Because at times I think some influences in art are socio or socio-political. They are things that affect you, things that you see every day in your life, personal things and cultural things.

EC

With Thupelo the influence of Bill's ideas of abstraction, how did that affect you? Did you find it opening up your work or did you just continue as you were before?

PM

You see that it's something that still applies now. If you don't have a degree or anything in the arts world then you belong to a certain layer of artists, irrespective of your skill and experience. They get into these rules and movements and all that, ultimately ending up in a cul-de-sac. Many of them end up just writing. Which is not wrong we need lots of those, but we still need dynamic painters in the mode of the South Africa idiom more especially from the other side of the race. Because in many a case it becomes very difficult to speak about South Africa without speaking about all these barb-wired demarcations. Which is a generation of us have lived through. Maybe our children will be talking in a different way. There hasn't been lots of progress in ways of doing art in other races, and that's why you only end up with one person, you end up with William Kentridge carrying the flag right round the world. At least we should have had two, three people. He's captured the globe and all the assistance goes to him. It's nice to see that he was at least a protégé of the Art Foundation.

EC

There was an amazing output of energy that came from the JAF. Either association with it or teaching, or just working there. And many of those people like yourself are still making art.

PM

I think the Art Foundation happened possibly at the right time where it got people who were not interested in the nationalist idiom of life and there's a space we can be able to make friends and work and worry about what we loved, which was art. You had this mal-artificial space and environment and persona which were versed in that space. That was important and with that inculcates confidence within the people who come there. They come there happy knowing that they are not about their political whatever. They come there to enjoy the space and doing the work. For me that was one of the most important things. It was almost like a window into what this world can be if we didn't have all these hot heads. Also many people got their first international opportunities per se. After we'd done all these workshops I managed to go to the Triangle by invitation and within the Triangle I made some friends which I still have. Very important connections, the likes of Robert Loder. It garnered friendships across the board for South Africa and as such all those people came to South Africa.

EC

It exposed you to art that was completely different.

PM

Different across the world. I remember when I went to New York they gave me a chance to spend two weeks. I went up to almost the border of Canada where we had the workshop and I went Tony Caro's farm where he had this whole nation of sculptures and when I got back to New York there was this exhibition from the Egyptian tombs. Where else could I have seen that? When I was working in Central Park I met one of the top musicians he had just been made a professor of music Max Roach. He was playing free in Central Park. It was amazing and some of the places that I saw when I went there.

EC

Your actual experience of teaching?

PM

From primary school I have always been asked to teach. When I was in Std. 6 I was asked to help the teacher help those that are slow to learn, and as such I was doing illustrations on the board for them to understand. For instance I would do a world map the size of this

whole wall and people would relate to it. When it comes to Biology I would do all the sets of teeth with cross sections.

EC

Teaching through visual elements.

PM

Yes, experiencing the object.

EC

The teaching concept of the Art Foundation wasn't so much conceptual it was perceptual. We looked at stuff and we talked about the material.

PM

Yes and feel it and experience it. Take them into a trip through this and get them to enjoy it and later ask questions as opposed to; this is the way. When you asked me this question I was thinking of what I was doing at the school where Anthusa is teaching. I ran workshops for the parents. People were surprised that they could paint. And I said it's all in the mind, anyone can do anything as long as you put your mind and ease and apply. What I was doing with the students, I just got them around and became friends with them. It's a different process. I'd say making art you can actually use any tool that's within your reach, and I would say "what is this now". You look at the world in your own natural way and a different way because now using cameras, using cell phones and I would say to them every one of you has got a technical tool and you can actually use it to apply it to what you are doing. You can take your camera, there's a still life there, or take your phone you just zoom in and zoom out and choose a portion that you want to make of your still life and draw it, and you've got more of a reference point, and that is a way of copying. There is another way of getting your eyes to get into the subject itself.

Interview with Sam Nhlengethwa by E Castle August 2014

EC

The focus here is on the concept of art workshops.

SN

The concept of art workshops was initiated by amongst others Bill Ainslie and David Koloane on his return from the Triangle International Workshop in New York in 1982. Thupelo Workshops were initiated in 1985. I took part in the very first Thupelo workshop held at Hunter's Rest in Rustenburg. This was followed by several workshops in Broederstroom. Later the Johannesburg Art Foundation, which was founded and directed by Bill Ainslie, became the base of operations for further Thupelo workshops.

In 1991 I was selected from Thupelo to take part in the Triangle International Workshop in New York upstate area of Mashomack.

I was fascinated by the workshop concept as an appropriate vehicle for bringing artists together especially in an environment where the movement of people from certain communities was restricted.

It is in the same year that the Bag Factory Artists' Studios was founded by Sir Robert Loder. I became one of the founding members of the Bag Factory. I have been working full-time from my studio at the Bag Factory since 1991.

EC

Can you tell me about the importance of the Bag Factory Studios.

SN

I used to work from home before the Bag Factory was established. I came across space challenges like any other township artist as I had to share the same "studio space" with the rest of my family. In addition to not having sufficient wall & floor space where I could work on my canvasses, I battled to find space to store my art material, work in progress & finished work.

EC

Tell me about your experience of Thupelo

SN

Thupelo workshops gave us freedom to express ourselves on canvas and alleviated space problems. Unfortunately we could only enjoy this for two weeks in a year. At the end of the programme we would go back to where we were or even in a worse position ...returning from the workshop with more artworks and less storage space.

The studio concept at the Bag Factory was beneficial in that one could do large scale work, which I could not do working at home. It became a primary intervention in attempting to resolve

the space problem within the working lives of black artists. The politics of the day dictated that there was virtually no collective studio culture in South Africa. separate racial compartments. The Bag Factory continues to be part of the Triangle Arts Trust & runs a residency programme.

It is interesting to note that most of the artists who were regular workshop participants used the training in abstract and figurative expression and redefined that expression into a new dynamic.

Steven Sack in conversation with E Castle July 2014

EC

How would you describe the JAF

SS

I know now that in any environment in which one works you are going to have a group of complex and diverse people. For many of the teachers and artists, who had worked and developed under Bill's vision and leadership, the adaptation to a new leader was extremely difficult. This was further compounded by the political environment that ushered in the new democracy - all organizations throughout South Africa were confronted by the dynamics of a pre-1994 contestation - who would take the lead in the new democratic dispensation? Which institutions and non-governmental organizations would survive into the new democratic state? Returning exiles, changes in funding policies, uncertainty about what a democratic cultural practice would look like - all of this made for a complex and unsettled environment.

