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A fragile archive: Refiguring | Rethinking | Reimagining | Re-presenting Gladys Mgudlandlu

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A Fragile Archive:
Refiguring | Rethinking
Reimagining | Re-presenting
Gladys Mgudlandlu

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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree

_____ Date:_____

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Abstract

A Fragile Archive: Refiguring | Rethinking | Reimagining | Re-presenting Gladys Mgudlandlu

This thesis examines the exhibition archive of Gladys Mgudlandlu in order to understand how archives contribute to the writing of artists' biographies. This is done through two integral methods. The first method is the theoretical research and writing, and the second is curating as another form of critical research. Both these methods elaborate on how archives function as a conduit to understanding the way in which an artist's biography has been written. Structured in four chapters, the thesis explores how Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive within the broader historical context is reflective of a specific social, cultural and political space within the arts. Examining this exhibition archive enabled ways of exploring and understanding limitations and complexities surrounding this artist's biography. To this end, the archive provided ways to study, analyse and frame Mgudlandlu's contribution within South African art practices and discourses in a more critical way.

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Introduction

To be acclaimed as South Africa's 'first' black woman artist to appear in the 1960s implies three things: first, that you occupy a space that has not previously been occupied; second, that you have presented a special skill; and third, that you have gained exceptional achievements for that skill.[1] Gladys Mgudlandlu was for a long time believed to have been the 'first' black woman artist in South Africa.[2] This claim is now contested, with recent research revealing artists such as Valerie Desmore (1925-2008), who 'first' appeared on the Cape Town art scene in 1942, preceding Mgudlandlu.[3] Although recent research disrupts what had become known in South African art history about Mgudlandlu as the 'first' black woman artist, Desmore's art is also not greatly known in this country. This is partly because of her emigration to London in 1946, where she lived until her death in 2008.[4] Even though Desmore's work was reintroduced into the South African art scene in 1997 in the exhibition *Land and Lives*, curated by Elza Miles, she still remains relatively unknown in this country.

I mention Desmore because her neglected contribution is exemplary of South Africa's racialised cultural institutions' disregard for some black artists and disproportionate acknowledgement of others. It is testimony that such acclaims had a lot to do with the construction of the political system at the time. If Desmore's case is anything to go by, there exists the possibility that many other artists have been overlooked in South African art history. In the essay '"…us blacks…" Self-construction and the Politics of Modernism', Ivor Powell argues that South African historical forces of discrimination systematically made

[1] African or black: Even though the racial terms such as black, Indian and coloured had already been distinguished through the apartheid policies as early as the 1940s, these terms became commonly used only from the 1970s onwards. Before this time people of colour were called African. Today, the terms African is understood to apply to all races, particularly of people whose citizenship is of an African country, and it is no longer appropriate to use the term to distinguish the race of a person. However, during Mgudlandlu's time (in the '60s and '70s) black people were still referred to as Africans. In this essay I will use black, but keep African where direct quotes are used.

[2] On August 15 1962, the *Cape Times* published an article stating that "[Gladys Mgudlandlu] is the first African woman artist to exhibit in Cape Town". In the same article she is quoted as saying "I think I am the first African woman in the country to hold an exhibition. As far as I know, I am the only African woman who has taken up painting seriously."

[3] Desmore's first solo exhibition of drawings and paintings took place at the Herbert Stanley Argus Gallery in Cape Town. This exhibition was sponsored by a company called New Group. In a clip in the *Cape Argus on* January 19 1942, it says the company sponsored Desmore because it considered her as one of the rare examples in South Africa of a child who holds high promises of being a sincere professional.

[4] In her archive file housed at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG), there is a handwritten entry by librarian Jo Burger that writes her date of death as August 2008. I was not able to find any other information to verify this except from a conversation with Jackie May, a reporter for *The Times* who is an acquaintance of this family.

selective claims over black artists' productions (1995: 12). He argues that, in the past, the interest of white patrons in black art had an influence on which black artists were endorsed in the public domain. Sabine Marschall, in her essay 'Strategies of Accommodation: Towards an Inclusive Canon of South African Art', also attests to this influence and writes that white patrons created selective criteria that only included certain black artists into mainstream art institutions based on Western ideologies of what black art should be (2001: 51). She argues that this influence explains why some black artists became better known than others. It can also be argued that such selective support and influence of white patrons forced other black artists to seek support from outside countries, as was the case with Desmore.[5]

These selective strategies make acclaims such as the one garnered for Mgudlandlu questionable. Furthermore, these exclusionary measures meant that the artistic creations of black artists began receiving critical attention only in later years. To be acclaimed as the 'first' in South Africa can thus be understood to imply more than just exceptional accolades. The questions that must therefore be asked with regards to Mgudlandlu's acclaim are: Why then? Why her? And for whose gain?

In her PhD thesis, *Writing White on Black,* Lize van Robbroeck writes:

> Until the 1980s, when Noria Mabasa and Bongi Dhlomo joined the ranks of modern black artists, black women artists to produce 'art' in Western understanding of the term, were few and far between. Apart from Gladys Mgudlandlu, a handful of female artists were trained [...] It is only in the 'Resistance paradigm' that a more inclusive conception of 'the black artist' arose (2006: 7).

Van Robbroeck's statement speaks indicatively to the invisibility of black South African women artists. This invisibility is the motivating reason for my interest in writing about Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive. I argue that exhibition archives reveal complexities within art history writing about the invisibilities and visibilities of artists. They also provide a means towards a more nuanced understanding of written histories and offer a way to understand why and how positioning of artists gets created.

For this thesis I used the archive of the monograph *Nomfanekiso* (2002), compiled by Elza Miles, as the primary exhibition archive reference on Mgudlandlu. I will refer to this archive

[5] In a handwritten CV that went along with a letter dated May 6, 1997 and was addressed to Elza Miles, Valerie Desmore records: "1946, came to London to study at the Slade and also to escape racial persecution in South Africa. I have never gone back".

as the Miles archive from here on. The archive is currently housed at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG). It is the only comprehensive archive on the artist compiled in this country to date. Going beyond this archive, I also engaged other sources for documents relating to Mgudlandlu and the context in which she lived. The purpose of auditing other archives was to collect and compare what was not already available from this single source. For example, I was able to get a hold of copies of original newspaper articles where she featured, from the South African National Library and other libraries. This allowed me to find other stories on the artistic, social and political context in which she worked and lived. In that way I was able to understand how she was portrayed in relation to these contexts. It also gave me access to clearer copies of information included in the Miles archive that had faded over time, or had become cropped from being photocopied repeatedly.

The library also had other newspapers that were not included in the Miles archive, such as *Contact* magazine, which was affiliated with the Liberal Party, and other issues of *The World* newspaper.[6] I also consulted other museum archives, such as the South African National Gallery, the William Humphreys Gallery and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum. These archives contained select material that exclusively referenced artworks by Mgudlandlu represented in these collections. While I was consulting these museum archives, I was able to make further comparative analyses to the Miles archive. These museum archives were also a source for works that were later included in the curated exhibition to be discussed in Chapter 4.

