

**SUSTAINABILITY OF THE KWAZULU-NATAL CREATIVE SECTOR:
THE KWAZULU-NATAL SOCIETY OF ARTS AS A CASE STUDY**

Angela Shaw | 2692535

Supervisor | Nontobeko Ntombela

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MA in Curatorial, Public and Visual Cultures
School of Fine Arts, University of the Witwatersrand



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ABSTRACT

Title:

Sustainability of the KwaZulu-Natal creative sector: The KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts as a case study

The research question:

Using Systems Theory, how has collaboration and refusal in key projects and components of the case study, the KZNSA, contributed towards energy and inertia, and impacted its sustainability?

This dissertation explores factors impacting sustainability in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) visual arts and crafts domain of the creative sector – and how these have played out in the case study, the KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts (KZNSA), since its formation in 1905 and especially since 2000. The study asks how collaboration and refusal could contribute to the sustainability of the KZNSA. The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in sustainability theory and, using systems theory, explores modes of participation, whether collaboration or refusal and the resulting energy or inertia. It looks at how these could build on the latent talent and the tendency towards innovation found in KZN, and how they may contribute towards sustainability in the creative sector.

The ecosystem of the case study, the KZNSA, contains the operating divisions of the organisation – the gallery, the shop and the café. Initiatives undertaken by these divisions such as forays into artist incubation projects, the Members' Exhibition, education programming, gallery retail, online retail and art fairs are used to exemplify how collaboration and/or refusal impact the sustainability of the organisation. The operating divisions and their projects are themselves contained within a system of member-based governance with the KZNSA members, the Council and the Constitution as constituent elements in play. Broad themes describe the activities and context of the organisation – the environment, programming and commerce – and frame the interactions between entities in the KZNSA system. The focus of the study is to examine the dynamics between these entities, how they interact with each other and the resulting energy or inertia generated. This in turn provides clues to sustainable practice for the organisation that could be applied to the KZN creative sector.

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Name: Angela Shaw

Student #: 2692535

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CONTENTS

Introduction	7
<i>A background to the study.....</i>	7
<i>Research question</i>	8
<i>A short history of the KZNSA</i>	10
<i>KZNSA's historical sustainability challenges.....</i>	13
<i>The context of the study - the prevailing conditions and the challenges that are relevant to the KZNSA.....</i>	15
<i>Rationale</i>	16
<i>Research methodology</i>	17
<i>Chapter outline</i>	21
CHAPTER 1.....	23
Theoretical Framework and Literature Review.....	23
1.1 Mapping the research question.....	23
1.2 Systems theory.....	25
1.3 Sustainability.....	30
1.4 Participation theory	37
1.4.1 Collaboration.....	38
1.4.2 Refusal	39
CHAPTER 2.....	44
The case study and its environment.....	44
2.1. What makes an institution?	44
2.2. Counters to the KZNSA institution.....	47
2.2.1 The FLAT Gallery.....	47
2.2.2. Third Eye Vision Collective	48
2.2.3. amaSosha Art Movement.....	49
2.2.4. #Independent artists.....	50
2.2 The building	51
2.3 Membership.....	56
CHAPTER 3.....	63
The case study - programming.....	63
3.1 The exhibition programme	64
3.2 The Annual Members' Exhibition	76
3.3 The Young Artists' Project (YAP)	84
3.4 Participation in Art Fairs	89
3.5 The education programme - KZNSA LAB.....	93
CHAPTER 4.....	96
The case study - commerce	96

<i>4.1 The KZNSA Shop</i>	96
4.1.1 KZNSA Shop founding story	96
4.1.2 BUZZART.....	102
4.1.3 The Park Retail Gallery	104
4.1.4 KZNSA Online.....	105
<i>4.2 The Arts Cafe</i>	109
CONCLUSION	116
REFERENCES	120

Introduction

A background to the study

This dissertation explores factors that impact the sustainability of the creative sector, as it pertains to the visual arts and crafts domain, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) in South Africa by employing systems theory. To begin with, the study included numerous visual arts and crafts role players in the KZN creative sector, dating from the late 1800s and more immediately since 1994, in order to map the KZN creative ecosystem and draw on this understanding to reflect on sustainability. Besides the KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts (KZNSA), the other KZN institutions and individuals to be evaluated were the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) and its *Red Eye* activations, the African Art Centre (AAC) and its *Velobala* programme, the Rorke's Drift ELC Arts and Craft Centre (Rorke's Drift), the amaSosha Art Movement, artists Wonder Buhle Mbambo and Thami Jali, and curator Gabi Ngcobo. However, the nature and scope of a study of this size proved too broad for this thesis, and in the end the research focussed on the KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts (KZNSA), where I have served as the Director since 2014.

A formative conversation in early 2020 prompted thinking on notions of collaboration and its relationship to sustainability. In an online meeting with a project manager at an independent Cape Town organisation similar to ours (albeit fully funded by a private foundation) about how KZNSA could revive its education programme, he proposed that funding or resources were not necessary. Instead, we should collaborate with artists and other organisations in Durban/KZN and they would contribute the resources needed for the education programme. Having been part of a lobby group petitioning eThekweni Municipality to release the Grant-in-Aid funding that should have gone to arts centres, I knew the dire financial situation of the creative sector in Durban and felt it was unfair to lean on fellow organisations who were also struggling to stay operational for their time, skills and human resources. Also aware of artists' struggles to sustain careers in Durban, I was averse to asking artists or arts educators to contribute to the programme without remuneration. It struck me that 'collaboration' is relative, rather than a global cure-all for a lack of resources, and this inspired me to explore examples of collaboration that were and were not successful and how these may be of use to our challenges in KZN. The study also considers how energy put into the ecosystem has been thwarted in the past, causing migrations away from the region and/or a refusal to engage in historically prescribed ways.

When South Africa went into national lockdown shortly after the above conversation, KZNSA was without any of the turnover from the shop and cafe it relies on to contribute to the organisation's

overheads, and the organisation faced closure. This crisis made us deeply reflective on what we are and how we could survive. Integral to survival was the question of how we were relevant to artists and arts audiences, and the realisation that the participation of the creative community was the key to sustainability.

In the dissertation, systems theory provided an invaluable framework in which to place the themes of sustainability and collaboration and explore how these play out between entities of the KZNSA. Systems diagrams help to think through and illustrate these dynamics and I agree with Donatella Meadows (2009) that ...

... words and sentences must, by necessity, come only one at a time in linear, logical order. Systems happen all at once. They are connected not just in one direction, but in many directions simultaneously. Words, then, are limited in comparison to systems (2009, p. 5).

To illustrate further how systems thinking applies to the case study, I have also “made liberal use of diagrams” (Meadows, 2009: 5).

Research question

Using Systems Theory, how has collaboration and refusal in key projects and components of the case study, the KZNSA, contributed towards energy and inertia, and impacted its sustainability?

The definitions of the terms; *systems, participation, collaboration, refusal, sustainability, energy and inertia* as they are used in this paper follow below.

Pre-eminent systems theorist Donatella Meadows describes a *system* as an “interconnected set of elements that is coherently organised in a way that achieves something - a function or purpose” (2009, p. 11). As a researcher in the field of environmental science, Meadows helped usher in the notion that we have to make a major shift in the way we view the world and its systems in order to correct a course that is leading to an environmental crisis. “Today, it is widely accepted that systems thinking is a critical tool in addressing the many environmental, political, social, and economic challenges we face” (2008, p. xi). South African complexity theorist, Rika Preiser adds to this, explaining that complex systems thinking offers a way of “interconnected thinking about the world that allows us to see the dynamic behaviour and patterns of change that systems display” (2019, p. 6). The dissertation presents the case study, the KZNSA, as a dynamic system with an internal set of interconnecting parts between which

there are feedback loops of energy or dissonance/inertia in the same way that Alfonso Montuori proposes a new way of thinking focusing on “interconnected, interdependent, dynamical systems, rather than parts that can be isolated from the whole” (in Rogers, et al., 2011, p. 414).

In the study, sustainability theory is explored to develop a holistic understanding of what constitutes sustainable practice in current times. Overarching this, *sustainability* is broadly presented as an entity that can maintain *energy*, that is, continues with momentum on its own. When an entity falls into *inertia* and stalls, it becomes unsustainable.

Participation refers to the ways people take part (*collaboration*) or opt not to take part (*refusal*). Collaboration is where there is the possibility of producing a greater outcome than would have been developed in a silo. It implies an agreement between parties or entities to mutually contribute efforts towards a process, and that the benefits of the outcomes are shared. Refusal is an active state of non-participation that defines its positionality as a matter of rejecting or denying a mode of behaviour, ideology or existence:

To refuse is to say no. But, no, it is not just that. To refuse can be generative and strategic, a deliberate move toward one thing, belief, practice, or community and away from another. Refusals illuminate limits and possibilities, especially but not only of the state and other institutions (McGranahan, 2016, p. 319).

This understanding of refusal as generative is echoed throughout the dissertation and builds on the premise that refusal can contribute energy, and by association, sustainability to a system.

In addition to these definitions, the use of the term *creative sector* recognises that this is not a homogenous monolith but made up of varying sub-sectors, or domains. The South African Cultural Observatory (SACO¹) is a research unit hosted by the Nelson Mandela University, Rhodes University and the University of KwaZulu-Natal that collects data on the cultural sector to understand its socio-economic impact. In their report, *Snapshot of the cultural and creative industries in South Africa* (2024), SACO splits the South African Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) into the following domains: Design and creative services; Cultural and national heritage; Performance and celebration; Audio-visual

¹ Initiated by the [Department of Sports, Arts & Culture](#) through the Mzansi Golden Economy Strategy (2011), the [South African Cultural Observatory](#) (SACO) is a statistical and socio-economic research project, launched in 2014, which charts the socio-economic impact of the arts, culture and heritage (ACH) sectors and the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in South Africa (<https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.org.za/about-us>)

and interactive media; Books and press; and Visual arts and crafts (SACO website, 2024). This paper focuses on the sustainability of the KZN Visual arts and crafts domain within the creative sector.

A short history of the KZNSA

The KZNSA is a member-based visual arts organisation based in the city of Durban (eThekweni) in South Africa. It is housed in a complex that was purpose-built in 1996 in the suburb of Glenwood and has four exhibition galleries, a shop and a cafe. Using this organisation as a case study seemed fitting as it, in itself, is a dynamic system with three operating divisions – a gallery, shop and cafe – all of which intersect with and provide feedback to each other within the organisational whole.

The KZNSA registered as a nonprofit in November 1999 and a public benefit organisation in 2008. The current constitution, adopted in 1995, says that the Society's first aim is: "To foster the development of the visual arts in KwaZulu-Natal and to assist artists and art groups, regardless of race, creed, age or gender" (KZNSA Constitution, 2018, p. 1). In 2012 an ethos of *activation, incubation, transformation* was adopted by KZNSA Council – the non-executive board of the organisation that is comprised entirely of volunteers². These strategic imperatives meant that:

The facilities of the KZNSA will always be an active resource and hub of influence to the members and artists in the immediate and extended communities (activation), the KZNSA is committed to encouraging the development of artistic talent in young people by creating a platform for artistic self-discovery and providing skills and opportunities (incubation) and that the membership-base, management, activities and facilities of the KZNSA need to always be representative of the community in which the gallery exists, just as the activities of the KZNSA should bring about relevant transformation in the lives of individuals who take part (KZNSA Vision and Mission statement, 2012).

In 2021, the Council felt that claiming a strategy of transformation was outdated, as this was an embodied rather than a future aim. An updated vision statement was drafted and adopted "To be a highly-regarded contemporary art space that engages its complex and diverse community with socially relevant concepts for the support and development of artists and culture production" (KZNSA Vision

² The KZNSA non-executive board members (Council) are the external directors of the organisation. They are not involved in managing internal operations but help make decisions around vision and strategic direction. They are independent of the organisation's operations and stakeholders, and are nominated by other members based on their qualifications, experience and knowledge, and contribute contacts and relevant insights to Council.

and Mission statement, 2021, p. 1).

The KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts, or Natal Society of Arts (NSA) as it was called at the time, was founded in 1905 as a Society for lay and professional artists wanting to create a space to discuss and exhibit their work. It has been asserted that the KZNSA is the second oldest Society of its type in South Africa (after the AVA in Cape Town established in 1851) and the oldest still retaining its original name and constitution (McMeekan, 2003, p. 96). Melanie Hillebrand lists the founding intentions:

The chief aims of the Society were (1) "to foster the Fine Arts, such as drawing, painting, sculpture, and craft work, in the Union of South Africa, but more especially in the Province of Natal," (2) to maintain "a suitable Club room," and (3) "to give financial assistance to promising students." (1986, p. 80)

In the model of other Societies from the mid-1800s and early 1900s such as the Royal Botanic Society and the National Geographic Society, this entity centred its (colonial) culture as pre-eminent. The founders of the KZNSA, Cathcart Methven and Wallace Paton, had also contributed to the creation of the Durban Art Gallery (DAG) in 1892 – "established in order to promote a European, and particularly British, culture" (Brown, 2005, p. ii). Both institutions were colonial initiatives established exclusively for British settlers. DAG is now the municipal gallery for the City of eThekweni and is housed in the City Hall with four exhibition galleries and a permanent collection. With regards to the shifts in the name of the KZNSA, Michael McMeekan says:

... the Society's name often described its intentions. At its inauguration it was called the Natal Society of Artists, and its objectives were to provide services for those involved with or principally interested in the arts, a type of 'club' for aesthetes ... However, during the 1960s 'artistic revival', the NSA changed its name to the more inclusive Natal Society of Arts, and appeared to adopt a somewhat proselytizing attitude in its attempts to convince the public of the need to support and be involved in the arts ... At the beginning of the 1970s the Society embraced the ideal of a national body of art by joining the South African Association of Arts and changed its name accordingly (to SAAA Natal), and just prior to its secession from the SAAA [in 1995] it once again changed its name back to the Natal Society of Arts. With the coming of the new political dispensation in South Africa it has adopted the preface KwaZulu to its name [in 2000], thus once again signalling its inclusiveness (2003, p. 224).

KZNSA's relationship with SAAA is noteworthy. As mentioned, in the 1970s it was absorbed into a national body of fellow arts societies throughout South Africa and Namibia named the South African Association of Arts (SAAA) with the mother body based in Pretoria. Over the years, two KZNSA

Presidents served as Presidents of SAAA; Sylvia Kaplan from 1982 to 1985 and Jeff Chandler from 1993 to 1995. During this time, there were many disagreements with the mother body who was aligned with the apartheid ideologies of the National Party and over the years of its membership the (KZ)NSA refused any financial aid which stipulated adherence to apartheid policies.

In 1992 the question of the (KZ)NSA withdrawing from the National Association was raised at a meeting between Chandler and McMeekan of the (KZ)NSA and representatives of the African National Congress's (ANC) Cultural Desk³. The questionable politics of the SAAA, and its perceived irrelevance to the greater proportion of artists were given as authoritative reasons for seceding. The ANC's position at that stage was that the (KZ)NSA should remain as part of the national organisation, the argument being that it was preferable to transform from within rather than having to begin again from scratch (McMeekan, 2003, p. 38).

Chandler took on the position of president of SAAA in 1993 with the hope of affecting this transformation, however, the participation of the SAAA in the Venice Biennale (during sanctions⁴) “served as the ‘last straw’” (McMeekan, 2003, p. 26).

Those opposed to apartheid supported the principles of international sanctions and refused to participate in any state initiatives that disregarded them. The South African Association of Arts was invited by the Department of National education to organise the South African participation in the Venice Biennale. This was in direct opposition to the Cultural Boycott and the ‘State Of Art’ resolutions taken in 1979 which urged all artists to refuse to participate in State sponsored exhibitions until such time as a fair and equal distribution of resources was achieved (McMeekan, 2003, p. 72).

As well as the 1993 biennale, Chandler's passion was to develop a SAAA national arts publication and when this was censored and published in Afrikaans it was another motivating factor for him being key to the secession. “‘The SAAA was really pissing me off’, (he) recalls in typically blunt style” (McMeekan, 2003, p. 40). In 1995, the KZNSA along with SAAA Western Cape, now the Association for Visual Arts (AVA) in Cape Town, the two biggest and most active members organisations seceded

³ After the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1990 by the apartheid government, South African institutions opposed to apartheid began to interact with ANC bodies in recognition of their leadership role in a future democratic state.

⁴ During apartheid South Africa, the international community reacted by implementing economic sanctions as a way to condemn apartheid and apply pressure. The United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 1761 in 1962 denouncing South Africa's apartheid policies, which led to the creation of the United Nations Special Committee against apartheid.

from the central association, SAAA, to become independent bodies. In 1998 SAAA became SANAVA, the South African National Association for the Visual Arts, and currently has 21 associated branches in South Africa. The KZNSA remains independent of SANAVA.

The KZNSA has been a member-based Society since its formation in 1905, meaning that leadership positions on the Council are nominated and elected by members, making the organisational structure of KZNSA one that employs the principles of democracy. Council terms are two years and the person can stand for re-election for any number of additional terms. The constitutional maximum for a president is three one-year terms. Members join the Society by signing up and paying a nominal annual subscription fee⁵. Council is in turn responsible for the appointment of staff on the operations team. The member-based model of a Society is the source of ongoing deliberation – how is membership relevant in an age of social media followers? The act of buying membership in exchange for benefits; the transaction between Society and member, is of interest. What engenders loyalty and, hopefully, patronage in current contexts? What is the difference between a Society and a community?

KZNSA’s historical sustainability challenges

Due to its name and founding commonality with the municipal museum, the Durban Art Gallery (DAG), there is a recurring misconception that KZNSA is a government organisation belonging to, and with budget provided by, the province of KwaZulu-Natal or the City of eThekweni. It is, however, an entirely independent, non-aligned entity that supports itself. It does qualify for grants and project funding from government due to its nonprofit and public benefit status, but these are given based on the proposal submitted. Funding must be applied for along with all other applicants in the sector. In my tenure of ten years KZNSA has applied for every open call made by KZN-DSAC (the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Sport, Arts and Culture) and has never received project funding or Grant-In-Aid funds from the province. In 2014, KZNSA was notified by an eThekweni Parks Recreation and Culture (PRC) official that our Grant-in-Aid application had been approved for the cycle 2015/16/17 and we had been allocated R1m a year but, despite numerous follow up queries to PRC, these funds did not materialise. In 2018 a leaked copy of an eThekweni PRC document signed by the City Treasurer came into our possession showing that R1m per year had been allocated to the KZNSA for the cycle 2018/19/20. Of the R3m allocated in this cycle only R1m was dispersed with the outstanding R2m remains unaccounted for. In 2021 another eThekweni PRC document allocating R250,000 a year to the KZNSA for the 2021/22/23 cycle was leaked. Of the total of R750,000 for that cycle only R150,000 was received. The misconception that KZNSA’s sustainability can be attributed to income from eThekweni Municipality

⁵ In 2023 adult membership for the year is R250.

surfaces regularly. An example can be found in Mario Pissarra's⁶ paper, *Recalling The Natal Visual Arts Organisation: a roundtable conversation*, where he facilitated a discussion between senior KZN artists, Thami Jali, Zamani Makhanya, Sfiso ka-Mkame and Paul Sibisi. Sibisi says;

But now KZNSA has been formulated by eThekweni Municipality. When I saw KZNSA written, I wondered how it came into being. Then I remembered it was from NSA ... eThekweni Municipality consumed them easily. They said no, we are accommodating you now, it's KZNSA, they can receive funding here ... (Pissarra, 2018, p. 21).

Other examples include a message from arts journalist, Wanda Hennig, about a cancelled event at the KZNSA saying, "What a shame ... guess it's easier to ask for funding" (W. Hennig, text correspondence, 5 May 2022), a member writing, "... you are adopting a ... viewpoint in line with the ANC government that runs the eThekweni Municipality from which you receive funding" (email to KZNSA Council, 30 December 2023) and a fellow creative sector researcher sharing that a Durban-based artists collective believes that the "KZNSA is hoarding money" (M. Paulk, interview, 24 August 2023). In reality, the KZNSA's current business model has, along with applying for funding, the shop and cafe working to generate surplus to cover the overheads of the gallery, with the aim that art sales in the gallery also contributes to this. In a nonprofit one refers to profit as 'surplus' and loss as 'deficit'. The KZNSA model is in line with that described by James French;

(A nonprofit's) objectives do not include making profits for shareholders ... winning the votes of the people or large bonuses for Directors. Here surplus is circulated back into operations and the delivery of the vision and mission. VANPOs' (Visual Arts Non Profit Organisations) missions are generally focussed on the creation, education and promotion of the visual arts and visual artists (French, 2015, p. 8).

After an energised period from 2000 until the 2008 global economic downturn, the organisation slowly lost momentum. When I started there in 2014, KZNSA was in financial difficulty, had no permanent staff in place and was facing closure. Over the next six years up until the 2020 pandemic it was possible to slowly restore the team needed for the essential roles in the gallery, shop and cafe and implement a

⁶ Mario Pissarra is a Durban-based arts researcher, a co-founder of Community Arts Project (CAP) in Cape Town in the 1980s and the founder of Africa South Art Initiative (ASAI). ASAI began in 2005, concerned with the lack of engagement by South African artists, art historians and curators with their peers on the African continent. The resources generated by ASAI represent a modest contribution towards the development of discourses rooted in (rather than imposed on) formerly colonised contexts, especially in Africa, in order that a more inclusive vision of international art and art history can emerge, informed from 'below'. Based at the University of Cape Town since 2008, but not funded by or affiliated to the university, ASAI sees its role as bridging academic and popular discourse, with artists being central to this process (<https://asai.co.za/about/>).

process of transformation with regards to membership, access for artists and inclusivity for community. However, the funds needed to bring the full vision of the organisation to life (an independent visual art space supporting experimental practice with a robust education programme) remained a challenge.

The context of the study - the prevailing conditions and the challenges that are relevant to the KZNSA

KZNSA is the only nonprofit contemporary gallery operating in Durban. The lack of creative spaces offering opportunities and validation to creative practitioners in KZN is verified by French:

(Visual Arts Non Profits) VANPOs make up a tiny percentage of all the NPOs in the country. Of the 98920 nonprofits identified, the 2010 HSRC report on the visual arts sector reveals that only 312 visual arts organisations belong to the nonprofit and public sector in South Africa. VANPOs make up 0.3% of all nonprofits in the country ... the majority of visual arts firms are based in the metropolitan areas of Cape Town and Johannesburg (2015, p. 8).

There is the view too that creatives from KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) struggle to sustain viable careers while in the province, that institutions are falling into inertia and that the creative sector cannot realise its potential. While KZN is well known for incubating talent and producing innovations that go on to be celebrated nationally and internationally, there is a tendency for creative individuals and endeavours in KZN to not be recognized while practising locally, but to achieve validation only once they have moved elsewhere.

There's also a common lament that the creative sector in Durban and KZN is siloed. I have found this to be true. There's very little interaction between visual arts and crafts organisations, institutions, collectives and artists in the province. One of the reasons for this is that when you are under-resourced, struggling to survive and there are inadequate resources to operate outside of your immediate needs, there tends to be very little energy for collaboration. What, then, is required for collaboration to be possible and generative for the sector?

Besides Covid-19, contributing factors to the lack of resources and sustainability in KZN are the exodus of young creatives as those with the means choose to attend tertiary arts institutions elsewhere; an underactive commercial creative industry; and a crisis in state funding for the arts. While Cape Town and Johannesburg are centres for magazine publishing houses, the film industry, advertising agencies and numerous commercial galleries and art fairs that contribute to the creative economy, Durban has a relatively low number of commercial entities with employment opportunities and budgets for creative work, and there are no commercial galleries. An initiative to launch an art fair in Durban in 2022 and

again in 2023 was ‘postponed indefinitely’ with the organisers citing a lack of cooperation from the eThekweni Municipality as a contributing factor. When Durban-based corporates do need creative services, these are often commissioned to creatives based elsewhere. An interview with arts journalist Peter Machen confirms these challenges;

Two things are important: one is a lack of local municipal recognition of the cultural and economic importance of cultural activities in an area when they happen, and when they gain momentum. But also, national interest and international recognition is important. There’s this weird antipathy to Durban from the rest of the country. I remember a judge (on a national journalism award) saying, ‘Yeah Durban, we just didn't pay any attention to Durban’. So, all this exciting stuff was happening (in the 2000s), but it didn't seem to fit the national cultural narrative. I think gallerists in Joburg and Cape Town just saw Durban as this place where they were making this weird, experimental stuff. And the money wasn't that (P. Machen, interview, 6 October 2023).

The growing crisis in state funding for the arts at all levels; national, provincial and municipal, has further left creative institutions in KZN in disarray or on the brink of closure, and artists without the local infrastructure to establish careers in the province. In this structural context, KZNSA sits at a crossroads of relevance and survival, inertia and the energy needed to sustain itself.

Rationale

Just as both the KZNSA and the province have struggled to find a footing or achieve recognition on the national arts landscape, this notion of exclusion is reinforced by the fact that there is very little material in the archive on the KZNSA and that the visual arts and crafts domain of the creative sector in the province is under-researched. While there is some writing about the Durban Art Gallery and a few other standout organisations such as The Rorke's Drift Evangelical Lutheran Church Arts and Craft Centre, there is limited documentation on the achievements and challenges of artists, creative practitioners, arts programmes and initiatives, and visual arts and crafts institutions in the province.

This lack of research also means there are too few indicators of why visual arts and crafts creatives leave the province. Or indicators for how inconsistent collaboration between organisations and artists has resulted in the strained interactions between them, to departures and to subsequent refusals, to how local institutions have failed to fulfil the needs of artists and how this has contributed to the prevailing distrust in the sector.

There is a great need to capacitate skills in the province in terms of people working in research, curating and critical writing. The lack of skills and the lack of research material are interdependent – without the one, the other is not sustainable. The lack of research is symptomatic of a slide into inertia and the trend towards unsustainability in the province. In some part, the study addresses this knowledge and skills gap and hopes to be the foundation for further studies *and* capacity building within this valuable sub-sector.

Research methodology

This study utilises a qualitative research methodology with an art historical approach employing theoretical engagement rather than the quantitative analysis used in policy management or social development disciplines. In this way, the accounts of individuals along with supporting material, and the insights these brought, guided research rather than focus groups populating insights against controls. Conversation, whether in-person, online or in email and text correspondence, was the primary method of research. Participants in the conversations were grouped into four categories according to their roles in the sector or their intersection with KZNSA so that those in each group had the same discussion points. The categories of interlocutors were: people in leadership in creative sector nonprofits and Societies; former KZNSA Council members and employees; artists and curators; and journalists and fellow researchers.

Discussion points for those in creative sector nonprofits and societies were the shared history of southern African Societies that were established for colonial members 1850-1910, transitions and transformation undertaken by Societies in recent history, collaboration initiatives in Societies and nonprofits and their success or failure, sustainability initiatives in Societies and nonprofits, the ‘business model’ of selected nonprofits, protecting experimental practice and incubation opportunities in the art industry, building networks amongst similar arts organisations in KZN and SA – challenges and opportunities, and membership.

Discussion points for former KZNSA Council and employees were shifts in public funding, shifts in the exhibition programming, the Young Artists’ Project, transformation over the years, the relationship between experimental practice and commercial initiatives, the evolution of the Members’ Exhibition, membership dynamics in general, the relationships between the three trading divisions of the organisation – Gallery, Shop and Café – and visibility for the organisation.

Discussion points for artists and curators were the independence of artists or collectives from established institutions and prescribed channels of the art industry, the artist's or curator's relationship with the KZNSA and other galleries, and incidents of refusal.

Discussion points for arts journalists and researchers were writing about the Durban arts scene and the KZNSA, 1990 to the present, KZNSA exhibitions and projects of note, observations on the shifts in curatorial strategy over the years, shifts in community and membership, and KZNSA as a cultural hub for the region.

This research project also uses the device of a case study to exemplify a systemic phenomenon – in this instance, how collaboration and refusal can impact energy and inertia in a system. The KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts was selected to illustrate the context of arts organisations in the province, and as a microcosm within which the challenges and possible solutions for it could be explored.

To revisit the research question, *Using Systems Theory, how has collaboration and refusal in key projects and components of the case study, KZNSA, contributed towards energy and inertia, and impacted its sustainability?* Case study research is an appropriate methodology for this research for a few reasons: one, it “factors in the ‘real-world context’ of the entity by means of an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’)”; two, case study design is “preferred as a research strategy when ‘how’, ‘why’, and ‘what’ questions are the interest of the researcher” as is the case with the research question for this paper; and three, case studies are effective within a “bounded system” - a tool already in play with the employment of systems theory as a means to understand feedback loops of energy or inertia in the sector (Coombs, 2022, p 3; Yin, 2014, p. 16).

According to Hayden Coombs in *Case study research: single or multiple [White paper]*;

A case study is a methodological research approach used to generate an in-depth understanding of a contemporary issue or phenomenon in a bounded system. Case study research requires in-depth investigation conducted into an individual, group, or event to gain an understanding of a real-life phenomenon. It is often used in the social sciences and humanities to explore complex issues and to provide insights into specific phenomena or situations. A case study may involve multiple sources of data, such as interviews, observations, or documents. The goal of case study research is to gain detailed and nuanced understanding of the case subject and to generate new theories or insights (Coombs, 2022, p. 1).

Robert Yin lays out the six elements of case study research: “the plan, design, preparation, data collection, analysis and reporting and emphasises the power of high-quality case study research that focuses on readability, credibility, and concern with confirmability of all matter” (2018, p. 192).

Of the three types of case studies: (single) instrumental case study, collective (multiple) case study, and intrinsic case study, this research employs a single case study, where the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to illustrate the issue. Due to the lack of research into the visual arts and crafts creative sector of KZN it is possible that a future extrapolation of this single case study could evolve into a multiple case study where the researcher selects multiple cases to illustrate the one issue or concern. A multiple case study aims to compare cases to identify common patterns, relationships or similarities. “In a multiple case study, the cases may be similar in nature, or they may be diverse, but the researcher is looking for patterns or relationships across cases” (Yin, 2017). This method is often used when “the phenomenon being studied is rare or difficult to observe” (Coombs, 2022, p. 2).

For desk research I sourced journal articles, papers, books and print media relevant to the study. Digital material included websites, social media sites – and the interactions in the comments of social media posts of arts organisations, artists and collectives, including those of the KZNSA⁷.

In the KZNSA storeroom I found numerous scrapbooks that contain press clippings from 1989 to 1995 and filing cabinets with the paperwork, printed catalogues and invitations, and sometimes a CD backup of exhibitions that had been hosted in the Glenwood complex between 1996 and 2010. These were useful to track the exhibition programme and the Members’ Exhibition over these years. In the admin office bookshelves, there was a large leather-bound book of minutes from Council meetings from 1961 to 1976, speaking to issues under discussion and engendering a sense of an organised and well-governed institution during these years.

In late 2022, the son of Sylvia Kaplan, who had recently passed away, asked if KZNSA would like the records she had compiled during her time on Council, including her tenure as KZNSA President from 1969 to 1972, and then SAAA President from 1983 to 1985. This was gratefully accepted, and five large boxes of her papers including correspondence, minutes, press clippings and catalogues were delivered to the gallery, and form the basis of historical data for 1968 to 1989. In 1987 Kaplan had

⁷ Where websites are referenced as source material, these belong to accredited organisations and archives in the sector, such as the AVA Gallery, South African History Online (SAHO), Africa South Art Initiative (ASAI) and the website of the KZNSA itself. Social media accounts include those of practising artists as a means to track their self-promotion and its results, and of the KZNSA to reference comments left by KZNSA members and audience.

made a call-out for historical material on the organisation for her own research via letters to the editors of local newspapers, and members of the public sent her items dating from 1937 to 1964. These were included in the boxes delivered in 2022.

I am also grateful to the Africa South Art Initiative (ASAI) for the loan of two catalogues of KZNSA Members' Exhibitions 1953 and 1954 from their library⁸.

I acknowledge my positionality as the Executive Director of the KZNSA and the access, and also avoidance, this may bring. Since refusal is a theme of the study, I accepted and observed where interlocutors refused to share information, or to interact at all. I am mindful of the racialised history between artists and the KZNSA, and how this might contribute to refusal in the form of lingering distrust. In *Refusal – opening otherwise forms of research* (2023), Lena Gross, Sepandarmaz Mashreghi and Emma Söderman reveal that “refusal turns the gaze at colonial modalities of knowing”. The methodology of their research provided many helpful markers on how refusal could be embedded in my own:

The analysis of instances of our refusal in/to research also demonstrates that refusal is an active and generating praxis that redirects the attention to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned ... thus making space for relationality, reciprocity, solidarity, community, and care (Gross *et al*, 2023, p. 2).