I was inevitably much more 'academic' in my approach having spent some time in formal teaching institutions. So I introduced the teacher training programme and a more thorough sculpture programme which expanded the other existing studio programmes. A partnership with the City of Johannesburg around the first Biennale, resulted in a Curator Training Programme being located at the Art Foundation. My greatest disappointment was that despite many efforts, we were not able to curate a major exhibition of Bill's work. Looking through my papers, I found a proposal for just such an exhibition, submitted to David Elliot at the time that he was curating his big SA art exhibition, when he was Director of the Art Museum in Oxford.

When I look back now at how young and inexperienced I was, I recognize that it takes an enormously long time to learn to run an institution, particularly an art institution where you inevitably have complex, diverse individuals and egos -how does one manage those creative spaces, if you're not the charismatic founder - Barney Simon of the Market Theatre - Bill Ainslie of the Art Foundation etc.? So these art spaces start with powerful charismatic leaders and visionary individuals and then they have to take on an institutional form and that's incredibly complex, difficult and demanding - seemingly impossible. This is made even more complex by the stigma attached to 'institutions', during Apartheid, which made artists distrust organizational forms that had the potential to limit their 'agency'.

This kind of notion of what is an institution, versus what is a workshop or what is something that is in effect is owned by a single individual, who also has sufficient resources just to run the place as their own 'kingdom'. I think that's part of the problem, what we now refer to as the 'challenge'. Making effective democratic institutions is the challenge of our time. That transition into a formal institution can very easily kill the original spirit and identity. And then there was the added complexity that Bill established the Art Foundation with Fieka at his side - and her on-going role, post his tragic passing, was an inevitable contradiction and a conundrum for the Art Foundation Board, which they never managed successfully to resolve.

EC

What in your perception is the legacy of the JAF?

SS

Bill's legacy is undoubtedly the many living and practising artists, who are still artists today, because of the opportunities that were created in the Johannesburg Art Foundation, and I think that is probably more important than anything else. The fact that the institution didn't

survive is maybe just inevitable. [...] I think that there's a lot to be said about the subtractive drawing method that Bill taught, where the rubber was as important as the pencil and the charcoal in that sort of build-up and eliminate technique [push-pull method]. His presence as a working artist with his studio on site, must have been an inspiration to many, despite his enormous struggle to resolve his own creative project. His invitation to other artists to work and explore in the Thupelo programme, meant that people experienced the Art Foundation as a place respected by artists and not just arts educators. His ability to create a space where people who resisted apartheid could find a home and a place to be creative in what he described as 'the cracks of apartheid'.

Interview with Mmakgabo Helen Sebidi by E Castle April 2013

EC

What I would like to ask you Helen is when did you start at The Art Foundation? How did you actually get to be there in the first place? Then I would like you to perhaps tell me if you would, how you benefitted, how you grew from being part of it.

HS

Well in the first place I hoped to get something that will uplift my work. I went to do ceramic to get myself a sponsor to be able to find somewhere to study. I was pushed very much by Lucky Sibiyi and my grandmother, who actually told me about meeting people and communicating, and that made me hunt, because the Zoo Lake was not very much in communication. It was sort of like a business kind of thing. Seeing that I exhibited 10 years at Zoo Lake, my grandmothers spirit does not succeed and as well as Lucky Sibiyi's spirit who really wanted me to communicate and to grow my work. I felt I was already there but I really wanted to have somewhere to study, but I didn't know where to go. Then I met David Koloane. When I explained to him that all I wanted to do was improve my work and communicate, so it's communication as well as study. When I got to the Art Foundation the first time, I felt myself being so lucky. I worked and worked and I found that Bill did support the artists and he got an understanding of how to help the artists, especially those who come from not understanding anything. So my point of view on communication went very well and Bill was very supportive. I worked one year with them and the second year I participated in Thupelo. Because then we had people coming from overseas and supporting our Art Foundation and again Bill made the artists aware that if he travels around the studios of the artists, even the artists who's finished at the Art Foundation it will make a big difference because then the artists will feel that free of seeing other artists work. So once a month we travelled to the professional artists, also attending exhibitions and that world was completely a new world for me, and I really got free with Bill Ainslie who did not have to say who you are. I was quite happy and excited because it's what I wanted and it's what I am. So I worked there freer and happily.

In the meantime I would say there is no place where you cannot have problems, especially when you are hunting your life you always meet those who really don't know who they are and what they want. I happened to watch so many people, and I found many people they quite liked to own the Art Foundation while the Art Foundation is free for everybody. Bill was very supportive to everyone. But I happened to just stand still and watch it, but I read people quickly and look at people's background more, instead of saying this person is no good, then later I feel that sorry for that person because I can see the background is completely difficult and poor, and Bill's trying to build that. So I must say I enjoyed the Art Foundation and the freedom that was there and everybody was quite happy. Bill liked debate, which I didn't have, and he would always say "Talk, you have so much, I can see you have so much" and I couldn't open my mouth because I come from a miracle I am quite happy to find life, and if I have to talk about those miracles. It's the life that I came from. For me there was quite a communication between that life through my grand-father's voice and the Art Foundation.

What I really appreciated is what Bill wanted to do for people. Whoever is a hunter, is a hunter and you can't change that person. So the whole thing was the Art Foundation was a mother of all, because everything that you wanted as an education you would get it and you would also find a way say, if you wanted to go to Wits like Fikele. So that's really what I liked about Bill, he was very supportive, and the Art Foundation was a life. So that is the thing

that I don't think anybody will forget about it. I don't think those that went to the Art Foundation will forget what has been done. It was just a gift for Bill, because he struggled during apartheid to get it done. He was hated by many people but he didn't care because that's what he wanted. So for me it was a special gift. I think for me because I wanted that, and seeing that I've got it I feel spiritually that the world can meet only if you are patient enough to work the work you have been gifted and push it hard. You will be answered. I'm saying to myself today that if I didn't find the Art Foundation in those days where would I find a place like that? I came specially to find a place like that where you can communicate. It was a special place, started by one person who agreed with his spirit, and my belief is that that one person had a lot of communication with some kind of spirits, and saying this is what I'm choosing and I'm going to do it, and my spirit was as well there, even though I didn't come the same year when he opens it. The road was made that you will one day meet a place like that. Bill was a help not only by himself, I feel a lot of tears that came in South Africa, the good spirits got together and say why don't you take out from there one or two people to be able to be helped by the spirits that really wanting people to be helped.

EC

What year did you begin?