Various analyses of the Mgudlandlu archive extend throughout this thesis, and the function of archives is a fundamental part of this study. As it is generally known, archives are understood to function as evidence used to support, prove, establish and construct information that can be used towards further research and writing. For this thesis, it was important to understand the evidence in the context of its original purpose and function, so as to fully understand how it allows for a reading of Mgudlandlu's position as an artist, and how this position changed over time. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michele Pickover and Graeme Reid, authors of the book *Refiguring the Archive,* explain the function of the archive when they write:

[6]The Liberal Party of South Africa was a South African political party that operated between 1953 and 1968. The party was founded on May 9 1953 at a meeting of the South African Liberal Association in Cape Town (Paton, 1968:28). Essentially, it grew out of a belief that the United Party was unable to achieve any real liberal progress in South Africa, particularly the on the matter of mixed membership (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_Party_of_South_Africa).

> For the archive is also always already being refigured; the technologies of creation, preservation and use, for instance, are changing all the time; physically the archive is being added to and subtracted from, and is in dynamic relation with its physical environment; organisational dynamics are ever shifting; and the archive is porous to societal processes and discourses – although at certain junctures, like the one in which South Africa finds itself now, formal conduits need to be put in place (2002: 7).

Underlying this statement is the implication that archives, by their ever-changing nature, are limited and complex. What these editors allude to is that archives often do not reveal easy answers, but instead probe more questions about the information they contain. They suggest that archives must therefore be approached critically when attempting to understand, argue and analyse them.

Over the past 50 years, Mgudlandlu has captured the interest of many gallerists, collectors, curators and art historians. The inclusion of her work in important shows such as *Women Artists in South Africa* (1985, The South African National Gallery), *The Neglected Tradition* (1988, Johannesburg Art Gallery), *Land and Lives* (1997, Johannesburg Art Gallery), *Nomfanekiso* (2002, first launched at JAG and later toured other museums around the country), The *Lie of the Land* (2010, The South African National Gallery) and many others demonstrates the importance she holds as an artist in South Africa and reflects the amount of interest her work has generated. The long list of exhibitions featuring her work is evidence that her visibility has remained untarnished and her artistic contribution embedded in the memory of this country's art history. This visibility is captured and deposited into the archive.

The writing of this thesis focuses on two areas of research: the first is the trajectory of her exhibitions and the second is the theoretical writing on these exhibitions. Both of these components are central to the practice of producing knowledge within exhibitions and academic research. They demonstrate two different forms of writing, visual and textual, both of which function as forms of critique and reflection on the history of South African art practices. This gives provision to analysing ways in which Mgudlandlu's exhibitions were presented and received in public. To frame the role of exhibitions, authors of the book *Thinking About Exhibitions* – Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne – explain the following:

> During the course of the 19th century, exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known [...] These exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed (1996: 2).

This statement suggests that exhibitions have become the primary sites where knowledge is produced. What is written about artists, their work and their exhibitions is drawn from these encounters, as opportunities to record the developments of this artistic practice. In essence, exhibitions function as sites for theorising and creating meaning. The volume of press media clippings on Mgudlandlu found in the archives is evidence of this function.

To examine the textual writing of this archive, I have looked at how formal conventions of art history writing on Mgudlandlu's exhibitions have created certain theories around her work. These conventions have positioned her work within categories such as naive and primitive art, so much so that other aspects of her contributions to other art history movements were overlooked. This thesis researches other means of critiquing, understanding and analysing her work and exhibitions by looking at other theoretical frameworks that link to her work. It also responds to writings generated through exhibition reviews, as there was no scholarly research produced on her work around that time. This research ultimately uses these writings to facilitate other interpretations of her artistic practice and position.

The two areas of research (thesis and curated exhibition) explored in this thesis also take cognisance of methodological differences of writing explorations applied to Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive through exhibition reviews in newspaper articles. Both the thesis and the curated exhibition imported these exhibition reviews into a scholarly enquiry. These newspaper articles serve a dual function in my research: they are used as evidence in my critique of the lack of scholarly writing on Mgudlandlu's work as well as being forms of critical writing through which critique can be generated. Different writing methodologies are also used in reading this biography and exhibition archive. These writing methodologies reflect current forms of critical research and make use of emergent terminologies that were not previously applied to the work of early black artists.

Research Methodology

For this research I have used four research methods.

The first and primary research method was the in-depth excavation of all published material relevant to Mgudlandlu's exhibitions from 1957 to 1979, the period from when she began seriously producing and exhibiting her work, until her death. Information such as original press articles, reviews, newsletters and any other original documents connected to her exhibitions were the primary focus of this excavation process. This process was undertaken to verify and accurately capture information on all her exhibitions. Such information included: titles of the exhibitions (although some didn't have exhibition titles), the exact dates of the exhibitions, images of the artworks and exhibitions, lists of artworks on display, plans and layouts, records of biographical information on the artist and curators involved in the exhibition preparations, pictures of exhibition openings, along with the history and background information on hosting organisations, and any other information relating to her exhibitions and biography.

The Miles archive carries a great deal of information on Mgudlandlu, so the bibliography of the book *Nomfanekiso* was the first to be consulted, followed by library and museum visits. National reference and gallery libraries provided additional information. This cross-institutional research method provided an opportunity to explore Mgudlandlu's biography in depth so as to better understand the environment she lived in, the art scene of her time and who her contemporaries were. I was able to gather information on arts organisations and galleries that were operating at the time, which was not available in the Miles archive. Such an excavation allowed me to begin understanding the complexities of Mgudlandlu's archive.

My research is thus concerned with Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive as a conduit to enabling multiple readings on her exhibitions, artistic achievements and biography. The exhibition archive also operates as an indicator of the archive's content limitations, particularly around anomalies such as the issue of her being the 'first' black female South African artist and her date of birth. These limitations are even more apparent when analysing the environment in which the archive exists, where it is stored and its purpose.

The second research method involved examining relevant theoretical material. This material included essays and Mgudlandlu's short biographies found in published books, journals, magazines and online. In structuring this thesis, such an examination was critical in order to understand the contextual background and theoretical debates concerning her work. This gave me insight into how her work solicited public interest, which resulted into a public profile being created for her as an artist and I became interested in the anomalies that existed within that public interest.

The third research method involved conducting interviews with scholars, arts practitioners and collectors familiar with Mgudlandlu's work. These interviews provided insight into the study of Mgudlandlu's work and exhibitions. The personal recollections of people such as Randolph Vigne, Aart and Val Bijl and Judy Drewieka were important links that also had not been included in the Miles archive. Memories shared through interviews offered an in-depth understanding of how those who knew Mgudlandlu remember her today.