Tuck and Yang discuss Simpson's three dimensions of refusal in research methodology, namely;

1) interlocutor refuses to disclose further details or engage in certain topics, 2) researcher refuses to write about certain topics, and 3) the refusal to engage with the logic of [problematic reasoning] (Tuck & Yang, 2023, p. 4).

In this vein, I have also made the decision *not* to write about or publicly discuss certain findings as part of my research process and embrace that “refusal is both method and subject and thus multidimensional” (Gross *et al.*, 2023, p. 2).

Refusal for us is a choice that does not ‘thin’ analysis, but that enrichens and creates openings for other stories and other forms of research. A common thread in our work is also a strive for

⁸ The catalogues had been donated to the ASAI library by artist Omar Badsha as they featured the work of his father, Ebrahim Badsha (1931 - 2003). According to South African History Online; “In 1953 (Ebrahim) Badsha, was the first black artist to be invited to exhibit at the annual Natal Society of Arts (NSA) members' exhibition at the Durban Art Gallery. Nils Solberg, the son of a Swedish Missionary family, who was a leading artist, influenced Badsha's work. In 1954, Solberg was elected president of the Whites Only Natal Society of Artists” (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/ebrahim-badsha>).

engagement and collaborative work with our interlocutors, a collaboration that takes different forms and intensity depending on contexts. Refusals to ask/write are closely related to respect, as they mean taking our responsibilities as researchers seriously and seeing consent to participate as a process rather than a single act (Gross et al., 2023, p. 8).

Mindful of my position of authority, the research approach aimed to adopt Greenspan's self-reflexivity and subjectivity of the author, combined "with (a) commitment to sharing authority throughout the research process, represent(ing) a fundamental shift in perspective from 'knowing about' to 'knowing with'" (High, 2009, p. 16). Similarly, I acknowledge "the observer's role as an inextricable part of the system" (Shanken, 2015, p. 13). The possible refusal of participants in the collation of research and of mine in the sharing of some findings, adds to the limitations and potential of the outcomes, where a refusal creates an acknowledged boundary between what is shared and what is not. These "no-go zones" are themselves a powerful denial of appropriation, misrepresentation and misplaced validation.

Chapter outline

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework and Literature Review covers the literature on the themes of the dissertation – that of sustainability, participation theory and systems theory – and lays out the theoretical framework for the argument.

Chapters 2 to 4 discuss the case study, each focusing on aspects of the KZNSA's structure, modes and activities:

Chapter 2 – The case study and its environment contextualises KZNSA as an institution in the KZN and Durban creative sector. It looks at how its positionality over the years as established, exclusive and mainstream has resulted in incidents of counter-culture and how these refusals in turn make valuable contributions to the local ecosystem. It also contextualises the precinct and building in which the KZNSA is located and how these impact its identity and sustainability. Finally, Chapter 2 expands on the governance structure of the KZNSA and how the membership model impacts sustainability, while contemplating the limits and opportunities of this model.

Chapter 3 – The case study – programming looks at the gallery programme and selects key exhibition projects and education activities to exemplify how collaboration (or a lack thereof) and refusal impact sustainability.

In *Chapter 4, The case study – commerce* there is an examination of the commercial entities of the organisation, the shop and cafe, how these have employed collaboration and to what effect. This chapter also includes initiatives undertaken by the organisation to engage with the art and built-environment industries towards economic sustainability and the learnings gained along the way.

Each aspect of the case study is reviewed as a constituent element in the KZNSA system and is assessed as to whether it employs collaboration or not, whether it generates energy or results in inertia and how these contribute to sustainability.

CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This chapter engages the theoretical frameworks and the related literature that inform the study, including sustainability, participation theory and systems theory. This is done so as to create the framework in which the case study and its initiatives are assessed in terms of their sustainability, success and potential.

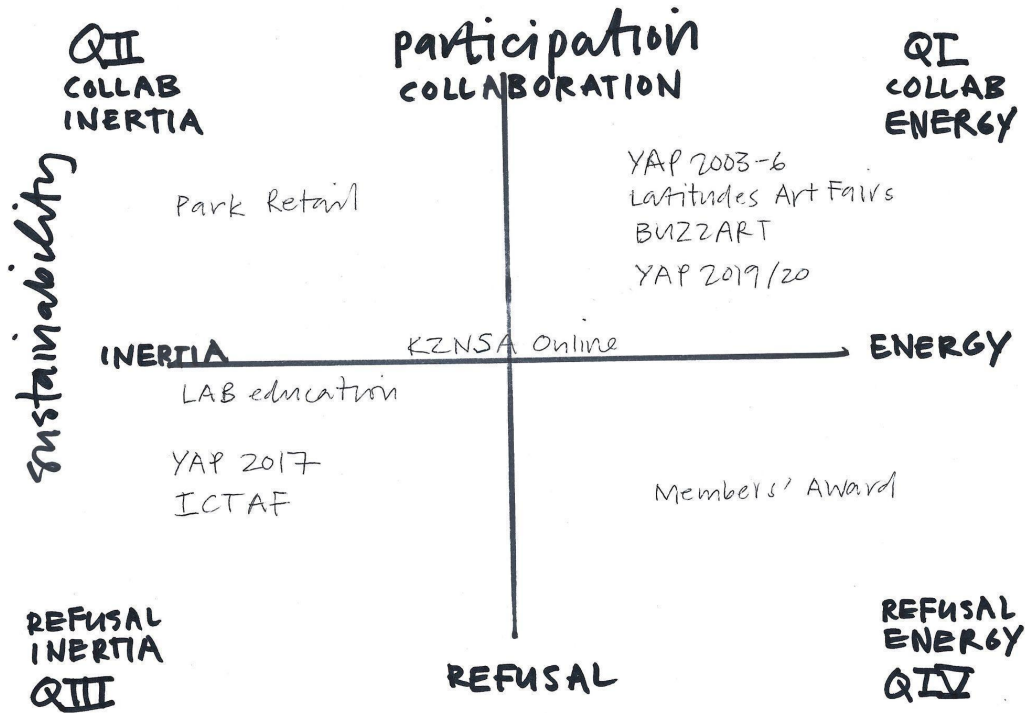
1.1 Mapping the research question

Using Systems Theory, how has collaboration and refusal in key projects and components of the case study, KZNSA, contributed towards energy and inertia, and impacted its sustainability?

If we use a Cartesian plane to map *sustainability* and *participation*, it results in four quadrants in which there is a relationship between energy, inertia, collaboration and refusal. The study looks at these dynamics in the context of the case study, the KZNSA. The projects and initiatives of the three divisions of the KZNSA, the gallery, the shop and the cafe are mapped in the Cartesian plane according to their energy and inertia, showing how collaboration or refusal have influenced these. For example, stricter conditions of entry into the Annual Members' Award and refusing works that don't meet these conditions has energised the member base and the success of artists accepted for the competition. Similarly, although the Park Retail Project involved extensive collaboration it failed and fell into inertia.

For the purposes of the case study, the project and initiatives are the KZNSA Young Artists' Project (YAP), the Park Retail Gallery, the Annual Members' Award, BUZZART, participation in Latitudes Art Fair and the Investec Cape Town Art Fair, KZNSA Online and the KZNSA education programme (KZNSA LAB). Each of these will be discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. The resulting relationships show that some entities that have embraced refusal have energy, and some that have embraced refusal have fallen into inertia. Some entities that embrace collaboration are energised, and some that have attempted collaboration have failed and become inert.

The Cartesian plane also provides an opportunity to place examples of creative projects within a quadrant and reflect on which entities have generated the most energy and therefore contribute the most to sustainability. The Cartesian Plane below maps the projects and initiatives of the three divisions of the KZNSA within four quadrants: I. collaboration and energy, II. collaboration and inertia, III. refusal and inertia and IV. refusal and energy.



The Cartesian Plane of the projects of the three division of KZNSA operations

The Cartesian plane is useful to a point but is ultimately limited to a dualistic approach that is reductionist and devoid of the complexity inherent in the sector. Gross *et al.* contextualise the colonial implications of Cartesian philosophy which underpin its inadequacy as a methodology for analysis of the case study:

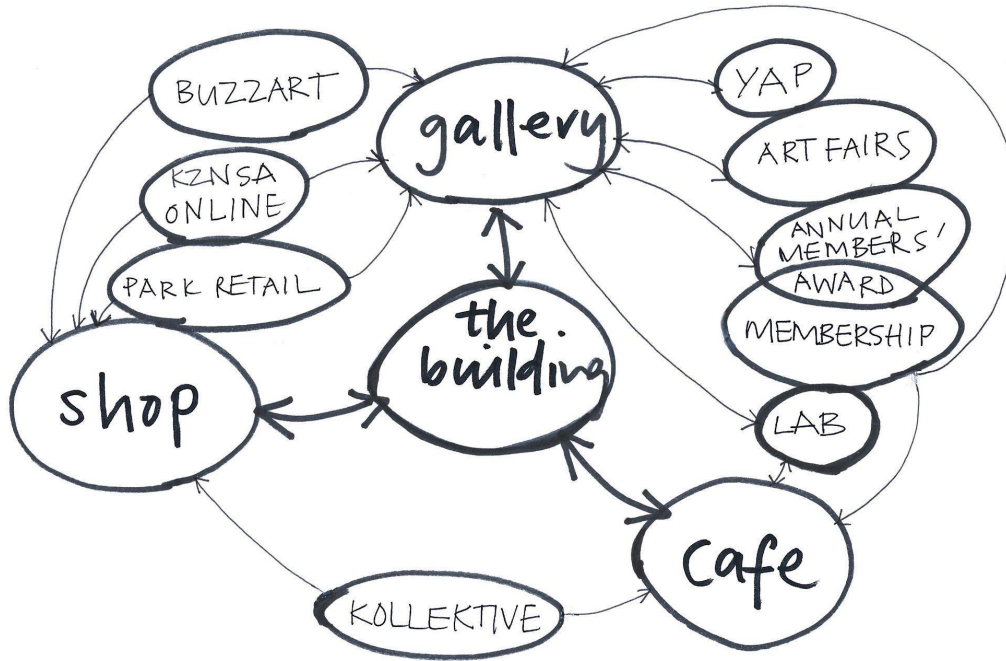
The European imagery that has emerged from the Enlightenment, has constructed a dominant knowing subject against a multiplicity of inferior and racialised subjectivities. In line with Cartesian thought, an individual self-actualises through knowing about something else, yet the object of the knower is deemed unchanged and remains a mechanism for the becoming of the subject, I think therefore, I am . This supposedly inherent right to discover is grounded in a philosophy that assumes “what you are coming to, belongs to you somehow”. This philosophy justifies the acquisition of bodies and territories to know about, and to rule over them. Maldonado-Torres argues that under such philosophy, ‘I conquer, therefore I am’ is the constant backdrop to the Cartesian formulation of knowledge. In this way the conqueror’s sense of self is a prerequisite to his knowledge of others. The right to know, therefore, is directly linked to the right to conquer. In this way, modern/colonial knowledge system is built upon frontiers and a self-entitlement to transgress them (Gross et al., 2023, p. 3; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Neel et al. 2007, p. 29).

After the initial mapping, the Cartesian plane is set aside for a *systems approach* that embraces complexity theory and explores the dynamic and fluid inter-relatedness of the operating divisions of the KZNSA and their projects, the impact of collaboration and refusal in these and the resulting energy or inertia.

1.2 Systems theory

As mentioned, to begin with the study included numerous role players in the KZN creative sector dating from the late 1800s, and specifically since 1994, in order to map the KZN creative ecosystem and draw on this to reflect on sustainability. Besides the KZNSA, the other KZN institutions and individuals proposed were The Durban Art Gallery (DAG) and its *Red Eye* activations, The African Art Centre (AAC) and its *Velobala* programme, The Rorke's Drift ELC Arts and Craft Centre (Rorke's Drift), the amaSosha Art Movement, artists Wonder Buhle Mbambo and Thami Jali, and curator Gabi Ngcobo. While the macro KZN ecosystem is no longer the subject of the study in favour of the more focussed ecosystem of one of the role players, systems theory remains a useful tool to understand and map the micro system and internal dynamics of the KZNSA. Since "systems can be embedded in systems, which are embedded in yet other systems" (Meadows, 2008, p. 12), this approach could be applicable to other centres in future studies, and also scalable within the sector to show how selected role players operate in a system /ecosystem. In this way it provides a model that can be used to understand reasons for the challenges in the sector and imagine solutions to these.

A systems approach provides an invaluable device for exploring the inter-relatedness of entities, the feedback between them and the forces in play around them across time. In the case of the KZNSA we look at how the operating divisions – the gallery, the shop and the cafe – interact in dynamic ways to support and, at other times, to compete with each other. The study looks at historical and recent examples of these and reimagines a sustainable future using this device.



The System map of the projects and the environment of the three operating divisions of the KZNSA

In her 2009 book, *Thinking in Systems*, Donella Meadows asks

So, what is a system? A system is a set of things—people, cells, molecules, or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behaviour over time. The system may be buffeted, constricted, triggered, or driven by outside forces. But the system’s response to these forces is characteristic of itself, and that response is seldom simple in the real world (Meadows, 2009, p. 2).

One of the first researchers exploring systems, art critic Jack Burnham wrote in a 1968 *Artforum* essay titled *Systems Aesthetics*, that “we are now in transition from an object-oriented to a systems-oriented culture. Here change emanates not from things but from the way things are done” (1968, as cited in Shanken, 2015, p. 12). Looking at the energy and feedback between the entities of the case study as opposed to focusing on a fixed “thing” is an instrumental device in asking and answering the research question *Using Systems Theory, how has collaboration and refusal in key projects and components of the case study, the KZNSA, contributed towards energy and inertia, and impacted its sustainability?*

Similarly, in his book, *Systems*, writer Edward Shanken presents a series of essays on the subject, and offers the view that;

In contrast to western scientific approaches to knowledge, (systems theory) shifts attention from the absolute qualities of individual parts and addresses the organisation of the whole in more relativistic terms, as a dynamic process of interaction among constituent elements (Shanken, 2015, p. 13).

Deborah Hammond affirms my experience, and agrees with Shanken, on the limitations of Cartesian methodologies in *A guide to systems research: Philosophical foundations of systems research* (2017). In unpacking the evolution of systems theory, Hammond explains that a multifaceted systems field emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to the limitations of traditional scientific research approaches. It challenged the mechanistic and reductionist views of Descartes and Newton. Instead of focusing solely on isolated parts, a systems approach emphasises the interconnectedness of elements, mutual causality, and the potential for the emergence of new and unpredictable phenomena. This shift in perspective acknowledges the complexity and dynamic nature of lived realities, providing a more holistic framework for understanding and exploring challenges in the creative sector and in the case study (Hammond, 2017, pp. 3, 6).

In *Identifying general trends and patterns in complex systems research: An overview of theoretical and practical implications* (2019), Rika Preiser writes that there is “a general acknowledgement that theories of complexity introduce a shift or new scientific paradigm from the landscape of classical Newtonian/Cartesian science” (Preiser, 2019, p. 2). The non-reductionist theories of complexity theory challenge positivist assumptions of a linear, atomistic and deterministic world. A systems analysis allows us to factor in the emergent properties, feedback loops, nonlinear dynamics and unpredictable behaviours that we experience (Preiser, 2019).

In this way, complexity and systems theories dovetail in that both “favour relationships over entities” rather than a focus on organising static structures (Preiser, 2019, p. 3). Systems methodology looks for the “interconnections, the relationships that hold the elements together” (Meadows, 2008, p. 13). This focus on relationships echoes Burnham’s observation that change emanates not from things (or entities) but “from the way things are done” (Shanken, 2015, p. 12). The case study looks at the relationships between entities in the KZNSA system and asks how these relationships and the dynamics that result may contribute energy or inertia.

When reflecting on the history and evolution of the field, Hammond cites Ludwig von Bertalanffy as the ‘father’ of General Systems Theory;

(Bertalanffy) proposed the concept of organismic biology in the early 20th century, as an alternative to the mechanistic paradigm, then dominant in the life sciences. Perhaps his most

important contribution to the evolution of systems ideas, the concept of open systems highlighted the capacity for *self-organisation*, creativity, and spontaneity in the behaviour and evolution of living systems (Hammond, 2017, p. 6).

The notion of self-organisation is relevant to the KZNSA as it is interesting to remember that it is, itself, a self-organised entity – a group of enthusiasts with shared interests and agendas came together in 1905 to form a collective. Meadows identifies three key features of a system – “resilience, self-organisation, and hierarchy. Promoting or managing for these properties of a system can improve its ability ... to be sustainable” (2009, p. 85). On the tendency of systems to be self-organised, Meadows says;

The most marvellous characteristic of some complex systems is their ability to learn, diversify, complexify, evolve ... Self-organization produces heterogeneity and unpredictability. It is likely to come up with whole new structures, whole new ways of doing things. It requires freedom and experimentation, and a certain amount of disorder. These conditions that encourage self-organization often can be scary for individuals and threatening to power structures (Meadows, 2008, p. 80).

As well as being self-organised, the fact that the KZNSA is still in operation 119 years later could also be described as resilience. If the KZNSA meets two of the criteria – those of self-organisation and resilience, the question, then, is how does it relate to the notion of hierarchy proposed by Meadows? Malatsie references systems theory as a guiding principle in her Masters research paper, *AUTONOMY? South African Independent Self-organised Art Institutions, funding models and its effect on institutional programming* where she shares that “the definition of the term ‘self-organisation’ ‘is borrowed from Systems Theory’ “ (2018, p. 15). Malatsie explores the potential for independent arts organisations to be “non-hierarchical, open, and operate (using) participatory decision-making processes” (2018, p. 15). While Malatsie speaks to aspirations of non-hierarchical networks, Meadows points out that systems naturally employ hierarchy;

The world is organized in subsystems aggregated into larger subsystems, aggregated into still larger subsystems. This arrangement of systems and subsystems is called a hierarchy. If subsystems can largely take care of themselves, regulate themselves, maintain themselves, and yet serve the needs of the larger system, while the larger system coordinates and enhances the functioning of the subsystems, a stable, resilient, and efficient structure results ... Hierarchies evolve from the lowest level up—from the pieces to the whole, from cell to organ to organism, from individual to team ... Life started with single-cell bacteria, not with elephants. The original purpose of a hierarchy is always to help its originating subsystems do their jobs better (Meadows, 2008, p. 82).

An important distinction arises about notions of hierarchy and how these apply to the case study. One implies an abuse of power, where those with greater access, privilege or resources, consciously or unconsciously, assert their dominance and skew the outcomes for the whole. This seems to occur when individual rather than holistic agendas are adopted or there is a disconnect with how each level of a hierarchy intersects with the others.

The purpose of the upper layers of the hierarchy is to serve the purposes of the lower layers. This is something, unfortunately, that both the higher and the lower levels of a greatly-articulated hierarchy easily can forget. Therefore, many systems are not meeting our goals because of malfunctioning hierarchies (Meadows, 2008, pp. 82, 85).

Like the participation model and sustainability theory employed in this study, functional hierarchical systems evolve from the bottom up. This mode of hierarchy implies that the system regulates power dynamics into tiers of functionality in order to serve the whole. For the KZNSA, within the member-based model of the organisation, all members are technically the owners and decision makers of the organisation, and this 'power' is transferred to the elected Council. However, when that Council avoids consulting or involving members in strategic direction, changes to the governance model or operational imperatives, the functional hierarchy is destabilised.

The study looks at how, in the system of the KZNSA as it exists now, incidents of participation, either collaboration or refusal, contribute to energy or inertia. Preiser speaks of "a qualitative, philosophical and practical engagement that explores what it means to participate in and creatively co-construct the phenomenological experiences of everyday instances and encounters of a messy, complex reality" (Preiser, 2019, p. 3). The energy or inertia that these encounters generate go on to impact the sustainability of the system –where "systemic phenomena ... behave in a manner in which time and energy expenditure is irreversible" (Preiser, 2019: 3). The KZNSA has an embodied mode of participation and self-organisation by means of its membership structure. The dynamic space that is shared by members has the potential to create incidents of collaboration that generate energy or inertia, but has also been party to incidents of refusal that contributed energy or inertia.

Hammond reminds us that "in seeking to understand the behaviour of living and other complex systems, the environment emerges as a critical factor" (Hammond, 2017, p. 4) and the environment in which the KZNSA operates is explored in Chapter 2. "The system, to a large extent, causes its own behaviour! An outside event may unleash that behaviour, but the same outside event applied to a different system is likely to produce a different result" (Meadows, 2008, p. 2).

Another useful theory embedded in systems theory is that of ‘policy resistance’ where the dangers of a lack of collaboration are documented. Meadows speaks of how some systems can produce extremely unnatural and even problematic behaviour when the individual subsystems each have a different goal. In the study of the KZNSA, ‘policy resistance’ echoes the lag of *inertia* that can result from its dysfunctional hierarchies and a disconnect between entities.

If one actor within a system or any of its subsystems gets the upper hand and uses it to shift the system’s direction, all the others will have to work twice as hard to pull it back in line. The result is a system that looks stuck, reproducing the same problems over and over again. To correct such a system, it’s actually necessary to let go and turn the energy and resources available toward uniting the actors in the various subsystems. This way they can find a situation that works for everyone (Meadows, 2008, p. 111).

In order to find a mode that works for everyone, Preiser encourages those operating with a systems mindset to

1. Create conditions that nurture the system's capacity for developing creative responses to unintended consequences resulting from deep uncertainty and non-linear dynamics, 2. Strengthen personal and institutional capacities that can guide systemic insight and action that result in the ability to adapt when necessary, and 3. Facilitate transformative dialogues to foster trust and new relationships. Allocate resources that allow for critical reflexivity, shared learning experiences, and constructive evaluation to take place regularly (Preiser, 2019, p. 7).

By employing systems thinking, the study considers the ways in which this approach can create “self-generating entities and networks, alter our experience of time, change the configurations of social relations, cross cultural borders, and interact with threatened ecosystems” (Shanken, 2015, p. 1).

1.3 Sustainability

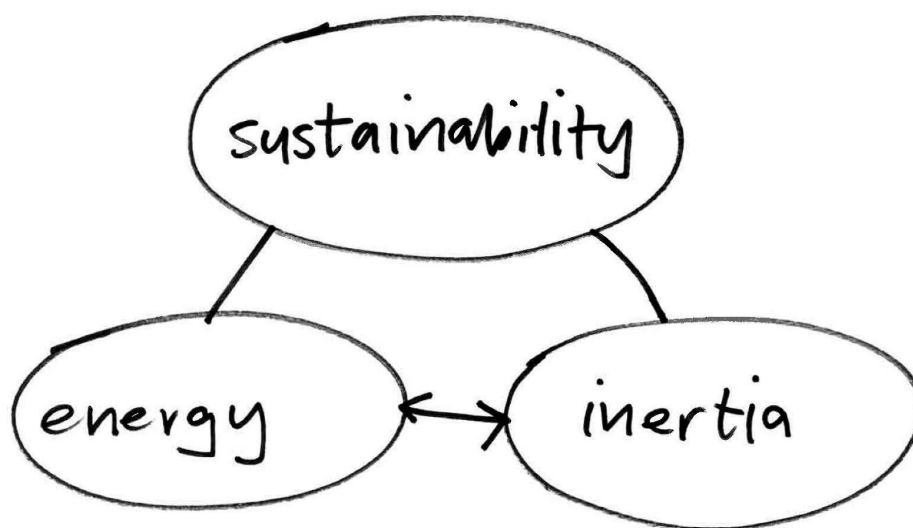
In order to build a holistic model of sustainability for the case study, multiple aspects of sustainability are explored and proposed. These include financial, social justice, communal well-being, environmental, and also cultural, considerations.

In her Masters dissertation titled *AUTONOMY? South African independent self-organised art institutions, funding models and its effect on institutional programming*, (2018) South African curator Kabelo Malatsie describes sustainability as “all-consuming idealism and naive hopefulness for

formations that can exist and be sustained locally” (Malatsie, 2018, p. 11). Malatsie’s thesis looks at “local independent spaces and how alternative funding models could be found that were viable within the local context in order to gain some degree of autonomy and to preserve experimental practices, both on the institutional and artistic level” (2018, p. 11). I related to her desire for the sustainability of local, self-organised arts entities, and it was reassuring to realise that the sustainability challenges in the KZN creative sector and at the KZNSA were not unique, and that research exists exploring these complexities. There are many valuable insights from interlocutors in her dissertation about the tensions between funding, aspirations for collaboration and experimental practice, and sustainability.

Sustainability is the basis of the study’s theoretical framework and the filter through which the case study is viewed. *Sustainability* is broadly understood as an entity that can maintain *energy*, with sufficient inputs to sustain outputs. An entity that cannot maintain *energy* tends towards *inertia*. If something has energy, it can sustain itself.

In this way, energy and inertia are presented as two subcategories of sustainability that interact and provide feedback to each other.



To begin with, the study looks at what constitutes financial sustainability in the creative economy of KZN, resulting in job security and sustainable livelihoods from creative work for practitioners, and Durban-based organisations being able to continue and grow their offerings. There are quite a few examples of organisations and institutions in Durban and KZN falling into inertia, including the African Art Centre, the Rorke's Drift ELC Arts and Craft Centre (between 1994 and 2006 and again between

2014 and 2021)⁹, the BAT Centre and the Durban Art Gallery. Why would their energy lapse? Why do they seem inert and will they ultimately cease to be?

In *VANPO Sustainability: The Impact of Requirements for Economic Sustainability on Visual Arts nonprofit Organisations in Johannesburg*, (2015) James French writes,

Since the 1990s financial supporters of South African nonprofit Organisations (NPOs) have increasingly stressed the need for the NPOs to become more sustainable. The white paper on arts and culture of 1996 emphasised the need for sustainable projects in which the State would ‘encourage self-sufficiency, sustainability and viability in the arts and culture’. Since the early 2000’s South African arts NPOs have been increasingly challenged to find ways to maintain their missions beyond the support of grantmakers.

Expectations for NPOs to be more sustainable regularly lacked contextual clarity. It has been left to NPOs, through their managers and directors, to find their own way to professionalize, monetise and sustain themselves, and somehow break the previous dependencies on grants without creating other dependencies. They also need to do this without compromising their constituencies, missions and legacies. Efforts to keep the visual arts NPOs (VANPOs) running have been hampered by the gradual but persistent withdrawal of international funding from post-apartheid South Africa. The international financial recession that has been present since 2008 has also contributed to difficulties experienced by VANPOs. While there seem to be numerous financial supporters for the arts, arts NPOs have complained that funding for the arts has been decreasing, and because of decreasing levels of art education, public support may also decrease (French, 2015, p. 7).

In a conversation with Malatsie, Khwezi Gule, the curator of the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) captures many of the challenges of the sector and laments that “independent spaces ... have to depend to some extent on funding from either funding bodies or corporate money and are essentially constantly living from hand-to-mouth” (Malatsie, 2018, p. 92). Gule also touches on a key constraint of public funding in the visual arts sector that negatively impacts recipients including the KZNSA, that is;

⁹ The Rorke's Drift ELC Arts and Craft Centre was established in 1962 by Swedish art graduates, Peder and Ulla Gowenuis and funded by the Church of Sweden Mission. It taught fine art, weaving, ceramics and textile printing. During apartheid it was one of two centres in South Africa offering tertiary art education to Black students. The fine art studio closed in 1982 with the weaving, ceramics and textile studios continuing to produce work to international audiences until a lull in 2010 when production slowed dramatically. In 2021, Edmund Tyler, the grandson of the former Director Princess Tyler, was appointed Director and production in the weaving, ceramics and textile printing studios has slowly restarted. On a visit in October 2023, there were trainees in their 20's and 30's learning alongside older master weavers (Ntombifuthi Sibisi) and ceramic artists (Elizabeth Mbatha and Gordon Mbatha) and a group of young people making work in the textile studio.

... (because) funding is geared towards projects, there is not enough money for institution-building or training of staff and there is a bias against long-term programmes as opposed to short-term projects ... (and) the admin burden increases accordingly (Gule in Malatsie, 2018, p. 91).

This hand-to-mouth existence plagues many South African cultural and community arts entities, has been a reality for the KZNSA in its past and continues to be a challenge. In an interview with Emmeline Young, Gallery Administrator at KZNSA 2009 to 2013, she repeated Gule's words;

It was quite hand to mouth. In fact, one of the reasons why I left was that more than once I had to be paid in two (tranches). Trevor [Moore] would call us in and say, 'We've run out of money, can we pay part of your salary now and the rest in the middle of the month?' So, it was literally out of Gloria's [Hoff]¹⁰ till into the salary bill (E. Young, interview, 28 August 2023).

Further reading adds dimensions to the concept of sustainability, and how current discourse addresses more than financial sustainability with insights that could be relevant to the creative sector's challenges.

In *Sustainable development – historical roots of the concept* (2006), Jacobus Du Pisani, Professor of History, School for Social and Government Studies at North-West University, South Africa traces the origins of the concept of sustainability, and cites that the idea has been in use for centuries, for example in ancient Egypt, and later with the word itself occurring in a French text on forestry in 1713.

The term 'sustainable development' was coined, probably by Barbara Ward, ... founder of the International Institute for Environment and Development ... and sustainability underpins many of the principles adopted in the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972 ... It was during the 1970's that the first non-governmental environmental organisations (NGOs) were founded, such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth and the term 'sustainability', a noun used in ecology to refer to a state or condition that can be maintained over an indefinite period of time, was introduced on a more regular basis than before into development discourses (Du Pisani, 2006, p. 91).

Realising that economic growth or 'development' and environmental conservation were at odds with each other, new thinking emerged about the limits to growth and the need for more complex strategies

¹⁰ Gloria Hoff founded what has become the KZNSA shop in 1986 when KZNSA was located in Overport City on the Berea. She has been part of the KZNSA team since then and, at the time of writing in March 2024, continues to work in the shop.

where the protection of resources for conservation and exploitation of resources for growth were interdependent. In 1987 the Brundtland Report proposed the term ‘sustainable development’ – “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Du Pisani, 2006, p. 83).

John Elkington developed the accounting framework term, the ‘triple bottom line’ (TBL or 3BL) in 1994 that spoke to equally valuing *People, Planet and Profit* in corporate strategy. Elkington’s TBL, adopted as ‘part of the business lexicon’¹¹, is a sustainability framework that aims to balance a company’s social, environment and economic impact.

Contemporary sustainability theorists such as South African Mark Swilling find TBL woefully inadequate in a reality where “‘deep-level ‘structural transformation’ is needed to achieve development and sustainability-oriented goals” (2020, p. 198) and that this “needs to be driven by a commitment to both the goals of human well-being and sustainability” (2020, p. 219). For Swilling, the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) in 2015 by the United Nations marks the start of the sustainability age – “a time of crisis and transition when contested interpretations of sustainability provide the coordinates for future imaginaries” (2020, p. 3).

In current sustainability theory, TBL’s *People Planet Profit* model is replaced with the ‘people-planet-prosperity-peace-partnership’ paradigm (Swilling, 2020, p. 218). In the end, Elkington agrees with Swilling that TBL allowed corporates to adopt a reductionist approach to sustainability – as long as they made token gestures to social causes and the environment, like carbon offsets, they could continue with an unsustainable use of resources in the pursuit of profit. Elkington himself revisited the theory in 2018 and commented:

TBL wasn’t designed to be just an accounting tool. It was supposed to provoke deeper thinking about capitalism and its future, but many early adopters understood the concept as a balancing act, adopting a trade-off mentality ...TBL’s stated goal from the outset was *system change* — pushing toward the transformation of capitalism (Elkington, 2018, p. 3, 4).

The success or failure of sustainability goals cannot be measured only in terms of profit and loss. It must also be measured in terms of the wellbeing of billions of people and the health of our planet ... (2018, p. 2).

¹¹ ‘A decade ago, *The Economist* was already signalling that the term had become part of the business lexicon’ (Elkington, 2018, p. 2).