HS

1986, I stayed one and a half years. I exhibited for 10 years and I worked at Katlehong for one and a half years as well. I didn't see myself as a student. I saw myself as a moving someone. So I didn't have night time, I didn't have holidays. I didn't have time to have fun even, that's why I took one and a half years because my time was work and that overtime meant that my road must be clear. Bill saw all that and started looking after me so much, and he would come while I was busy before the classes and look at my work and crit me, and I really liked that, that I still have a teacher with me even when there's no classes. So I kept up.

EC

How did Thupelo influence you? Bill was very interested in abstraction and the use of abstraction.

HS

The whole depend who you are in your life and what you think in your life. Bill was interested in abstract. I came to the Art Foundation understanding what I want. So he did try to influence towards abstract, but I didn't say yes or not. He used to crit the work every 3 weeks, so I did my work until the day before he would crit, then I would do abstract that Thursday the whole day, because I know that on Friday he's going to do some crits, because I knew he wanted me to get out of the model which I didn't want. I wanted my work to control itself. So what I did to keep him quiet and happy was that I must do the abstract on Thursday.

I also went for Triangle workshop so that also helped me very much to find supporters to the workshop and the Art Centre. It wouldn't be just Thupelo. Those people looked at Thupelo and seen that it was also doing well. So you when start going both sides you start getting stronger and stronger, and the Swedish came in. I don't know if they had money in the Art Foundation, but they had money in Alexandra. Bill was also part of the board at Fuba. When Funda started he also supported that. So when you have something that you are working on, it seems that many people come in to ask for your help and many people come in to support your work. So he had strength on both sides. He wouldn't lose anything. He got stronger and stronger. That's how at that time when all those university

people were doing all that garbage he didn't open his mouth and they did what they want. Bill did not open his mouth, he just left them. Bill had done a lot of work when he was escorting the artists to exile.

EC

Dumile was one of them?

HS

Not only Dumile Feni, Rudsani there were a few. They even knew him at the airport. For them to know him is because he has done so much escorting.

EC

You see all of us got something from the Art Foundation, as David Koloane says. Nobody came away empty handed from that place. It didn't matter if you were a poet or a teacher or an artist, you got something from that place.

HS

Lionel Abrahams was teaching writing. Bill would plan to get somebody who has that skill to give him a little space where he can work. He even had the apostolic church for Sundays. He accommodated everybody.

So with my work the strength that came from Thupelo, and of course Bill started working bigger on abstract. He was our inspiration to try and exercise ourselves and see if we can grow bigger assisted by Thupelo art projects so we gained on both. If people didn't gain it was up to them completely.

EC

He showed us how to teach. He had a very special way of teaching.

HS

I think with the abstract it's about individual. I happened to say one day that when you leave your home you do know what you want, nobody can tell you other things. So with abstract he wanted to bring a new way of painting from America to people in South Africa. Because he felt that it's also communication. I just happened not to love abstract. Because I knew what I wanted. When he sees this abstract it wouldn't mean that I did it for a few hours, he would say "this is the right thing". There I saw him wanting to take me out of the road. He would point to the work that I had been doing for 3 weeks and say get out of the model and do abstract. I didn't shake my head, I didn't say anything, I just kept on helping him with what he wants from me. Until he sees the real work that has turned to be abstract even though it's figurative.

EC

Didn't that experimentation into abstract allow you to be more wild and creative, and use colour in a way that you probably wouldn't have before.

HS

Yes, and collage as well. Because Illona gave us collage and it also does have a role to play in the abstract, because as you throwing on the paint there's somewhere where you still want to block, you can block it with collage. So I happened to take that collage and use it and that's how my work began to be both figurative and abstract. That's where he started to believe what I wanted was true.

What I would really like to say is that people like Bill will not be found, but those who have been helped by him could encourage those that are coming behind us to try to see what to do in their life. They didn't get it from university and that's what he always used to say. "It's only theory there" After that people don't do anything. They want to interview people all the time. They don't touch any brush, but they studied fine art. But I learned a lot from

those who came from universities. Deborah Bell was quite different, she knew what she wanted.

EC Why do you think they didn't want to acknowledge the work? What is it to them? Are they afraid?

HS

They're afraid of course because they are teaching what they have not seen. They don't want us to bring what we have seen, and this country needs the reality of the country before we have the communication of the outside world. We can't communicate in the way that people are being called "professor". We come from nature, and the nature came from god and those people practise the nature that they got from god in their own countries, and they developed it and they decided to share with other countries, but our country is not allowed to share. When are we going to develop our own communication?

EC

What did Thupelo mean to you?

HS

Thupelo for me meant a lot. That's why I became freer. Thupelo is the workshop that started in New York and meeting the world in New York, and now we have Robert Lauder, who is trying to transform it in Africa, and get Africa to communicate with Europe, and that's how we became freer. After those messages Africa is going to meet Europe through work. Not by peoples knowledge, not by papers from the university and not by money, but knowledge comes from god and shared to people.

EC

You talked to me about "moving house".

HS

Moving house is that reality that my grandmother told me about. She says "I don't want to build you by this house or help you to see this house or building this house by hands. I want you to have moving house from me. The house that will be received everywhere in the world". That house is very important the insight is that you must move. As a teacher you must keep on adopting other languages, other knowledge from other countries and move. That's a moving house.

EL

So what did you think of the criticism of Thupelo and the JAF that South African artists, or black artists in particular shouldn't be exploring abstraction?

HS

Abstract started in our people. Ruralists. They were working on abstract because they were seeing god in those differences. They didn't call him god they called him creator. They respected him. The word says you must respect this man and the respect will help you to need him. So they did many abstracts which I've done, they taught me to do it. But when it comes to communication it tends to be different for abstract. You come to adopt that knowledge and communicate it. And for me abstract if you want it in real you've got to work on real and for me abstract is kind of like play, moving to another world. So I quite like it, but you can't just start with it you land up wanting to go for figurative but you have never practised it, because figurative is a very hard thing. So if you want to really face it I think it is important to look at the figurative, the land, looking at the trees properly, and if you want to draw a cat draw it properly. Then starting to loosen the spirit and collecting freedom and you begin to just throw freer. And that's freedom to me. And it will be a very wonderful

thing because you will see the leg of the cat moving but you won't see the cat, you'll look for the cat into abstract. That's an abstract that I understand.

But with me Thupelo, the way that Thupelo helped African people in this country, I'm not going to call myself black because I'm brown and I'm the soil of this country and the reality of the soil. So here we must call somebody black and white when we communicate it. Not by pretending. There's too much pretending in this country. I am not going to be called black and I'm not going to call anybody white, because we will be communicated we will be brothers and sisters. And that's how we were taught by our elders not by talking but by working together. We have so many people that are being called coloured now. We didn't know if they're coloured, we always knew that they were sisters. They were a gift from god. Our parents had been these children to be the brothers and sisters. We don't know those things we only know communicated by work it means meeting god. And why are we living? We are living for work and that is how we have to live here. All of us, not to pretend that you are with me while you not.