The fourth research method was the practical component. I devised this method as a strategy to analyse, read, examine and frame Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive in an interactive manner, which was in the form of a curated exhibition held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery between January and April 2012. Titled *A Fragile Archive* (2012), the exhibition included a restaging of Mgudlandlu's first exhibition in 1961, a survey of artists whose work preceded her, and a survey of artists who came after her in the 1980s and 1990s. The intention behind restaging this exhibition was to raise questions about the role of Mgudlandlu's archive history and memory in the writing of a biography through exhibitions. The restaging also brought attention to the limitations and complexities that exist within this exhibition archive.

The abovementioned methods as different forms of writing provided alternative ways of looking at this complex history and offered a critical recount of this artist's biography. In this way, Mgudlandlu's voice, historical background, context and position is looked at critically and her contribution to the South African art discourse is closely examined.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into four chapters.

Chapter 1 looks at how Mgudlandlu's archive becomes accumulated. By questioning the influences of media and patronage, it explores how value and context were created for Mgudlandlu's work by these structures. In turn, it demonstrates how media and patron influences were platforms of authority over Mgudlandlu's career, revealing why her work has remained relevant in the South African art scene. Based on evidence contained in the exhibition archive, this chapter unpacks some of the effects that these forms of authority had on her career.

Chapter 2 examines the writing of Mgudlandlu's biography. It looks at methodologies on writing biography and how these methods can consequently impose certain views about the artist's life and achievements. By comparing information found in the main archive with that found in other archives, this chapter shows the inaccuracies in her biography and reveals what the contributing factors to these inaccuracies might be. Most importantly, the circumstances in which Mgudlandlu lived and worked enables a deeper understanding of some of the complexities of her biography.

Chapter 3 offers an alternative way of looking at her archive. Through feminist readings, a different consideration of Mgudlandlu's archive and biography is argued. In addition, the feminist lens offers a different reading of Mgudlandlu's position by asserting the 'self' as another way of reading her public profile. This artist's public profile is looked at from the perspective of a self-defined position, which is often overridden by positions of her that were created by others. The feminist view draws on Mgudlandlu's own voice traced in various newspaper clippings in which she is quoted speaking about her work. These extractions demonstrate how she presented herself in the public domain, particularly in the spaces she claimed as an artist. They also infer notions of 'self definition' by demonstrating how she positioned herself through her use of feminist strategies.

Chapter 4 focuses on the curated exhibition *A Fragile Archive* (2012) as a method of exploring, questioning and revisiting the artist's archive. Functioning as a parallel component of the thesis writing, the results of chapters 1, 2 and 3 aided the shape of this exhibition based on what was retrieved, particularly from visits to museums and private art collections. The chapter functions as another form of re-narrating, discoursing, and reflecting on Mgudlandlu's work.

The conclusion: By looking at Mgudlandlu's archive and biography in these groupings, the aim is to reveal that such accounts highlight complexities with methods of writing within histories of art yet at the same time enable a different reading of Mgudlandlu's position as an acclaimed artist. Through both the dissertation and the exhibition, this re-narration and reinterpretation of her exhibitions reflects critically on her creative and intellectual strategies as well as her contribution to the South African art practices and discourse.

Chapter 1

Gladys Mgudlandlu's Exhibition Archive

This chapter sets out to do two things. Firstly, it will look at the changing role of public institutions in their inclusion and insertion of archives of artists who previously had been systematically excluded from these spaces by the past political regime. Secondly, this chapter will look at the role and position of critics, patrons and collectors within this exhibition archive. The intention is to draw out how these two operating systems have facilitated the ways in which we come to engage with this archive today.

1.1 The Institution and Exhibition Archives

> The term 'archives' first refers to a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state. However, 'archives' is also understood as a collection of documents – normally written documents – kept in this building. There cannot therefore be a definition of 'archives' that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents stored there (Mbembe 2002: 19).

In his essay 'The Power of the Archive and Its Limits' (2002), Achille Mbembe posits that archives comprise correlating documents assembled together form part of a public institution. Equally. Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive constructed through the Miles archive, which is housed at the JAG, a government public institution, now also forms a part of this 'public institution'. However the fact that this exhibition archive did not originate within a public institution premises the primary focus of this chapter. The aim is to explore how the archive transcended from a state of randomly scattered documents to that of a formally collated and packaged record. This transcendence of an archive that essentially started from an informal institutional art space – such as the boardroom where her first exhibition took place and later through privately owned commercial spaces, which were the only spaces available to black artists to exhibit their work – to a public institution such as the JAG, where these black artists were systematically excluded, speaks to the complexities of South Africa's art history. For Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive to now exist in such an institution needs to be questioned and critiqued, particularly the process with which this archive becomes inserted.[7]

[7]The Rodin Gallery, first opened in 1960, also operated as a furniture store called Hollywood Furnitures. The gallery was on the first floor of this shop.

Underlying Mbembe's definition of the archive is a question about the relationship between archives and the institutions keeping them. In South Africa, public art galleries and museums have a key function in the representation and preservation of art productions and in keeping records of these productions. However, it is also known that museums and galleries in this country previously operated under exclusionary systems that prevented fair representation of all South African artists. As a result, there is a scarcity of archive material on many early black artists in public museums today.

Steven Sack, in the catalogue for the exhibition *The Neglected Tradition*, states that "it is in the 'official' histories and art museums that this art [of black artists] has not been fully represented" (1988:7). Though the exhibition took place at the Johannesburg Art Gallery – a public institution – in 1988 during the time of the discriminatory apartheid regime, Sack's statement and the exhibition at large presented a means to challenge the governing system and offered a reconsideration of the neglected contributions from black artists in the arts.

The Neglected Tradition has come to be considered one of the most important exhibitions in the history of South African art, mainly because of its attempt to shift perceptions and build knowledge on the works of black South African artists. It was one of the first large-scale museum exhibitions to challenge the way museums included and represented works of black artists. With more than 50 black artists included in the exhibition, it is considered to be a critical review of the state of black artists' contribution to South African art at the time. [8]

The only other two shows that made similar attempts were *Tributaries: A View of Contemporary South African Art* curated by Ricky Burnett, and *Women Artists in South Africa* curated by Lynn McClelland and Lucy Alexander. Both took place in 1985.[9] These two shows grouped the contributions of a few black artists within a large group of white artists, showing a curatorial strategy that Sabine Marschall calls the "affinity approach" (2001: 53).[10]According to Marschall, this approach is one that is "a powerful and convincing visual to convey a message of equal abilities and similar concerns among members of different racial or ethnic groups" (2001: 53). She further says that this strategy had become an urgent project in the mid 1980s and into the 1990s as a way of accommodating black artists'

[8]Sabine Marchall describes this exhibition as revisionist (2001: 52).
[9]The exhibition *Tributaries* is considered a turning point in South African exhibition histories as a concerted effort to include works of black artists from rural areas was given great significance.
[10]Marschall describes the affinity approach as a "powerful and convincing visual tool to convey a message of equal and similar concerns among members of different racial or ethnic groups, and on occasion still influences curatorial practice today" (2001: 53).

works into an inclusive South African art canon (2001: 55). In my view, the problem with this strategy in the case of these two 1985 exhibitions is that this 'affinity approach' took away the focus on the 'overlooked' positions of black artists and did not address their disproportional inclusions. As a result it made no consideration of what Marschall articulated as "the relevance of racial segregation or other social issues" (2001: 51).