In *The Age of Sustainability, Just Transitions in A Complex World* (2020), Swilling proposes “a ‘just transition’ through ‘radical incrementalism’ - a strategy for building post-capitalist commons - as an alternative to a belief in revolutionary ruptures, systemic collapses or over-optimistic modernising techno-fixes to ‘green’ the status quo” (Swilling, 2020, p. 7).

A just transition is a process of increasingly radical incremental changes that accumulate over time in the actually emergent transformed world envisaged by the SDGs and sustainability. The outcome is a state of well-being founded on greater environmental sustainability and social justice (including the eradication of poverty) (Swilling, 2020, p. 6).

For Swilling, only focussing on environmentally sustainable strategies could undermine the need for marginalised communities to shape their own solutions and the capacity of the state to step in when necessary. Individuals with greater wealth would benefit the most from sustainability efforts as they can insulate themselves in eco-friendly bubbles where they drive hybrid vehicles, buy organic products, and produce renewable energy on their properties. An emphasis on sustainability that overlooks broader social issues and equity rather than inclusive and transformative change will increase inequality. Holistic approaches that embrace social justice, economic empowerment, and inclusive governance are needed so that sustainability efforts are equitable and just for all members of society (Swilling, 2020, p. 197). ‘Radical incrementalism’ proposes the combination of two modes that, in business and sustainability studies, were historically considered to be mutually exclusive – radical change and incremental change. Instead of an either/or scenario, ‘radical incrementalism’ consciously pursues a radical goal by means of marginal, integrated and incremental process. This strategy is increasingly recognised as effective when needing change in large-scale systems that are stuck in irrelevant modes, as the KZNSA may be. It also allows the system to pay attention to and respond more adaptively to the feedback it gets along the way. In *How to Work a Great Mindshift for Sustainability Transformations* (2016), Maja Göpel writes:

Large-scale system transitions take time and are full of political battles and small steps. The actors that steer or influence a transition are, at the same time, part of it. Their freedom is a structured one, framed by the existing path dependencies. Here we find the basis for the concept ‘radical incremental transformations’: no deep and wide changes will happen without ... (a) build-up leading to frictions and crises that provide the space for them (Göpel, 2016, p. 29).

In addition to his advocacy of ‘radical incrementalism’, Swilling’s focus on inclusive bottom-up strategies echo those of participation theorists referenced later in the study. It’s possible that the creative sector can take inspiration from his proposal that “an integrated conception of structural transformation

... that is driven by a commitment to both the goals of human well-being and sustainability” can be drawn on when thinking about sustainability (Swilling, 2020, p. 219).

The role sustainability discourse plays in the research is to set out a framework for what may add energy to the KZNSA. By asking what is necessary for the KZNSA to be sustainable, and by inference how the KZN creative sector could be sustainable, the research looks into the complexity of these entities' needs. For the global north, the first response to questions about sustainability seems to be concerned with *environmental and ecological* issues. In under-resourced scenarios and regions like KZN, the response may start with *financial sustainability*. Finances are a critical factor in the KZNSA's current reality, and it seems they have been a challenge in play for many years of its existence. McMeekan reports that:

Another important aspiration of Marianne Meijer's Presidency 1982-1988 was to achieve fiscal stability. She was both historically and experientially aware of the NSA's financial struggle, so realised that economic security was of paramount importance. During the period of negotiations about building the new NSA complex, Meijer's questions invariably focussed on matters financial, and although at times misunderstood, her queries generally reflected concern for the protection of the economic viability of the Society (McMeekan, 2003, p. 32).

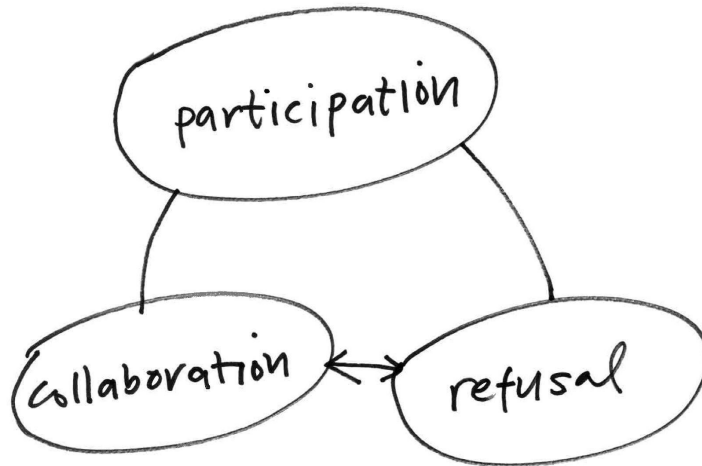
Similarly, arts journalist Peter Machen points out that a single reason (for the decline in the KZNSA after 2008) was “the failure of institutional support from local authorities and the money available to institutions” (P. Machen, interview, 6 October 2023).

By combining environmental sustainability and human well-being in his theory of sustainable transformation, Swilling offers an approach that acknowledges the agency of all participants in the system, whether resourced or not. Financial sustainability in the context of 'just transitions' goes far beyond economic growth for a few in a capitalist system to address economic disparity and propose a shift towards social justice and equal access to resources. The erasure of culture that often results from the commodification of craft and the loss of criticality in the 'art industry' in a capitalist economy solely focussed on growth, investment and capital undermines the human well-being Swilling proposes. Adopting the criteria of environmental sustainability along with human well-being (economic, social justice, communal – *and* cultural) provides a model that could energise the creative sector.

While looking at the initiatives of the case study, these aspects of sustainability will be revisited – financial, social justice, communal well-being, environmental and cultural, as will the strategy of 'radical incrementalism' in the KZNSA system.

1.4 Participation theory

In the same way that energy and inertia are referred to as subcategories of sustainability, *collaboration* and *refusal* are proposed as two subcategories of *participation*.



Tristan Claridge cites contemporary participation methodologies as being:

.. a move from the global, aspatial and top-down strategies that dominated early development initiatives to more locally sensitive methodologies. The importance of participation grew out of the recognition that the worlds' poor have ... suffered as a result of development, and that everyone needs to be involved in development decisions, implementation and benefits (Claridge, 2004, p. 17).

This bottom-up methodology reflects the shifts occurring in the fields of systems theory, sustainability and “the political and social dimension(s) of participation” (Bishop, 2006, p. 10).

Claire Bishop's books, *Participation, documents of contemporary art* (2006) and *Artificial hells: Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship* (2012) are a rich source of insight into the history and iterations of participatory art. In the former, Bishop cites Ranciere's essay, *The Emancipated Spectator* (2006), where he argues that;

The opposition of 'active' and 'passive' (participation) is riddled with presuppositions ... because the binary of active/passive always ends up dividing a population into those with capacity on one side, and those with incapacity on the other. As such, it is an allegory of inequality ... Spectatorship is not the passivity that has to be turned into activity. It is our normal

situation. We learn and teach, we act and know as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt (Ranciere cited in Bishop, 2006, p. 16).

This view of all participants (whether audience or ‘actors’) as having agency within a system is useful for the KZNSA. Ideally, the membership model provides a way for those less directly involved in the governance and operations of the organisation to be actors in a dynamic and interconnected community, as active participants in the system. Bishop goes on to look at the changing identity of the audience across the twentieth century and suggests that “artistic models of democracy have only a tenuous relationship to actual forms of democracy” (Bishop, 2012, p. 5). This study proposes collaboration as the iteration of this “artistic democracy”.

1.4.1 Collaboration

Collaboration as a form of participation has been the subject of many studies that, similar to my experience, and that of Molemo Moilola below, reflect its complexity. While in discussion with Malatsie, Moilola shares the challenges of the collaboration model on a project she is part of:

In a network compris(ing) 25 organisations from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia that (is) meant to be a non-hierarchical, self-organised ... aimed at shifting our ways of operating, our relationships to money and our relevance to our contexts, (we’re) recognising that we don’t have the capacity to be non-hierarchical and self-organised – we don’t have the skills of a ‘different paradigm’ required to make that desired ‘different paradigm’ ... to truly collaborate and make space for others (Moilola, as cited in Malatsie, 2018, p. 94).

The title of Meredith Brown and Michelle Millar Fisher’s compilation of essays; *Collaboration and its (dis)contents: Art, architecture, and photography since 1950* is telling. For Brown and Fisher “collaboration is complex, messy, time consuming, and often fraught. It is also generative, expansive, and creatively invigorating”, speaking to the energy that collaboration has the potential to add to a system (Brown & Fisher, 2017, p. 12).

In an essay titled *Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom* published in *Àsikò : On the future of artistic and curatorial pedagogies in Africa* (2017), Nigerian curator Bisi Silva writes on collaborative methodology of the Contemporary Centre for Art (CCA), Lagos Àsikò curatorial project. Here collaborative participation “eschews a ‘master’ teacher hierarchy in favour of a changing and diverse roster of facilitators and guest speakers who are invited less to ‘teach’ and more to share, exchange and, in turn, learn” (Silva, 2017, p. xvii). This learning mode echoes the value of all participants in a system as suggested by Ranciere.

South African curator Gabi Ngcobo refers to collaboration in numerous interviews throughout her career. In a 2018 interview with Aspasia Karras of the *Sunday Times*, she says:

I like a collaborative way of working - having a conversation both with the people I work with and the city. My art career since 2000 has been quite collaborative. When I was living in Durban I co-founded the Third Eye Vision Collective, and many projects done on my own and in my curatorial practice and as a lecturer at the Wits School of Arts have been collaborative, like the Centre for Historical Re-enactment and NGO Nothing gets Organised (Ngcobo, online, 2018).

In 2017 when speaking to the *Mail & Guardian* about her up-coming role as Berlin Biennale curator, Ngcobo says; "It is still early to speak about the structure [of the team I want to assemble], but I am interested in collaboration and having conversation partners" (Ngcobo, as cited in Sosibo, M&G online, 2017). Similarly, Sinethemba Twalo, Ngcobo's co-founder at NGO (Nothing Gets Organised) talks about their practice where they invite other people to collaborate with them. "NGO is about morphing into whatever is necessary at a particular time. We are weary of over-programmed spaces" (Twalo, as cited in Malatsie, 2018, p. 53).

In the KZNSA, there are historic moments, and also ongoing systemic modes of collaboration. The collaborative 'morphing' that Twalo refers to is evident in many of the initiatives undertaken at the KZNSA over the years. Some of these are successful and add energy and a resulting sustainability, such as the relationship between BUZZART (which is a shop project) and the gallery since 2000, and the interactions between members and the cafe since 2014. However, many collaborations over the years at KZNSA have not spoken across race, gender and class and the legacy of these limitations echoes throughout the KZN creative sector.

1.4.2 Refusal

Not all participation translates as collaboration. In the study, refusal is presented as a subcategory of participation, or, if you like, non-participation. Claridge's summary of participation theory above implies willing participants in a mode of collaboration, but this is not always the case. "Refusal occurs as a result of the limitations of the participatory impulse" (Claridge, 2006, p. 15).

Refusal in South Africa has its roots in the resistance movement of the apartheid struggle.

In *Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement* (2017), Leslie Anne Hadfield points to Mbulelo Mzamane's argument that "Black Consciousness effectively used culture as a form of affecting a black awakening and resisting white supremacy in an oppressive political climate" (Hadfield, 2017, p. 5).

And for Julian Murphet in *The Politics and Aesthetics of Refusal* (2007) edited by Caroline Hamilton, Michelle Kelly, Elaine Minor and Will Noonan;

So-called political “refusal” is most striking for the extent to which it is seen to emanate from an ethical injunction; hunger strikers, conscientious objectors, peace demonstrators, anti-capitalists, and so on, all variously construe their political praxis as a performative disengagement from ongoing processes because they are unethical. In this, they and their mode of praxis differ from those modalities grouped under other “r-words”—revolution, rebellion, riot, reaction, and resistance—all of which are defined in relation to a structure of power that is conceived directly politically, rather than ethically. There is no question, of course, about the extraordinary political salience of certain ethically motivated acts of refusal (Murphet, 2007, p. vii).

This study also references the work of the Practicing Refusal Collective, a group convened in the United States in 2015 by Tina Campt and Saidiya Hartman, based at Princeton and Columbia Universities respectively, and their proposal of forums, theory and institutions that refuse to operate within established western and Eurocentric frameworks, nor are intended to address white audiences. In *Black visibility and the practice of refusal, women & performance: A journal of feminist theory*, Campt writes:

The practice of refusal invoked in the collective’s name signals a rejection of the status quo as liveable. It is a refusal to recognize a social order that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible. It is a refusal to embrace the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented and to use negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise. The practice of refusal is a striving to create possibility in the face of negation (Campt, 2019, p. 25).

Campt comments on the work of artist and cinematographer, Arthur Jafa whose film piece, *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* (2016) intermingles images of black joy and trauma to portray American structural racism of the last hundred years.

What is most striking is how artists like Jafa are pushing their audiences to grapple with new forms of black visibility that deploy this unsettling visual archive in ways that force audiences to witness and reckon with contemporary assaults on blackness. In doing so, they mobilize a curatorial practice that refuses the authority of dominant visual regimes that seek to refuse blackness itself (Campt, 2019, p. 25).

In *Refusal – opening otherwise forms of research* (2023) Lena Gross, Sepandarmaz Mashreghi and Emma Söderman present the concept of refusal employed in their research methodologies, which involves;

... examining the history of research from non-Western perspectives that have been intertwined with processes of colonisation, exotification, and othering - an unfortunate trend that still persists today. Over the past two decades, much of the scholarship in the social sciences has focused on 'giving a voice' to marginalised individuals through narratives that depict their experiences of pain, struggle, and trauma. It is through this portrayal of pain and/or resistance against it that the subaltern is allowed partial subjectivity. These narratives of pain and struggle also serve to establish and validate the work conducted within the realms of social sciences and academia (Gross et al., 2023, p. 3).

At the same time, Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang argue that "refusal to engage, and to be defined, by the structures of violence and coloniality, makes spaces for other ways of being and existing to be theorised and practised" (Tuck & Yang as cited in Gross et al., 2023, p. 10).

There are interesting echoes, and potential precursors, of the American proposition of refusal from artists, curators and cultural theorists on the African continent. In 2013 Molemo Moiloa, former Director of VANSAs and a founding member of the collective MADEYOULOOK¹², introduced the concept of 'Practicing'. She describes it as "engaging different practices simultaneously in ways that contradict or make difficult our initial wider opinions - a compendium of sorts; but as a whole thing, not a sum of its parts" (Moiloa, 2013, p. 2). In *Practicing: A Few Notes on Curatorial Training in Africa* (2017) Nontobeko Ntombela comments that:

... such an approach locates the importance of learning from one's surroundings and compares this to the 'intimate knowledge' and 'evocation of lived experiences' that Njabulo Ndebele formulated in the 1980s. Given that in Africa curating is a fairly new form of career, it gives Africans an opportunity to write about their contributions in ways that evoke lived experiences in a true sense. This requires a quiet space that is not rushed or constantly disrupted by the need to be compared and contrasted against the West (Ntombela, 2017, pp. 174, 173).

Similar to Tuck and Yang, where the refusal to be defined by the structures of western realities makes space for other ways of being, "the act of 'Practicing' is employed by people who, through negation of discipline and separated communities of practice, become explorers of practice as a worthy action

¹² MADEYOULOOK is a Johannesburg based interdisciplinary artist collaborative between Molemo Moiloa and Nare Mokgotho (founded in 2009). The works of MADEYOULOOK take as their point of departure everyday black practices that have either been historically overlooked or deemed inconsequential. These works encourage a re-observation of and de-familiarisation with the everyday of urban South African life" (<http://www.made-you-look.net/about>). In 2023 MADEYOULOOK were announced as the artists for the South African pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2024.

and an occupation in itself” (Moilola, 2013, p. 2). Here, negation is an iteration of refusal, and resembles the principles of the Practicing Refusal Collective where “negation (is used) as a generative and creative source of disorderly power” (Campt, 2019, p. 25).

Moilola’s thinking on Practicing is prompted by the question:

If we are to develop novel ways of creating new relationships, where are we to start? If the intention is to create new relationships in which we determine our own narratives and prescribe the terms of the discussion, by what frames might we do that? One year out of art school, Nare Mokgotho – the other half of the MADEYOULOOK collaboration – became obsessed with ‘unlearning’. We were both raised on the super-urbanised edges of the inner city of Johannesburg, part of a minority of brown skinned professionals in the visual arts, and steadily less able and less interested in ignoring the specific social realities of our immediate environment. But there is also perhaps a specificity to the experience of the post-colonised, urbanised individual that means that she must necessarily *practice* in a way that negotiates and reflects on the politics of her time (Moilola, 2013, p. 2).

This study argues that refusal can add energy to a system. In Gross *et al.*, Simpson agrees that “refusal is used and theorised as a generative act that has methodological, ethical, political, and theoretical implications. It, therefore, ‘thickens’ rather than ‘thins’ ... and engages rather than avoids” (Simpson, cited in Gross et al., 2023, p. 3). Refusal is a “redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned” and “has the power to create community” as is evident in the examples of counterculture in Durban explored in Chapter 2 (Gross et al., 2023, p. 4; McGranahan 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 239).

Gabi Ngcobo is as vocal about refusal as collaboration and this apparent contradiction is a powerful reminder of the way in which collaboration and refusal can intersect and create feedback loops between each other within a system. In Kabelo Malatsie’s paper on autonomy and self-organisation in the South African creative sector, Ngcobo speaks about the Centre for Historical Re-enactment (CHR) project:

We want to be determined by things that relate to that negation or refusal or embracing something else or a space of doubt, a space of mixed feelings, a space of uncertainty... (Ngcobo, as cited in Malatsie, 2018, p. 22).

Similarly, Ngcobo says; “when you look at the history of CHR you can see that we are looking at the environment where we were but also responding to things like funding. We really had to stop and say **‘no, thank you, we’re not ...** (bold my own emphasis)” (Ngcobo, as cited in Malatsie, 2018, p. 20).

The theoretical framework of the study includes an exploration of modes of *participation*, whether *collaboration* or *refusal* and the resulting *energy* or *inertia* they may bring to a scenario. It looks at how these could build on the latent talent and the tendency towards innovation found in KZN, and how they may contribute towards *sustainability*. The case study, the KZNSA, is used to illustrate how incidents of collaboration and refusal in its ecosystem have impacted its sustainability.

In the study, *participation* refers to the ways people take part (*collaboration*), or opt not to take part (*refusal*).

In development studies, the importance of participation grew out of the recognition that everyone needs to be involved in ... decisions, implementation and benefits ... But this implies willing participants in a mode of collaboration that sceptics argue places unrealistic demands on people, with more pressing demands on their time, or no interest in the agenda of the ‘collaborators’ (Claridge, 2004).

Collaboration implies a willingness to participate and, counter to this, refusal denotes an unwillingness to participate. *What relationship do collaboration and refusal have to sustainability?* There are people or entities whose identity is structured around their autonomy and who refuse to work with other entities in the local creative sector. In the study, refusal refers to the intent to not participate in forums and institutions that are viewed as unable to accommodate, or are irrelevant to, participants, and is presented as a version of participation with its own energy or inertia. Some that have refused participation are thriving and energised, and this proposes an alternative model of sustainability.

This study goes on to explore how acts of refusal within the case study have energised its programme and improved its sustainability, while others have compromised sustainability. But before this is introduced, the study reflects on the immediate context of the KZNSA, how the institution has inspired refusals in the local arts community and how these have in turn impacted the KZNSA’s sustainability.

CHAPTER 2

The case study and its environment

Chapter 2 presents the environment and organisational structure in which the case study exists. As mentioned in the introduction, the KZNSA is a visual arts nonprofit organisation based in Durban, South Africa. It was founded in 1905 as a Society in which artists could commune – exhibitions are its core activity and the gallery is its reason for being. Also within the ecosystem of the organisation are the craft shop and the cafe. Before introducing the operating divisions of the KZNSA, the gallery, shop and cafe, it's necessary to contextualise the environment in which these activities happen and their significance to the identity of the organisation. This chapter looks at the nature of its institutional positionality within the local visual arts and crafts creative sector, at the precinct and building in which the KZNSA is located, and at the KZNSA's member-based governance structure.

The aim of the study is to employ a *systems approach* that explores the dynamic and fluid inter-relatedness of the divisions and their projects, the impact of collaboration and refusal in these and the resulting energy or inertia.

2.1. What makes an institution?

In order to speak about the KZNSA as an institution and the impact of its policies and practices on the creative sector, it is helpful to refer to literature and commentary on what defines an institution, and garner an understanding of views on them. According to Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen,

... institutions are in the most general sense building blocks of social order: they represent socially sanctioned, that is, collectively enforced expectations with respect to the behavior of specific categories of actors or to the performance of certain activities. Typically, they involve mutually related rights and obligations for actors (Streeck & Thelen, 2005, p. 9).

Levitsky & Murillo also claim that institutional strength depends on two factors: stability and enforcement:

An unstable, unenforced institution is one where weak rules are ignored and actors are unable to make expectations based on their behavior. In a weak institution, actors cannot depend on

one another to act according to the rules, which creates barriers to collective action and collaboration (Levitsky & Murillo, 2009, p. 115).

This implies that a functional institution has, or should have, the ideal conditions for collaboration. Malatsi offers a more nuanced view on institutions and their potential to contribute to experimental practice. With regards to the tension between institutional protocols and experimental practice, she goes on to say:

My interest, however, is not to villainise external funders, but to encourage institutional autonomy as a moment where temporary autonomy can enable experimentation on the artistic level as well on the institutional models rooted in the local context. So, the experimentation is both on the institutional model as well as the artistic level (Malatsie, 2018, p. 12).

Arts institutions play a crucial role in validating artists by means of publications, exhibitions, collections or sales and as such need to be accountable for their agency in the trajectory of an artist or project. In many cases, a lack of validation, or overt invalidation, leads to inertia and/or refusal. When reflecting on the role of KZNSA as an institution of validation in KZN, it's interesting to speak about the collaborations with, and refusals of, others in the broader ecosystem of KZN.

It is also valuable to revisit the evolution of the KZNSA's positionality within the sector by laying out key moments in its history. In *Art and Architecture in Natal 1910-1940*, Hillebrand details the founding of the Natal Society of Artists by "Victorian stalwart" Cathcart William Methven, who had already been instrumental in creation of the Durban Art Gallery and was the Chairman of its Committee. According to Hillebrand, "in 1907 (sic) he, and a small number of fellow artists, founded the Natal Society of Artists" (1986, p. 26).

At the opening of their first annual exhibition on 16 December 1907 Methven outlined their ambitions: For a long time, it had been felt that they ought to have some sort of organisation in the Colony as a sort of centre for the propogation (sic) and encouragement of the arts of painting and sculpture, because up to the present that had been done more or less in a haphazard sort of way. The Colony had had exhibitions, to which paintings had been contributed by many throughout the Colony, but these exhibitions had not always been organised quite on the lines of the more ambitious exhibitions which they had at Home, where a good deal of discrimination had to be used in order to keep up the standard of the work (Methven in Hillebrand, 1986, p. 19).

There are opposing dates of founding in the archive – Hillebrand’s account has the founding year and first Members’ Exhibition in 1907. However, a KZNSA catalogue from the Annual Members’ Exhibition in 1926 is titled, *Twenty-first Annual Exhibition 1926* meaning, by deduction, that the first exhibition occurred in 1905. Other evidence supporting 1905 being the more commonly accepted date of founding is a book published by the KZNSA in 2005 to commemorate 100 years of existence titled *KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts: A community of artists*. McMeekan (2003) goes on to provide a concise history of the institutional modes and names of the associations at the time.

The earliest documented South African art group, constituted in 1851, was named the ‘SA Fine Arts Society’ and eventually reconstituted into the ‘SA Association of Arts’ some fifty years later (1945). The next, established in 1889, was the South African Drawing Club which, it appears, was absorbed into the ‘SA Society of Artists’ (SASA) in 1902. This organisation (SASA) then affiliated to the SA Association of Arts (SAAA) in 1945 and became known as the SA Association of Arts (Western Cape), arguably the oldest remaining art organisation in South Africa. The Natal Society of Arts (formed 1905) is therefore the second oldest, and the oldest still retaining its original name (p. 20).

It is difficult to say exactly when the KZNSA evolved from a self-organised collective into an institution, and at what point the colonial gentlemen’s club became an established entity which the creative practitioners who were excluded needed to counter. The very founding of the KZNSA, by the role players who did so, may have automatically made it so. In its colonial era, the Society excluded the participation of indigenous South Africans, and during apartheid from 1945 to 1994 the exclusion of Black South Africans was legislated by the state. Going over minutes from 1961 to 1989 there are only two Black people on Council: Omar Badsha in the 1970s and Robin Moodley in the 1980s. This absence of Black participation in leadership and in artist representation has left an enduring distrust of the organisation within the artist community of the province. In a 2017 conversation Mario Pissarra asks veteran artist Zamani Makhanya, “So what is it that an organisation like KZNSA can’t offer you, that you feel the need for an alternative network?” and he replies, “It needs to transform first and gain trust from people like us. We’ve been marginalised here for a long time. We do exhibit here, but there’s still that thing that we don’t belong here” (As cited in Pissarra, 2018, p. 20). Moilola (2013) asks, “regardless of who *we* are, or if there even is an *us*, can an engaged and relevant practice exist not constrained by the limitations of an unengaged and now irrelevant tradition? (p. 1) It is clear that the KZNSA became disengaged and irrelevant, and that from the start it excluded certain individuals, sectors and entire race groups, some of whom actioned their own alternatives over the decades that followed. “Alternatives, I think, are things we search for. And increasingly, we are part of a growing whole. A whole that *needs* alternatives” (Moilola as cited in Malatsie, 2013, p. 2).

2.2. Counters to the KZNSA institution

There are some interesting examples of the alternatives Moilola refers to that have formed in Durban from the 1990s to present. In varying ways, these independent entities have stated their positionality as in reaction to, or as a counter to, the NSA / KZNSA and in response to their frustrations with, and distrust of, the institution. They include *The FLAT Gallery* in the 1990s, *Third Eye Vision Collective* in the 2000s, the *amaSosha Art Movement* 2014 to the present, and a wave of early career self-proclaimed ‘independent artists’ from 2010. In these spaces there is the phenomenon of;

... renegotiating power but not denying it, a succumbing to limitations and a mediation of them, an inherent freedom in difference and a direct embedding and embracing of sameness or commonness. These are our contemporary alternatives, and the spaces in which we are able to change (Moilola, 2013, p. 2).

This study proposes that refusal can add energy to a system and when viewing the context in which the KZNSA has operated since 1990, it is possible that resistance to the KZNSA in the form of independent and self-organised visual art initiatives created pockets of energy that in themselves challenged and re-energised the institution.

2.2.1 *The FLAT Gallery*

The FLAT Gallery, an informal space established in 1993 (and disbanding in 1995) by then Fine Art students at Technikon Natal was developed by emerging artists feeling “institutional neglect, and discontent toward the commercial galleries’ preoccupation with object and profit” (Allen, 1999). In *THE FLAT GALLERY, A Documentation and Critical Examination of An Informal Art Organisation in Durban*, Siemon Allen (1999) comments on their founding motivations:

Born out of a growing dissatisfaction with the limitations of the existing art scene in Durban and the need to take a more proactive approach in creating exhibition opportunities, the FLAT became a site for exhibitions, performances, multi-media ‘events’, as well as a place for a broad range of creative exchanges. Running parallel to the political developments in South Africa that led to the historical elections of April 1994, the FLAT Gallery boasted 32 exhibitions/events over a period of 16 months, bringing a vital ‘alternative’ voice to the cultural climate of Durban. Young artists, students, recent graduates, as well as established artists and those working outside of institutions were all given the opportunity to participate and all came to explore their

work in ways that might not otherwise have been possible in the limited or more restricted conditions that existed in the region's few established venues (p. 1).

Initiated by the then occupants, Ledelle Moe, Thomas Dry Barry and Siemon Allen, the FLAT operated out of a second story apartment in Mansfield Road (now Steve Biko Road) and cultivated an inner-city context for Durban's avant-garde.

'We needed a site for inter-disciplinary activity to combat Durban's overwhelming apathy in the arts', says Moe. This tough militaristic description is sharply contrasted by the more elusive Barry who says: 'We actually just wanted anything to happen' (Allen, 1999, p. 305).

Sculptor Etienne De Kock exhibited at the FLAT Gallery in April 1994. He speaks to choosing to be free of the institutional identity and "political" baggage that the KZ(NSA) embodied at the time:

I just felt like with the NSA, I just could not exhibit ... the NSA has a political structure; the whole point is that you have to buy into that if you are going to exhibit there. Do you buy into that? I was very glad to exhibit at the FLAT Gallery because I didn't have to buy into anything. I could just deal with the space, you know. There was nothing attached to it (de Kock as cited in Allen, 1999, p. 160).

This study argues that incidents of refusal can add energy to the system, and positively impact sustainability. By creating alternatives to institutions that had not been relevant to artists, or had failed them, artists "embraced practices that (defied) definition" and that, in turn, went on to energise the institutions that were countering (Allen, 1999, p. 227). In an exhibition opening speech in 1994, Mike McMeekan who was the president of the KZNSA at the time cites the FLAT Gallery as instrumental in generating new art works and modes of creative practice in Durban. Inspired by the energy created by the project, he went on to invite Allen, Moe and Barry to create a small space at the new KZNSA building in Glenwood. This did not materialise as by the time the building was completed in 1996 the collective had disbanded and most of its members had left Durban. Even so, it is clear that the FLAT's practice was influential and inspired the KZNSA to recognise that it needed to embrace a 'non institutional' and more experimental approach to programming.

2.2.2. Third Eye Vision Collective

Zamani Makhanya recalls his participation in the formation of Third Eye Vision, a collective that was active in Durban in the early 2000s:

You remember Crart Art Studios in Crart Avenue? So, it was just a coincidence that me and Sfiso (ka-Mkhame) visited Gabi Ngcobo there. We started going there every day. Then young artists started coming there from the Technikon – Khwezi Gule, Thando Mama, Langa Magwa, Zama Dunywa, lots of them and we formed another collective called Third Eye Vision. We don't see each other often because people moved to other provinces but that spirit is still there ... And it came as a need, like you say, there'll always be a need to organise each other (Z. Makhanya as cited in Pissarra, 2018, p. 20).

In an interview with Storm Janse van Rensburg, the former Curator of the KZNSA, he says;

I remember that Gabi (Ngcobo) was very specifically articulating a need for space that was outside of Durban's white art world. It was a very clear articulation around the resistance to, and also a gesture towards, Black representation in this space, or the lack of it. That was an issue during my time (at the KZNSA). We worked very hard on representation, but there were not any Council members of colour at the time I was there. Nathi (Gumede) was assistant curator, but he was the only Black person ... (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

In an interview with Carol Brown, the Director at DAG 1980 to 2006, she recalls reaching out to Khwezi Gule who had been a member of Third Eye Vision Collective for input towards a catalogue text relating to the collective. The request was met with an opacity that denied access. Out of respect for Gule's refusal, I refer to the Third Eye Vision initiative as an additional example of artists in Durban refusing the KZNSA but step away from any further telling of their story.

2.2.3. amaSosha Art Movement

In the judges' citation for the 2019 KZNSA Members' Exhibition, curator Gabi Ngcobo mentions and "commends the many young artists in (the city of Durban who) have set up their own platforms of self-validation, which in turn compliments, if not unsettles the power dynamics" (online, 2019)¹³. In this citation Ngcobo celebrated the amaSosha Art Movement, an artists' collective that was formed in 2014. amaSosha have remained independent of existing gallery and museum validation, refusing participation in exhibitions at the KZNSA and for their work to be acquired by DAG. Zamani Makhanya recalls how they came about – "At the BAT centre we found these boys, they were young and they didn't know anything about art. Then it was Mthobisi [Maphumulo], uSthenjwa Luthuli, uWonder [Buhle],

¹³ <https://www.kznsagallery.co.za/News/Read/446/members-exhibition-2019-judge-s-comments-winners>

Sphephelo [Mnguni] and others. There was a class of about 14 youngsters. We taught them, we organised workshops, we called Gabi Ngcobo to come down and show them videos. So we really shaped their careers, we were teaching them for six months” (Z. Makhanya, as cited in Pissarra, 2018, p. 24). Another veteran KZN artist, Thami Jali, is an ongoing mentor to the collective and they hold regular training workshops, screenings, residencies and exhibitions accessible to artists and members of the collective. According to Jali:

It’s about being organised; I don’t want to say Natal is the most disorganised province. But I feel that collectives have a better chance of achieving things and networking. You need to network all the time as artists. I’m not sure if whatever happens needs to be political, I really believe in people forming themselves into some kind of group. Look at Amasosha, they are doing what should be happening. You open up your opportunities, your chances, that is why networking is very important. Things become difficult if people think as individuals. Now I find myself working closely with Amasosha. I see this guy (the founder, Mthobisi Maphumulo), I mean those boys are making headway because they know how to use the information that is in front of them, they are beginning to exhibit all over the world (T. Jali, as cited in Pissarra, 2018, p. 20).