Traditionally we didn't pretend. We had the church there and we had our tradition here and they all worked together. Our tradition was free to tell somebody by singing. By singing about you as you are wrong. You did not disagree because you did it, and your child will also sing about you. Right now they wanted to say our tradition must stop singing about people, and that's our bible. So now everything is under the carpet gossiping. We are not the gossipers. We are people who tells people straight. We are not the pretenders we are people who does things straight because our old people used to say it wastes time, time is to work and all this work has been thrown away. It has been pushed under the carpet. Only the paper runs over through the universities and schools. When are they going to work for communication? The Art Foundation, Bill Ainslie was that free man. And I found myself being so lucky to meet him and to work and to listen to his voice. But he doesn't give certificate because the certificate must come from you, and I realise that was the "moving house" that my grandmother wanted and I knew that I was in the right direction. I knew that when he was accused, I had such a pain I wanted to tell them, but I said to myself "No" it's the way to learn the world, how the world can accuse people who are right. They don't want the people who they should learn the right thing from. When we were invited to Sweden they asked Bill to speak for us He stood up and said I am not the right person to speak for the people in South Africa, Helen Sebidi is the one. I stood up and spoke about the communication I wanted from white people then he said to me the white people communication in South Africa is in the police station and is not in the Art foundation.

Bill Ainslie always said "I always found the stronger people who work hard come from the rural", and he said to me "We must go to the rural and open an art centre there". But it was just after his tough life when he was so much accused, and I think the death came very early, or maybe it was its time. But I am quite happy to stand and witness him even then I'm painful because he died while I was with him. But I feel the struggle he had through white people here. That was my chance to witness his life. Who else would witness him because they accused him all the time? They didn't want him to do the right thing. So my witnessing became for opening his gate for him to get in, I am quite happy that even when I'm here he's with me.

So the whole thing is that the exhibition of Bill Ainslie must be bigger than anything else. It must teach the African people in Africa, the white people in Africa. When you have been born with a gift you must develop the gift. It should not be taken like a little paper, and they must allow people to go to universities and teach because that university is on the soil of

Africa. How do they do this? Is that brave? They are wasting time because god is waiting for the gift of Africa to develop.

EC

What were they actually criticising him for?

HS

He was funded by USA, then they got jealous of this money that comes from USA and then again they got jealous because we were developing more than them. That's how I understood it at the time. The University was sending Colin Richards to talk, to shout while they were not doing it. Poor Ken Moffatt he will never come back to South Africa because whenever he spoke during his slide show he got this first line "Rubbish, rubbish why do you bring this rubbish from America" and they said to Bill this money you spending it should be spent by Wits. The money did not come from South Africa in those days, it came from USA. They said you are wasting money for nothing, inviting artists from all over the world. They not saying you should have brought those people to us to teach. They were fighting for money. How is the country going to develop? God had created the world for people to develop. Freedom is needed in truth. People come by purpose through god's voice.

EC

We go a long way back, our history is there. We know a lot of the same people.

Interview with Mongane Wally Serote by E Castle 3 April 2013

EC

So Wally, I was wanting to go back right to the Eiselen Commission, you know with the Bantu Education System, just as a leading into it, because my whole premise is how different the Art Foundation was, how different that kind of pedagogic was and the space it occupied in between that apartheid system and freedom of expression. What was the basic premise that made it so successful? So many artists came through its doors, and they didn't come through the other institutions in those numbers. I'm trying to work out what that magic was. It was largely Bill but it was also all of you, it was that whole cultural thing. You are really the person that I need to talk to about all of that because you were there and you were so much a part of it.

WS

You had on the one side the whole Bantu Education System and all the people who were thrown into it knew that that wasn't a good sys so we all searched for an alternative. Much more so our parents who wanted to make academics out of us. But we had a very different understanding of what we wanted to do. The main thing right up front in our heads was what was it that we should do to ensure that we are part and parcel of freedom in the country. There was Bantu Education, there was the pass law, there was the Group Areas Act, there was the whole thing about where you can stay and where you can work and so on. All of which presented a lot of barriers amongst people, and people developed this consciousness that the group areas must be broken so when Bill came with the idea of an art centre, we did not see it only as an art centre we saw it as a space where we would be exposed to all kind of knowledge. We also thought we had something to contribute towards it, our background was that we came from backgrounds where you'd never find anything about art, anything about teaching people art, anything about practically creating an oasis of free thoughts. As you know it was also besieged, and because it was besieged it created more resistance and more rebels? I was introduced to that sector by Dumile, that's how I came to meet Bill and Fieke and from then on we became partners in working. I think I'm conscious that we were breaking the law very deliberately in insisting on creating space for our thoughts; for our spirit for our being. The art centre being that, you entered the gate of the art centre it was like entering the 'most-free' space. I remember how when I was detained there were very concerted questions about the art centre. The starting point at all times was the issue around the Immorality Act, it became a major concern, and a lot of people suffered because they were interrogated about that. The second thing was of course that they believed that we were communists whatever that was, and we had the Immorality Act, we had the Terrorism Act Section 6 and also they believed that we were terrorists. They believed that the whole thing about art was a smoke screen. And no matter that I tried to tell them that I was very educated by being there and experiencing art and understanding that human beings no matter their colour are the same. And of course that was anathema to their ears, and I believe that at one time they were going to detain Bill because they expressed utter hatred for Bill teaching us that type of space. You and I know that a lot of young people, young men mainly, few young women black women, entered the arena of the arts after having been at the art centre. A lot of them are very important contributors to the art of our country now. Besides the art many of them are very articulate about many things of the world because of the great exposure. Many of them deep in their DNA know that people, no matter your colour, are meant to be together. They know that inside them, they know it they experienced it, no-one can take that away from them. I'm

sure of them have outgrown what was called township art by now. They are now leaning heavily on the experiences they had with interacting at multi-levels at the art centre. I've seen some of their work, I remember in 1987 when Bill came to London and he visited me and he was telling me that he was introducing abstract art, and I was very angry with Bill and I was saying to him "are you hiding or what. I think we must have talked for over 24 hours, and we really didn't agree". I really believed that he was retreating from the front that he occupied which I considered the front of rebellion.