Although all of these exhibitions were beginning to demonstrate an inclusive museum and art gallery system, the mixing together of all these artists' backgrounds in *Tributaries* and *Women Artists in South Africa* did not address why black South African artists had been neglected in these spaces for so long. What also remained unaddressed was the inequalities inherent from the education and political systems, which were apparent in the quality, aesthetics and intention of art making and thus furthered differences that existed between the work of white and black artists. Sack's curatorial decision to focus only on the works of black artists was distinctly different from the other two shows. This exhibition acknowledged that the differences in the artistic contributions of South African black artists deserved its own platform in order to make clear the challenges that affected only black artists. It thus provided much-needed scholarly research and survey that addressed issues of invisibility for black artists operating in the country at the time.

These three exhibitions point to the extant gaps in the history of black artists. Their emergence also implies that it wasn't until the mid 1980s that the achievements of black artists began to be recorded by public museums.[11] This supports the statement that "exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known" (Tawadros1996: 2). Consequently, these gaps and omissions have affected the way that information on black artists can later be retrieved and archived. Unless there is a trail of newspaper reviews, there is very little or no information available on early black artists that can be found today. Unlike white artists whose work was often taken up in academia and written about in academic art historical contexts, black artists were left with journalistic reviews as the only form of textual engagement. The task of this thesis is to examine the archive using strategies that unpack this material and make sense of it in relation to how the archive gives agency to the position of the artist.

[11]Marschall also points out that the *Tributaries* exhibition ushered in a series of revisionist exhibitions and publications during the late 1980s (2001:53).

In his essay 'The Archives and Political Imaginary', Bhekizizwe Peterson writes:

> Archives cannot, therefore, escape the thick imprint of their institutional and political nature [...] If one recognises the vexed issues around the procedural, political and institutional questions that determine archives, then, quite clearly, archives cannot be naively approached as spaces or custodians of documents and information (2002: 29-30).

Peterson's statement emphasises the importance of the political nature inherent to the 'processing' of archives. It is also in this instance that the question about the relationship between archives and institutions is reiterated. His argument also alludes to issues of representation and access as well as issues of processing the archive. In this sense 'process' also relates to the issue of 'whom, what and how' the information found in these archives is accumulated, collated and used. The vexing question relating to Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive is how and by whom her archive is accumulated, accessed and utilised. The following section looks at the making of this exhibition archive.

1.2. The Making of the Exhibition Archive

This section looks at two areas of Gladys Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive. Firstly, it looks at how media contributed to Mgudlandlu's public position. Secondly, it looks at the roles played by collectors and patrons in creating value for her work. I have structured this section in this way in order to map out how these different contributions elaborate on the accumulation of her archive.

Beyond the role of the institution, this chapter also attempts to examine the role of the contributors to this archive – i.e. collectors, patrons and critics. In the Miles archive there is a collection of media reviews taken from different newspapers, which featured Mgudlandlu's exhibitions and life as an artist. This archive accumulates a set of documents that evidence and constitute what is to date considered her exhibition archive. It is important to remember that before these exhibitions took place and their reviews written, there was a set of contributors that helped Mgudlandlu put together her exhibitions and promoted information about them. These contributors in essence also became makers of this archive. I am interested in the position of these contributors and how they influence what became known about this artist. In many newspapers reviews, white patrons were consistently mentioned as structures

that provided support for Mgudlandlu through buying and exhibiting her work.[12] This implies that both the media and patrons played an essential role in the creation and making of this archive while at the same time giving value to her work. In this section I have investigated how media and white patrons functioned as institutions of influence and support, contributing towards the make-up of Mgudlandlu's career and in turn the archive.

I am also interested in the notion of the 'make-up' as it pertains to ideas of 'being made-up', 'dressed up', 'packaged' and the process of the 'coming together' of Mgudlandlu's career or the 'putting together' of the archive both in its figurative and metaphoric sense. I am curious about how the question of the archive also extends to the 'make-up' of value and context, which is associated with her later becoming one of South Africa's most important early modern artists. This section also examines this 'make-up' and function of Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive in relation to how it has become construed today.

To unpack the 'make-up', this section focuses on two areas. The first area of focus is the influence of media and the second is the influences of patrons and collectors. Through referencing evidence contained in Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive, this section attempts to understand this artist's history by looking at these two influencers. This section also offers an understanding of the archive's current formation, while allowing for additional approaches in questioning it.

The Miles archive shows the interest Mgudlandlu's work has continued to receive even after her death and the extent of this research, which later culminated in the retrospective exhibition and the book *Nomfanekiso* (2002). As previously mentioned, it was not until the Miles archive was compiled between 2000 and 2002 that these records on Mgudlandlu's artistic achievements were put together into a single file. Although the archive was compiled for the exhibition and book, it now serves the purpose of being the only, largest and most in-depth archive on the artist to date. It carries more than just newspaper reviews on her exhibitions – it also has letters, notes and other personal documents linked to Mgudlandlu that belonged to different people who either owned her artworks or knew her. The fact that

[12] An article published in the *Eastern Province Herald* dated November 20 1963 states that "Among those who had attended the exhibitions are many diplomats and their wives. Before the exhibition the artist entertained the wife of the United States consul, Mrs Charles Manning, at her home in Nyanga location". And many other critics constantly wrote about the kind of attention her work received and noted how important people were buying it,including critics themselves.

this archive was previously scattered is indicative of the apartheid-era South African public museum system and demonstrates the kind of relationship this archive had with the public art institution.[13]

Moreover, the previously scattered nature of this archive's content is even more recognisable in the inconsistencies and inaccuracies found in Mgudlandlu's biographies. For example, her date of birth is inconsistently recorded throughout her career, indicating the lack of critical writing on her biography. These errors often appeared in news press clippings published in that period. These inconsistencies continued to show up in publications printed after her death.

Mbembe argues that such inaccuracies are created through the "subjective act" of making and engaging with the archive (2002: 23). This suggests that such mistakes happen in the process of the initial media reporting and writing, and are later taken up by historians, curators and librarians. Mbembe says that there are two levels of engagement with the archive. The first is in the action of "putting together" (compiling) data, both historical and current. The second is the act of "using" the archive (2002: 23). But both these actions exercise a level of authority and discretion, which can also result in archival inaccuracies. As a result, these inaccuracies affect what gets accumulated in the archive, and the subsequent use of the archives.

Another method of examining the archive were interviews with people who knew Mgudlandlu. During the course of my initial research, I came across a small group of people who knew the artist either personally or through relatives. Judy Drewieka (a grandchild of Mavis Orpen who was a great collector and friend of Mgudlandlu); Aart and Val Bijl (who were working for the Liberal Party at the time of Mgudlandlu's first exhibition in 1961 and collected a few pieces by the artist); and Randolph Vigne (who assisted Mgudlandlu with her first exhibition) were in this group. I consulted this group in order to gain insight into their personal encounters with Mgudlandlu and they provided a better understanding of how they remember her, the 1961 exhibition, and the art scene of that time.