Madison Paulk¹⁴ whose dissertation focuses on the amaSosha collective refers to their distrust of institutions in Durban and their refusals to engage with them. Paulk’s research explores “how kinship within these collective spaces is necessary to the sustainability of the arts in Durban. And to also create opportunities for artists to want to stay in Durban as opposed to it just being a launching pad to Joburg or Cape Town” (M. Paulk, interview, 2023).

2.2.4. #Independent artists

According to Brown & Fisher (2017), “humanities disciplines still privilege individual research and authorship and.. produce scholars geared toward working in silos” (p. 12). In the introduction I mentioned the lament that Durban’s creative scene is siloed. I have found this to be true but this does not always make it a negative for the sector. There are notable artists, employing the hashtag #independentartist on social media while building their careers who have contributed significant energy to the local creative economy. Solo artists, Wonder Buhle Mbambo and Sthenjwa Luthuli, have worked

¹⁴ Paulk is a PhD candidate at Brown University in the Department of Anthropology whose dissertation focuses on the amaSosha Collective.

with the KZNSA in the past but intentionally forged their careers outside of a gallery model¹⁵. Wonder Buhle was scheduled to mount his first solo at KZNSA in 2018 but pulled out and moved it to the municipal museum, DAG, to ensure his independence from a gallery. He has gone on to establish a successful commercial practice earning over a million rand from the sale of a work in 2021. Given his choice to keep his studio in his hometown of Durban, there is no doubt that Mbambo's success will energise the local creative economy with knock-on income to assistants, suppliers and artists in his network.

In Malatsie's conversations with self-organised practitioners there are numerous references to their positionality to institutions, with Curator Gabi Ngcobo sharing:

In both the Center for Historical Reenactments (CHR) and Nothing Gets Organised (NGO) there's a resistance of sorts to being an institution, but of course we do have to define 'institution' and what we mean by the term. CHR, for example, was an experiment on institutionality, so the whole project can be thought of as an artwork rather than an institution (2018, p. 17).

The spaces of counterculture in Durban – The FLAT Gallery, Third Eye Vision, amaSosha Art Movement, and the independent artists - are feedback loops of refusal responding to the position of the KZNSA as a space of institutional power. They reflect a healthy system in which an entity that may have been centred and stifling inadvertently stimulates self-organised, autonomous initiatives. These incidents and initiatives of refusal have contributed enormously to the energy of the creative ecosystem in KZN and are powerful examples of how refusal contributes to sustainability.

2.2 The building

¹⁵ The gallery model refers to the contractual agreements between artists and galleries. In a commercial gallery, it is common for artists to be required to sign exclusivity agreements consigning any work made for the duration of the agreement to the gallery, giving that gallery sole rights to represent the artist and sell their work. Artists may also have to agree to generate a certain amount of work within agreed timelines to create stock for the gallery to sell. In commercial galleries, it is common for the gallery to earn 50% of the sale as commission. In exchange, the gallery is responsible for cataloguing the work, exhibiting and promoting it in exhibitions and, if possible, art fairs, and engaging collectors to ensure sales. The gallery also contributes to the critique of work in progress and to creating critical writing about the artist's practice. The gallery builds relationships with art critics who review exhibitions and publish articles for the press and/or academia. In a nonprofit gallery like the KZNSA, the gallery earns 30-40% commission with the artist receiving 70-60%. There are no lifetime exclusivity agreements but, in some cases, the KZNSA asks for exclusive representation of a particular body of work for up to one year in order to list it online and promote it beyond an exhibition duration of three to four weeks.

Since its inception in 1905 the Society rented various spaces in Durban for their operations. Initially they took space for their Annual Members' Exhibition once a year and then in 1964 established their first gallery on Hermitage Lane for exhibitions all year round. In 1969 they moved the gallery into the YMCA building nearby on the Esplanade, from 1973 to 1982 rented space in a high rise building at 320 West Street (now Pixley Kaseme Street) in the inner city, and from 1982 to 1996 were located at Overport City, a shopping centre on the Berea. As early as 1977 the KZNSA Council set the intention to have their own premises. Marianne Meijer, who was President of KZNSA from 1982 to 1985, is quoted as saying that "the one thing, which is still not resolved, is the establishment of a permanent home, and not until this aim is achieved should this council rest!" (McMeekan, 2003, p. 32). Finding the right premises for a permanent home was Meijer's passion project, starting from when she first joined Council in 1977 and continuing beyond her years in office. This responsibility was central to her presidency and she raised funds, reviewed numerous proposals, engaged in negotiations with property owners, and lobbied City Councillors. Meijer was instrumental in advancing the KZNSA's goal and the subsequent acquisition of premises in Bulwer Park (McMeekan, 2003).

In 1995, the KZNSA Council secured a thirty-year lease on a plot owned by the eThekweni Parks Department on the border of Bulwer Park in Glenwood, and raised funds to build their own premises. They elected to make the design of the building a competition with an international call-out for submissions from architects who had lived or resided in KZN, to ensure that the submission would factor in the hot and humid climatic conditions of the region. The brief was for a community art gallery that would encourage and promote young artists and create a vibrant and stimulating environment in which to exhibit work from around South Africa. The project called for collaboration with local artists who made up the client body. The success of the project depended on a building that achieved maximum flexibility within a very limited budget and a detailed understanding of the local climate.

The objective of the complex was, among other things, to provide the public with a facility to identify with and an exhibition space where they might appreciate the wealth and variety of visual art and design available in Natal (McMeekan, 2003, p. 46).

The winning submission for the building in which KZNSA now resides was designed by Cindy Walters and Michal Cohen who graduated from the School of Architecture at University of Durban, Natal (now UKZN) in 1988 and who went on to establish Walters & Cohen in London in 1994, a RIBA award-winning architectural practice. Just before building completion in 1996, with a limited construction budget of under R1m, it was decided that the complex should have a cafe, and areas designed as storerooms for the gallery and shop were converted into the cafe kitchen. On the other side of the building to the cafe kitchen (and hijacked storeroom) is a space now called the Media Gallery. It has been a darkroom, a curator's office, a multimedia gallery for the 2002–2006 chapter of the KZNSA

Young Artists' Project, a workshop space and then in early 2019 converted to a formal media gallery. However, the ongoing shortage of storage space means this is the default place for artwork crates, gallery props and maintenance projects, and the Media Gallery slides between public and private, empty and congested on a regular basis. This oscillation between energy and inertia is a powerful embodiment of the status of the KZNSA.

The shortage of storage space remains a problem years later, as does drainage and flooding during heavy rains. The open tops of interior walls and the timber slat wall on the north elevation of the building mean it is impossible to manage dust, temperature and humidity in the galleries. This lack of climate control for artworks has led to the KZNSA being unable to loan any works from collections that require preservation protocols, and requires a great deal of extra care and dusting for all other works installed in the galleries. Unfortunately, these issues cannot be overcome without radical structural alterations that are currently not financially viable.

The precinct of Glenwood that the organisation is located in is also experiencing a downturn, and there are noticeable signs of municipal neglect and urban decay. As with Johannesburg, business and investment has migrated north – to Umhlanga, Umdloti and Ballito. In 2022, a high profile, high earning event booked at the gallery was cancelled when the client made a preliminary site visit. Their reason for cancelling was – “love the building, but the area is crummy”. Security has also become a concern with KZNSA experiencing seven major break ins from 2020 to 2022 and an untold amount of copper theft and vandalism. During the 2021 civil unrest, Glenwood was particularly hard-hit with numerous retailers (two across the road from the gallery) looted and gutted. All these factors discourage visitors from travelling to the complex, and tourist visits seem to have also decreased. Durban itself is experiencing a decline in tourism spending, with an eNCA report citing a 40% decrease in visitors during the 2023 festive season compared to the previous year (Zikhali, 2023, online).

Having shared the detractions resulting from aspects of the construction of the building, as an occupant it is important to record the successes of the design. As with all great design, its pared-down simplicity allows for complexity and flexibility, and for infinite ways in which to mount installations in the space. The interaction between the Main Gallery and the Mezzanine Gallery in the same volume provides the opportunity to play with double volume and single volume heights, looking up and overlooking, constructing smaller contained spaces under the mezzanine or working with one vast expanse; one holistic presentation on both levels or two separate installations on each, etc. The stand-alone Park Gallery provides space for another chapter of a large exhibition using all the galleries, or a separate autonomous exhibition. Similarly, the Media Gallery can be an extension of a large exhibition in the other galleries or an unrelated screening, digital or media work that needs its own presentation.

While the design of the KZNSA galleries provides the space for experimental practice, the high overheads of maintaining the building and covering the utilities of this much larger facility simultaneously compromises experimental practice due to the organisation needing to generate income for these costs. Experimental art initiatives like The FLAT Gallery and Third Eye Vision Collective were located in small communal living spaces with relatively low costs, allowing them to be nimble, autonomous and responsive. The tension between commerce and experimentation is highlighted in this example – the KZNSA must prioritise income, often at the expense of experimental projects that don't guarantee income. As it stands, the KZNSA struggles with the costs of managing its facility, and it begs the question of why an organisation that struggled to generate income from art sales at its previous premises opted for a much larger one with significantly higher expenses. This move set in motion the sustainability issues the organisation now faces, and McMeekan's paper documenting this transition does not mention the development of a business plan to support the expansion. He does, however, speak to members of Council being concerned about sustaining the future site:

Meijer's motivation and vision contributed significantly to the development of the Society and in particular during her terms as President, she ... set the foundations in place for the Society to achieve its goal of a permanent home ... However, some 10 years later when the Society's dream of a permanent home was about to be realised, Meijer's apprehensions regarding the financial implications to the NSA caused her to become one of the more reluctant of the committee members. The minutes reflect Meijer's anxieties, which were expressed from the beginning of the project 1994 through 1995 and right up to completion of the building in 1996 (McMeekan, 2003, p. 33).

Many of the NSA's Committee members were unconvinced of the financial viability of the project. When this complication was added to the pressures associated with an extended period of uncertainty in terms of Municipal leasehold, negotiations with various bureaucracies in acquiring licences, authorisations and the normal tensions involved in the building of a multi-million-rand complex, plus the necessity of a fundraising number and substantial bank loan, it caused tempers to fray and on one occasion at least, the manifestation of inappropriate behaviour (2003, p. 46).

The reference to uncertainty about the leasehold in the 1990s is also relevant as this has resurfaced as concern for the organisation. In 1995 a thirty-year lease would have seemed 'permanent' but as the expiry date of the lease looms in 2025, this is less certain. KZNSA is in the process of applying to renew its lease with eThekweni Real Estate. Given the protracted two-year process to amend a clause in the lease in 2015 and incidents where long standing tenants on municipal property have not had their leases

extended, such as Durban Funworld¹⁶, a 75-year-old amusement park on the beachfront, it cannot be assumed that this will happen.

When the organisation occupied their new building, they also realised that its accounting, administration and HR systems were inadequate for the greater scope of work:

After Chandler was once again elected President of the NSA in 1996, one of his first tasks was to initiate reforms within the administrative systems of the NSA, because of complexities and problems, which had surfaced in the management of the new centre. Minor problems, which had surfaced at the restructuring of (administrative systems) at Overport City assumed brobdingnagian proportions due to the enormous increase of activities at the NSA's new centre. Administrative and financial concerns had begun to supersede issues of management at the NSA meetings... (McMeekan, 2003, p. 41).

However, while there were anxieties in the transition to the new complex, the move was widely celebrated as a triumph with journalist Ingrid Shevlin publishing an article titled, *A Ninety One Year Wait Ends!* in the June 1996 edition of *Newsart*:

In his opening speech Dr Ben Ngubane applauded the NSA's initiative in generating its own funds for the new centre, a building intended mainly to be favourable to creativity and which has ended up being a landmark. "The Government" he warned "simply does not have the resources to fund all the worthy cultural initiatives and projects that apply to it for funding. The NSA serves as an example to other cultural organisations to find ways to sustain themselves, and to ensure their longevity. The centre reflects the role the private individuals can play as patrons of the art as well as the role of the private sector in making it happen (Shevlin, 1996, as cited in McMeekan, 2003, p. 47).

At the time of its design and construction, the building embodied a sense of hope and possibility for artists and creative practitioners in Durban. This was to be a spacious complex with four exhibition galleries and an inclusive exhibition programme that would cater to a far wider creative community

¹⁶ In a 7 April 2023 News24 article written by Nkosikhona Duma titled, *'Depressing': Durban's beachfront amusement park to close after 75 years*, it was reported that the popular Durban beachfront "Funworld" was closing. The owner cited the main reason for the closure as eThekweni Municipality Real Estate failing to renew the lease for the business since 2016. 'Steyn claimed, "the refusal" by the eThekweni municipality to lease the land to a potential buyer had led to his decision to put "the amusement rides, attractions and other assets up for auction online from 20 April".' <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/depressing-durbans-beachfront-amusement-park-to-close-after-75-years-20230407>

needing space for their work to be shown. A Black Fine Art student at Technikon Natal¹⁷ in 1995 recalls her lecturer, Jeff Chandler, also a practising artist and a member of the KZNSA Council, announcing to the class that this new gallery was “their space, being built for them”. This promise, and the failure of the organisation to deliver on it, haunts the KZNSA to this day.

2.3 Membership

What does it mean to be a Member at KZNSA? For a certain subscription rate, someone can join the Society and become a member. Currently the organisation attracts new members with the following material benefits – eligibility to submit work to the annual KZNSA Members’ Award (with cash prizes for three places), access to KZNSA special events and activities, a 10% discount at the Arts Cafe, 10% off KZNSA workshops, voting on KZNSA matters at the AGM, eligibility to stand as a KZNSA Council member, and a complimentary glass of wine or juice at selected exhibition openings.

In this model, members are the de facto owners of the organisation. Members nominate and elect a Council who operate as the board of the organisation, ensuring good governance and strategic imperatives. The organisation is governed by its constitution; the current version was last amended in 2018, but remains almost identical to the one formulated in 1995 that drew its inspiration from that of arts organisation, Thupelo¹⁸. Council is made up of six to twelve people who are nominated by members. The Executive Committee (ExCo) is made up of office bearers, namely, the President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. Office bearers are voted in every year, with a maximum term of three years for the role of President. ExCo appoints staff who form the operations team and the Director, who is head of operations, sits on Council (the full board) and also on ExCo (the office bearers) as an ex-officio member.

This complex organisational model presents many challenges in current contexts. Council members serve on the board as non-remunerated volunteers for renewable periods of two years and must hold meetings a minimum of six times a year. Due to their full-time commitments and income being elsewhere and their minimal engagement with the operational realities of the organisation, their input

¹⁷ In April 2002, two technikons, the ML Sultan Technikon and Technikon Natal were merged to form the Durban Institute of Technology which became the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in 2007.

¹⁸ “The Thupelo workshops were initiated in 1985 in Johannesburg by the South African artist, David Nthubu Koloane, together with William ‘Bill’ Ainslee and a group of artists. Koloane had been a participant in the first Triangle Network artists’ workshop in New York in 1982 and based Thupelo on a similar approach of the artists run workshop. South Africa had gone into a state of emergency and facilities and resources were not offered to Black artists on both educational and professional levels. The workshops aimed to address and make artworks that dealt with the current socio-political climate that affected South Africa and the impact it had on Black artists.” (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/thupelo-1985>)

is occasional and often misinformed. In the last ten years, most Council members have served two to four years with some falling away in the first year. This is in contrast to the role of Council in the past that can be determined from meeting minutes covering 1961 to 1996 and from the accounts given in McMeekan's thesis. It is clear that in the past the Council was integrally involved in management and operational matters, and directly contributed to financial administration and to running the exhibition programme. There were also stalwart members who served on Council for extended periods, such as Marianne Meijer who was on Council for over 20 years and attended every AGM for 50 years from 1969 until 2019 (a year before her passing in 2020), who provided institutional memory and context to challenges. In a conversation with Robin Moodley who served on Council from 1986-1988 and was elected onto Council again in September 2023, he reflects on Council engagement then. For Moodley, a factor impacting Council in the 1980s was the interconnected relationship between the Natal Technikon Fine Art department (now DUT) and the then NSA as the Fine Art teaching staff were also the leadership on Council at the time.

Firstly, the entire focus and celebration of uncompromised art that flowed to the (Fine Art) student body then was influenced by the passion that the lecturers carried. All of them. They (Jeff Chandler, Virginia MacKenny, Clive van den Berg and Andries Botha) were involved in the NSA gallery space. And then they were involved in the dynamic life of the students ... they were really invested in teaching and open relationships of trust and vulnerability in teaching. But the point I want to make is that because these lecturers were invested, they created an almost a protective covering on the NSA space (R. Moodley, interview, 9 July 2024).

With the move to Glenwood, the new complex required a far greater amount of administration and a bigger operations team and the direct involvement of Council in operational matters dropped off from then. At the same time, the era of stalwart Council members enabled by the privileges that apartheid brought for middle class white people – secure employment and the time to invest in charity or passion projects – has passed, and the organisation must engage contemporary Council members on terms that are realistic to their divided loyalties and life commitments.

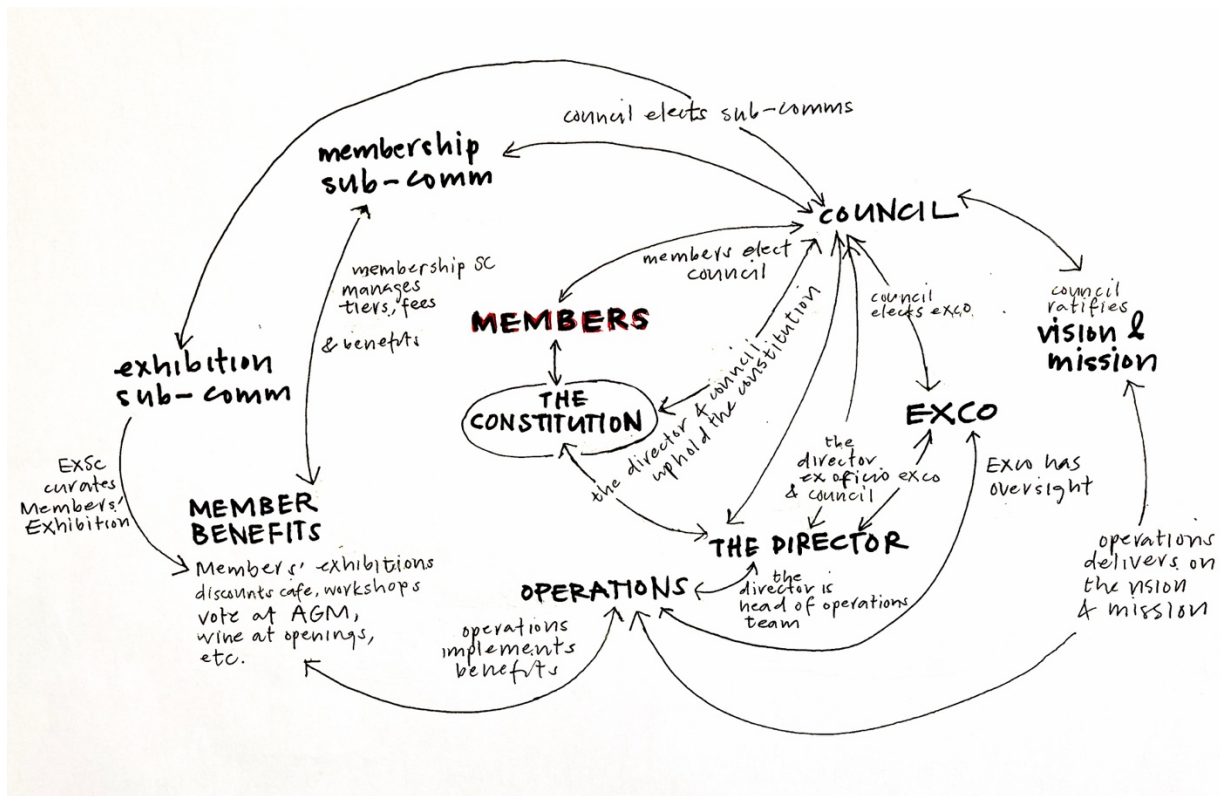
The shift in Council members' capacity to contribute to the organisation has been felt with regards to the Membership and Fundraising Sub Committee, known as the M-SC which has been dormant since my start date at the KZNSA in early 2014. Fundraising activities and membership drives have not happened. The lack of collaboration on the M-SC has resulted in a state of inertia on Council with an accumulative drain on energy and compromised sustainability for the organisation. This state resembles Meadows' 'policy resistance' where "some systems can produce extremely unnatural and even problematic behaviour because the individual subsystems each have a different goal". Meadows' advice to correct such a system is to "let go and turn the energy and resources available toward uniting the

actors in the various subsystems” (Meadows, 2008, pp. 111, 114). This gives participants the space to understand the feedback loops that fail and shift the system in a better direction towards shared goals – echoing the mode of ‘radical incrementalism’ proposed by Swilling in Chapter 1 (2020, p. 6).

For the Director of a member-based organisation, the members are their employer, with the elected Council serving as the members’ representative. When there is high turnover of Council members, the Director reports to individuals who are new to the idea of a member-based Society, have a limited understanding of the operational and financial challenges in play and their history, and who often have no experience in business or governance. It is the Director’s responsibility to induct new Council members each year and explain the operational and financial workings of three different trading entities, plus share how the work the gallery undertakes supports the ethos of the organisation. Ideally the relationship between the operations team and the Council is a collaboration and there are instances where this works. But there are many other cases where Council, the interaction between operations and ‘the owners’ representatives’ is obstructive and coloured by the personal agendas of individuals on the board. Storm Janse van Rensburg shares his insights, and some of the challenges he faced as an employee during his time as Curator 2000 - 2006:

With the membership I realised that a lot of the power decisions happened at that level, that is, from the membership. So, we worked much more strategically in terms of recruiting members and getting members elected, like everybody else has done for years. Everybody plays that system to get the friends, or the representation from a particular crowd (onto Council). It's a political game. It's like democracy in a way, everybody has a vote, but you're clear about shaping the kind of organisation that you want. Let's encourage people to take part and for that to work, but there's always going to be resistance - I was once threatened with violence in a committee meeting where a Council member wanted to beat me up outside (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

The relationship between operations and Council is now also complicated by the effects of the pandemic, with some Council members needing to move to other cities for employment reasons and online meetings being normalised. These lead to a disconnect between the challenges on the ground and a slow disengagement of Council members from their roles as non-executive directors of the organisation. The resulting lack of collaboration between operations and Council negatively impacts the sustainability of the KZNSA.



The governance diagram of the KZNSA

It could be argued that Societies were founded in a spirit of collaboration. Well known Societies include The Royal Botanic Society and The National Geographic Society that were constituted by a group of peers who came together to share interests and areas of study in a relatively non-hierarchical entity where gatherings combined laypeople, academics and professionals. The National Geographic Society began as a club for an elite group of academics and wealthy patrons interested in travel and exploration (amyatwired, online, 2010). That the peers in a Society were British, from the upper class, and had similar backgrounds of privilege is a factor – collaboration within an exclusive club remains exclusivity. That their “travel and exploration” served the colonial agenda of the British Empire to occupy and extract resources from territories also rules out current notions of collaboration and inclusivity.

In the era of the ‘Gentlemen’s Club’, the benefits of belonging to a Society offered members a degree of exclusivity and access to a network that would privilege them. In the early 1900s when the Society was founded, the intention was, as with the DAG, “to promote a European, and particularly British, culture” (Brown, 2005, p. ii). The prevalence of being part of a privileged network was made evident in an interview with Jenny Stretton, Senior Curator of the Durban Art Gallery, 1988-2023. When she was shown a catalogue from the 1926 KZNSA Annual Members’ Exhibition, she recognised many names of KZNSA members in the catalogue whose work is in the DAG Collection. This suggests that belonging to the KZNSA in its early years, 1905–1945, gave artists who were members greater opportunity to be acquired by the permanent collection of the aligned local art museum. Stretton shared

that DAG first acquired a work by a Black artist, sculptures by Michael Zondi¹⁹, in 1961 and 1962, more than sixty years after its establishment. Until then acquisitions were entirely of white artists, most of whom seemed to know each other within the Durban creative community of the time, or were high profile artists from Britain.

How does KZNSA membership contribute to sustainability for the organisation? Currently in material terms – with 217 paid up members, and subscription prices ranging from R250 for adults, R100 for students and pensioners, R400 for a family of four and a once-off R2500 fee for a lifetime member – very little. Even in colonial times there were complaints that an income model relying on subscriptions, that is, membership fees was not viable. There is an uncannily familiar lament made by MacKenzie in his 2017 book, *Museums and empire: Natural history, human cultures and colonial identities*, about the South African Museum, Cape Town (now named the Iziko South African Museum) during the period 1856 - 1895.

Indeed, funding was long going to be a problem. Rendering the museum's financial well-being dependent on public subscriptions to supplement official funding was a dangerous policy. Such subscriptions readily slip away (2017, p. 5).

In other arts societies in South Africa annual membership fees are similar to the KZNSA. At the Knysna Arts Society annual membership fees are R220 for adults and R150 for students and pensioners. According to Nandi Hilliard, the Gallery Manager at the Association of Arts Pretoria their annual adult membership fee is R250 and the student and pensioner fee is R125. The Association of Arts Pretoria has “about 600” members (N. Hilliard, interview, 29 September 2023). At the Association of Arts (AVA Gallery) in Cape Town the Director, Olga Speakes, shares that the current annual adult fee is R150 and students and pensioners pay R75 but that these would be increased in consultation with members at the 2024 AGM. In addition, the AVA Gallery offers a membership tier called *The Circle* for 50 AVA collectors who pay an annual fee of R25,000 in exchange for exclusive activities, priority access to work donated to the gallery, private exhibition previews and 10% off artwork purchases. Speakes, who

¹⁹ Michael Gagashe Zondi (1926 -2008) was born in Msinga in Greytown, Natal. Zondi spent his childhood at a Swedish Lutheran mission station at Mtulwa, Natal. He attended school in Dundee, Natal and was later trained in woodwork by Mr Magni at the Swedish Lutheran mission trade school. At the age of twenty-five while an instructor at the Edendale Vocational Training School in Natal he began sculpting and then became a woodwork instructor at the Swedish Lutheran mission trade school. After 1949 Zondi was a woodwork instructor at the Swedish Lutheran mission trade school. During the late 1950s he received instruction in Fine Arts at the UN, Pietermaritzburg. He obtained certificates in building construction and design and worked at the Appelsbosch mission hospital in Natal, executing the design, construction and decoration for the hospital chapel. After leaving the hospital he served with the Department of Information until 1972. In 1992 and 2008 Zondi suffered strokes that left him paralysed and unable to work. He passed away on 15 March 2008 (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/michael-gagashe-zondi>).

was appointed as the Director in October 2023, goes on to say that this program “needs attention” as Circle members require a level of service that previous staff had struggled to maintain. The AVA Gallery has “about 150” paid up members (O. Speakes, interview, 28 November 2023). Both Hilliard and Speakes affirm that membership fees from their current number of members does not significantly contribute to covering the overheads of their operations, and that the administration of renewals is a challenge. Annual membership fees at the Visual Arts Network of South Africa (VANSA) are R100 – R300 for individuals, R500 – R750 for non-profit organisations and R1,000 for businesses.

When I ask Janse van Rensburg to compare membership at the Zeitz MOCAA, where there is an entrance fee as well as a membership programme, with the KZNSA he replies that:

(Zeitz) membership is tiered starting at R290 and very important for our income stream. Members get a lot of benefits for the money that they pay but there's no decision-making like at the KZNSA. We all participate in this economy of sustaining our organisations. The transaction of buying a membership is twofold. It's the idea that you get something back, but that's not necessarily a philanthropic gesture. So, it's important (for the KZNSA) to instil a certain level of “I'm a member because I support what this institution stands for, and the work that it's doing. When do we come on board for artists?” It's important that the work is being done especially with apartheid era organisations (such as the KZNSA) – they serve historical debt that still needs to be paid. And collected (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

Zeitz MOCAA's annual membership fees are R290 for pensioners and students, R390 for adults, R650 for 2 adults, R1,200 for 4 adults and R10,000 for *Gold* members who receive private exhibition tours, discounted venue hire and free guest access. Annual membership at the Norval Foundation in Cape Town is R450 for an adult, R800 for 2 adults and R4,000 for a group of up to 10 adults.

The KZNSA is committed to making membership financially accessible to early career artists and the call to sign up claims ‘annual membership is affordable’. In immaterial terms, it forces the organisation to ask how it is relevant to members and how it can inspire their loyalty. This loyalty is an indication of participation and may translate into material value in donations, endowments and other gestures. Loyalty can also iterate as social media followers which has an economy of its own, both material and immaterial. It is interesting to compare a culture of followers who are influenced by the behaviour and positioning of particular social media personalities with that of a small clique of members who privilege each other. While the former has access to an exponentially wider audience from diverse demographics and has the opportunity to radically increase participation, it still employs a top-down approach when communicating. The comments function on social media platforms does, to a limited extent, allow the

audience to share their responses to posts, but it is still in response to material that has been entirely crafted by the publisher, and can be deleted if the social media account chooses. A member-based club has a limited audience in its traditional format, but also contains the seed of a community format that connects with, supports, and collaborates with each other in a bottom-up format.

To revisit the question - what is the difference between a Society and a community? - is to consider that membership contributing to financial sustainability is deeply connected to its relevance and accessibility – to its ability to embrace human well-being, social justice and cultural sustainability. By embracing and facilitating bottom-up participation models of collaboration the KZNSA has the potential to attract thousands of members who seek to commune, share, learn and transact in a self-made space. To this end, KZNSA is re-imagining membership offers and researching software and apps for membership administration and retention that also provides digital tools to communicate and connect with members. A key criterion for this app is that it facilitates forums for member-to-member interaction in online space, allowing KZNSA members to connect and collaborate all over the world – and re-energise the organisation.

Folks who do systems analysis have a great belief in 'leverage points'. These are places within a complex system (a corporation, an economy, a living body, a city, an ecosystem) where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything (Meadows, 1999, p. 3).

One of the greatest opportunities for collaboration to add energy and contribute to the sustainability of the organisation lies in the membership programme, and is identified as a 'leverage point' within the KZNSA system.

CHAPTER 3

The case study - programming

This chapter looks at the core activity of the organisation – that of exhibitions. It explores the relationship between programming and sustainability, and how these intersect with collaboration and refusal, energy and inertia. It also discusses the challenges the gallery encounters to deliver the exhibition programme according to its vision and mission while maintaining sustainability practices at the same time.

There are very few formal texts, books or journal articles on the KZNSA, given its 120-year history. The two that I have found most useful are Melanie Hillebrand's unpublished PhD thesis, *Art and architecture in Natal 1910-1940*, submitted to the University of Natal in 1986 that provides useful historical facts about the early years of the KZNSA, and the most comprehensive paper on the KZNSA is Michael McMeekan's 2003 Masters dissertation, titled *The Natal Society of Arts – Perspectives on its History and Influence on the Visual Arts in Durban, 1905-1997*, submitted to the University of Natal in 2003.

Brendan Bell's unpublished MA thesis, *Clement S n que Life and Work, including Catalogue Raisonn * (1988) submitted to the University of Natal, 1988 and E. M. Turnbull's, *The painting collection of the Durban Art Gallery, 1892 – 1921: Attitudes and policies governing its development*, an unpublished MA dissertation, University of Natal (1991) both make passing remarks about the KZNSA in the context of those studies.

A self-published book by the KZNSA in 2005 to mark 100 years of the organisation, *KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts : A community of artists* (2005), documents the studios and workplaces of 106 artists in the KZNSA network. In the introduction, then president Alan Rycroft writes that "this book is a celebration of the artists who have exhibited at the NSA gallery in the past few years" (2005, p. 1).