But Liz when I came back from exile 1990 and I was staying with Fieke at the house I was surrounded by that art and I watched it as it played with the light, dancing with the light, as it expressed different temperaments, sunrise, sunset, darkness and I wished that I could go to Bill and say "you know I was wrong" but as you know it was already too late. But he knows that I respected what he did because I was surrounded only by that. I had a constant discussion with everybody who came. I'm saying this because I'm sure that that whole period of the abstract art laid a whole different base for people who came out of the art centre as artists. They have a very strong spectrum of experience in terms of art. So in that we also moving away from the rebellion part of it and entering the space of freedom. They occupy now that space.

EC

It also, don't you think brought us in line with what was happening in the rest of the world, instead of being our art being judged on an African basis.

WS

I suspect that it will always retain African spaces, but when it occupies the global context it will express itself as African but also of something of humanity, because the battle of humanity for us was a very serious battle. And I think the painters learned how to express that. The musicians, painters, poets, sculptors other forms of writers, theatre people, you name them they used to come there. Dance, I remember meeting Sumela Manaka?? It was a space of the arts, but also because we were living in a country which was not free, but also a space for freedom. Where freedom was most cherished, because it did not exist.

EC

How do you think that he actually managed to duck under the radar as far as being arrested and that kind of thing was concerned. How was the JAF actually situated that it managed to stay as it was and assert itself.

WS

You know one thing about Bill was that he was an absolutely total free spirit. Bill knew something about faith. I remember having a discussion with him about what you're asking me, and I understood – with hindsight – when I reflect on that discussion that he was saying that faith is not an abstract engagement. Faith is active understanding, active belief and active anticipation of good results. You know he had that Chinese book of his.

EC

Yes and the I ching, and he was interested in Sufism

WS

He and I delved in that a lot, and I didn't know at that time that we were discussing our spirituality. I always in my head contextualised it within issues of freedom of people. When he came to Botswana, he David, Nadine, Colin Smuts and we used to have endless discussions about how to plant the seed of art in our country. And that's why out of the Art Foundation came areas like Alexandra Art Centre, Fuba and many others which spouted. That was the spirit which said we know the Johannesburg Art Foundation has created a

certain type of spirit. Now the question was how do you spread that, and that's why we created other centres.

It's really a grievous that the art centre died, and I am glad that you feel that you should do something about it. It's a very, very important thing. It's a very important history of the arts but also history in its own right. A History of our people. I think as soon as you take Johannesburg Art Centre, Fuba, Alexandra Art Centre we should approach government and say let us create a centre like that, we are entitled to do that. Many of those people that are ministers they know f... all about art Some of us should sit down and agree that we have a responsibility to say to them. We would like your audience we think that there was a gem of a thing here in this country and those of us who experienced it from many angles would like to recreate it. Go to people who have money in the private sector in this country and say that. In an open society like ours now we have now that type of thing would flourish. Bill did this miracle of being able to find the resources for that, I don't know how he did it. We should do it ourselves.

EC

It's interesting that Dumisani, you know he and Tony were the first black teachers at the art centre, and he said he was very unsure about teaching these middle class white women. They were also unsure about him, because it was something we didn't understand at that time. Listening to him talk from that angle, how difficult it was for both, and yet in the end he said the centre itself embraced both sets, and appreciated his teaching and he appreciated their circumstances as well.

WS

When I arrived one day Bill very cautiously and very carefully approached me and said you know you must model today. I said you're talking nonsense, but he convinced me. He gave me a book called "Illuminations" and I sat there on this step ladder reading this book. It was a very important moment it was a moment of self-examination I learned then in that a life that is not self-examined is not worth living. I had to ask myself those questions, I'm sitting here pretending that I am reading this book, which I don't know what it is about, and I don't know why I'm sitting here with all these people staring at me, measuring me, and especially Bill. Suddenly out of the blue I was imaging on different easels staring at myself, and I had never looked at myself in the manner in which I looked at myself then. From different angles, and different understandings of people as to who I am. I am most thankful of that because it exposed a lot of things about me which I did not know. He then gave me a painting. Many times I put it in a place and people said "who is this it looks like you"

EC

Bills perception of you

WS

Yes, but I know it's me and I know what he saw at a certain moment, and I know what he froze. Now, coming from Alexandra, I never can explain how I thought that that was extremely ridiculous, that people can sit there and be painted. I dismiss it as white nonsense for white people who don't have anything else to do. But until that day when I saw myself on about 15 easels, each person saw me according to their own eyes. Of course that makes you want to know, 'what is this, what does it mean'. I was very engaged by this.

EC

He made that possible. He made that space accessible. You wouldn't have done that for many people.

WS

No, but he was my friend you see. I saw he was preparing for something but I did not know what. He was very persuasive.

EC

What was your involvement with Medu?

WS

Medu art centre was founded I had the Art Foundation experience, I'd been abroad and I'd come to understand very well the significance of the arts. So I went to the ANC and told them we have to find a way. We need to make space for people who are creative. At the present moment people were thinking of the struggle. The struggle had blood in it, has violence, has guns, has jail, has exile, that's not all there is, there is something underneath the unbreakable spirit of human beings. One day O.R. Tambo called me and we discussed it. Of course there were many other people who were already in exile who felt very strongly about it. So it was a context which was ready to accept the thing so we created it and whenever Bill, Nadine, David, Bongi and other people came there, that was a space where they could sit and be exposed it to artists coming from all over South Africa. There were also European and American ex-patriats, there were also the African diaspora and other exiles from from the continent. So it created that type of platform. I know that Bill and David and Nadine really cherished that. If you recall, out of all that we came up with that thing called Cultural Resistance. One of the biggest conferences that South Africa ever organised in the arts spectrum. Where you welded the exiled artists and the internal artists, where you looked at the whole spectrum of the arts. That experience eventually formed ANC Art and Culture policy.

Events like that took place in London, in Amsterdam, back here in this country after unbanning the ANC and other political organisations.

EC

Wasn't it closed down here?

WS

No, it toured here. It was many things photography, film, music, dance. That was Gaborone. We had one here in Johannesburg called Culture and Development. We had one in London called Culture and *Zabalaza*, we had one in Amsterdam called *Culture in Another South Africa*. They were projecting freedom through culture in South Africa.

EC

If we have this exhibition at the Bag Factory can't we make it a really large.

WS

We should. We should do it in the spirit that we should remind everyone in the country. Especially government, decision makers, art people. We must remind them this country has real talent. This country has produced incredible art, and we still can produce more art, precisely because of the experiences of South Africans.

EC

I think that was so important about that small space that became the Art Foundation was that even under these terrible circumstances where culture was almost annihilated still it managed to flourish

WS

That is the very expression of the human spirit it is completely intact no matter what happens around it.

EC

I personally benefitted tremendously from the Art Foundation, and yet there is nothing written about it and I feel it is vacuum that needs to be filled.