For example, Judy Drewieka was in possession of the original catalogues (artwork listings) of three of Mgudlandlu's exhibitions from the years 1961, 1962 and 1972. This included a catalogue of Mgudlandlu's first exhibition. These documents were not kept in any public

[13]The Johannesburg Art Gallery is the first museum to purchase an artwork from a black artist – Gerard Sekoto – in the 1940s, but it was not until the 1970s that the second purchase took place. It is believed that even though Sekoto's work was bought so early, he was not permitted to enter the gallery, even just to view his own work.

archives, including the Miles archive. Other documents, such as permits, postcards and cheques, were also retrieved during the process of meeting with this group. Importantly, this material was most valuable for the practical component of this research project, the curated exhibition discussed in Chapter 4.

I am also interested in how Mgudlandlu herself contributed to the 'make-up' of this archive. During the course of my research, I came across a collection of badly conserved works belonging to a Cape Town-based collector (who has asked to remain anonymous).[14] According to this collector, these works previously belonged to the artist's son, Malvern Mgudlandlu. Malvern apparently inherited them from his mother, as they were the last works she owned. These works were, for all intents and purposes, Mgudlandlu's last archive. Malvern Mgudlandlu passed these on to his employer for safekeeping and died while they were in the care of the collector.[15] There are no other archival records belonging to Gladys Mgudlandlu except for these. This limited archive by the artist indicates a very common problem with archives of many black South African artists from this period.

Lesley Spiro, writing in *The Neglected Tradition* catalogue, states; "[These] artists, often working in extremely difficult circumstances, have seldom had the opportunity to develop detailed records of their lives and achievements" (in Sack 1988: 97). This is often the reason why there is a lack of the artist's voice in their archives. However, without the artist's own archive it is difficult to get a sense of the things Mgudlandlu considered important in her own career. The absent voice of the artist also leaves the selection of these important things to those who kept an archive, limiting it to what they deemed to be of archival value. Speaking to this difficulty, Sack writes: "Anyone who has consulted the written histories on South African art will know how little information there is on black South African artists" (1988: 7). This also suggests that Mgudlandlu's archive also suffered a similar neglect to that of many of her contemporaries when it came to keeping records of her own career. Peterson also observes this difficulty when he writes:

> Except for a few cases, archives and, in particular, public archives in South Africa have been monolingual: they have embodied and voiced only the experiences and discourses of the successive white oligarchies that have governed throughout the twentieth century. The experiences and insights of Africans, women, workers and

[14]Interview with the collector in Cape Town (2011).
[15]Mgudlandlu's son, Malvern (also known as Mandisi), was born in 1948, and her daughter, Linda, in 1952. Linda died from a stabbing incident, which took place in 1980, the year after her mother's death. Malvern, who was fond of drawing, started building bungalows and died in 1991 (2002:16).

> other communities were generally ignored or criminalised, at times even banned and destroyed (2002: 30-31).

Peterson further makes us aware of the monolingual attributes of South African archives. This compelling statement makes us aware of the limitations of archives today, particularly in South Africa. From this statement, we can begin to see how political influences often shaped the make-up and use of these archives. This observation also implicates the media as a "monolingual" contributor in Mgudlandlu's archive. In the following sections, I discuss in more detail the roles of media and patrons, giving specific attention to the political positions asserted by Peterson and Mbembe in view of this exhibition archive.

1.2.1. Mgudlandlu's Exhibition Archive and the Role of the Media

The purpose of this section is to examine Mgudlandlu's public profile based on the opinions of media writers and critics as a way of demonstrating the role of the media and how it forms part of the mechanisms that constructed the first layer of this exhibition archive.

Mgudlandlu's artistic career in the public domain lasted for 19 years, from the time she began showing her work publicly in 1960 until her death in 1979. During this period, Mgudlandlu was still an active participant in the making of her archive in the sense that she was still actively producing and exhibiting, although it is reported that, because of an illness that was caused by complications from a car accident, she stopped producing work after her last solo show in 1972 (Miles 2002: 7). This illness eventually led to her death in 1979 (Miles 2002: 7). Nevertheless, her work continued to be exhibited until her death. The last group show in which she featured was titled *Contemporary African Art in South Africa* (1979), and took place at Fort Hare University the year she died.

The role of the media is important in understanding how and why Mgudlandlu features in it. In the book *Magema Fuze: The Making of a Kholwa Intellectual*, Hlonipha Mokoena argues that "there is a historical and cultural reality and background that has meant that writing and being read have always been a mark of racial privilege in South Africa" (2011: 4). In writing about Magema Fuze, Mokoena draws our attention to the transition from an oral culture to a literature culture, a culture that black people were previously not privileged to.[16] Her statement highlights the problem with the "role" of early writings, as it was seen as a state of

[16]Magema Fuze published the first book in isiZulu titled *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona* (1930). Fuze also frequently published a column in the *iLanga* newspaper.

"privilege". Looking at this statement, Mokoena warns us about the "politics of writing", which prescribed how certain people were given public visibility (2010: 4).

Thinking about Mokeona's writing in relation to Mgudlandlu's press archive, I am compelled to ask the question: if writing – and in this case, writing in the media – was reserved for the privileged, how did Mgudlandlu, a black woman, attract so much media attention? Many of the newspapers that covered Mgudlandlu's exhibition were also often written in English and Afrikaans, and written predominantly by white reporters.[17] So what did it mean for her to be featured in a space habitually reserved for privileged whites? For whom was she being featured and how did what was being written about her contribute to the accumulation of her archive?

This is not to say that there were no black writers who wrote about Mgudlandlu. Bessie Head wrote a review titled 'Gladys Mgudlandlu: The Exuberant Innocent', which was published in 1963. What is interesting about this article is the fact that Head does not write in praise of Mgudlandlu's work, but rather offers a critical review of the context surrounding it. Head criticises Mgudlandlu for being an "escapist" who fed on "white guilt", and argued that her material was only to entertain white audiences (1963: 209). Head's criticism gives a view that is contrary to what others wrote about Mgudlandlu. To quote Miles:

> For eleven years, from September 1961 to January 1972, Mgudlandlu's vibrant personality and pristine form of expressionism enchanted journalists, artists and art lovers. Art critics not only reviewed her exhibitions, they also bought her paintings. Paging through newspaper cuttings, it is evident that, from her debut to her last solo exhibition in 1972, she was, with the exception of 1969 and 1970, in the news every year (2002: 7- 8).