Numerous KZNSA exhibition catalogues over the years, and the KZNSA website which has archived all their exhibitions since 2008, provide references to shifts in exhibition programming and organisational ethos. Of particular interest are the catalogues for the Young Artists Project (YAP) 2004/05 and 2005/06. Initiated by then curator, Storm Janse van Rensburg, "YAP was conceived as an institutional platform for experimental art practice in the city of Durban" (Janse van Rensburg, 2005, p. 2). YAP encouraged proposals for new media work, shifting the KZNSA programming away from its focus on traditional art forms such as painting. The study uses these texts and traces to recount the recent revivals of YAP in 2016 and 2019/20.

The catalogue for the Natal Society of Arts Twenty-first Annual Exhibition in 1926 was found in the online archive of The North West University (NWU). The foreword written by president Leo Francois, states that “while the Exhibits have been reduced in number, it is evident that there is a considerable increase in merit” (1926, p. 4). This an uncanny echo of the recent move in 2020 by the KZNSA Exhibition sub-committee to limit the works accepted for the Annual Members’ Award to address problematic and poor-quality submissions. The KZNSA Annual Members’ Exhibition (now renamed The KZNSA Annual Members’ Award) is a fascinating case study that exemplifies the forces of participation via collaboration and refusal, and sustainability as reflected by energy and inertia at play in the organisation. The 1926 catalogue provides many rich points of comparison between the Society then and the recent self-reflection on the relevance of organisation by the KZNSA Council mentioned in the background to this study, such as: what is the difference between a Society and community?

3.1 The exhibition programme

The exhibition programme is directed by the organisation’s vision and mission statement:

KZNSA is a not-for-profit contemporary art space whose vision is to be a highly regarded contemporary art space that engages its complex and diverse community with socially relevant concepts for the support & development of artists and culture production (KZNSA vision statement, 2021)

The KZNSA’s mission includes notions of relevance, significance, dialogue and the advancement of the visual arts industry at large. The organisation’s strategy includes curated shows and exhibitions, encouragement of new audiences and participations, and successful utilisation of space.

In terms of facilities, the KZNSA has four exhibition galleries – the Main Gallery, a 180 m² space that is double-volume in two-thirds of the floorspace; the 77 m² Mezzanine Gallery overlooking the Main; the 60 m² Park Gallery which is separated from the Mezzanine by a doorway; and the Media Gallery which is a 45 m² standalone space on the ground floor off the Main Gallery. The latter is often requisitioned as a storeroom but when used for exhibitions is a blacked-out room fitted with a mounted projector and surround sound for digital works and film screenings. The four exhibition galleries each have venue hire rates that are charged by the week. The rates are relatively low and have not been increased since 2018 to make the space accessible to a wider array of exhibitors – the Main Gallery is charged at R3,025 excluding VAT a week and the other three galleries are R1,755 a week each. These fees contribute to the running costs of the gallery but by no means cover them. (As at November 2023

the monthly overheads of the gallery are R111,343.) However, the cost of hire influences the duration of exhibitions due to the budgets available to each exhibitor and exhibitions tend to be three to four weeks long.

The exhibition calendar at the KZNSA is determined by the Exhibition Sub-Committee (E-SC). The E-SC is made up of Council members who opt to serve on this committee (often artists or curators themselves), the Director and the Gallery Administrator, Gallery Director and Curator employed by the organisation. Each year in August the gallery makes a public call to artists, curators or interested parties to submit proposals for exhibitions for the following year. These are reviewed by the Exhibitions Sub-Committee, exhibitors are given feedback in November and, in discussion with the successful applicants, the calendar for the year is populated. The selection criteria for exhibitions is based on a rubric that considers the exhibitor's budget for gallery hire, the exhibitor's demographics, the themes covered, technical strength, conceptual strength, educational value and the relevance of the exhibition to the KZNSA's vision and mission. A second category of exhibitions is where the E-SC invites artists to exhibit at the KZNSA's expense. These invitations can be towards a group show curated by the KZNSA or to artists who are identified as masters originating from KZN or who are inspirational to KZN-based artists and audiences. In 2021, KZNSA invited Georgina Gratrix to mount a solo exhibition; in 2022, Sibusiso Duma; in 2023, Clive Sithole; Thami Jali was invited to mount a solo in 2024. The third category of exhibitors are those that, in the words of Janse van Rensburg who was Curator at KZNSA 2000-2006, "are of national significance" (interview, 6 September 2023). The gallery calendar historically accommodates one or two of these a year including exhibitions such as *Scenorama*²⁰, a Javett-UP group exhibition curated by Gabi Ngcobo that travelled to the KZNSA in 2023, The Gerard Sekoto Award, The Portrait Award and The Ernest Cole Award. These are either covered by gallery hire paid by the exhibitor, part of a funded project or undertaken by the KZNSA at its own expense. The fourth category of exhibitions are where costs are covered with public funding from DSAC, NAC or another national or municipal entity. On these exhibitions, the KZNSA is able to activate projects that support experimental and early career work and have an accompanying education programme. Due to the sporadic nature of receiving funding and the low values received, the occurrence of this category of exhibition is inconsistent.

²⁰ "SCENORAMA is a new collaborative platform for artistic experimentation and new commissions working with artists and transdisciplinary researchers from different locales connected to pan-African experiences. The pilot version of this curatorial undertaking features research and artistic positions by Amanda Mushate, (ZIM) Luana Vitra (BR), Manyaku Mashilo (SA), Nolan Oswald Dennis (SA), Nyakallo Maleke (SA), Oscar Murillo (COL/UK), Paulo Nazareth (BR), Simnikiwe Buhlungu (SA/NL) & Tessa Mars (HAT/NL) in collaboration, Thierry Oussou (BEN/NL) and Zara Julius (SA). SCENORAMA is curated by Javett-UP Curatorial Director Gabi Ngcobo working closely with the Javett-UP curatorial team" (<https://javettup.art/exhibitions/scenorama>).
<https://www.kznsagallery.co.za/Exhibitions/View/1024/scenorama>

Historically, the cost of gallery hire impacted transformation with the tendency for white artists and curators to have the funds to hire the space but less likely for a previously disadvantaged Black artist or curator to do so. It is also possible that Black artists had less access to technology in the past and were not able to submit proposals. Along with a history of white curators and E-SC members who privileged work by white artists due to their own networks and agendas, this has led to decades of dissatisfaction from Black artists. Emmeline Young, who was the Gallery Administrator at KZNSA 2009-2013, comments that the engagement of the Exhibition Sub-Committee at the time

... felt a little bit like they were using it as their vehicle for their little personal Glenwood painter's society. And not necessarily serving the bigger community ... (someone) came up with a very unflattering nickname for them of 'The Cabal'. But it was their diehard crew of painters. And when they were on the committee, (they were) the first to stand up for members and the first to be at the BUZZART openings. So, in that regard, they very much supported (the organisation). But it was a small clique ... it wasn't a very broad swath of the Society ... The problem was that 'The Cabal' could fund their own exhibitions, whereas the broader populace could not, so when there was no money we were delighted to have whoever was willing to pay the rental to put their paintings up (E. Young, interview, 28 August 2023).

This tendency is also evident in many comments made during a round table discussion hosted at the KZNSA in 2017 by Mario Pissarra of ASAI and Russel Hlongwane, President of KZNSA 2016 to 2018, with veteran Durban artists, Thami Jali, Sfiso ka-Mkame, Paul Sibisi and Zamani Makhanya. The conversation looked at the four artists' practice from the 1970s to 2017 and their historical and current issues with accessing exhibition space in Durban and with the KZNSA exhibition programming.

Zamani Makhanya: Our main problem was exhibition space. We didn't get recognition at galleries. Accessing the galleries and the workshops were our main aims.

Thami Jali: I think with the NSA exhibitions, it was just artists getting frustrated with the fact that they are not getting a chance to exhibit at the NSA -

Sfiso ka-Mkame: We felt that we shouldn't be exhibiting at the African Art Centre. There was also this big gallery [NSA] that we always read about in The Daily News, and The Natal Mercury, but we never read about people like us exhibiting there ... They said we must come with portfolios and then we came and they liked the work. ... That is how we went to these white establishments. For the young stars after us, it was now easier because we had exhibited in those places.

Thami Jali: It took time to change, for the transformation to happen. We exhibited at the NSA, but that didn't mean that they would have Black artists exhibiting there often. For quite some time it was a repetition of the same artists exhibiting there. It's not that flood doors opened

immediately because the African Arts Centre kept its status as the gallery for Black artists. Even at the Durban Art Gallery, only recently have they started giving Durban's Black artists a chance to exhibit there, so it's something that didn't change ... overnight (in Pissarra, 2018: 8).

Hlongwane responds to the veteran artists' frustrations by pointing out changes that have occurred since their interactions with the KZNSA between the 1970s and 2010s:

For example, if you say that this place [KZNSA] does not accommodate Black artists, I can bring up the names of at least 15 Black artists who have exhibited here in (2017). But these are also guys in my age category ... But I do know that I have more difficulty reaching out to senior artists ... is it a matter of Black artists or a matter of Black artists from a certain era that they are not being reached out to or being engaged with [by the KZNSA] (as cited in Pissarra, 2018, p. 24)?

The exhibitions listed on the KZNSA website in the last five years confirm Hlongwane's observation about the programme predominantly showing Black artists. However, this has not shifted the older artists' perception that "the KZNSA is for whites. Black artists looked at the KZNSA and they saw a white institution" (T. Jali, interview, 23 October 2023). It is possible that the inclusion of Black artists since 1994 was influenced by whether they had graduated from a tertiary arts institution or not, and some older artists remained side-lined because they were not trained by the academy. The 2005 publication created by KZNSA to celebrate its hundred-year anniversary titled, *KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts : A community of artists*, would have contributed to the perception that "the KZNSA is for whites". The book features 106 artists that had exhibited in the gallery from 2003 to 2005. There are 72 white artists and 34 Black artists. Some may say this is an indication of the beginning of a transformation process, but it is sobering that after 10 years of democracy two thirds of the artists represented were white.

Having said this, 2000 to 2006 was the era of Storm Janse van Rensburg's tenure as Curator at KZNSA which is widely viewed as an injection of energy into the organisation, and the KZN creative sector as a whole. The exhibition programme changed dramatically from traditional, predictable presentations of paintings, drawings and sculpture to those embracing Janse van Rensburg's background of an "experimental gallery framework" developed while he was assistant curator to Stephen Hobbs²¹ at the Market Theatre Galleries in Johannesburg in the late 1990s. Janse van Rensburg says;

²¹ Stephen Hobbs (b. 1972) graduated from Wits University with a BAFA in 1994. He was the curator of the Market Theatre Galleries (Johannesburg) from 1994 to 2000, and Co-Director of the purpose-built Gallery Premises (2004-2008) at the Joburg Theatre. Since 2001 he has co-directed the artist collaborative and public art consultancy, The Trinity Session, and since 2004 has co-produced a range of multi-medium urban and

At that point I was already quite ambitious and thinking about exhibitions and exhibition making and the language of things”. This approach brought a much-needed criticality and professionalism to the exhibition programme that disrupted what had been historically ... a very conservative, white liberal (member base) ... So, we upset some people that were stalwart members, because they used to have an exhibition every two years ... and the idea was that we can bring contemporary art to Durban. We’d sit around transforming aspects of the institution (such as) the kinds of exhibitions that were held and thinking around what is needed. I also started my relationship with Jay Pather who was very influential in a large part of my thinking at that point around performance in spaces, or what these institutions could be. Durban was going through a particular, exciting moment. So just to say, that was not a singular thing, it was connected to other stuff happening in the city. And so, whatever we did at the KZNSA could only be happening because of those other things too. I think there was also a real desire from a younger group of people at the time ... I could only do this with community support (from people like MacKenny, Streak,) and also Andrew Verster ... and Marianne Meijer (who) was always trying to navigate blockades of members and the more conservative people (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

Peter Machen is an arts journalist who was based in Durban 1993 to 2012 and reported on arts and culture for the *Independent on Saturday*²² 2001-2004, for the *Natal Witness* in 2006, and in 2007 published the book, *Durban, A Paradise and its People*. Machen affirms the energy of the Durban creative sector during Janse van Rensburg’s time at KZNSA:

Something that frustrated me about Durban was often the lack of professionalism. The key thing about Storm is how he professionalised (the KZNSA), more than the financial implication of people doing things for money, which is what professionals are, but way beyond that he made it into a slick and professional organisation. Like Steven Stead (of KickstArt Theatre at The Playhouse) and Nashen Moodley at the Durban International Film Festival turning these very effective and slightly parochial institutions to world class organisations. What Storm and Jay (Pather) introduced is that things should be at a high level. And that takes everybody high

network-focused projects with Marcus Neustetter, under the collaborative name Hobbs/Neustetter. Hobbs is based between County Cork, Ireland, London and Johannesburg (https://latitudes.online/artists/stephen_hobbs).

²² The Independent on Saturday is a South African newspaper, part of Independent News & Media. It was launched in 1998 to replace the Saturday Paper, which was formed in the mid-1990s after the demise of the Saturday editions of the Daily News and the Mercury. The Independent on Saturday circulates primarily in the greater Durban area, but is also distributed to other parts of the KwaZulu-Natal province.

... At the time it was as if Durban was supported by a few handfuls of very active individuals. And those people started to leave for a whole lot of complicated reasons. And their leaving accelerated those reasons. But as they started to leave as individuals, the structures and activities they were a part of started to fall apart (P. Machen, interview, 6 October 2023).

Machen, who now resides in Berlin, compares the energy and innovation in the sector then to a lapsed energy now, both in Durban and in Europe,

I really wanted to move to Europe or the States in the late 90s. But I couldn't because Durban was so interesting. The new South Africa was such an extraordinarily creative place. It's important for me to say the work I saw in that period from the late 90s to 2010 was good and more interesting than nearly everything I've seen elsewhere. The work that Durban was producing in the late 90s and early 2000s is now like one of the aesthetics around the world. If you look at the Turner Prize nominees for this year, they look like years ago (in Durban).

The funding for the arts in Berlin from the German government is more than all of the funding in America for arts. There are probably about 10,000 artists who are just living their life in an expensive city like Berlin. There is an artistic freedom here like there was in Durban in the 2000s. You can activate anything in Berlin, but it's not nearly as good as the Durban work 20 years ago. I have two thoughts. One, it was amazing. And we were there. But the other is, why couldn't it have continued? Those amazing things could have been built into more amazing things, and accumulated and created wealth in an artistic and capital sense (P. Machen, interview, 6 October 2023).

Besides Black artists feeling marginalised from the KZNSA for most of its existence, another frustration for artists of all backgrounds is the KZNSA's poor record of art sales. Comments made by Gloria Hoff confirm that the KZNSA was not able to sustain itself from art sales during its time at Overport City in the 1980s and into the 1990s – “We were not doing enough sales, with paintings and exhibitions ... It was always a problem to sell” (G. Hoff, interview, 29 September 2023). Poor sales means that artists showing at the KZNSA did not realise income from these exhibitions either. Like most galleries, the KZNSA keeps a percentage of an art sale as commission. For commercial galleries in South Africa such as Stevenson, Goodman and SMAC galleries the commission on sales is 50% of the selling price. Since KZNSA is a nonprofit, it opts to take less, that is, 40% of the sale, in order to keep the selling price down and/or allow the artist a greater portion of the sale. However, this still doesn't guarantee a sale. Zamani Makhanya shares that:

We went (to the African Art Centre) because that's the only place in Durban where artworks were sold. Here [at the KZNSA], I'm telling you these will go back to where they came from after the exhibition. But at the African Art Centre, if it's not sold, it's put aside and will be sold later. We knew we had, every month, on the tenth of every month you get something from the African Arts Centre to feed your family (laughs). That's the reason we went there (as cited in Pissarra, 2018, p. 30).

The migration to Glenwood in 1996 and the vastly bigger gallery spaces does not seem to have radically changed the number of sales and, as mentioned, asks the question of what the business plan for the organisation was when it moved to premises with far greater overheads. Janse van Rensburg admits that a commercial approach to the Members' Exhibition that eschewed a selection process and installed all the submissions to boost art sales and collaborating on the shop's end of year exhibition to make up for inconsistent art sales in the year was the strategy for income.

Having to embrace the commercial was something I knew we had to do. I understood that it was part of the brief, that we had to have income. I didn't mind beginning to shift things. So I found the funding to do the experimental stuff, the projects that drove me from a point of interest and that support(ed) young emerging contemporary artists. We said, Okay, if we're going to do (commercial projects), just do it properly, just embrace it. If it's a Members' Exhibition then let's not have a selection committee, just hang everything that comes in. For the annual end of year exhibition, I came up with the name BUZZART, inspired by the word Bazaar to embrace Gloria's merchandising in the shop and commercial approach to that show (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

Securing art sales relies on building rapport with collectors and professionals seeking artworks for projects, and also having art that is affordable to occasional purchasers. Ways of engaging varying types of art buyers are explored in Chapter 4 where modes of commercial activity are reviewed in terms of the energy and inertia, collaboration and inertia each contributes to the system.

The high turnaround and short durations of exhibitions can be attributed to the budget constraints of exhibitors. Another factor contributing to shorter exhibitions is that the KZNSA is the only consistently active gallery in Durban and the demand for exhibition space from the local creative sector exceeds what is available in the city. Mindful of this, the KZNSA accommodates as many exhibitions as possible each year, but this often leaves the gallery operations team overwhelmed and burnt out. The team has been short staffed since 2013 and from 2014 to the end of 2023 was made up of a Gallery Administrator or Curator (depending on the time), the Director and a cleaner who assists with installations, and sometimes with a freelance social media contractor. Currently there is the Director, cleaner and three

former interns sponsored by the DSAC PESP4²³ programme who have been brought on full time in the roles of a Gallery Assistant, a Publicity Officer and an Online Administrator for the e-commerce site. It is an ongoing challenge to find the balance between making the space available to as many exhibitors as possible, supporting early career and experimental practice, honouring the work of exhibitors, maintaining curatorial integrity, the fair workplace conditions of the team, and keeping the doors open by meeting the financial needs of the organisation. In 2022 KZNSA mounted 17 exhibitions and participated in the Investec Cape Town Art Fair; in 2023, 17 exhibitions and participated in Latitudes Art Fair in Johannesburg; the current calendar for 2024 has 22 exhibitions scheduled and participation in two art fairs are planned. When KZNSA hosted Zanele Muholi's project *iKhono LaseNatali*²⁴ in 2019, they were dismayed at the numerous short exhibition slots and complained that the exhibition programme was "like quickie sex!" In that year there were 23 exhibitions mounted and KZNSA participated in the first Latitudes Art Fair in Johannesburg and Prizm Art Fair²⁵ online.

The obvious response to this is, "what about funding for exhibitions?" This would address costs for previously disadvantaged and early career artists' exhibitions and, for experimental work, reduce the short turnaround times for the gallery team – and allow exhibitions to be on for longer to a wider audience. On paper, the KZNSA is a nonprofit, registered public benefit visual arts organisation that qualifies for funding from arts and culture public entities. In reality, the KZNSA has received R735,400 from applications to DSAC, DSAC-KZN, NAC, ACT and NLC in the last six years. Considering that the monthly overhead of the gallery is over R100,000 and only 30% of funding can be used towards running costs, this funding has contributed less than 3% a month to overheads. Another way to view

²³ PESP4 is an internship programme in the cultural sector funded by the Department of Sports, Art and Culture. The programme places graduate interns in arts organisations to gain work experience towards their careers. "In appreciating the challenges faced by young people, the Presidential Employment Stimulus is providing hundreds of thousands of young people with vital work experience to place them on a career path, while at the same time contributing to our country's employment" (Sebasa, online, 2023) (<https://www.gcis.gov.za/presidential-employment-stimulus>).

²⁴ *iKhono LaseNatali* is a project of the artist and visual activist Zanele Muholi. "In late 2018, Muholi commissioned 25 emerging artists to interpret photographic images from their ongoing self-portrait series *Somnyama Ngonyama*. The IKHONO LASENATALI project also commemorates 25 Years of Democracy, with most of the commissioned artists from the 'born free' generation. The exhibition showcases the hidden or latent talent of these remarkable KwaZulu-Natal based artists who work in a variety of mediums and utilising different techniques. These include wood-cut printing, beaded string, oil and acrylic on canvas and paper, pastel on paper and digital imaging, among many others" (Dhlamini, 2019: online at <https://www.kznsagallery.co.za/Exhibitions/View/949/ikhono-lasenatali>)

²⁵ Prizm Art Fair is a hybrid (online and in person) art fair based in Miami, US, that runs concurrently to Art Basel Miami. Now in its eleventh year, the fair focuses on the work of "emerging and established galleries and artists offering their varied Diasporic narratives and perspectives, riveting conversations led by new and established thought leaders in Diasporic Visual arts practice and cutting-edge events and installations ..." (<https://prizm.art/>).

this is that the annual operating budget for the gallery is R1,3m. The 30% from project funding that can be used on overheads contributes R36,700 a year to this. This does not include any of the costs needed for essential repairs, replacing gallery equipment and the maintenance of the facility, or for salaries for empty positions such as the Education Officer. It has been necessary to self-reflect and ask whether the presence of a white Director in a nonprofit is a hindrance to receiving state funding. However, KZNSA is not alone in the crisis in public funding. In 2018, in response to being in possession of an eThekweni city document allocating sixteen art centres three years' Grant-in-Aid (GIA) funding for 2018-2020 by the eThekweni Parks, Recreation and Culture unit (PRC) and these not being released, the centres formed a collective to lobby the city. Of these sixteen organisations, fourteen had Black directors and two white. Among them were long standing nonprofit arts organisations such as The African Art Centre, The BAT Centre, Centre for Creative Arts, Durban Music School, Wentworth Arts and Culture Organisation, Wushwini Arts Centre, KwaMashu Ekhasya Multi Arts Centre (K-CAP), Siwela Sonke Dance Company, KZN Music Industry Association (KUMISA) and the KZNSA. The process culminated in the lobby organisations receiving the 2019 tranche of their grants from the city, with the 2018 and 2020 tranches remaining unaccounted for. When the next cycle started for 2021-2023 and the same organisations enquired about their grants, PRC made heavily reduced payments to the organisations for 2023 only citing "budget cuts". Instead of the R1m allocated to KZNSA annually they received R150,000 - with the other organisations reporting similar, much smaller, amounts granted, and their 2021 and 2022 grants missing. While lamenting on the "profound lack of institutional support (for the arts) from local authorities", Machen goes on to say:

The failure of Durban is simply to recognize that art is economics. The cultural sector around the world is recognised as one of the biggest economic drivers, both of exports and local economic activity. Money and art are fundamentally linked, all of those artists needed patrons, it costs money to produce art when you're not working. Experimental art requires that people need to survive and, ideally, want to make their lives better. That tension is real. It's okay for artists to remain pure, especially when they're young, not wanting to be tainted by money and make the work itself but there should be structures around them that help them to monetise themselves (P. Machen, interview, 6 October 2023).

The findings of the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO) confirm this. In their report, *Snapshot of the cultural and creative industries in South Africa* (2024), SACO cites their 2022 mapping study showing "that the total contribution of the cultural and creative industries to South Africa's GDP was R161 billion in 2020. This represents just under 3% of South Africa's total economic production in 2020 and makes the sector approximately the same size as agriculture" (SACO website, 2024). SACO categorises the South African Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI) into the domains of Design and creative services; Cultural and national heritage; Performance and celebration; Audio-visual and

interactive media; Books and press; and Visual arts and crafts. Of the six domains, Visual Arts and Crafts is the third highest contributing domain with R23.4 billion in 2020, 15% of the CCI contribution to GDP (SACO website, 2024).

When I asked Janse van Rensburg about there being more public funders in play and higher value grants during his time at the KZNSA from 2000 to 2006 he says:

The lottery (NLC) was generous in the beginning. Very generous. I didn't expect to get money. And then suddenly it was this huge amount where we got everything we asked for. That changed things for me in terms of money and programming (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

In addition to local authority funding, the years after democratic transition were well funded by international bodies such as Oxfam, The EU, The Prince Claus Fund, The Ford Foundation and many more. As South Africa moved out of the 'developing nation' category this funding was diverted to countries perceived to be in greater need. A 2013 report titled *Funding Constraints and Challenges Faced by Civil Society in South Africa* published by the South African National Development Agency (NDA) compares international funding in 2001 to 2011 and finds that "International private donors, governments have ... rapidly diminished ... (due to) dramatic declines in confidence in whether CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) have good prospects for long-term, medium, or short-term financial sustainability ... Much of this decline can be explained that the euphoria of a democratic dividend has diminished significantly (NDA, 2013, pgs. 40-41). On top of this, the global economic downturn in 2008 also signalled the end of many sources of international funding for South African arts and culture organisations. Similarly, while NLTDF (now NLC) funding was "generous" when it was first established in 1998, it has markedly dropped off, in part due to investigations of internal irregularities where "the NLTDF was put into a kind of receivership (in 2016), and it has only recently started making awards again" (Bunn, 2018, pg. 5). Machen mentions that he ...

... would like to see a graph correlating the disbursement of National Lottery Funds with cultural progress in South Africa, and how they're stopping effective organisations in the last 10 years. I think that there's a really negative impact on culture production in South Africa. That's a complicated analysis to make, but I'd love to see somebody do it (P. Machen, interview, 6 October 2023).

Somebody has indeed made this analysis. In September 2010, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), in partnership with the African Micro-Economic Research Umbrella (AMERU), the University of the Witwatersrand and Thompson Research Services, published a research report titled,

An Assessment of the Visual Arts in South Africa Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations, commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture.

This report represents the first major national study of the visual arts sector in South Africa as a basis for making informed recommendations for the growth and development of this important sub-sector of the creative industries. The HSRC research project involved the conducting of an in-depth survey of over 350 artists, businesses and organisations working in the visual arts sector, together with a series of individual studies on museums and collections, education and training in the visual arts, funding, the policy and legislative environment for the visual arts and the position of the visual arts at a provincial level. The research project also involved the development of a database of over 6000 visual arts practitioners and 1200 business entities across South Africa (Hagg, 2010, abstract).

One of the many insights into the Visual Arts Sector at the time was that ...

... this report suggests that there is in fact a sufficient pool of resources (principally within the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund) that would enable these organisations to both survive and grow, but that these resources are not at the present time being effectively distributed or accessed (Hagg, 2010, p. 9).

An *Art Times* feature titled *National Visual Art Survey* lists highlights from the 2010 research report:

53% of people working in the visual arts are youth

50% of people working in the visual arts are women

58% of people working in the visual arts are black

Gauteng and Western Cape make up 73% of all of South Africa's visual arts infrastructure (museums, galleries, support organisations, educational institutions)

South African Public Art Museums had a total of approx. 1,05 million visitors

3.18 million South Africans said they were 'extremely interested' in the visual arts (*Art Times*, online, 2023).

In the chapter on *Community Arts Centres and Arts Development Organisations* (the category of visual arts organisations KZNSA falls into), the 2010 HSRC report notes that

Alongside government-owned centres, a number of old and newer non-governmental arts development organisations have developed a variety of innovative programmes concerned with the visual arts in job creation, skills development, education, public health and advocacy. In

spite of their direct linkage to the social and economic development mandates of government, these organisations struggle to survive in an unstable and insecure funding environment, with limited access to reliable and recurrent sources of core organisational funding from the state, and an over-reliance on project funding from government and international agencies (Hagg, 2010, p. 9).

Artist associations such as the South African National Association for Visual Arts (SANAVA) (and its many affiliate organisations), the KwaZulu Natal Society for the Arts (KZNSA) and the Association for Visual Arts (AVA) in the Western Cape have played an important role in developing new market platforms and opportunities for artists through competitions, international exchanges, workshops and member exhibitions ... All of these organisations face similar constraints to arts development organisations with regard to their sustainability within a difficult funding environment (Hagg, 2010, p. 10).

The 2010 HSRC report also correctly identified “the need for the provision of core running and project costs for independent visual arts development organisations and spaces, industry bodies and associations, particularly those focused on providing opportunities for young artists entering the industry” (Hagg, 2010, p. 28).

In addition to the “difficult funding environment” verified by the 2010 HSRC report, corporate sponsorship for visual art is also reported as low.

While there are significant instances of corporate investment in the non-profit dimensions of the sector, and sponsorship of major events, projects and competitions such as the Joburg Art Fair, the Africa Art Centre and the Absa Atelier competition, by international standards, the sector enjoys very low levels of corporate investment and sponsorship. Total sponsorship is estimated at between R10 and R15 million – similar to levels of public funding in the visual arts. The report notes the need to create more awareness around the existing provisions for tax deductibility on donations, as well as the need to explore more substantial tax benefits for artists, organisations and institutions in dialogue with the Department of Finance and SARS (Hagg, 2010, p. 13).

In the thirteen years since the report, very few of the recommendations it contains have materialised. An update to the 2010 report was commissioned by DSAC in 2023, to be published in 2024.

The Department of Sport, Arts & Culture has commissioned a review of the 2010 report ... This year's update covers a wide spectrum of important visual art sector issues to help the sector identify and define where it's going, and what it needs to thrive.

The information will be used to inform recommendations made to the South African government, but will also be shared publicly with the visual arts sector as a whole. Many of (the 2010) recommendations were implemented, however there is still substantial work to be done to support people working in the visual arts to succeed. While the canvas of possibilities is vast, this sector also confronts formidable challenges ... It's also important to be able to argue for the important impact of the visual arts – which has grown immensely across the African continent since 2010 – at social and economic levels (Art Times, online, 2023).

The intentions expressed in the 2023 DSAC press release are encouraging. They speak to an arts and culture ministry that understands the potential of the visual arts sector, and also the dire circumstances it is in. Decades of disappointments in accessing funding when it was critically needed, however, means that it remains to be seen whether public funding interventions will result in the sector “thriving”.

In the absence of consistent public funding and corporate social investment, the current KZNSA gallery programme relying on self-generated funds is not a sustainable model, and it is surprising that it still has some energy. In terms of financial sustainability, despite selected exhibitions paying venue hire this does not cover running costs and neither do inconsistent art sales or inadequate public funding for exhibitions. When funding is received it can only be used towards the costs of the exhibition or project itself, and not towards any capital overheads like building repairs or replacing the equipment necessary to the gallery functioning, for example computers, projectors and other electronic items, or towards salaries. The financial constraints of the gallery and of exhibitors influences which exhibitions are shown and limits the potential for the social justice aspects of sustainability such as poverty alleviation and creatives' access to institutional resources. The stifling of bottom-up participation due to financial constraints also undermines cultural sustainability with a reduced representation of ideas and work by under-resourced communities. The relentless workload on gallery staff and their disproportionately low salaries leads to a high turnover on the gallery team and senior staff find themselves in a semi-permanent state of training and lack of professionalism. This impacts the service and sales artists receive and undermines the sector further. All of these factors point to the gallery moving into a state of inertia.

3.2 The Annual Members' Exhibition

To revisit the research question: *Using Systems Theory, how has collaboration and refusal in key activities and projects of the case study, the KZNSA, contributed towards energy and inertia, and impacted its sustainability?*

The aim of the study is to employ a *systems approach* that explores the dynamic and fluid inter-relatedness of the divisions and their projects, the impact of collaboration and refusal in these and the resulting energy or inertia.

The Members' Exhibition is a useful vehicle to track participation (both in terms of collaboration and refusal), and how this has impacted sustainability over the years. An annual event since the founding of the KZNSA in 1905, the Members' Exhibition traditionally allows any paid-up member to participate.

In the early years of the Society, "The Annual Winter Exhibition held the night before Durban's famous horse race, the July Handicap, became a major occasion on the Durban social calendar and had achieved for Durban a reputation as a place of culture, a fact not always appreciated by Natal's political leaders" (McMeekan 2003, p. 13). According to Hillebrand in *Art and Architecture in Natal 1910-1940*:

Leo Francois²⁶ built up the NSA annual exhibition into an event of national importance during his tenure as President from 1926 to 1933. Almost every practising artist in South Africa exhibited there between 1918 and 1940. The selection process was limited to the elimination of the more grossly unfit and was not associated with stylistic preferences. Francois himself (who was not averse to self-promotion writing under the nom de plume 'Vermilion' for the art column of *The Natal Mercury* newspaper) went on to claim that this exhibition is now recognised throughout the Union as the leading art event of the year to which, not artists alone, but a large number of the public also, look forward to with special interest (1986: 68, 69).