WS

We have to look for the people that were there. Steven Sack is in serious trouble.

EC

Steven Sack wasn't Bill. The JAF had a very ignominious ending for a wonderful place.

WS

Something happened and there was battle after battle after battle that just tore it apart. It just disappeared like a snow flake.

EC

I think it's important for me to have dialogue with all the people that I was involved with. I taught there from '82 to the early '90s

WS

It would be interesting to study the art centre as a concept so that others can see how it was conceptualised, with the idea that once you understand we then understand how we can conceptualise it in the current times.

EC

That's for you to do. You have personal experience of all of that

Interview with Anthusa Sotriades by E Castle February 2013

EC

How did it benefit you, how was the process important for you, that whole teaching premise?

AS

For me it wasn't only about the teaching. I went in completely new to the field came out of a medical background, completely new to think, as everybody approached Bill with a talent. I knew I had something but I'd had no training at all. Then from that that growth in all sorts of areas, myself as an artist, but also as a community worker. It's very hard for me to speak only about the teaching. It wasn't for me only about that. I know for others it was, but my involvement with Thupelo and Alex Art made it more community orientated growth.

EC

But I think that's crucial, because that was important for everybody, in my paper I talk about Thupelo, and I talk about the workshop ethic and how important that was for artists, and how the growth began there because of the possibilities it opened up. I don't think any of us were there just for the teaching, because he wanted us to be artists remember we all had to have those group exhibitions, and I think that was a very important part. Jill Trappler talks about the fact that if she's not working her teaching is not the same, it's different.

AS

That was very important, and the interesting thing for me is that it has translated so well, the philosophy, the ethos, the methodology into a formal environment that initially that when I was asked to go and teach at Parktown College I went into that completely green, not having been in that environment, and very soon I realised that what I was bringing was actually very important and then being able to morph that into the formal structures that a college and in this case the school required. The restraints of the system are really quite harsh but it stands up very well and I feel quite confident in that area. For some reason it set a very good foundation for teaching even though it wasn't structured and formalised.

EC

What was it? It's so difficult to pin it down into words. I had to be apprenticed to Bill originally to see how it was done.

AS

I can only speak for myself but the important thing about that apprenticeship was it wasn't a case of watch me and learn, it was a case for me of him implying let me hear your voice, and how will I tweak it. It felt like it was okay to explore and experiment and to have an opinion and that encouraged growth and that encouraged your search for a new way of saying things.

EC

How much did his philosophy of Sufism and the various things that he was studying, he was searching for things, both his own experimentation with art and with his reading and with the seminars that we had with the teachers. Do you think that made a difference to you?

AS

It made a big difference to me because it felt like a very familiar voice and it felt like a safe voice. I grew up with that stuff, I grew up with the Sufi stories, so it was in a sense my father's voice mixed in with his voice. I guess that's why I felt I could grow as much as I did, because it was familiar but it was now being taken to a different level and a different context. It was very familiar territory for me.

EC

Talk to me about Thupelo, because you were part of the first group weren't you? How important it was for you.

AS

That was important for me, not as a teacher but as an artist. It was really, really a turning point for me. The first artist coming out, Peter Bradley, helped me understand myself as a sculptor because the Foundation was really painting there was no sculpture. Again things just tumbled one into the other so conveniently, it was almost as if an answer was required and then it presented itself. I did a lot of admin stuff then and fund raising and co-ordinating workshops and people and materials and again that was really important experience for me too.

EC

How do you perceive the positioning of the Art Foundation in that space or void between what was happening with the government system and possibilities. I know the Secret Police used to come and I think they thought it was subversive, which I think it was in many ways, but they couldn't ever find anything.

AS

It's heart was good, the basic premise of being a space where people were just people and it was a good thing. Everybody helped in their own little way to keep it going. So that "little old lady" helped. It made me brave it required you to be brave because some of the stuff was scary. It remember the first few times going off to teach at the clinic at Alex was scary, the road blocks. But the understanding that you were doing a good thing made you brave.

EC

Talk to me about Alex

AS

That was basically to create an Art Foundation environment in Alexandra. We began teaching at Gordon Combined Primary School once or twice a week, we then moved to a space in the clinic. Then with the funds from Fluor Engineering we found an empty factory in Marlborough right on the border of Alex and everything moved over there and huge fund raising drives, Sweden put in money and it was music, drama and visual arts all in one space.

EC

How long did that last? Can you put years to it?

AS

.....Long. I was teaching still part time at the Foundation and then full time at Alex every day. That was a tough deal because it basically was starting from scratch from buying the furniture to the first teaspoon and setting up the programme and teaching, and keeping it going and at the same time having the "visitors" coming to check up. That was very scary. It was during the State of Emergency. Joe Manana was the person who asked for it to happen, so his visit to Bill initiated it, so it was his request. He was on our board for a long time and then joined by Wally.

EC

The criticism of Thupelo from outside?

AS

There are articles written by Samantha Jame high-lighting the facts of that. A seminar one day at the Foundation where some of these people were invited and there was quite a confrontation. There was talk of the funding some of it being American money and, therefore, the accusation that it was CIA money. Our initial money was from an

organisation called Ussalep and at the time American money was considered blood money so it was very controversial.

The initial Thupelo was because Bill went to Triangle followed by David, and Bill liked the model of the workshop and then began the process of trying to replicate it on this end. Then the money from Ussalep to make that first workshop in Rustenburg happen that was Peter Bradley.

EC

It's an intangible thing that I'm trying to do because there's very little written about the Art Foundation itself. I don't want to go the way of making Bill into this Guru person, but he was.

AS

He made an extraordinary difference in my life.

It will be easy for you to set out the programme itself that was taught. The basic course. A huge emphasis on perceptual studies, very little on conceptual thinking. In fact if you were to talk about a gap that would be a huge glaring, gaping gap. Very much about what you see. Anybody who has moved on from that has done that alone.

EC

Except that the workshops with abstraction were more about who you are?

AS

It was very formalist very much the material and your instinctive response to that. It was not about thinking ideas. It was about the material, the physicality of that stuff. Jackson Pollock that idea.

EC

How much do you think Joseph Beuys and his attitude to teaching has got anything to with, Bauhaus and all of that.

AS

Maybe a bit of Bauhaus, but not Beuys. We touched on it but there was none of that kind of work. Do you ever remember any kind of exercises towards related to building a concept. There were none. It was glaringly missing there. But then Bill's work wasn't like that either. In fact that kind of work was a bit of a dirty word.

EC

Were you part of that Greenberg exhibition?