This quote from Miles shows a positive spin on the way Mgudlandlu's work was positioned in public, as opposed to Head's opinion. Yet, Head claimed that her criticism was based on the fact that Mgudlandlu's work did not challenge the political situation, but that her art "performed a kind of service", with her "hasty, childish scrawls" that were fitting for "the demand for escape that she is the unconscious supply" (1963: 209). She goes on to compare Mgudlandlu's work with Ephriam Ngatane's work, implying that the success of her work was only because of "these childish scrawls" (1963: 209) that entertained white audiences. Head continues to write, "[Ngatane] is an intense, passionate controlled, vividly imaginative artist and his township scenes rebound and vibrate with life" (1963: 209). The problem with

[17]Refer to the newspaper bibliography from page 101 to 102.

Ngatane's work, she goes on to say, is that it "reminds people, who would rather forget, that township are nasty places where people walk some two hundred yards to fetch water from a communal tap shared by some 80 000". This, of course, was not the kind of art Gladys Mgudlandlu produced.

Head's writing raises questions about media's authority and the perceptions that the media is able to generate in the public. Few writers delved into questioning the political dimension of Mgudlandlu's work and environment. Head's article alludes to a disruption of assumptions of what seemed to be a unified appraisal of Mgudlandlu's art.

Imvo Zabantsundu, a newspaper based in Cape Town for Xhosa speakers only caught wind of Mgudlandlu's artistic career in 1972, 11 years after her first appearance in public as an artist in Cape Town. This is also the year of her last solo exhibitions before falling ill. An article written by George Kulati, titled 'Mgudlandlu's Art a Real Eye Opener', was the first article published on Mgudlandlu in this newspaper, appearing on January 22 1972. Even though it was for a Xhosa-speaking readership, the article was written in English. Kulati shares Head's take on Mgudlandlu's work. He criticises Mgudlandlu's painting ability, disapproving of the fact that she relied on memories of her Peddie childhood, instead of painting "life around her in Cape Town". He states that, "her emphasis on 'rural life' is detrimental to her growth as an artist […]". Kulati concluded that Mgudlandlu "could learn a lot from others as to a variety in subject matter and flexibility in treatment". This, of course, was not necessarily true, because Mgudlandlu's works did in fact explore a wide range of themes, including her landscapes of the township where she lived, other still life and portraiture. It is clear that Kulati was not very familiar with Mgudlandlu's work and chose to critique only the works depicting rural landscapes, which allowed him to sound provocative.

Besides the lack of an informed perspective on Kulati's part, we can still question what it meant for Mgudlandlu to lack support by the media that spoke her language. Why was she so invisible in the media of her own community? What does it mean to have this article written in English in a Xhosa newspaper? These questions go back to Mokoena's writing on the privileges of being "written about". It seems that in Mgudlandlu's case, these privileges are both given and taken away from her. Mgudlandlu is simultaneously an exciting story for white readership and a questionable story for black readership. The role the media played in

Mgudlandlu's archive is both of writing in commemoration and of severe criticism, bordering on racial and political divides.

While other writers lavishly praised her, here are at least two black writers who disagreed with this praise.[18] Observing this play between writers of different races and publishing houses reveals the many factors that influenced how Mgudlandlu was presented in the media and in turn how she was portrayed in public. These complexities also show the contextual influences surrounding the media's 'make-up' of this archive and what Peterson calls a monolingual influence.

1.2.2. The Role of Patrons and Collectors as Critics: A Negotiation of Power, Influence and Dominance in Collecting and Patronage

There is another angle that is important to understanding Mgudlandlu's publically perceived position that relates to the role of the patrons and collectors. I make a distinction between patrons and collectors. A patron is a supporter, follower and mentor. A collector is merely a buyer and financial sponsor. This section discusses the role of patrons in influencing the kind of art made by black artists. It also explores how these patron-directed valuing systems are created. I will explore these valuing systems based on market value and historical importance, with some consideration of the influence of racial delineations.

Ivor Powell argues that "black artists in this country have, in general, been more or less systematically and historically forced to remain in the condition of curio makers" (1995: 12). He posits that the interest of art patrons in black art had an influence on what black artists produced, though he admits that this is not true of all artists, particularly towards the late 1980s, this is of course many's years after Mgudlandlu's time. To qualify this, he analyses the following statement made by collector and gallerist CG Damant about the work of Samuel Makoanyane, taken from the exhibition catalogue *The Neglected Tradition*:

> [Samuel Makoanyane] produced a few figures modelled from Europeans [...] they excited some interest because the likenesses were very good, but I felt constrained to advise Samuel against this type of work, pointing out to him that, to really establish himself, he should produce models of his own people, in their various daily occupations [...] in his

[18]Although I have references of two black writers who are not in support of Mgudlandlu's work, it does not mean that all black writers rejected her work. For example, for *The World* newspaper had many black writers who were positive about her work. The point being made by referencing the two critical writers is to highlight the opposing views of newspapers, particularly from her home city.

> village and in the fields. I was certain there would be a constant and growing demand for this and I was proved entirely right. Samuel saw the point and followed the advice; he ceased to make any more European figures and settled down to making various types of Basuto, for which he became known far and wide (in Sack 1988: 110).

Powell argues that these sorts of advisements positioned and framed the work of black artists in a particular way, and that such advice is "'archetypal"' of the relationships that previously played between white patrons, collectors and black artists in South Africa. He argues that South African discrimination played a role in what black artists produced and how their work was influenced, valued and collected by white patrons. Powell further posits that these white patrons' influence perpetuated notions of what was "African" according to Western understandings and created separate "artistic identities for blacks" (1995: 19). This is also true in the case of Mgudlandlu. In her book *Nomfanekiso*, Miles states that:

> When Ray Alexander-Simons, the first national secretary of the Federation of South African Women and general secretary of the Food and Canning Workers' Union, got to know Mgudlandlu's work early in the 1960s, she noticed the absence of the scene of Langa, Nyanga and Guguletu. She encouraged Mgudlandlu to paint the homes of the people of Nyanga where she lived (2002: 8).

Alexander-Simons' encouragement echoes CG Damant's advice to Samuel Makoanyane. This shows the kind of influence and power relationships that existed between the black artist and the white mentor. The undertone of such relationships often involved placing black people in firmly fixed identities. These mentalities also echo what became a popular political statement by former apartheid president Hendrik Verwoerd about the inferiority of black people that became entrenched during those years, when he said, "There is no place for [blacks] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour" (in Omond 1985: 80). This kind of attitude towards blacks did not only translate in politics but also through other spheres of South African life.

In the same article, Powell discusses "the taste of the buyer (or at least what the dealer believes is the taste of the buyer) is given precedence in the commissioning over the intentions of the artist" (1995: 16). He recounts artist David Koloane's experience of being rejected by a white dealer because the dealer believed Koloane's work was "unAfrican" (1995: 18). Such statements indicate how these relationships often perpetuated an exoticism and prescription of what black artists should and should not illustrate in their work.