An early catalogue titled, *Natal Society of Artists, Twenty-first Annual Exhibition, 1926*, lists over 600 works submitted by 149 members. This large exhibition was mounted in a warehouse on the Esplanade loaned to the Society for the event. In *Art and Architecture in Natal 1910-1940*, Hillebrand writes that it was "Francois who managed to obtain the use of the upper floor of Shaw Bros. Wool Mart - an enormous room, capable of holding hundreds of paintings and spectators. This suited the Society's

²⁶ Leo Francois Rbc was born in Chemnitz, Germany, 1870. Francois, a long serving President of the NSA, was a protagonist with SASA in his quest to unite the various art societies in South Africa into a single academy. His efforts were untiring but they came to nothing up until his death in 1938. In 1914 he moved to Durban, where he was an art critic on *The Natal Mercury*, writing under the nom 'de' plume "Vermilion". As such, he used to propound his ideas on the issue of a "national" school of art that used SA subjects. He was elected President of the NSA seven times, and while in that role founded the short-lived SA Institute of Art in 1925. He served as its first President from 1926. Under his direction the NSA became one of the most influential and successful of SA's art societies, and vied with SASA, SA's oldest, for pre-eminence. In 1929, in recognition of his contributions to SA art, he was elected a member of the Royal British College (RBC). Francois' reputation has since evaporated. His National Academy failed, his writings on art are no longer read, and his own work, poorly represented in museum collections, is seen only at its best in private collections. He died in Durban, 1938 (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/leo-rbc-francois>).

catholic selection policy, but often drew criticism” (Hillebrand, 1986: 43). Ironically, the foreword to the catalogue says that “while the exhibits have reduced in number, it is evident that there is a considerable increase in merit, demonstrating the advance that has been made generally in South African art” (NSA catalogue, 1926, p. 4). Ironic as “the reduced number” was still a vast amount of works and “the increase in merit” was disputed by an art critic at the time who wrote

As in all exhibitions of this kind, when encouragement has obviously played more part in the selection than criticism there are many yards of bad pictures, bad workmanship, and lack of vision; pictures for which one can discover no reason why they should ever have been painted ... for most of us have during the season wandered up and down those incredibly boring halls lined with the works of little men and women who see no further than their tubes of paint - in many cases hardly so far. And the Natal Society of Artists' Exhibition follows this tradition ... (Hillebrand, 1986, p. 43).

What is of note is that artists outside of KZN took part in the Members' Exhibition with the names of acclaimed artists standing out in the catalogue including Jan Ernst Abraham Volschenk (based in Riversdale, Western Cape), J. H. Pierneef (Pretoria), Ruth Prowse (Cape Town), Tinus de Jongh (Rondebosch) and Anton van Wauw (Johannesburg). This migration of work from other parts of the country spoke to early collaborations between art centres at the time.

After World War I the establishment and growth of provincial art centres resulted in the creation of a fruitful art circuit. The oldest existing art society in South Africa was a Cape Town group, The South African Society of Artists, which held its annual exhibition each December. The NSA, founded in 1907 (sic), held its annual exhibition in July and was followed closely by the Eastern Province Society of Arts and Crafts which held an exhibition every August/September. Artists could arrange for unsold works to be sent from Durban to Port Elizabeth at the close of the NSA exhibition – a demonstration of the co-operation that existed between societies at the time (Hillebrand, 1986, p. 44).

Another clue to tensions over the programming and vision of the KZNSA between 1925 and 1945 was the debate about whether the ‘style’ of work should emulate that of British art as exemplified by The Royal Academy which, according to its detractors, created a vacuum where local artists were overshadowed by ‘overseas interlopers,’ or whether artists based in South Africa should develop a ‘national style’ influenced by life and scenes around them. The latter was the passion project of Leo Francois, who used his art column to advocate for this. McMeekan observes that Francois regarded himself as “an educator of the public and when not reporting on or promoting art, he would expound on aesthetics, academics or general reportage. As a practising artist (employing a ‘national style’), he

was not above using his art column for a little ‘auto-appraisal’ “ (2003, p. 15). The 1926 Members’ catalogue proudly announces that it is “the first year in which a prize of Twenty Guineas is offered ... for the best painting or drawing ... descriptive of the domestic or tribal life, or the customs of South African Natives (1926, p. 31). François used this prize as part of his campaign to boost a national spirit in art. He rationalised that “the use of local subject matter plus diverse depictions of the local landscapes would dictate a South African style, and thereby engender a sense of patriotism” (McMeekan, 2003, p. 14). This problematic representation of indigenous people reflects their being othered and oppressed in colonial territories. It most certainly did not consider including Black artists as members in the Society as the British sense of patriotism and “racial unity was generally conceived as harmony between the Briton and the Boer” only (McMeekan, 2003, p.14).

Although some embraced this ideal of a “national style”, no doubt influenced in part by the entry of the four provinces of South Africa into political union in 1910, others were vehemently opposed. It is quite conceivable that in certain instances racial prejudice rather than aesthetics contributed to several of the objections because it appears that the public were reluctant to embrace what they considered "distasteful" subject matter and something that they would avoid displaying on the walls of their houses (McMeekan, 2003, p. 14).

Traditionally, the Society model secured loyalty from members by providing benefits to them including exclusive access to resources, networks and information, and in the case of the KZNSA, space to exhibit once a year. The current annual KZNSA Members’ Exhibition allows paid up members to submit a work, with prizes for the top three entries. From 2019, KZNSA acknowledged that it must actively distance itself from the colonial and racist roots reflected in its early Members’ Exhibitions in order to be sustainable. Two of the prevailing issues from the past surfaced in debates about the Members’ Exhibition of 2020 – one of problematic representation, and the other of exclusivity versus inclusivity. According to Hillebrand:

The success of the (early) NSA was probably also due to its very undemanding constitution, a factor which François was to exploit. Exclusivity was discouraged from the outset. Active membership was open to anyone who could submit at least two of their unassisted original examples of work for the approval of the Council. Members' works were automatically accepted for the annual exhibition and non-members were rarely refused hanging space (1986, p. 39).

These questions of inclusivity and exclusivity are valuable to unpack. All of the members who benefited from François' aversion to exclusivity were white settlers. Since 1994, increased access for artists from all backgrounds and reduced resources place pressure on a gentlemen's club model that historically

privileged white artists. When these artists are not included it gives rise to the complexities of the previously advantaged taking issue with a new 'exclusivity' that no longer privileges them. Russel Hlongwane adds to this discourse, saying:

I think inclusive organisations don't want to perpetuate the illusion of inclusivity. Perhaps they are trying to form new ideas that may conflict, but members are mature enough to live with conflicting ideas. I don't think a cultural institution that is inclusive shouldn't tackle difficult questions. It's ignorant for an organisation to think that we can't have this conversation because it might be divisive and split our membership. People should be mature to exist with other people with conflicting views if the conversation is not to divide people but to bring new narratives to the table (Hlongwane, as cited in Pissarro, 2018, p. 31).

Clement Seneque's admiration for "over 900 exhibits" in the 1925 Members' Exhibition and the great pride Francois took in their "inclusivity" is no longer sustainable in a context where resources for career artists are in demand. Ultimately, the costs of installing and promoting an extensive exhibition of poor quality, problematic artwork made by occasional painters became unsustainable for the KZNSA.

In 2019, the theme of the Members' Exhibition was *Umhlaba | Land* and the KZNSA invited curator, Gabi Ngcobo, along with artist and DUT lecturer Themba Shibase and DUT Head of Department, Motsamai David Tshabalala, to judge. There were over a hundred submissions from predominantly white 'Sunday painters', many of whom had not responded to the theme of *Umhlaba | Land* and employed problematic representation. When Ngcobo had viewed the works I asked her thoughts on judging the submissions; she replied that it was "excruciating". Ngcobo's citation on behalf of the judges says

It has been an interesting process to learn what this very topical and urgent topic means to the artistic community represented here. Some have come from the position of the dispossessed to express their opinions on this question. Others make visible just how haunted our landscape is and therefore how to face the ghosts that continue to interrupt our present. Many come to the topic to express an uncertainty these discussions transmit to their sense of place and belonging. Others poetically and beautifully show us the fantastic potentialities of our environment, if we take good care of it. Others courageously place their bodies on the spot in order to claim space and in so doing bring into the gallery space a language of making memory and of mourning that which has been lost but can be recovered. Of course, there are others who couldn't care less about addressing such a question (online, 2019).

In 2020, the KZNSA Exhibition Sub-committee made the decision to place stricter conditions of entry to the Members' Exhibition, renaming it the KZNSA Members' Award and reserving the right to refuse entries. The new criteria had a size limit of 1.5 m for any dimension of a work. Each artist could only submit one work, work needed to have been made for the Award that year in response to the theme, and the E-SC reserved the right to eliminate work that employed problematic representation. As many members had not participated in the consultations along the way and not paid attention to the entry form conditions, they were indignant when the work they brought in was rejected. To begin with, members cited their right to take part in the Members' Exhibition as enshrined in the KZNSA Constitution. When it was pointed out to them that there is no clause in the Constitution to this effect, they took to social media to express their outrage. The majority of complaints came from white artists, some of them former members of 'The Cabal' mentioned by Young in her interview. Some of the comments on the KZNSA Facebook page were:

An Exclusive (Open) Members exhibition where a select few decide whose work had value and substance is not acceptable. Over 70% of the submissions EXcluded. Great pity.

Very disappointing that so few people were allowed to exhibit their work. Defeats the object of the occasion.

It's become incredibly exclusive. The members exhibition this year was an absolute disappointment compared to previous years ... I thought the members exhibition was the one exhibition that was meant to be subjective to us the public and not to the tastes of a select few. Very sad.

A massacre.

Similarly, a member wrote to the organisation saying:

I've given this some thought and have decided that I'd like to rescind my membership to the KZNSA for 2020 ... The ethos of this members exhibition goes against every fibre of my being (those being inclusivity, generosity and kindness). I would like to place on record that I have always respected Council's decisions in the running of the KZNSA (having been involved for so many years I know how hard it is). Should the council decide to take the gallery in a more exclusive and elitist direction, I will support that decision but will not feel a part of the organisation. One cannot have a members-based institution and treat the members with disrespect and disdain. Basically, you can't have your cake and eat it. I feel the KZNSA must make a decision - have the gallery do what they desire for 49

weeks of the year (which also incorporates an inclusive heartfelt, generous 3-week members-based exhibition), or continue with their elitist, exclusiveness for the entire 52 weeks of the year (email to KZNSA Council, 23 March 2020).

Despite the reason for instituting selections having merit, the implementation of the change was badly handled by the E-SC and the Gallery Administrator. They eschewed consultations with members about the changes in advance of the submission dates, and when some people submitted work and it exceeded the size limit or immediately did not meet other criteria they were dismissed with little explanation. In addition, where people had left work that was not selected by the E-SC they were not notified that it would not be installed. There were quite a few members who came to the opening with family and friends to proudly point to their work in an exhibition but were handed their rejected works to take home instead. Many complaints were received about the disdain and rudeness they experienced in interactions with the submissions team, and this directly resulted in member numbers dropping from over 400 to the low 200s in the following year. Acknowledging that some members were distressed, the KZNSA called a Special General Meeting for members to voice their concerns and for the organisation to contextualise the change. Dane Knudsen, then a member of the E-SC, prepared a letter to members saying:

Yes, the change was drastic but we felt that we needed to just rip the band-aid off. One of the major things we are doing through the competition format is asking Durban artists to continuously do better – through their technical and conceptual approach. The shift from thinking about the exhibition as one where every work gets shown to only the finalists in the competition is a break from old tradition, but aligns the resulting exhibition with the prestige surrounding the competition awards ... Our interest in benefiting the artists in Durban extends beyond just showing one of your works in a crowded exhibition once a year. We aim to elevate the standard and reputation this city has when it comes to Art. We would like to build on the foundation set by the history of art in Durban and this means that every now and again a couple of walls need to be taken down for the space to be reshaped ... We hope you will continue to feel like the KZNSA is where you belong (Knudsen, 2020).

This letter weirdly echoes an entry form to the 1970 Members' Exhibition, found when going through Sylvia Kaplan's papers in 2023, that makes it clear that there is precedent for a selection process when entering the Annual Members' Exhibition. The form says:

TO ALL MEMBERS ... your Committee is desirous of putting on an Exhibition of a high standard. For that reason and because of space limitations the selection will be VERY STRICT and members are requested to submit only their BEST WORK ... The Selection Committee's

decision will be final and no correspondence will be entered into regarding any works not accepted ... REJECTS TO BE COLLECTED: Before 12 noon Thursday, 24 December 1970 from the gallery (NSA entry form, 1970).

The Special General Meeting fell a week before national lockdown in March 2020 and soon after there were other more pressing issues to attend to with regards to the survival of the organisation, while knowing that some members were still simmering in the background. After lockdown, due to the protests of the artists who had been excluded, the family who had donated the prize money since 2003 also threatened to withdraw their funding. When it came time to issue the call-out for the 2021 Members' Award, myself and Sumayya Menezes, the KZNSA Curator between 2021 and 2023, met with the family and talked through the rationale of the change. We left that meeting with the amount for prizes doubled. It was also decided by the E-SC that as a gesture of compromise the Park Gallery would be reserved for members' work only during BUZZART, from November to January each year, guaranteeing any member who brought in work a longer 8–10-week exhibition slot in the gallery each year, as well as the chance to submit for selection into the Members' Award in the middle of the year. I asked Janse van Rensburg his views on introducing selection criteria for the Members' Award given that the Zeitz MOCAA, where he is now Curator, had mounted an open exhibition after lockdown in 2020 showing the work of any member and he replied,

I think the decision that you made is also the right one. It's about creating new spaces, that's how you develop. I don't necessarily think we should be all inclusive all the time, this is why we can look back at certain moments of courage – it reflects the kind of urgency the time needs. We should have positions and viewpoints – if we don't, we disappear. I think that (the change) is impactful in the long run if one of your drives leads to the transformation of the organisation, that's where your energy is going. And if you put some people off along the way, that's okay. You have to push through the initial resistances and stuff and grow a thick skin. I mean, really thick skin – when I was there all kinds of shit was lobbed at me. It was also a big moment when Jeff (Chandler) decided to break away from SANAVA. These are big, momentous moments where serious decisions are being made along the way like bringing back a selection criterion for the members' exhibition (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

The change in the annual members' exhibition format was regrettably executed and resulted in unnecessary fallout to an organisation already distrusted by many KZN artists. At the same time, the refusal of poor-quality work has greatly energised the Annual Members' Award and contributes to a sustainability that benefits career artists, the KZNSA and the sector. The practice of quality submissions and the growing participation of Black artists who felt marginalised by the white identity of the former format is slowly building a space of professionalism criticality needed in the province.

3.3 The Young Artists' Project (YAP)

Initiated in 2002 by then curator, Storm Janse van Rensburg, The Young Artists' Project (YAP) was "conceived as an institutional platform for experimental art practice in the city of Durban" (Janse van Rensburg, 2005, p. 2). YAP encouraged proposals for new media work, shifting the KZNSA programming away from its focus on traditional art forms such as painting. The tension this created in the then Exhibition Sub-Committee is legendary, with one member being so enraged that he threatened to beat up Janse van Rensburg in the carpark. According to Janse van Rensburg,

In that initial framework we pushed against the mistakes of the exhibition model where the barrier was the fact that you had to pay a rental fee to have the space. That excluded artists I felt very strongly should have access to those spaces. I started the program with the logic to get funding on board because I was like, we have to change this model. We can also have more say about who exhibits, because the proposals that we got were because people could afford it. So, we changed that whole model, and came up with a strategy of funding, where we would put money towards exhibitions and pay people fees and the cost of things (to exhibit).

What happened is that I got the money (from funders) for us to be able to actually do away with certain parts of the exhibition programme. The focus of YAP was on experimental work with a move against painting at the time, particularly a trope of Durban painting. And, not to say that KZNSA excluded the amazing painters, but it was like painters exhibited all the time so we were going to do something different. The vision was for new media work.

The Young Artists' Project came out of a desire to create some kind of energy around young artists in the city, to get an ecosystem going around young artists, along with the writing workshop with young writers. We did these tiny little brochures. Young artists could specifically apply for an exhibition that would be funded. And those projects were kind of crazy, I think we did some naughty things with that money in the end. It was pushing a lot of boundaries - we did this event where there was a noise performance that was unbearable. People were freaking out; a lot of moments were almost out of control. But it was also really interesting to be pushing on that level. It was very experimental and the only thing that kept us going was that I didn't have to beg for money, so I found that funny (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

In the funding report for YAP in 2002, Janse van Rensburg writes that

YAP was initiated as an annual project designed to stimulate a ‘next generation’ of artists, by creating an experimental component to the NSA Gallery exhibitions programme, where four invited young artists annually work closely with a curator to produce their first solo. The projects’ focus is on the development of ‘new-media’ such as video, installation, digital work and performance-based projects, with no commercial objective. In addition to this the NSA Gallery publishes a small-format catalogue per project and hosts a seminar to discuss issues brought up through the project contributions. (2003, p. 3)

Nathi Gumede, who was Assistant Curator at KZNSA from 2000 to 2012 and who continued to manage the project when Janse van Rensburg left the KZNSA in 2006, confirms that YAP funding covered materials budgets for artists and the costs of mounting the exhibitions. Gumede had reservations about limiting the invitations to artists working in new media as the medium itself implied an access to resources that many Black artists did not have. He also felt that funded exhibitions needed to include mid-career artists like Thami Jali, Zamani Makhanya, Paul Sibisi, Sfiso ka-Mkame, etc. who had experienced systemic exclusion from Durban institutions in the past (N. Gumede, interview, 14 December 2023).

The artists who took part in the 2002 chapter of YAP were Hlengiwe Lushaba (performance and installation), Milijana Babic (installation), Lyndon Daniels (animation and video) and Thando Mama (video and installation). Each artist could nominate a young writer who would contribute text to the YAP catalogue in collaboration with the catalogue co-editor and the curator. “The intention for this process is also to develop critical writing skills and opportunities, a neglected and under-resourced component of visual art and its discourses” (Janse van Rensburg, 2003, p. 4). In 2003 the participants were Jan-Henri Booyens, Khwezi Gule, Doung Anwar Jahangeer and Georgia Kotretsos. The 2004/5 young artists were Anawana Haloba (video) paired with Gabi Ngcobo as critical writer, Dean Henning and Rike Sitas (interactive digital video) with writer Niall McNulty, Vaughn Sadie (installation) with writer Kirsty Cockerill and Mlu Zondi (performance) with writer Siyanda Duma. In 2005/6 the artists were Colleen Alborough (installation and video) with writer Nathaniel Stern, Dineo Seshee Bopape (installation) with writer Rike Sites, Bronwyn Lace (installation) with writers Doung Anwar Jahangeer and Miranda Young-Jahangeer and Peter van Heerden (performance) with writer Aja Marneweck. The 2002-2006 YAP project was funded by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund, the Royal Netherlands Embassy, Pro-Helvetia, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the National Arts Council.

From 2016, it was KZNSA’s vision to revive YAP and proposals were made to numerous public funders and private sponsors to raise the funds to do so. These proved unfruitful and it was decided to initiate

the revival on a smaller scale, offering to waive gallery hire and to cover all exhibition costs for artists. To this end, in 2017 KZNSA invited two Durban-based early career artists, Sthenjwa Luthuli and Wonder Buhle Mbambo to mount their first solos at KZNSA under the YAP banner. Luthuli declined the invitation due to capacity issues and Mbambo accepted with a date being set for his solo to take place in May 2018. As discussions about the exhibition agreement between Mbambo and the KZNSA evolved, it became clear that he was not happy with the fact that this version of YAP had no materials budget for the artist to produce work and that, since the project was not funded, the gallery requested that works were for sale to cover the costs of installation and gallery overheads. These proved to be areas where the artist and gallery could not reach agreement and Mbambo opted to withdraw from the project three weeks before his opening. He later moved his solo to the municipal gallery, the Durban Art Gallery, to take place in July 2018, where he would have more autonomy and there would be no gallery commission on sales. This was a blow to KZNSA due to the short notice of the cancellation and the loss of the partnership with Mbambo. Mbambo had appointed Nkule Mabaso²⁷ as an independent curator for his first solo and her insights into his decision shed light on the dynamics in play:

(Mbambo) asked me about different strategies about how one might manage to have a career that doesn't wait for recognition from galleries ... He wrote sometime later saying that he has this project at KZNSA ... then he had some moments later where there were problems or issues that he wasn't happy with how things were going with the KZNSA, especially around the money, how the gallery is going to take x amount (as commission), and so on. And that was his big discontent – to not being able to arrive at what would be a fair and equal understanding between the institution and himself. I did explain to him that this is normal practice in the context of galleries ... I said, it's possible to do things on your own, to be an independent person. But that means you take on all the costs of what it means to produce visibility. If you're going to work with a space, you then have to find an agreement that fulfils your needs and the space's needs. Or if you want to allocate the resources yourself you are setting the terms of the engagement as opposed to entering simply into structure, you also have to be quite clear what's

²⁷ Nkule Mabaso is the director of Natal Collective an independent production company active internationally in the research and presentation of creative and cultural Africana contemporary art and politics. Projects include the curation, together with Nomusa Makhubu, of the South Africa Pavilion at the Venice Biennale Arte 2019 under the title *The stronger we become*. Nkule graduated with a Fine Arts degree from the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2011 and received a Master's in Curating from the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) in 2014. She is the former curator of the Michaelis Galleries at University of Cape Town (2015-2021). She has curated and organised exhibitions and public talks in Switzerland, Malawi, Tanzania, the Netherlands and South Africa. Nkule voluntarily serves on the advisory boards of VANSAs, the Standard Bank Art Gallery in Johannesburg, The University of Cape Town Works of Art Committee, the Museum Services Board of the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport and is contributing editor to the *Oncurating.org* Journal at the ZHdK (<https://parsejournal.com/authors/nkule-mabaso/>)

possible within that range of engagement. A few weeks later he said he had identified the DAG as a space to do something.

When I ask what it was like working as an independent curator on a project at DAG, Mabaso replies, “it was horrible. It was really disappointing”. She goes on to talk more about how a Durban artist’s geographic location impacts their career:

Movement is not the first thing to do in order to solve a problem. It's like, how am I working? How am I managing visibility? What do I want? And how hard do I want to work? Because the work of the support structures, the galleries and so on, is to assist the artist who is very focused on ‘I just want to make my work. I don't want to think about administration’. So, you know, so if you are that person, are you that person who needs this service? Because think about it, about your needs and your requirements, and then it's easy to identify (N. Mabaso, interview, 28 October 2023).

With regards to Mbambo’s refusal to work with KZNSA in 2018, it’s necessary to acknowledge the success he has had as an artist. His refusal extends to not adhering to the norms of the art industry by sidestepping gallery representation in the early years of his career, self-promoting on his own Instagram platform using the hashtags, #africancontemporaryartist, #artistsoninstagram, #independentartist and #artisttowatch, and building a collector base independently. His collectors now include DJ Black Coffee and at the end of 2023 he worked with Coca Cola Global to produce a television commercial and a range of NFTs for the brand. More recently Mbambo has been represented by BKHz Gallery²⁸ owned by Banele Khoza, but when he does work with other galleries it is on short term projects with a defined body of work or to be represented at international art fairs. This disruption of art industry protocols is not limited to the primary art market, and he is known to send work from his studio into the secondary market. On 1 October 2021, his oil on canvas, *The Hearts*, was featured on a Christie’s auction with an estimate of US\$30,000 - US\$50,000 and went on to sell for US\$175,000. Given his choice to keep his studio in his hometown of Durban, there is no doubt that Mbambo’s refusals and related commercial success have energised the local creative economy with knock-on income to assistants, managers,

²⁸ Banele Khoza founded BKHz Gallery in Rosebank, Johannesburg in 2016. Khoza is one of a few Black gallerists in South Africa and also practices as an artist and curator. “The space has been rumoured to be a gallery/shop/studio/ artist project/ project space. Perhaps it is a collective of all the mentioned, that is why I myself do not know the actual answer to it. I also do not know how it will adapt going forward as there will be plenty of projects taking place, there will be an activation of talks, there will be curated shows, open studios. This is a space for creativity, driven and led by expression. I thank the landlord as he agreed to all my absurd requests of wanting to paint the floors green – he had no problem with it, that is what I hope to achieve with the space, where people are given the maximum expression of the space. That is what I am interested in” (Khoza, 2016: online at <https://bkhz.art/>)

suppliers and artists in his network. Mabaso also reflects on the tension between commercial success and criticality in Mbambo's career;

There is a boom-and-bust possibility for the careers of these (early career) artists, because there is market circulation. But there is not the intellectual engagement with the production of works. What I tried to say is, even when you are a market machine, you have to think about the production of the intellectual part. In order for the sustainability and future of the work and future of the market beyond your productive years of making and selling. You need to commission some writers so you're going to have a publication. What kind of content is written and how do you manage it? I don't think (Mbambo) took that on that aspect (of criticality) quite as well as he did the business side of things (N. Mabaso, interview, 28 October 2023).

In 2019 the KZNSA received their Grant-in-Aid funding from eThekweni Municipality and committed this funding to reviving YAP again, with the budget providing materials allowances for artists to produce the work. In 2020 eight young artists mounted their first solos in the gallery across a range of media. This iteration of YAP included the critical writing programme as per the 2002-2006 chapter, and also added a programme to mentor aspirant curators as it identified a need to build curatorial capacity in the region. The artists in YAP1 of the 2020 chapter were Yasmien Mackay (video, sculpture and installation), Vanessa Tembane (collage), Cherie Dilrajh (installation) and Minenhle Nxele (painting and sculpture). The lead curator was Greer Valley who mentored Luyanda Zindela and Rohini Amratlal. YAP2 in 2020 featured artists Jessica Bothma (sculpture and drawing), Lindani Nyandeni (painting), Vuyolwethu Ndakisa (mixed media) and Kundai Moyo (photography and video). This leg of YAP was compromised by national lockdown in 2020 and the invited curator Thulile Gamedze was not available for the rescheduled time slot when the gallery reopened. Carol Brown replaced Gamedze and mentored two aspiring curators, Yasmien Mackay and Kenneth Shandu. The writers in the programme, Brook Schafer, Cherie Dilrajh, Sanelle Ebrahim, Sumayya Menezes, Lukho Witbooi and Luyanda Zindela participated in both YAP1 and YAP2 and were mentored by Mario Pissarra of ASAI, who was the editor of the catalogue.

KZNSA continues to apply for funding to implement more chapters of YAP. The current vision for the YAP programme includes being able to represent YAP artist/s at an art fair in order to cement their visibility and careers in the industry. This move contributes to the commercial success of young artists, and KZNSA needs to be resourceful about income outside of the local market. But it does not exist in isolation from facilitating experimental practice and building capacity for criticality. Similar to Janse van Rensburg's position on YAP, KZNSA embraces the feedback loops in the system between mainstream and non-commercial practice:

I don't think I would have shown painting during YAP at the time. Now, of course, the whole environment has changed quite a lot. I think that now something like (YAP in 2002-2006) would not necessarily fly, but we can still think about experimental practices in different ways. We have to create environments for things that might not be universally accepted, or practices that go into different directions. There's a fixation on emerging artists now in the market, and also greater opportunities exist for them. But there are still other ways of thinking and being in the world that we need to support (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

3.4 Participation in Art Fairs

After decades of unsuccessfully trying to engage art buyers in KZN, the KZNSA embraced participation at national art fairs in 2019. This was coupled with the realisation that the organisation and the artists it works with would remain invisible to the art industry if it did not turn up in these forums. Artists from KZN need the visibility of a national platform to establish their careers, and the KZNSA needed to engage collectors to secure art sales and remain sustainable. Malatsie asks whether

... the model that is being currently used (of) commercial galleries or selling artworks to collectors is the only way of practising sustainably, while there may be other avenues outside of the trajectory of the young graduate who exhibits in a project space and gets noticed by commercial galleries ... trying to find alternatives should be experimented on, tested and investigated (2018: 93).

The KZNSA had certainly tried to find alternatives to sustain itself, and now needed to enter the commercial terrain of the industry. In Dane Knudson's letter to members during the upheaval caused by changes to the Members' Exhibition, he writes:

One of the major things we are doing through the competition format (of the Members' Award) is asking Durban artists to continuously do better – through technical and conceptual approach ... Over the last year we have been fortunate enough to start partaking in various national art fairs, which has been a phenomenal experience, plus we get to take Durban artists to a wider audience. Entering the national platform in this way has impacted the way we run the exhibition calendar (2020).

Since the change to the Members' Exhibition, the KZNSA E-SC uses the KZNSA Members' Award as a filter for their selection of KZN artists to invite to art fairs. The Members' Award is judged by independent creative practitioners who have an understanding of the sector, and the stricter conditions

mean that artists who are placed are more likely to be candidates for further professional representation. This is in line with the strategy to support career artists, and encourages local artists to take the entry criteria and the quality of their submissions to the Members' Award seriously.

The first art fair KZNSA took part in was the inaugural Latitudes Art Fair in Johannesburg in September 2019. KZNSA had applied to participate in the 2019 FNB Joburg Art Fair in 2018 and was accepted. In the interim between the acceptance and the fair, the ownership of The FNB Joburg Art Fair changed and it was renamed Art Joburg with a new vision to show first and second tier galleries only, with nonprofits 'only by invitation'. When it became clear that the new model excluded the KZNSA I reached out to Lucy McGarry who had been the curator of the fair under the previous ownership. She invited KZNSA to participate in a new art fair she and Roberta Cocci had founded, Latitudes Art Fair, and KZNSA invited Sthenjwa Luthuli, Derrick Nxumalo and Cameron Platter to exhibit²⁹. Both Platter and Nxumalo were mid-career artists with established followings in South Africa, and Platter had also shown internationally. Luthuli had been placed runner-up in Sasol New Signatures 2017 but was relatively unknown. Latitudes were generous with space and provided a long wall where KZNSA could show one of Nxumalo's legendary large-scale works and they installed *The South African Art, Culture, Economy & Tourism*, an 8m wide by 3m high acrylic painting on paper depicting a fantasy cityscape. Platter exhibited large abstract pencil crayon drawings and his wooden sculptural works mimicking plastic tables, buckets, pool noodles and stools. Luthuli exhibited five of his works; hand carved and painted MDF board at sizes of 184 x 136 cm and 250 x 184 cm. MacGarry and Cocci were taken with Luthuli's work and asked permission to use images of *Izwi Lenhloko* for all the branding and publicity of the fair – on city-wide street pole advertisements and banners, on fair signage and on the web banner and catalogue cover. In the lead up to the fair, Luthuli was also invited to be part of a collaboration with David Krut in which a print work that he developed would be released as a limited edition folio and, in partnership with Daytona, be used to wrap a luxury car for VIPs at the fair. Luthuli sold out with all five works going to prestigious collections. This injection of income and validation was deeply energising for the KZNSA and Luthuli's career has grown exponentially and internationally, with him going on to work independently with a solo at Whatiftheworld in Cape Town and two at Unit London, United Kingdom.

Following on from this, KZNSA has participated in The Investec Cape Town Art Fair (ICTAF) in 2020 (representing Callan Grecia and Derrick Nxumalo)³⁰, in 2022 (representing Siphesihle Ntsungwana, Siobahn Doughty and Sphephelo Mnguni)³¹ and in the RMB Latitudes Art Fair in 2023 (representing

²⁹ <https://kznsagallery.co.za/Exhibitions/View/961/latitudes>

³⁰ <https://kznsagallery.co.za/Exhibitions/View/971/investec-cape-town-art-fair>

³¹ <https://kznsagallery.co.za/Exhibitions/View/1004/kznsa-at-investec-cape-town-art-fair-2022>

Selloane Moeti, Nindya Bucktowar and Alka Dass)³². KZNSA took part in the ICTAF in 2024 representing a Cameron Platter and Georgina Gratrix collaboration and Mfezeko Gumada³³. In line with artist's invitations to art fairs being based on how they are placed in the KZNSA Members' Award; Moeti was the winner of the 2020 Members' Award, Ntsungwana received a commendation in 2021 and was placed third in 2022, Gumada was placed first in 2021, Doughty was awarded the Marianne Meijer prize in 2021 and Dass was the 2023 winner of the KZNSA Members' Award.