AS

No, that was before me. I met Greenberg at the workshop at Triangle. That was very funny, it was on Greenberg's descent. There were little upstarts that were beginning to question him, especially some of the Spanish painters, you know if you've got the formula you've got Greenberg, we'll show you what we mean. The upstairs was occupied by this rebel group and one night – as we would work through the night sometimes - one of these guys I'll show you lot, when you come back in the morning, because Greenberg used to come with his entourage in the morning through the barns to see what you'd done, I'll show you tomorrow and he worked the whole night. He stapled onto the barn walls this massive piece of canvas metres long and metres wide, and one nights worth of painting hurling buckets at this thing. Of course up to that point Greenberg wouldn't even look in his direction because his work was much more conceptual, juxtaposing images with messages. The next morning Greenberg walks in, turns the corner, and it was strategically placed so that as he turned the corner, and he stopped and all his minions stopped behind him and he

went "There it is" I don't know if he ever knew, but everybody else did, and the point was made, you the recipe and you did it.

EC

Did you love Triangle?

AS

Triangle was incredible, for somebody so young being around somebody like Carot, for me Greenberg wasn't the issue because my life had already moved towards sculpture, but to have Carot there every day coming passed and looking at your work it was absolute heaven. He was an amazing teacher, also very generous and respectful of your opinion. Not dogmatic at all, a wonderful man.

I don't know how you going to put this thing in words? I would start with what I know and what I could put my finger on. So write that stuff out, for example write out the programme and write the things that developed out of it, the tangibles, and hopefully as you write that things will occur to you.

Interview with Jenny Stadler by E Castle August 2014

EC

When did you teach at the Art Foundation?

JS

1977 to 1981. 1982 I joined Wits.Architecture department as a lecturer.

EC

Where does your abstraction come from? Where was your influence?

JS

My interest in abstraction was actually from Bill Ainslie, I saw the first abstract paintings that really made sense and those were his paintings. I could never make paintings like his. Previously I had played around with abstraction. It was only through Bill. Bill had useful exercises on how to start an abstract painting using a grid: a very clever way to start, because the grid makes the whole surface even and you don't have that horrible thing of the focal point and perspective. His other exercise was "screen and passage" for looking very closely; one abstracted from something seen and very particular, a very focused exercise. Then there was the exercise that wasn't focussed, the exact opposite: one put down colours on the palette, red, yellow, blue etc. looking at the object and one put a red on your canvas and you dotted it around where ever it was appropriate. Eventually one built up an image. One wouldn't in other words draw something and colour it in, that was totally out. It was a way of painting, almost like music, where you'd play with colours and eventually build up a chord and orchestrate a whole piece with these different combinations. Usually one looked at a vase of flowers, but one didn't paint flowers per se one abstracted. It became a dialogue between the artist and the canvas and that's actually how I work. That's why I can never repeat the same painting. It's got to be spontaneous. It's hard to be spontaneous, one has to work hard at being spontaneous otherwise the work gets very tired and dead. The whole point of painting is I want to surprise myself, and I think Bill used to say that too. You can only do that if you're going to approach it in a very dynamic way.

Jill Trappler interviewed by E Castle Cape Town 13 Feb. 2013.

EC

I am interested in Bill's seminar readings in relation to his teaching philosophy

JT

The person to talk to is David Trappler, David became very close to Bill and that's why David went into psychotherapy because already in those days Bill was reading Jung, he was reading Hillman. He was deeply involved in Sufism which my mother was too, and I read quite a lot of Sufism, but not on the same level as Bill did. It's the principles that really affected the whole approach. Ricky came in at a different level. He got the theories of these philosophies and he got the message on how to teach, but, in my opinion he didn't have that sort of spirituality. The interesting discussions we've had, and I agree, I think Bill was basically a Christian. There were a lot of Christian principles that he held.

EC

He was questioning.

JT

He had a hard line to him and that hard line I think an asset as well, as I think he could have easily been pushed around. There was something that he held on to, and that I think that is what everybody asks. What was it? Because he used it a lot, even in his own painting. He knew where the measure was. He put all the pressure on and then he just knew – that's it, and it was in his lifestyle as well.

EC

That essence emanated from him and it affected all of us in a strange way. The question of the emphasis of abstraction needs to be addressed in my paper.

JT

I have spoken to a lot of people about that and it has got much more to do with the liberation of the spirit which comes in the Jung thing, and it's very deeply imbedded in the Jazz tradition so that's the Afro/American thing. So when other short-sighted people come and say well you know Bill invited Greenberg and all these Americans in, it was not about that, it was about a sense of history, and how do you liberate yourself under such oppressive circumstances. It's in the self and it's very linked to the Jazz tradition. I do think it's a different way of seeing. Some people get it and others just don't. It's a bit like poetry, the difference between the lyrical and the literal. Some people are poets and others are prose.

EC

Wally talks about when he was in London and he had long talks with Bill about abstraction, and big arguments, and he really didn't understand it. He just didn't get it. Then when he came back, Bill had already died, and he said he wanted to say to him "I get it"

JT

Just sitting in that lounge or dining room upstairs. You couldn't forget it. It was a wonderful space.

EC

It was wonderful, and that was Fieke too.

JT

I think Fieke drove him didn't she. She certainly gave him some sort of confidence. These strange partnerships, I saw it with Anne and William. Somebody said to Anne "how did somebody like you end up marrying such a painful man" and I said to her "you know what you're the only person that could be married to William." It was the same with Fieke. There

was obviously some uncertainty from my mother and my grandmother, and I've kept up with a lot of his university friends, and there were a lot of questions around him marrying Fieke. But I think she brought something out that wouldn't have happened otherwise. Then again I think the family got quite upset because Fieke put a huge amount of their family money into the Art Foundation and that was all very badly managed, and I think that led to a lot of sadness. But then it wasn't important to Bill. My grandmother was very angry that he didn't take more responsibility for his family. What Bill gave away he said it was blood money. That's what I mean there is a hard line there. He would never cross that line. But on the other hand that was the irony, because he would use money from Oppenheimer, and donations from out of the country.

EC

I was always interested that the Security Police thought the JAF was subversive and they used to sit around outside and watch the Foundation. My whole issue is that the cultural vacuum that Wally talks about. When did it actually close – it was such an ignominious end.

JT

It was a problem that because Stephen kind of had the right idea but he didn't get it. Anthusa I don't know why she didn't carry it on.

EC

I don't think she was allowed to. I don't think she was given the opportunity.

JT

There was basically unhappiness after that.

EC

We were two camps, there was Fieke and there was Stephen

JT

When I was trying to put this book together, I was thinking actually maybe it will never be written. But it has to be done somehow or other and I think that all these different takes on it will then read in different ways for different people. So I hope that you get it going and that Sophia gets it going, especially that next year we're 25 years since his death.