Elizabeth Rankin further attests to this influence of white patrons in her essay 'Black Artists, White Patrons: The Cross-cultural Art Market in Urban South Africa', saying:

> The earliest black painters were therefore largely self-taught, but their development was often initiated and nurtured by white mentors. Inevitably, these well-intentioned sponsors tended to impose their concepts of what black art should be like [...] White expectations of black art have probably been particularly influential in the area of painting, not only because this art form was new to black culture, but because the concept of art as commodity, another idea introduced from the West, has been adopted wholeheartedly by many black artists who have a thoroughly practical view of art as a way of earning a living and therefore pay close attention to the requirements of the market (1990: 25, 28).

Here Rankin refers to the influence of Western ideologies, which were used to direct and dominate the artistic products of black artists. It is evident that this was the kind of power mechanism used to both gauge and guard the kind of work that black artists were producing at the time, which then elevated them into the mainstream. She further states that "in addition, white dealers at home and abroad, either for further financial gain or because of racial guilt, have on occasion promoted less competent black artists, who were attracted to painting by monetary success and the considerable publicity they received" (1990: 28). These double standards displayed by patrons encouraged by this system of power, and also became a means of control over the value of these creations. Even to this day, the value of these artists' work differs. For example, works done by Mgudlandlu's contemporaries such as Irma Stern sell for up to R21.1 million, yet Mgudlandlu's most lucrative work sold for only R270 000.[19]

This inconsistency in price has much to do with how artists' work over the years has become valued based both on how much of an artist's work is circulating in auction houses, and how much writing on the artist is being generated. As Roger Cardinal asserts, "[…]the works of forgotten masters are from time to time reassessed and placed higher on the scale" (1972: 7). This historical valuing system is thus determined through the patrons who have collected works, kept them in good condition and made them available for exhibitions so as to encourage writing on the works. In this instance, the role of the patron exercises levels of mentoring, adjudicating, editing and evaluating, while at the same time weighing and fixing

[19] An article published on June 11, 2012 on the IOL online site covers the story of the Strauss and Co auction of Irma Stern's *Oman Arab Man,* and reports that this painting was sold for R17. 2 million rands. The article also states that the highest price for this artist's work was in the previous year, when her *Two Arabs* painting sold for R21.1 million.(http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/stern-painting-snapped-up-for-r17m-1.1316543).
At the 2012 Stephan Welz auction held in February 2012, notably Gladys Mgudlandlu's *Two Girls* sold for R270 000, outdoing its estimated price of between R40 000 and R60 000. This was said to be a new record for this artist (http://louiseniemann.blogspot.com/2012/02/stephen-welz-co-first-2012-art-auction.html).

the artist's positions, which was previously based on their expectation of what 'black art' should be. By buying Mgudlandlu's work, patrons were affirming that the work was deserving and that it met the expected standards of what black art should be. This is also apparent in Makoanyane and Koloane's cases.

In conclusion, by questioning the content of an artist being written about, what is accumulated in the archive, how the archive is categorised and accessed, we must first unpack the contextual background of art writing in a critical way and how it contributes to our understanding of an archive. Art critics and reporters of Mgudlandlu's time wrote about artists in order to report on the developments of the practice and to monitor changes within this practice, as well as to acknowledge artistic contributions these artists were making within the South African artscene. The role of the media in the context of Mgudlandlu functioned in this realm, beyond the critic, but also captured what historians only recorded much later, thus fulfilling roles of both recording and reporting. This dynamic bears implication into how we come into contact with these archives today. In its attempt to demonstrate how archives function today, this chapter has displayed the complexities within the archive. The environment in which the archive is constructed and the contextual background affects our readings of what is found and what is not found in them. The set of documents, stored in this exhibition archive, is merely an entry into a time and place in which Mgudlandlu lived and represents a capturing of these records on paper. Such entries allow for a closer inspection into this artist's life and history.

The treatment of archives as both enablers and limiters of critical information makes Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive important, particularly in the reporting on a generation of artists that have previously been neglected in South African art history. Such a treatment of archives also compels us to question how such artists' work is framed, discussed and referenced today. Moreover, the role of the public institution as the custodian of history and artistic productions of South African artists has a bearing on the way it stores and allows access to these archives. These institutions need to be seen participating and contributing to the rethinking, re-presenting and shifting of the use, purpose and function of these archives. It is only when there is a critical discourse around the writing of art history that newer ways of reading and engaging the archive can emerge. The criticism discussed in this chapter was not necessarily only about negating the position of these role players, but rather a critique of how

these role players have contributed to Mgudlandlu's visibility and public position, which has garnered a position of importance in the history of South African art. By engaging in a critical reading of these positions, the intention was to highlight how public positions are created through the efforts of many different contributors, a practice that continues to happen in the art world today.

Chapter 2

A Biography in the Exhibition Archive

Introduction

This chapter examines how content found in Gladys Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive is translated into the writing of her short biography. It looks at the ways the archive content has been used, paying particular attention to how Western writing conventions were used to formulate this biography. I examine methods of writing biographies as a way of problematising, critiquing and analysing Mgudlandlu's biography.

It is my contention that the discrepancies found in Mgudlandlu's archive are largely because of selective, systematic inclusions and exclusions of black artists in the public domain, which in turn affected writing on this artist. The methodologies discussed here offer ways of questioning the context that locates the use and formulation of her biography while making comparative analyses on it. This follows on the questions about the 'make-up' of the archive, looking at how archives contribute towards the writing of artists' biographies. It is important to point out that I will not be rewriting Mgudlandlu's biography but examining it from the point of biographical writing methodologies while reflecting on the archive.

In the essay 'Writing and Re-Writing', Johannes Deganaar makes this compelling statement about methods of writing:

> Re-writing [...] is all the more important when writing has become institutionalised, a thing rather than a process, static instead of dynamic, a foundation for canonisation, introducing fixed hierarchies, succumbing to the hegemony of certain discourses and the dictatorship of methodologies, a source of definitive labels, styles and genres, a basis for exclusion of alternative ways of writing, cultivating the illusion of the self-contained art object, of a universal aesthetic sensibility and of the timeless criteria for judging art (Deganaar 1987: 14).

Deganaar's comment connects to what has been discussed in Chapter 1 regarding the changing nature of archives but relates specifically to writing – that writing must be considered within changing dynamics in order to gain a more critical perspective on employed strategies and methods of engagement.

Although there is a wide range of writing on Mgudlandlu's artworks and exhibitions, these texts are usually accompanied by a short biography on the artist. I am interested in the short biographies on the artist as they capture key background information. I will also from time to

time use extracts from Miles' book on extended biographical information where such an extension is necessary. It is in the asking of 'how' and 'what' key information gets included that I would like to position my argument.

In art history, short biographies are often used as a means of sharing information on artists or writers and summarising important information on artists. Many of the early South African black artists have only limited biographical information available, mainly because of the limited research done on them. The short biography usually functions as a short résumé used to promote artists' work in the exhibitions. Curators, historians and museum administrators use it as a tool to promote these artists in exhibitions as well as for archiving and referencing their artistic achievements. This information is usually sourced and contained in the archives, be it in a file of a library or a museum, in newspaper reviews or in other published material.