In early 2022 there was a buzz in Durban with the news that Lungelo Mkhize of Section 9, an art handling and logistics company, was initiating the Durban Art Fair (TDAF) to be held on the weekend of the Vodacom Durban July horse race 7-10 July 2022. For KZNSA, it was encouraging that Durban could host a national art industry event that would attract national and international collectors to the city, and that the elusive 'Durban art collector' may emerge from the woodwork. The invitation from Mkhize to participate in the fair read

In the attempt to activate an untapped market in a region of South Africa which happens to be the home of many world-renowned and emerging African artists, the purpose of the Durban Art Fair will be to serve as the vehicle of activating the art market of the east coast of the country. It will do so through introducing Durban-based (and hopefully the broader KZN area) art lovers, collectors and entities to domestic and international galleries that already exist in other parts of the country and outside of South African borders. The fair will also act as a tool for educating potential clients of the art world market (artists/galleries/trends/prices and networks) that essentially does not exist in the region at the moment and thus through the art fair's presence overtime hope to unearth new artists and art world practitioners from the region (Mkhize, email, 18 January 2022).

In March 2022 KZNSA received an email saying that, "The Durban Art Fair has been postponed. We needed more time to put together a quality production and therefore moved our first rendition of the fair to 2023" (Mkhize, email, 22 March 2022). The lead up to the fair in 2023 was promising with a professional team in place for the fair infrastructure and commitments from established galleries such as Stevenson and Goodman to participate. KZNSA reserved three booths, one to show Mfezeko Gumada and Derrick Nxumalo whom we had invited, another was funded by Georgina Gratrix for a collaboration she and Cameron Platter were embarking on as a fundraiser for the KZNSA and a third was funded by auction house Strauss & Co who would auction works donated by KZNSA alumni for the fair. However, snags came up in the months before the fair with eThekweni Municipality forcing

³² <https://kznsagallery.co.za/Exhibitions/View/1025/rmb-latitudes-art-fair>

³³ <https://kznsagallery.co.za/Exhibitions/View/1041/kznsa-at-investec-cape-town-art-fair-2024>

TDAF to relocate and change dates because they had double-booked the Moses Mabhida venue. The new venue and date were at the amphitheatre on the Durban beachfront from 20-23 July 2023 but Mkhize soon discovered that the public restrooms there were out of operation and they would have to pay for temporary toilets. Finally, on 16 May 2023, Mkhize sent an email to exhibitors announcing that “it is with great sadness to notify you that we have made the decision to pull the plug on the Durban Art Fair indefinitely”. He went on to cite “red tape ... whenever dealing with the city coupled with the lack of additional support from the city” as one of the reasons for the cancellation (Mkhize, email, 16 May 2023).

The KZNSA’s relationship with the Investec Cape Town Art Fair is an example of the status and challenges of nonprofits in the broader arts ecosystem. In 2020 and 2022 the KZNSA booth was part of the fair’s Cultural Platform, a zone reserved for nonprofits and public institutions. While the per square metre rate was half that of the commercial galleries, it remained a financial challenge for KZNSA to fund the booth, transport the work and travel to Cape Town. We needed sales to recover costs and also felt it was important for the artists’ we represented to generate income and be validated by acquisitions. The fair organisers, however, objected to exhibitors in the cultural platform selling work, saying their display could be educational only as nonprofits should not transact. In mid-2022 in the lead up to the 2023 fair I entered into email and online meeting conversations with the fair to rationalise why we participated and how we were able to afford to do so, but they did not budge on their position of no sales. In the end, KZNSA agreed to mount an exhibition speaking to our member programme only with no work on sale for the 2023 fair. At the end of 2023 the ICTAF liaison contacted us to say that we were one of only two nonprofits who had agreed to the no-selling terms, and they were scrapping the Cultural Platform entirely. The position that nonprofits should not sell and, by inference, not participate in the art industry vastly underestimates the role they play in the industry ecosystem as incubators of new work and break-away spaces for artists to broaden their practice through experimentation. The idea that nonprofit art centres are feeder galleries for commercial galleries is not new. Quite a few of the sales made at ICTAF in 2020 and 2022 were to curators and directors of commercial galleries who went on to offer opportunities to the artists we had represented. As the KZNSA prepares to participate in the 2024 ICTAF in a booth amongst the commercial galleries charged at full rates, there is anxiety about whether the opportunity for visibility and sales will outweigh the risks of the financial cost to participate.

Successful participation in art fairs contributes enormous energy to the organisation – culturally, financially and in terms of social justice for underrepresented artists in the province of KZN. Sadly, art fairs have a large carbon footprint and remain an environmentally unsustainable activity.

3.5 The education programme - KZNSA LAB

I am mindful of Nkule Mabaso's comment that "in my estimation, art fairs are more about the production of a market visibility. That's where there is a boom-and-bust possibility for the careers of these artists, because there is a market circulation. But there is not the intellectual engagement with the production of works", KZNSA is committed to critically engaging with artists' practices and with aspects of the industry that overlook intellectual content (N. Mabaso, interview, 28 October 2023).

There have been various iterations of an education programme at KZNSA over the years. According to McMeekan,

A workshop programme was not without precedent in the annals of the NSA. Since the 1960's the minutes reflect ongoing workshop activities, and the Society's constitution stressed its commitment to promoting art in all of its diverse forms. Chandler (who was president from 1993 to 1995) himself remarks that the NSA had a remarkable record of outreach programmes. However, by making it a focus of his Presidency, he increased the frequency and importance of these activities which succeeded in not only helping underprivileged members of the community such as abandoned children and others, but also developed employment and training opportunities for many graduating art students. From this period onwards the NSA workshop programme has achieved a significant influence. (Recognition for the administration and development of these programmes is due not only to Chandler's initiatives, but also to the vision and motivation of Marlene Wasserman, the NSA's Director of Workshops) (2003, p. 35).

KZNSA's current education programme was formalised in 2016. The name KZNSA LAB, standing for Learning, Appreciation, nokuBambana (unity) was developed with the input of the 2016-2018 president, Russel Hlongwane. In its most productive phase between 2016 and 2019 there were regular activities aimed at a wide range of audiences including amateur and professional artists, aspirant writers and curators, secondary school and tertiary arts educators, and children. The programme was visualised as a pyramid with the free and most accessible 'must-have activities' at the base and the dream of a residency programme at the pinnacle - something that has not been achieved to date. One of the base activities is that all exhibitions at the KZNSA are accompanied by an educational walkabout with the exhibiting artist or curator. This offers further insight into the work on display, creating a platform for the viewer to engage with the maker. Participants gain a deeper understanding into the exhibition and its place in contemporary visual art practice. Another free activation was the KZNSA LAB Talks Programme. Held every First Thursday from 2016 to 2019, these master classes were presented by artists, curators, designers and crafters who share expertise within their discipline, technique or on arts

administration. The aim was for regular skills-sharing sessions between KZN creatives to celebrate excellence and provide a platform for local Masters. It also contributed to developing a creative community that is critically engaged and abreast of national and global industry standards and trends. A third free activity was to engender engagement with and between educators in local secondary school and tertiary institutions. Arts education practitioners were invited to evening get-togethers every quarter to find out about upcoming exhibitions, and to discuss ways in which they could collaborate with the gallery on activities that align with tertiary and secondary school curricula.

Education activities where a fee was charged included Saturday Sessions and Holiday Sessions. The former was a programme of weekly art classes that paired interested members of the public with popular local artists for a short session of learning and exploration within visual art disciplines such as figure drawing with a live model, oil pastel drawing, photography, illustration and portraiture, with past lessons in beading, acrylic painting, coding, collage and lino printing. The informal and informative nature of the classes attracted participants from across a wide range of age and experience. Holiday Sessions facilitated by local artists catered to children aged eight to sixteen with coding, beading, street art and collage workshops.

On all funded exhibitions, KZNSA allocates budget towards education activities that employ creative practitioners for making workshops, mentoring programmes and for talks. Whenever possible, exhibiting artists are encouraged to facilitate educational making workshops for secondary school and tertiary students. Workshops are hands-on and engaged, with participants learning a new skill or technique over the course of a few hours and leaving with a completed piece of art. In 2016, Sumayya Menezes who was Gallery Administrator at the time, developed a secondary schools blog in order to provide educators with an online tool for arts education. Regular school visits are not always possible for learners throughout the province, especially disadvantaged schools and those with limited resources available for arts and culture activities. KZNSA has created an online educational blog linked to the gallery's exhibition calendar, allowing educators and learners to engage remotely with the artwork on display and its themes.

As mentioned, KZNSA Gallery is understaffed, and the education programme is subject to the capacity (and interest) of the person who manages the gallery at the time. It is the KZNSA's intention to employ a full-time Education Officer, but until that can be afforded KZNSA, LAB has energy or inertia according to its human resources. In the tenure of Sumayya Menezes, who has a passion for arts education and is currently working on a Masters dissertation at the University of Johannesburg on the subject, the education programme was greatly energised. Menezes was Gallery Administrator between 2014 and 2016, Curator from November 2021 to April 2023 and a freelance Education Officer whenever there were funded exhibitions.

Mabaso proposes an “office for research”. She asks questions about artists who produce a particular kind of visibility and financial success, but who develop no intellectual continuity at a discursive level within their practice:

This also comes up when you're looking at the KZNSA where you want sustainability on a financial level ... how does the institution bring other kinds of attention to itself? What work does the institution need to be doing? It's not simply about the production, filling up a programme and the space ... there's research for commercial purposes and there's research that helps you build the institution ... The research is not supplementary, it comes first. That helps you to reorient all the activities and the priorities ...

... I start from a personal point of view ... I start talking to the people and say I like what you are doing, can we talk about it? And then something will develop ... We are creating a container in which to hold something as opposed to dispersing energy. What I'm proposing is a softer thing that could lead to productive collaboration, because you're seeking solutions, you're seeking something, but you have awareness as well. It is about commitment to talking ... So it's not collaboration in the same sense of like, I will write an email then somebody's gonna respond positively ... It's just a slow arrival at the established version of what the collaboration is. And because it happens organically, it's less contrived and is more truly collaborative (N. Mabaso, interview, 28 October 2023).

Mabaso's proposal of “soft collaboration” in developing partnerships that support criticality resembles Swilling's ‘radical incrementalism’ – that of a gradual but powerful move towards, and embodying, sustainable practice.

CHAPTER 4

The case study - commerce

Other nuances in the exploration of sustainability in the KZN creative sector are how income is generated for stakeholders via the sale of art and craft, and whether this commodification undermines the integrity of the work. This tension between art and commerce asks whether the commodification of craft or art is the only way to ensure sustainability. For Verges, a reflection on economy proves inseparable from a reflection on content (2016, p. 7). KZN has a rich heritage of craft with generations of highly skilled artisans in beading, weaving, ceramics and wood carving. Selling this work in the KZNSA Shop became necessary for makers and also for the survival of the KZNSA, and evokes Arjun Appadurai's assertion that things have social lives, namely, different trajectories which allow them to move in and out of the commodity state (1986, p. 13). This chapter reflects on the collaborations and refusals of KZNSA initiatives that embrace commerce, and whether these contribute to sustainability in all its dimensions – financial, social justice, communal well-being, environmental, and also cultural sustainability.

4.1 The KZNSA Shop

4.1.1 KZNSA Shop founding story

The seeds of the KZNSA Shop started in 1965 when, for the first time, the KZNSA had a year-round gallery space at Hermitage Lane.

The new gallery was, under (Hannah) Lurie's guidance, to become more than an exhibition space. Her idea was to create a showcase for artists to display their work throughout the year and to this end part of the gallery was set aside for semi-permanent displays. This move heralded the beginnings of the gallery gift and craft shop, which in turn was to become the financial 'engine-room' of the Society eventually enabling the NSA to finance its new complex in Bulwer Road, Durban (McMeekan, 2003, p. 27).

From there the KZNSA Shop evolved in the late 1980s under the influence of Gloria Hoff – “it started for the very reason that we were not doing enough sales with exhibitions ... It was always a problem to sell paintings” (G. Hoff, interview, 29 September 2023). At the time, the KZNSA Gallery rented space in Overport City, a shopping centre on the Berea in Durban. Hoff had prior experience in the local cultural sector in the early 1980s as a tour guide at the Durban Art Gallery when Carol Brown was the

Education Officer there. In the mid-1980s, Hoff, who was serving on the KZNSA Council, was asked to relieve the curator, Aidan Walsh,³⁴ for one afternoon a week. Walsh was a professional artist and wanted more time to make work. Very soon one afternoon a week became a day, and then every day. Hoff observed that very few people came into the gallery and when they did, they browsed the art quickly and left – “It was very difficult to sell art” (G. Hoff, interview, 29 September 2023). It occurred to her to place artefacts in the window so that people passing their shopfront on the way to the centre’s toilets would be tempted in. To start she placed Andrew Walford³⁵ ceramic works on wooden boxes in the window and this did draw more traffic into the gallery. As a result, the president of the KZNSA, Mike McMeekan, offered to make shelves for the window and then the reception area, and the product on display grew from there.

Hoff’s retail intervention at the KZNSA is cited as a significant financial contributor to the organisation on numerous occasions in McMeekan’s thesis and in interviews in 2023 with former KZNSA employees.

The record from 1985 to 1990 indicates a continuing period of stability and an incremental increase of financial security for the Natal Society of Arts. While the reasons for this are largely speculative, the minutes reflect that effective leadership shown by a trio of Presidents, Brown, Braude and MacKenny plus the commercial acumen exhibited by Gloria Hoff likely played a significant part in contributing to the soundness of the NSA during this period (2003, p. 35).

In 1986, when Walsh began to scale-down his administrative participation to pursue his painting career more ardently, Gloria Hoff joined the Gallery staff on a part-time basis. This

³⁴ Aidan Walsh (1932-2009) was Curator of the NSA Gallery, Durban from 1979 to 1987, before beginning to work as a full-time painter in 1987 (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/aidan-walsh>). Walsh was a well-known figure within the Durban art milieu, having opened his first gallery in 1966. On being appointed Curator of the NSA Gallery he commented how the NSA was doing “tremendously important” work in stimulating interest in art in Natal, and how he hoped to contribute to that work. He did, and the NSA President’s Reports from this period reflect the high esteem within which Walsh was held. (McMeekan, 2003: 34) Walsh was also the life partner of artist Andrew Verster (1937-2020).

³⁵ Andrew Walford is a ceramic artist based in Shongweni, Durban. Born in 1942, he studied at the Durban Art School from 1957 to 1959 and then apprenticed with Walsh Marais and Sammy Liebermann until establishing his own studio in 1961. Walford is arguably the leading exponent in South Africa of the Anglo-Oriental ceramic tradition and received the gold award at the Mungyeong Chasabal Festival in Korea in 2013. Walford has travelled to England, Sweden, Germany, Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea where he exhibited, taught, viewed and practised art. He visited legendary potter Bernard Leach in St. Ives, Cornwall, UK and Shoji Hamada in Japan, who profoundly influenced his artistic development. Walford is one of the few South African potters who digs his own stoneware clay, paints with specially imported Japanese brushes and uses the influence of Japanese brush strokes in his work (<https://www.news24.com/news24/work-on-ceramics-with-andrew-walford-20180716>).

new appointment proved to be a rather perspicacious step for the NSA's future because Hoff's entrepreneurial talents set the Society on the road to financial independence (2003, p. 34).

... the recognition of the vital role of the shop area, that led to a significant increase in funds available to the NSA, which eventually enabled the 1996 complex to be built (2003, p. 35)

As a result of the efforts begun by both curators and continued by Hoff, this section eventually evolved into the popular crafts and gift shop which, under Hoff's entrepreneurial skills soon became the financial mainstay of the Society (2003, p. 41).

However, not everyone welcomed the inclusion of craft and other commercial products in a gallery space. McMeekan admits that the 'window gallery' which was intended as an area that displayed craft work ... "was generally denigrated by the committee" (2003, p. 41) and that "the decision to upgrade the display space came about as a result of complaints by visitors and exhibiting artists about the shop's intrusiveness into the gallery environment. The display area (needed) to be both attractive and professional in appearance as it constituted the public image of the NSA" (2003, p. 36). Similarly, in an interview on his return from a residency in the United States in Issue 1 of *The FLAT*, the publication of the fringe art collective, the artist Greg Streak shares his thoughts on the "difficulties of being a young artist in the context of Durban:"

Although I am aware that the Natal Society of Arts is anticipating new premises, the current set-up is not satisfactory. The commercial curio shop in front of the gallery impinges on the clarity and ambiance of the exhibiting space. This particular gallery in my opinion is not discerning enough with regards to who exhibits there. It will never establish itself as a critical space which shows major artists unless it becomes more cutthroat (Streak as cited in Allen, 1995, p. 289).

Despite these tensions between commerce and artistic integrity, the shop endeavour continued, and Hoff recalls that in the early 1990s she came to know and mentor Zimbabwean crafters who had developed the first versions of a particular genre of wirework artefacts that are prevalent today. Hoff says that then the works – wire aeroplanes and animals – were "basic, but they were charming", and these items sold well. The Christmas show evolved from this; "... that was the big thing. That was our money spinner". Hoff recalls a generation of loyal buyers who collected craft and valued showcasing these items in their homes – "They never missed an opening at the African Art Centre and they came to our Christmas show ... Many of them have passed on or are no longer collecting ... The problem now is that young people want to leave Durban, they are not interested in buying craft" (G. Hoff, interview, 26 September 2023). It's also important to note that the financially successful era of the shop predated the

establishment of mass homeware retailers in South Africa like Mr Price Home, @home, and the ranges now in Pick ‘n Pay and Checkers Hypers. Besides sourcing one-off quality craft pieces and incidental purchases from crafters who visited the gallery, Hoff travelled to SARCEA, an annual gifting trade show in Johannesburg to source stock for the Christmas Exhibition and the shop as it grew in size in the reception area. The buying policy here was for predominantly hand-made, but not necessarily local goods. The priority was for low priced items that would be desirable, and Hoff dedicated herself to finding items that met these criteria, drawing on her childhood years working with her father in their family-owned trading store in Benoni outside Johannesburg in the 1950s.

When the Society moved to Glenwood into its purpose-made complex, the design included a dedicated retail space of 90 m² where craft could be displayed and sold all year round. Hoff, aged 84 at the time of writing, continues to work in the KZNSA shop. Cindy Walters, the architect of the new complex, recalls that the client brief was “for the shop to be the first thing you saw” as you entered the building (C. Walters, interview, 11 October 2023). In the 1995 design, this was realised by placing the shop on the street frontage of Bulwer Road with a large shop window on this elevation, and its entrance nearest the front door once you entered the building. A subsequent extension to the shop in 2005 added another 45 m² to the floor space but bricked up the window onto Bulwer Road and added two new large windows, one visible from the car park on the south end of the building and the other from the entrance on the north.

Deviations from local products increased over the years and by 2013 shop stock had drifted into mostly mass-produced, cheap imports from China Mall type retailers. Young recalls that during her time at KZNSA from 2009 to 2013:

There was concern about the Chinese crap that was there. I think we all understood the shop was really what was paying our salaries. It also brought in a lot of foot traffic when an exhibition may not have. So, from my perspective I was glad it was there. But I concede a lot of the stuff in those days was pretty inappropriate for a gallery craft shop (E. Young, interview, 28 August 2023).

When I started at KZNSA in early 2014, a first move was to redefine stock policies for the shop - with KZN-made as the focus for buying and consigning products and some allowances for ranges from the rest of South Africa and Southern African. This included researching and supporting the outputs of creative projects by Durban-based designers, independents, small enterprises and artisans, and to celebrate master craftsmanship in traditional mediums of beading, weaving and ceramics from the province. Imports were banned and existing imported stock sold off at discounts and then donated to a nearby charity shop to remove them from the shop floor. Similar to the move to discontinue imports,

the shop needed to consider more dimensions of the environmental impact of the items it stocked. It was resolved that the KZNSA Shop is not a gift store producing environmentally unsustainable “merch” like posters and mugs from exhibitions that may end up in landfill, and that goods would be selected based on their durability and potential to become part of an ongoing circular economy.

In this way KZNSA Shop is envisaged as a retail space for local practitioners where the income generated goes back into the local economy. In 2018 the KZNSA commissioned economic analysts, Lumec³⁶, to undertake an impact assessment looking at the organisation’s socio-economic impact as it relates to the perceptions of, and benefits to, members, artists and crafters. The assessment found that in the 2017/2018 financial year, R1.4 million was paid to shop suppliers. Taking into account suppliers sourcing local materials and labour, it is estimated there was an additional contribution of R650,000.00 to the KZN economy that year. In this way, the sustainability of shop suppliers becomes part of the sustainability of the broader system. An example of this is The Rorke’s Drift Evangelical Lutheran Church Arts and Craft Centre (Rorke’s Drift).

Rorke’s Drift is a celebrated creative centre at Sandlwana in northern KZN where ceramics, weaving, textile and fine art studios provided tertiary art education to Black students during apartheid. In 2023 the area remains rural and remote and there is limited infrastructure; no piped water supply with residents relying on a municipal tanker that fills a reservoir. Rorke’s Drift was founded in 1963 by Swedish art graduates funded by the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church. Hobbs refers to work that combined “inherited and imported technologies where mid-century Swedish craft and fine art merged with existing KZN ones” (2019, p. i). “The brief (to Peder and Ulla Gowenius) was to research the material culture of the Zululand area and consider viable opportunities for the encouragement and marketing of arts and crafts to assist local people, especially to provide an income for women” (Martin, 2020, p. 9). The fine art studio ran from the mid-1960’s and closed in 1982. Ceramics, weaving, and textiles continued into the 2000’s, but there were inconsistent craft outputs from 2014 to 2020. On a visit to the Centre in 2019 no one was producing work, and the reason given was that there was a power struggle over access to the key to the water pump. KZNSA Shop has stocked Rorke’s Drift tapestries, ceramics and textile products since 2017 and after national lockdown the centre became active again under the directorship of Edmund Tyler, the grandson of the former Director, Princess Tyler. It was the intention of the Rorke’s Drift’s founders in 1962 for income to be derived from outputs at the Centre. In an essay on the African Art Centre (established in the 1960’s), Anthea Martin writes that “selling work from the weaving studios became so successful and financially profitable (for Rorke’s Drift) that

³⁶ Lumec is a Durban-based interdisciplinary practice working in research, strategic planning and project management towards “informed sustainable development solutions”. Lumec “provides economic analyses that are data-driven and realistic. Our goal is to inform the development of a connected, inclusive and sustainable society that thrives in harmony with the natural environment” (Lumec website, 2023).

they were able to support the running of the Centre” (2021, p. 10). Similarly, Hobbs writes in detail about museum validation and exposure to international markets for Rorke’s Drift tapestries:

Although few South Africans were aware of this achievement, tapestries made by women at Rorke’s Drift were acquired from the early 1960s by Swedish institutions such as Konstfack and the National Museum. (There were) exhibitions at Gallery 101 in Johannesburg in 1966, IZIKO South African National Gallery (ISANG) in Cape Town in 1967 and Durban Art Gallery (DAG) in 1968. Tapestries from Rorke’s Drift also showed in the United States, Canada, Denmark, Greece and elsewhere. During the period of Swedish stewardship, these works represented South Africa on the Venice Biennale in 1970 and the São Paulo Bienal in 1973, and received gold medals in 1968 and 1974 at the International Art and Craft exhibition in Florence (2019, p. 2).

The commodification of art and craft raises issues about appropriation, historically unethical acquisitions and a Eurocentric reductionism of material culture. Tina Campt comments on the Practicing Refusal Collective’s rejection of the ‘Incorporation’ of black culture by western interests. Given this problematic tendency, John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff ask in *Ethnicity Inc.* “How do objects that signify cultural identity enter the market without an ethnicism (that) alludes, negatively, to “tribalism”,.. “a propagation of apartheid”?” (2009, p. 9). Tswagare Namane³⁷ argues an alternative to this, “i.e., that the commercialization of identity does not necessarily cheapen it or reduce it to a brute commodity”. He adds:

(t)his restless urge, (for “something genuinely mine”) is most acutely felt by persons dispossessed of their past ... with its connotations of property, propriety, prosperity, paradise lost. “What I am reclaiming is my ethnicity, my heritage; not my ‘ethnicism.’ ”. Quite the opposite: marketing what is “authentically Tswana” is also a mode of reflection, of self-construction, of producing and feeling Tswana- ness (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009: 9).

³⁷ In 1994, in the North West Province, there appeared an op-ed piece in *The Mail*, a local weekly newspaper. Titled “Searching for Tswana Heritage,” it was signed by one Tswagare Namane.¹¹ “I [cannot] claim to be [an] . . . expert,” it began, but “I . . . deserve to be heard.” The point of the piece was to argue that the future of the region, of its ethnic Tswana population, and of Africa at large lay in tourism. But, Namane said, to attract visitors to this corner of the country would demand more than just fine hotels and well- stocked game parks. It would require “uncovering” and putting forth “what is authentically Tswana.” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009, p. 9).

This touches on the cultural sustainability proposed as an essential aspect of overall sustainability. It has been an honour to work with Hlengiwe Dube³⁸, a master beader and wire weaver, who refuses to make work according to the demands of global north and tourist consumer trends. I have received numerous requests from gift stores in Cape Town who want me to convince Dube to use ‘contemporary designs’ or ‘fashion colours’ for them to retail. When I first shared the request with Dube, she ignored it. It is clear that she is not open to her material culture serving disposable fashion and I have since declined these requests as they represent an erasure of culture. Dube’s work is a response to her generational embodiment of Zulu culture where colour is a complex language in itself and her beading engineering is a uniquely innovative response to the techniques and designs she was taught by her grandmother. The real opportunity is to document her practice, along with the other practitioners the KZNSA collaborates with, and to exhibit and sell this work as part of the cultural sustainability of the KZN creative sector. The curation and layout of BUZZART in November 2023 embraced the principles of honouring makers and celebrating their practices.

The model of the shop references the sustainability criteria laid out earlier - environmentally sustainable practice accompanied by economic, communal and cultural well-being.

4.1.2 BUZZART

In an interview in 2023, Janse van Rensburg, the Curator at KZNSA 2000-2006, talks of his move to formalise the shop’s Christmas event in 2000, naming it BUZZART. For Janse van Rensburg, the name was inspired by how Hoff’s merchandising reminded him of a bazaar (interview, 6 September 2023). Now in its twenty-third year, BUZZART runs from mid-November to mid-January and sees the shop take over all the exhibition galleries to create a large Christmas Fair of locally made products. BUZZART acts as an internal fundraiser for the organisation, with retail income assisting with gallery overheads into each new year. Janse van Rensburg goes on to say

³⁸ Hlengiwe Dube (b. 1974 in New Hanover, South Africa) moved to the valley of a thousand hills in KwaZulu Natal at the age of nine. Here she learned to bead from her grandmother, and sold her first piece of beadwork, a ‘love letter’ necklace at the age of 12 to the permanent collection of the Tatham Museum in Pietermaritzburg. From her grandmother and mother, she gained a deep knowledge and appreciation for the history of Zulu beadwork, especially the meanings of different colours and patterns: the language of beads. She has since devoted herself to the study of beadwork and to the preservation of historic bead-working techniques and travels into remote areas to train artists. Author of several books, including *Zulu Beadwork – Talk with Beads*, she has worked with museums in South Africa and the U.S. to help develop and interpret their collections. Today her life revolves around artists and crafters practising today in KwaZulu-Natal.

It was something amazing and people loved it, I loved it. I was just like, let's do it properly. And then we started to put more effort into sourcing things and creating more structure. We did a whole marketing campaign about finding additional people to bring stuff in and it became more like a market in that way. I wanted to give Gloria the space to still do the random things that she did. And I loved that stuff, it was really exciting with really beautiful things. There were certain things that we added that were connected to the members' agenda which was a bit more conservative, like, hobby painters, but also serious artists. I just embraced them into this space, because we kind of understood where the money is gonna go (S. Janse van Rensburg, interview, 6 September 2023).

Nathi Gumede confirms that during his tenure from 2006 to 2012:

The main financial muscle for the NSA was BUZZART. That thing used to print money. Gloria would go to Grey Street, to Victoria Market and she'd get these plastic things to sell. And I mean, that thing used to print money in December, these Auntie's are buying gifts. And I'm being genuinely honest, that would sustain us for a given time and allow us to do the programmes. The programmes gave us the prestige we needed for people to associate with us. Hence, I'll say we were not begging, we weren't (N. Gumede, interview, 14 December 2023).

The stock policy of BUZZART changed in 2014 in line with that of the shop, and there have been no “plastic things” since then. It is interesting that there was a resounding appreciation of the income BUZZART generated, and the elimination of plastic imports disrupted that financial certainty. Part of the administrative infrastructure established in 2014 is the BUZZART tracker which has recorded daily sales during ten years of BUZZART, from 2014 to 2023. These figures show that BUZZART still contributes a cash injection into the organisation each year. Highlight years are 2017 with a turnover of R900,204 and R540,122 being paid to creatives in the sector, and 2022 with a turnover of R869,565 and R521,739 paid out. Is it not possible to know exactly what the 2000 to 2013 BUZZART turnover was as the Annual Financial Statements do not reflect this detail, and the electronic and paper records of these years were not archived. It is also difficult to quantify the value of the cultural and environmental sustainability measures taken since then.

However, the injection of energy and financial sustainability that BUZZART adds to the organisation is the result of a successful collaboration between the shop and the gallery at the KZNSA. All members of staff in both divisions contribute to planning and manning this project and the shop ‘occupies’ the gallery for this period.

4.1.3 The Park Retail Gallery

Since the KZNSA taking up residence in Glenwood in 1996, the shop has retailed the work of mid-career Durban-based artists, many of whom trained in woodcut printing at the BAT Centre in the 1980s and 1990s, had been mentored by the late Trevor Makhoba or were self-taught. These artists include Ezekiel Mabote, Everaldo Matsonse, Fanuel Moiane (brother of deceased artist, Isaac Sithole), Sibusiso Duma and Joseph Manana, among others.

From 2014, a wave of early career artists, some of whom had graduated from the BAT Centre, African Art Centre and DUT initiative, *The Velobala Programme*³⁹, also began supplying the shop with paintings, charcoal and pastel drawing, prints and photography. Along with space constraints to properly display artworks in the shop, it was felt that the work's integrity was compromised by being displayed alongside apparel, and a proposal was put forward to convert one of the exhibition galleries, The Park Gallery into a dedicated art retail space as an extension of the shop. This was launched on 24 August 2017 and included work from Wonder Buhle Mbambo, Sthenjwa Luthuli, Mthobisi Maphumulo (founder of the amaSosha Art Movement), Mandisa Buthelezi, Nindya Bucktowar and Nikhil Tricam among many others.

Besides the existing shop customer base, Park Retail sought to attract interior designers and architects looking to place art into their projects and local collectors who would be influenced by the tagline, 'Collect it while you can'. This phrase spoke to the common phenomenon of Durban artists going on to achieve acclaim in the industry, and our ability to identify these artists in their early career phases. Intended as a prompt to encourage collectors to invest in who was represented, the initiative failed to identify who was collecting art in Durban or to convince them to do so. This elusive Durban collector has been the source of much deliberation and the realisation that we needed to look outside the city and province to connect with collectors who could appreciate the opportunities of acquiring 'unknown' work from KZN. Our foray into participating in art fairs was hugely influenced by these learnings – and produced far more rewarding results. I had also been influenced by a comment made by an established Durban architect who, when asked where their clients who commission new homes to the value of ten million rand and more sourced artwork for the completed project, told me that her clients

³⁹ The Velobala Programme (meaning in isiZulu - *to be exposed to art*) was initiated by the African Art Centre (ACC) in 1995 to provide mentorship to early career artists. From 2007 the DUT City Campus was the base for the free Saturday classes which are aimed at teaching aspirant artists. The three-year course is a concrete foundation that develops the artists' craft whilst honing them for art courses in higher education institutions and preparing them for the industry. Partnering on the mentorship programme came as a result of DUT's long-standing relationship with the AAC. DUT Lecturer in the Fine Art and Jewellery Design Department Themba Shibase was appointed to facilitate the mentorship programme (https://www.dut.ac.za/DUT_Fine_Art_and_Jewellery_Design_Department_Develops_Young_Talent/).

fly her to Joburg to buy art from Goodman Gallery or Stevenson. When I asked why they didn't look locally first the reply was something to the effect that local work was not a good investment or 'too ethnic'. The great irony is that the work of one of South Africa's highest grossing artists in 2023, Wonder Buhle Mbambo, was available from KZNSA Park Retail Gallery at the time of this comment.