EC

I'd love to get a catalogue together as well. Wally says he will write the foreword, and I'm wondering if David will co-curate with me.

JT

I think Kay Hassan has a better eye there are other people around with a better eye, Although I think he has pulled away from the whole thing. There seems to be tension.

EC

There does seem to be a bit of tension there. I think that it's important that an exhibition like this should take place at the Bag Factory because of how it began, it's an important link

JT

It brings about a lot of issues. With Colin being the Chairman of the Board, and Colin and Bill worked a lot together in the early days. He had the open school. There was Colin and Lionel Abrams and Barney and Bill and Sipho.

EC

And Cyril Manganye. He says he can find minutes for me. I also spoke to Dumisani

JT

Dumi is amazing – he's survived this terrible thing. They really stick together these guys. But there again who helped him? He phoned me once and he was really very ill and Robert

Loder was staying with us. I said to Robert “where are we going to find money to get Dumisani his medication?” Robert helped.

You’re going to have to write a paper about questions that can’t be answered. Everybody answers them differently. You can link in somewhere. There’s definitely some way of making sense of it, but it’s not by answering the questions. There’s definitely a thread. You’ve got to get all these different perspectives and try and feel your way in.

EC

There are definite threads that run through the JAF’s core teaching. Can we talk about Thupelo?

JT

There wasn’t this discrimination. People are saying that Thupelo is about abstract painting. Thupelo is not about abstract painting. It was about experimentation and being away from distractions.

EC

There is so much original archive material to work from

The people at the PMB University were very helpful and that’s where I think everything should be archived. Bill came into his own there, he was very influenced by artists in that area and by the whole Liberal Party. I think he kind of grew up there.

If you ever go to the Midlands you should go and speak to my mother. She loves talking about Bill and she has a very good take on it because she was just that step outside. Although, she was a student of his at one time. She was very close to him in many ways which Fieke was very unhappy about. I’ve sat with her and talked through some of these other people who’ve written art thesis, and she’s very articulate. Also just brings in lovely bits of humour. Makes it real. I suppose that’s the other thing, Bill was just an extraordinary real person. When you approached him on anything he was right there, and he would give it full attention. Perhaps he was a bit distracted from real family life and I think Fieke struggled with that. I think Sophia did too. I thought that he helped her, because when I left Johannesburg he used to spend an hour every day in her room with her and I thought they were doing Unisa work.

EC

The Foundation’s wasn’t about teaching in the pedagogical sense it is perhaps the wrong approach.

JT

The strangest thing was one of the projects I remember so clearly was Maxine at Oxford Road. It was a fairly obscure project. It was very conceptual. It was very personalised. It’s one of the projects I remember as a life-changing thing. We had to build a shrine. That was one of the absolute proof of things that Bill insisted on, that you cannot teach and unless you are making your own art. In my experience, as soon as I stop working my teaching changes, I look at things differently. It’s much more important to look at them from the inside not that you then put what you are doing into your teaching, but you see it differently. I think that Bill kind of pulled that glamour out of Maxine.

The other person that would be worth talking to is Terence Maloon, he’s at the National Gallery in Sydney. I think that the interaction between Bill and Terence was quite significant and it was great having him as a critic in the studio. So again Bill brought in art critics, not just teachers as such.

EC

..... and the Greenberg story? He came out to South Africa to judge an art competition Was it '79.

JT

I'd talk to Naomi Press about it, she was the link there. Because Naomi was friendly with Bill and Fieke through Eduardo Villa, and Naomi I think she found a sense of place with Bill because of her abstract forms, but she was going backwards and forwards to and from America. She used to make stuff here and have it taken, to America for Greenberg to crit. So she was on a completely different level, almost like a Helen Frankenthaler she just had those kind of resources. Then Bill had read a lot of Greenberg and was very interested, and I think Naomi brought him out here and she facilitated that whole thing. Whether Bill had met him before on one of his trips to America, I'm not sure, and whether they met through Bradley I don't know. Naomi was devoted to Greenberg and was totally devastated when he died. Now she's mostly in London and I don't know if she comes to her Simonstown house. Then again this was the link and Bill took full advantage of that. Wits were horrified. Wits really didn't like the Greenberg take on things.

But then Olitsky is again such a good example. If you think of his paintings and how extraordinary they were, but he could turn around and do tiny little water colours. So it's not about what you do, it's about how you do it and what you seeing. The work comes first, you've got to see it fresh, and you've got to see if it's got that wow factor. It's not about the content, it's not about the technique. Sometimes it's there and sometimes it's not, and when an academic looks at a piece of work they're looking at it through so many layers, and one of the first things we learned was that the sooner you can start taking those veils away, the veils of education, the veils of where have I seen that before, you've got to work through taking them all away and just seeing the image. I don't think Lynda had it, but she's got something else. She can access and give people a way in, but I don't she can see it. I think Ricky has dropped his level of seeing. Can people sustain that? I think Bill just grew and grew and then he had it. I don't know. What would the last 20 years have been like – would he have gone to America – would he have carried on painting?

EC

Would he have worked on thePachipamwe.....works, because they're so wonderful.

JT

They're so wonderful and they're so underworked. Do you remember those great big boards he had in that upstairs studio that he worked on for ten years and he wouldn't show anybody. He was hugely inhibited. They went on and on and on. It was about 8 metres by 2.

EC

Then somebody gave him a sander and he sanded them down.

JT

That was ten years of work, and then he moved into the garage and then he started painting. And that's what the workshops did, the workshops said, come it's not just about you and your energy, you've got to come and be part of the whole world, and the colour came out then and it was so exciting. I wonder if people just have windows of times when they can see with that kind of clarity.

EC

What he tried to do was draw that clarity out of everybody.

JT

It was because he was just so engaged in every single image.



Ainslie rebuttal letter.pdf

Appendix C

- a. Consent letter from Michael Gardiner.
- b. Support letters from Alan Crump of Wits Fine Art Dept. and Willem Boshoff from the Technicon.
- c. Controversial correspondence between Ainslie and Erica Mitchell, Ainslie and Robert Hodgins.
- d. A letter to the Minister of the Interior concerning a
- e. Nadine Gordimer's support letter in regard to a refusal of a passport for Serote..
- f. Ainslie's personal notes on his ideas and thoughts.



Appendix C.pdf



Ainslie.pdf

Appendix E



Liz Castle Catalog A5 Landscape 8 Sept 2014.pdf

Appendix E: Catalogue (Insert)

Appendix F: Video (Instert)