Ultimately, the Park Retail Gallery did not achieve its goals – to grow sales for artists in a flexible retail space where numerous artists could be represented at one time, and where buyers could browse work for projects and collections, have an overview of exciting practitioners in the sector and acquire work without having to wait for an exhibition to close. Sales were poor and when it failed to achieve what could be earned from gallery hire for the space, and artists expressed frustration at the sales and the way work was displayed, Park Retail was deemed unviable. There were many complex factors and learnings. The mid-career artists who had been in the shop amongst apparel and craft shared that they preferred the shop to the dedicated retail gallery, and new artists to the retail gallery space resented their work having a shop 'swing ticket' on it, and the way this denigrated their practice.

Our own inexperience at the time with commercial gallery practices as a nonprofit, and the contractual requirements of consigning art was an important learning curve – exemplified by an incident where an artist requested to remove their work and then made a private sale in our cafe to an interior designer who had discovered the work in the Park Retail Gallery. From this, and many similar experiences, it became clear that built environment practitioners in Durban were not prepared to pay gallery commission when they could use us to access and buy directly from artists who were not party to the binding contracts that a commercial gallery would prescribe, and that some artists would not honour our efforts to represent them if we did not have these agreements in place.

The demand for exhibition space in Durban also made us mindful of what was at stake, and under pressure from the Exhibition Sub Committee to return the Park Gallery to the exhibition programme, Park Retail was decommissioned in July 2019. As a welcome critique to the failed experiment, the E-SC curated a group show titled *Everything's for Sale*, posing a 'tongue in cheek interpretation of consumerism'.⁴⁰

4.1.4 KZNSA Online

⁴⁰ <https://kznsagallery.co.za/Exhibitions/View/960/everything-s-for-sale>

The sharp decline in in-person visitors during national lockdown and subsequent Covid-19 regulations in 2020 and 2021 left KZNSA very close to shutting down after being in existence for a hundred and fifteen years.

As mentioned, in the absence of funding, the KZNSA business model relies on turnover from the shop and cafe supporting the organisation as a whole, contributing to the overheads of the building and providing surplus towards the costs of the gallery exhibition programme. The effect of Covid-19 on an economy that had already been in decline since the global economic crisis of 2018 negatively impacted disposable income for consumers, the means to produce work for small-scale suppliers to the shop and, in turn, the sustainability of the KZNSA. With no turnover in the shop and cafe during national lockdown there was no way to cover the overheads that continued despite the complex being closed – salaries, utilities, IT costs, etc. A donation drive was launched, plus applying our minds to how we could trade without visitors. The decision was made to add an online retail platform to the offering, and KZNSA Online was launched in May 2020.

In 2020, the aim of the platform was to realise sales of art and craft in the absence of an operational bricks and mortar shop and gallery. The global migration to online art retail had already begun in the 2010s, notably with *Artsy*.⁴¹ KZNSA had debated introducing an online platform since 2016, but were mindful of the constraints. The first of these was the additional resources needed – that is, another business division requiring additional staff overheads and the skills to create and manage digital listings, artwork and craft consignment contracts, recons of physical and digital stock, packing, shipping, exports and sales administration. We were also cautious about the slow uptake of e-commerce by South African consumers who distrusted the payment and delivery services of online retail. According to Goga, Paelo and Nyamwena in *Online Retailing in South Africa: An Overview* (2019):

.... with the size of general retail trade estimated to be R 1 trillion in 2017, (e-commerce) still only amounts to 1% of the total retail market (Statistics South Africa, 2017). With mature markets exhibiting a higher percentage of online sales, such as the UK with 18% of sales online (Office of National Statistics, 2018), this suggests that South Africa currently lags behind other countries (2019, p. 4).

Similarly, KZNSA did not wish to join the South Africa early adopters of design online platforms between 2010 and 2017 who had a short lifespan, for example, *Meekel*, *Africandy* and *Green Elephant Collective*. With South Africa ... “still (being) a nascent e-commerce market with low penetration, the

⁴¹ Artsy is an online art brokerage that hosts galleries and facilitates arts sales on their behalf, founded by Carter Cleveland while he was a computer science student at Princeton University in 2010 (<https://www.artsy.net/>).

art market was even more difficult to penetrate using online engagement as it relies on the trust and rapport that can be established in person, and a collector almost always needs to see the work for themselves” (Goga et al., 2019 p. 4). These were all reasons to delay launching our own ecommerce site. Thanks to the pandemic and lockdown, by 2022 the uptake of e-commerce had grown exponentially, with Yaa Agyare-Dwomoh reporting in a Bizcommunity article titled, *The shift to e-commerce in South Africa (2022)*:

In 2019, South Africa’s e-commerce industry was in its infancy stages, accounting for 1.4% of the total retail spending and 8% of total card payments spent in the retail space. In 2020, e-commerce spending grew by 30% while the average brick and mortar (or physical spending) decreased by 12%.

Due to the national lockdown imposed by the government in response to the pandemic, traditional retailers needed to reform their business models to draw their customers in without the enticements of malls. This accelerated the need for digital innovation, shifting consumer expectations to increased online consumption enabling South Africa to follow global trends.

This pushed the pace of change into hyperdrive with some business models thriving and others suffering early retirement. By the end of 2020, South Africa saw a 50% to 70% growth in e-commerce, with an increased uptake in online retailing, click-and-collect and video streaming. Furthermore, online spending on goods and products (other than travel and accommodation) doubled in 2020, reflecting a 102% increase (Agyare-Dwomoh, online, 2022).

As with many other entities relying on retail, the pandemic crisis pushed the KZNSA into online retail regardless of its concerns or lack of resources to do so. This was implemented during lockdown in April and May 2020 by me, with the help of an IT specialist who had been on KZNSA Council, Steve Jones of New Noise⁴². Jones recommended *Shopify* as a user-friendly e-commerce platform, identified a theme that was appropriate for art and craft cataloguing and created the initial product pages. From there I uploaded photographs of artwork and collectable craft items that I had taken in the week before lockdown, listed these and went live with KZNSA Online – <https://shop.kznsagallery.co.za/> – on 19 May 2020. The selection criteria for works to be listed was craft and design unique to KZN, and artworks made by artists we had exhibited and/or with whom we had an active relationship. The focus was on KZN art and craft as a means to direct income back to the province, and to build an international audience for what is available here. This remains the criteria and vision of the platform.

⁴² New Noise is a multi-disciplinary creative studio in Durban, South Africa, undertaking projects in web development, social media, sound, design and marketing (<https://www.newnoise.co.za/>).

Since its launch in July 2020, the KZNSA Online has had 93 orders, 45,326 visitors and sales of R528,485 with 36% of these being to international customers. This is rewarding but sadly, the monthly average over its 42 months existence of R12,583 is not a sufficient contribution to gallery overheads. Now that the initial crisis has abated and there are many other, better resourced online art platforms, KZNSA is weighing up whether to invest more in its own platform or join another, larger platform with an established audience such as *Artsy*. For now, the decision is to leave KZNSA Online as it is due to costs - the subscription to *Shopify* is far lower than *Artsy*, and from November 2022 to April 2024 KZNSA has been the recipient of a DSAC PESP4 intern grant where an intern assigned to us is managing the housekeeping of the e-commerce site.

Since products from the shop and artworks consigned to the gallery are both represented on KZNSA Online there are tensions as to which department is responsible for this new (and sometimes unwanted) newcomer to the KZNSA family. Each department has a pared down team with their own responsibilities and duties who do not welcome the additional workload. Ideally this is a collaboration between the gallery and the shop, but the lack of human resources does not engender this. The DSAC grant placing interns in the organisation allows this staffing pressure some relief, although each internship is four months at a time and a new intern must be trained in the role for each cycle.

Other functions of the site included an online auction plugin which we used twice in 2020, once to raise funds for Durban artists on the breadline, and the second to raise funds for the KZNSA itself. Similarly, when the complex was open again after lockdown, but sit-down trade was not allowed in the cafe, out of desperation for some turnover for the cafe, a takeaway and ready-to-eat food listing was added to KZNSA Online. This dismayed the Gallery Director, Kim Kandan, who already felt that showing work from the shop downgraded the art listed there. The emergency measure did not last long and was unlisted as soon as the cafe was allowed sit-down customers again, and due to the logistics of marketing and manning takeaway orders in this way. This incident is a good example of the tensions between ideas of artistic integrity and commercial realities, and the disagreements that result between these apparently opposed positions.

Systems theory allows a view where both artistic integrity and commercial realities can co-exist in feedback loops that add energy to the system. The online platform facilitates a collaboration between the gallery and the shop where the requirements for the site means resources are committed from each department to the critical writing needed for content and also to a commercial mindset needed for sales. I agree with Preiser when she points out a systems approach proposes that we adopt an attitude of radical self-reflexivity that becomes the means by which we are to face the “ever-changing, organic and messy vitality” of the world (2019, p. 7).

4.2 The Arts Cafe

The Walters and Cohen architectural design for the Glenwood complex did not include a cafe. The original client brief envisaged that a small tea kitchen and a counter in the foyer to serve cheese and wine at openings would suffice for food and beverage facilities. Shortly before building works were completed, Jonathan Beare⁴³, a KZNSA member and one of the funders of the building project, proposed that a cafe be added so that visitors would spend more time at the complex. He donated the funds needed for the additional building works and committed his time (as an enthusiast chef) to creating the menu and training kitchen staff. This addition to the building scope saw a storeroom designed for the shop and gallery repurposed to become the cafe kitchen, paved platforms added to the stairway corridor running through the building and an extension to the paved courtyard to accommodate cafe tables. As mentioned, a lack of storage space for art has compromised the gallery and remains a point of competition between the gallery and cafe.

Once the cafe was running the Council opted to appoint an operator who would pay the organisation rent and manage the Arts Cafe as an independent entity. Professional restaurateurs who were known and respected in the Durban culinary community were contracted and the Arts Cafe enjoyed eighteen years of success from 1996 to 2013, both financially and in terms of recognition from food critics, coffee aficionados and from loyal customers. During the years of the operator, “there wasn't a community between the cafe and gallery at all” (E. Young, interview, 28 August 2023) and in 2013, the then administration of the KZNSA decided to cancel the contract with the operator and bring the business in-house, citing a clause in the municipal lease (but ignoring others that would prove disastrous) that disallows subletting for profit on city property where the tenant has been granted a rates concession due to its nonprofit status. While this was the official reason given, it has been suggested that the then CEO Trevor Moore and president Peter McKenzie saw the profits the operator was making from the cafe and preferred these went directly to the organisation. Their opinion seemed to be that running the cafe wasn't difficult and they could undertake it themselves. This assumption could not be further from the truth and remains a decision that compromises the organisation to this day. From 2013, the Arts Cafe became self-administered by the organisation and entered a challenging period that has still not reached the financial and critical success of 1996 to 2013.

⁴³ Referred to as the “reclusive billionaire” by Biztech, Jonathan Beare is a property and technology investor. “According to the City Press, KZN-based Beare is thought to be one of the largest private landowners in the country” (staff writer, 2019: online at <https://businesstech.co.za/news/mobile/301442/reclusive-billionaire-buying-a-stake-in-cell-c/>)

The decline in the cafe can be attributed to a few factors. To begin with, the process of separating from the operator was acrimonious and resulted in fallout that impacted customer loyalty and perceptions of professionalism. The next challenge was to find a Cafe Manager who would be employed by the gallery. The waitron and kitchen staff of the operator had stayed on, and the new manager needed to fill the leadership and business management gap left by the operator. The people advertising and interviewing for the position were part of the gallery team and Council with no experience in the food industry. The Cafe Manager they appointed was woefully unqualified and, after a year, had accumulated R200,000 in debt, demoralised staff and lost customers due to an uninspired menu and a sharp decline in service. Kitchen equipment that was already almost 20 years old was not serviced or repaired and cleanliness was neglected. One of my first tasks as Director in early 2014 was to terminate this employment contract and find a new Cafe Manager. Another crisis was created when the 2012-2014 president, Peter McKenzie, agreed for the KZNSA to be a live music venue as part of the *Concerts SA* project⁴⁴. In principle this was advantageous to the organisation and a welcome partnership as it would activate the complex with culturally relevant events. However, the local events organisers who booked the music acts brought performances that were inappropriate to a small outdoor venue in a residential neighbourhood and refused to manage sound levels. Two extremely loud shows, a four-piece electric rock band and a hip-hop DJ, resulted in complaints from neighbours. One resident managed to source a copy of the KZNSA's lease with eThekweni and lodged a formal complaint with the municipality. It was made public that the organisation was in contravention of clauses of the lease, namely it was zoned as a tea garden, not a restaurant, so was not entitled to host live performances, operate after five pm or trade alcohol. The ward councillor visited me with a recommendation that we make the necessary amendments to the lease and a warning that if the organisation did not cease live events the neighbour lobby group "will close you down". This was the start of a two-year process to apply to eThekweni Land Use Management to be rezoned, then engage eThekweni Real Estate to amend our lease permitting us to trade after hours and sell alcohol, and then to apply for a new Liquor License with the KZN Liquor Authority. In addition to not being able to sell alcohol for two years and the resulting loss of income to the cafe, the demands this bureaucratic process placed on the human resources and time of the operations team was substantial and was a distraction from our core purpose, the gallery. In the end, the municipality granted permissions to trade after 5pm, sell alcohol and host acoustic live events. The KZNSA was required to sign a noise reduction policy committing to keeping decibels below a certain volume and to be closed by 10pm.

A really important part of this narrative is that culture and nightlife are integrally related in nearly all of the cultural explosions that happened to cities around the world. These are places

⁴⁴ "Funded by the Norwegian Embassy in Pretoria and the Southern African Music Rights Organisation (SAMRO), the (Concerts SA) project "aim(ed) to foster and empower vibrant live music circuits and grow dedicated audiences in South Africa" (<https://concertssa.co.za/about-us/>).

where artists meet business people and potential investors, funders and buyers. You need to have a social life surrounding art, that is the other part of the art capital story. The Durban municipality waged a war against nightlife, culture and street culture. An example is the rich indie band presence in the mid 90s, where it used to be like many cities with street posters all over the place. That music scene died pretty much overnight, because artists couldn't afford to pay the new municipal fee of R250 per street poster pole. That kind of shit, those little actions can have profound effects. The new administration in 2000 in the Parks, Recreation and Culture unit killed Red Eye because they didn't want people on the street (P. Machen, interview, 6 October 2023).

After an extensive search for a new Cafe Manager, Monique Kurvers was appointed in March 2014. Kurvers had owned and been the Executive Chef of two recognised Durban restaurants, *The Store* and *The Engine Room*. She also had experience as an accountant and came onto the operations team in the dual roles of Cafe Manager and Finance Manager from 2014 to 2020. During this time, Kurvers established a sound accounting practice that serves the organisation today and a cafe running at a surplus that contributed to the overheads of the gallery. Since the operations team had been depleted in 2013 and there was no hand-over when I was appointed to my position in 2014, working with Kurvers to rebuild the administrative infrastructure was instrumental to what is now in place. After lockdown in 2020 and due to the financial precarity of the organisation at the time, Kurvers opted to resign in order to pursue a career in software development.

As Director over the last ten years, I have been reminded regularly of the folly of terminating the professional restaurant operator's contract. The short-sighted ideals about profit were not balanced with an understanding of the risks of operating a restaurant business – and the expertise needed to do it. These risks were made evident again during national lockdown and the years of Covid-19-related restrictions. 2020 and 2021 were disastrous years for any hospitality business as lockdown and health concerns kept customers away, and regulations reduced visitor numbers, sit-down business and alcohol trade. As mentioned, the kitchen and front of house staff of the operator (thirteen people) were absorbed into the KZNSA operations team and given employment contracts with the organisation. After lockdown, it became necessary to retrench some staff as the organisation had no income to pay salaries and the long service periods of those who were retrenched meant the cost of retrenchment payouts were substantial. From there, with the remaining staff, the organisation was forced to adopt short time with staff on reduced hours and pay, and restructure the cafe to reduce its offerings to be manageable by the smaller team. While these were essential adjustments to the business operations of any hospitality entity at the time, it was another distraction from addressing the needs of the KZNSA's creative community of artists, creative practitioners, crafters and curators who were also in crisis. The large salary bill of

the cafe (totalling half of the salary overhead for the whole organisation) continues to be a strain on an organisation whose mandate is to serve the arts.

While rebuilding the cafe business after lockdown, the organisation was unable to afford the salary of a new Cafe Manager. It was decided to train and promote people on the front of house team into the Manager role from within, but this was unsuccessful as the candidates did not have the business aptitude or numeracy needed, and they left the organisation or returned to their former waitron roles in the cafe. A part-time consultant came on board to manage costs of sales and stock controls, improve gross profit and the quality of the menu, and work on kitchen and front of house systems in 2021 and 2022, but this also faltered as the business needed a full-time person to coordinate the complex workings of a restaurant and achieve a consistent gross profit. During this time, I was called on to contribute to daily cafe operational dilemmas, such as should the chips be made from hand cut potatoes or store-bought frozen chips? – which is not the best use of the Director of an arts centre's time. In a February 2023 ExCo meeting, a Council member expressed frustration that a part-time person could not consistently improve the cafe's gross profit, saying, "It's not that hard!". This misconception was reminiscent of the former CEO's lack of understanding, and prompted me to motivate for employ a full time professional, who (it was hoped) would contribute to the success of the cafe and their salary. This was ratified by ExCo and in April 2023, Shannon Haller who had worked as a manager at the highly regarded *9th Avenue Waterside* restaurant was employed as Cafe Manager. At the time of writing, nine months later, Haller is slowly growing the turnover and improving the gross profit month to month since she started.

This steady growth is encouraging, but the cafe still faces the space constraints mentioned in the building design. Most of the cafe seating is outside, and the indoor seating is along a stairway that has a slatted timber screen to the garden. This makes cafe business weather-dependent as even the indoor seating can be cold, wet and windy on inclement days. Managing dust and flies is also difficult and limits what can be served or how.

Having detailed the downside of the outdoor nature of the cafe design, the venue is one of the few in Durban that takes advantage of the temperate climate and allows visitors the magical experience of sitting outdoors under flat crown and mahogany trees on the many warm evenings throughout the year. There have been numerous memorable events, from a dance performance during Jomba!⁴⁵, live music

⁴⁵ Jomba! is an annual two-week contemporary dance festival in Durban hosted by the Centre for Creative Arts based at UKZN. Jomba! has run since 1998 and is headed by artistic director Dr Lliane Loots.

by Madala Kunene⁴⁶, Zawadi Yamungu⁴⁷ and many others, a film screening and an Anti-Racist Hot Dog panel discussion⁴⁸ (to name a few) where the creative community of Durban has gathered together in a palpable spirit of harmony and goodwill in the outdoor courtyard at KZNSA.

To address cafe business being so weather-dependent, there is currently a proposal for it to also occupy the downstairs of the shop. This creates the opportunity to host education and private events, introduce a harvest table and also retail packaged food in a more climate-controlled environment. This collaboration between the shop and cafe is promising, along with a new initiative in August 2023, KZNSA Kollektive. This monthly project is a collaborative effort between the shop and cafe to organise and host a market with products that are not sold in either the shop or cafe. This includes quality thrift clothing, antiques and preloved homeware, and fresh produce from community garden projects.

Nathi Gumede also makes some poignant observations and poses difficult questions for the future of the café:

People who came and had coffee wanted to be part of this place (in 1996-2012). And that was the currency. It was a missed opportunity that Ralph owned the cafe then, because that thing was also printing money. If the cafe was in the hands of the NSA, then I don't think we'd be having the same conversation. So, I'm thinking, how much of your existence being an NPO influences you, why are you not migrating to the new business model of the area (of late-night bars and clubs)? Meaning that I came here in December and I saw the money that is there (at the bars on Helen Joseph Road) – it was our dream to have those people there. It's a very serious generalisation and partly racist of me to say, but I don't think that in the current sort of changes that have happened in the neighbourhood that it's sustainable to stay as you are. Look at the

⁴⁶ Madala Kunene (b. 1951), affectionately known as “Bafo,” is an awarded South African musician known for his folk and blues guitar playing and incorporation of Zulu maskandi musical influences into his work. In 2014 Kunene played at Carnegie Hall as part of *Ubuntu: Music and Arts of South Africa*, a city-wide festival in New York City, USA. In 2023 Kunene was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music degree by the University of KwaZulu-Natal “for his contribution to the development of indigenous music and his contribution to the music of Africa and that of the world” (<https://www.iol.co.za/entertainment/celebrity-news/local/madala-kunene-says-hes-humbled-by-honorary-doctorate-from-ukzn-4dbcab93-c3b2-492d-b4dd-6d1bc3a720ca>).

⁴⁷ Zawadi Yamungu is the stage name of Nkosingiphile Mpanza meaning Gift from God. Mpanza is a Durban-based musician and composer specialising in indigenous Zulu instruments and a master of uMakhweyana bow. She works as a facilitator at K-CAP, a community art centre in KwaMashu and in 2023 was the lead singer in Edmund Mhlongo’s *Nandi the Musical* at the Playhouse Durban.

⁴⁸ The Anti-Racist Hot Dog drive is the project of Wandile Mthiyane, an Obama Leader, who was denied service at a Durban beachfront restaurant in 2021 due to his race. “Our Anti-Racist Hot Dog parties apply humour, dance, food, and thought-provoking conversation to create a shame-free environment for transformative conversations around race”. (<https://www.antiracisthotdog.com/TheStory>).

neighbourhood and the kinds of cars that are driving here. I mean, when I say racist it's because it has racial tones, but there is a particular interest for a majority sort of black people. And it's not unique to here, I've lived in Cape Town and seen what the black middle class do with their money, and it's a bad stereotype to make, but it will be very difficult for you to sell culture as a currency. So, people have an image of you that is non-existent. You think that most of the Black people here are cultured and, yes, they are. But I don't think the switch has been made to realise that you are here. It will be very hard for you to sell culture to (a member of the public) who hasn't done the work to say, I'm part of the Glenwood community, there is an entity that needs our support to sustain itself as a next-door neighbour. It has value in the community. It's a cultural institution, I need to add value. That thinking is not there yet (N. Gumede, interview, 14 December 2023).

In conversation with Pascale Chandler who was President of the KZNSA from 2006 to 2008 when the café was run by the operator, I ask whether there was any collaboration between the gallery and the café operator and she replies that “it wasn't a warm relationship. It was very much this is my territory and not yours - back off” (P. Chandler, interview, 25 January 2024). Thanks to the café being absorbed into the organisation in 2013, this is no longer an issue. The cover of the café menu has a feature on the current exhibition in the gallery and details upcoming events in the gallery, café and shop, and KZNSA members receive a 10% discount in the café. This seamless representation of the KZNSA system in one format exemplifies the collaboration between the departments. Meadows reminds us that “a diverse system with multiple pathways and redundancies is more stable and less vulnerable to external shock than a uniform system with little diversity” (2008, p. 4) and the current KZNSA system certainly has this diversity. The question remains whether the energy required to operate a hospitality business is sustainable when taken on by an organisation whose expertise is in cultural production and, after 10 years of doing this work, I would say no.

To summarise Chapters 2 to 4; - By detailing the realities of the environment of the organisation, its programming and its forays into commercial initiatives it is possible to see how the entities interact with each other, and whether these result in energy or inertia. The shop and gallery collaborate successfully on BUZZART and on KZNSA Online. The latter still needs to contribute more to overall sustainability and using this platform to galvanise member participation, including a research-sharing category, has the potential to add new energy. The successful collaboration between the shop and gallery also relies on the shop embracing cultural and environmental sustainability practices and not compromising the integrity of the gallery's vision and mission. The collaboration between the café and gallery is valuable, as the café provides a community space where the creative sector can gather and experience exhibition programming, LAB education activities and other cultural events in multi-

dimensional ways. Similarly, the collaboration between the shop and café is useful in that there is a cross-pollination of customers between the spaces and this adds energy to the system. The operating realities of a hospitality business, however, make it unsustainable for a visual arts organisation to undertake the management of the café and an ideal scenario would be the collaboration between a professional restaurant operator and the KZNSA.

External entities that have countered the organisation can be viewed as an opportunity to self-reflect on what the institution isn't doing (or cannot do). Ultimately, these refusals are incidents of energy that contribute to sustainability in the sector.

The gallery's refusal to accept all members' submissions to the Annual Award has resulted in a higher standard of work and the participation of early careers artists who can go on to be represented at art fairs. This greatly energises the gallery programme, KZNSA Online where work is listed, art fair listings, and delivers on the overall vision and mission of the gallery and has significantly contributed to the sustainability of the KZNSA.

At the same time, the lack of interaction and resulting disconnect between members and their nominated Council has led to inertia. Similarly, the absence of collaboration between the Director (and operations team) and Council is an example of 'policy resistance' where parties with different agendas work against each and a deadlock results. The member-based system of the organisation is currently in a state of inertia due to these two factors, but at the same time contains the potential for wide-ranging collaborations that could energise the organisation and contribute to lasting sustainability.

CONCLUSION

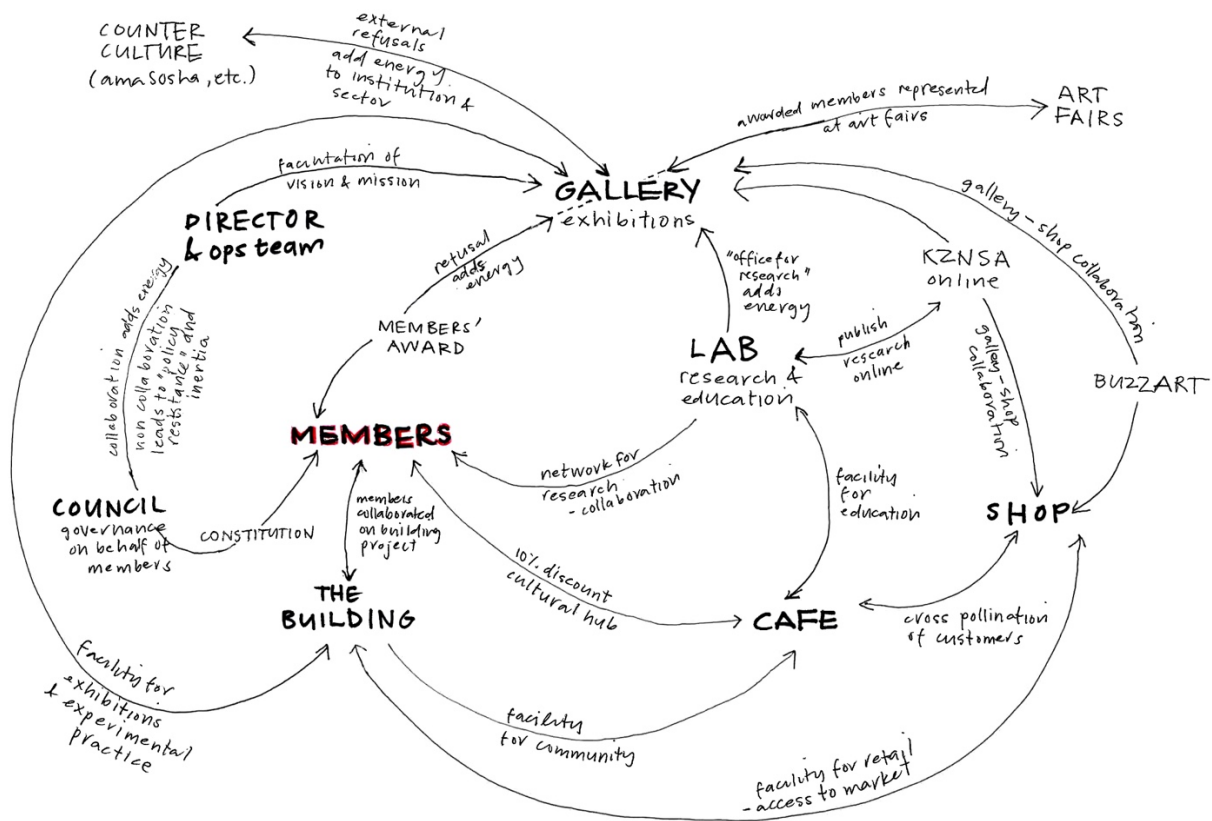
The aim of the study was to use a *systems approach* that explores the dynamic and fluid inter-relatedness of the divisions of the case study, the KZNSA and its projects, the impact of collaboration and refusal in these and the resulting energy or inertia.

The seed of the research journey was a comment by a project manager in a privately funded nonprofit arts organisation who proposed collaboration as the answer to a lack of resources. This led me on a train of thought to interrogate whether this could be the case and I looked at how collaboration, and its alter ego, refusal, has added energy to the KZNSA. Systems theory provided a framework in which to place factors of collaboration and refusal as they apply to initiatives of, and counters to, the KZNSA, and to observe how these contribute to energy – and could result in a sustainable model that embraces economic, cultural and social justice, and environmental and human well-being.

Since the relationships *between* entities was the focus, it helped to understand ways in which interventions could be most useful. “Most wicked problems are intractable problems that are interconnected in a synergistic fashion and can therefore only be navigated properly through *systemic interventions*” (italics my own) (Preiser, 2019, p. 7). I agree with Russell Ackoff when he says:

Managers are not confronted with problems that are independent of each other, but with dynamic situations that consist of complex systems of changing problems that interact with each other. I call such situations messes ... Managers do not solve problems, they manage messes (as cited in Meadows, 2008, p.1).

As it stands, the KZNSA is approaching insolvency and possible closure, and it is hollow to claim that collaboration instead of financial resources is *the* answer to managing the ‘mess’. Both are needed. Nonprofit arts organisations find themselves in an ironic double bind. Industry players such as the commercial galleries, FNB Art Joburg and the Investec Cape Town Art Fair object to nonprofits transacting, believing that ‘nonprofit’ means they should not engage in the art market. At the same time, state funding has failed to support nonprofit programs and existence, and the non-executive stakeholders of the KZNSA have not undertaken the fundraising and member engagement needed to supplement operational initiatives. The energy that nonprofit creative sector practitioners are forced to put into being self-sufficient is unsustainable. It cannot make up for a lack of public funding from the state and income from fundraising, and this perpetuates entities not having enough energy to collaborate and share resources. Without the economic contribution of funding and sponsorship to their systems, nonprofit arts organisations also seem destined to be unsustainable. The challenge under these



The System map of the KZNSA

The thesis has asked, what is the difference between a Society and a community? I propose that the answer may lie in the membership model which has the potential to create community, contribute to financial sustainability and also to embrace human well-being, social justice and cultural sustainability. By facilitating bottom-up participation models of collaboration within the member base the KZNSA can interact with thousands of members who seek to commune, share, learn and transact in a self-made space. There is also the opportunity to develop Mabaso’s “office for research” where discursive content is generated by and shared within a large network of member communities on the continent and in the diaspora. The development of a wide member-based network can become a 'leverage point' - a “place within a complex system ... where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything” (Meadows, 1999, p. 3). It also presents multiple opportunities for collaboration that can add energy towards the sustainability of the organisation.

In the end, the analysis of this study finds that the system of the KZNSA does need to exchange energy with external systems to complement the valuable initiatives undertaken by the organisation and to ensure its sustainability. The key to unlocking the ‘leverage point’ suggested above is to use the embedded asset of the membership model to incrementally, radically move out of a siloed survival

mode towards connecting with a wider network of members and member organisations that materially and discursively contribute to shared initiatives and support the KZNSA programme. Focusing on this objective may result in the shift the KZNSA needs to move towards its goal of human well-being, social justice, and economic, environmental and cultural sustainability.

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<https://www.antiracisthotdog.com/TheStory>

Artnet

<https://news.artnet.com/>

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<https://arttimes.co.za/>

Association for Visual Arts (AVA Gallery)

<https://www.ava.co.za/>

Bizcommunity

<https://www.bizcommunity.com/>

BKhz Gallery

<https://bkhz.art/>

Harvard Business review

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Centre for Creative Arts

<https://cca.ukzn.ac.za/>

Concerts SA

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<https://www.dut.ac.za/>

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Independent Online

<https://www.iol.co.za/>

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<https://javettup.art/>

KwaZulu-Natal Society of Arts (KZNSA Gallery)

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