Mgudlandlu's short biography provides an understanding of her life, geographical location and position within the context of where she worked and lived. There are a number of other publications that have included her short biography.[20] These biographies often carried misrepresenting information on the artist's life and achievements, such as in Mgudlandlu's case, where her date of birth is incorrectly captured. I would like to look at how these discrepancies occur and how they reinforce what becomes considered fact about her life.

Lesley Spiro, writing in *The Neglected Tradition* catalogue, says the following about the challenges she faced while putting together biographical information on artists participating in this exhibition (including Mgudlandlu):

> The fact that the artists in this exhibition represent a largely 'neglected tradition' was nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the effort to compile a reasonably accurate and complete set of biographies. In the first instance, no detailed biographical survey of this important group has been done before. Information had to be gathered from a wide range of sources – newspaper clippings, journal articles, exhibition invitations and catalogues, books, artists' own curriculum vitae, and interviews with the artists themselves and people with whom they have come into contact. Many of these sources yielded only sketchy and inaccurate data. Even the artists, often working in extremely difficult circumstances, have seldom had the opportunity to develop detailed records of their lives and achievements. In addition, such phenomena as multiple names for the same place and non-standardised spelling added a layer of confusion to the task of verifying facts [...] A great deal of more

[20]Sack, *The Neglected Tradition* (1988); Alexander and Cohen, *150 South African Paintings, Past and Present* (1990); Miles, *Land and Lives* (1997); Fremantle *Emergence* (1999); Stevenson, Ollemans and Viljoen, *Stained Paper South African Images in Watercolour* (2000); Seibrits *Sekoto to Sihlali* (2005); Fremantle, *New Beginnings* (2005); Godby, *The Lie of the Land* (2010).

> research will be necessary before we can claim to have done justice to the subject (1988: 97).

The ”neglected” group she refers to are early South African black artists who practised between the 1930s and the 1980s. This statement by Spiro is testimony to the challenge that many writers face when writing biographies of these artists. Even though Mgudlandlu's work regained public prominence in 2001, her biography continues to carry contradictory information. It was through surveying primary sources (old newspaper articles and other published material during her time) that I was able to gather and identify where these errors occurred. By understanding methodologies of writing biographies, I was able to interrogate and understand the contextual background of these discrepancies.

2.1. Strategies of Auto/biographical Writing

In examining Mgudlandlu's short biography, it is useful to look at *Selves in Question* (2006), a collection of essays on the topic of auto/biographical writing, edited by Judith Coullie, Stephan Meyer, Thengani Ngwenya and Thomas Olver. Well-known literary writers are interviewed in this book about the strategies adopted in their writings of biography. Although this book mainly focuses on the literary field, the various strategies and methods of writing a biography discussed in his book make it relevant and critical to my exploration of Mgudlandlu's biography. Important strategies employed in biographical work such as auto/biography, auto-fiction, monograph or '*autre*biography' (an account of another self) are discussed in this book. Although I will not be looking directly at these strategies, it is important to mention them in light of how they are connected to writing an artist's biography. I discuss some of them in relation to Mgudlandlu's biography.

In the introduction, the editors state that an account of an auto/biography is always "connected to issues of time, meaning and action" (2006: 1), which is embedded in issues of representation. This consideration also affects the writing of an artist's biography in a way that is implicit to the time it was written, its meaning and how it is used. They refer to a "scaffolding of agency" (2006:1) that writers need to be mindful of. The editors suggest that a biography is not always pure and objective, that the style, angle and sometimes narrative take on the personality or history of the author. "As much recent theoretical writing demonstrated, there is no such thing as a 'simple' biography, if only because under close analytical scrutiny the concept of identity has become necessarily fraught" (2006: 4). Looking at Spiro's statement from this perspective, it becomes important to understand her position as a writer and the historical context in which she writes these artists' biographies.

This argument also implicates the other participants involved in positioning and framing Mgudlandlu, such as art critics, gallerists and newspaper reporters.

An example of this is the position of the writer and historian, Elza Miles. In her book *Nomfanekiso,* Miles states that Mgudlandlu "was promoted by white women" (2001:8). This gives a glimpse into the kind of gender-based support Mgudlandlu's work received. What significance do these women promoters bear on Mgudlandlu's work? During the course of this research, I discovered that Mgudlandlu gained the opportunity to exhibit in the *Contact* magazine boardroom through a meeting with Randolph Vigne, who was at the time the national deputy chairman of the Liberal Party, and Patrick Duncan, chief editor of *Contact* magazine, both of whom are male.[21]

Without dwelling on the hearsay, here are the facts about this situation: the Liberal Party was at the time headed by men – Alan Parton as chairman and Vigne as deputy. The same was true for *Contact* magazine.. For this exhibition to have taken place at the Liberal Party building and in the *Contact* magazine boardroom implies that it would have been approved and supported by these institutional heads. Knowing these facts throws into question Miles' framing of Mgudlandlu's "women promoters". Why did Miles frame Mgudlandlu's support in this manner and was this claim meant to deposit Mgudlandlu's history within the discourses on women in art? Was Miles merely exercising an agency that she saw fitting to be inserted in Mgudlandlu's biography, or was it based on the research material available to her? In my interview with Miles in November 2011, she was unable to answer this question. She said that this research was conducted so long ago that she was not able to recall all the details. She assumed she must have been working with material that she had access to at the time.[22]

[21]*Contact* magazine was an independent news magazine that was established in 1958 to provide news on the state of politics in South Africa, as well as to be a multiracial platform that catered for all news without any prejudice, prohibition or bias, which was something dominant at the time with heightening political oppression of black South African. It had three branches – one in KwaZulu-Natal (in Pietermaritzburg, which later moved to Durban), in Cape Town (operating from Parliament Street in the same building as the Liberal Party) and another in Johannesburg.

[22] In an email correspondence with Randolph Vigne, dated June 7 2011 Vigne describes meeting Mgudlandlu through his maid Ethel Dlamini and how this led to Mgudlandlu's first exhibition in the *Contact* magazine boardroom. In this email he claims to have been the one to "discover" her and introduced her to Patrick Duncan.

Indeed what the editors of *Selves in Question* suggest may be true for the position of Spiro and Miles – that the 'self' and 'agency' are linked. This then means that there is a level of subjectivity similar to what Mbembe alludes to when he writes:

> However we define archives, they have no meaning outside the subjective experience of those individuals who at that given moment come to use them […] it seems clear that the archive is primarily the product of a judgment, the result of the exercise of power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded (2002: 20).

Miles' failure to acknowledge the contributions from Vigne and Duncan in the making of Mgudlandlu's biography speaks to this subjective experience of the writer. However, such omissions are understandable if you argue that Miles was the first to compile Mgudlandlu's archive, as it could mean more information could have been discovered since her initial compilation. Nevertheless, this example of a singular reading of archive information, such as the one implied here by Miles, can mislead how we understand her history, which in turn raise problems with how this information is later used.

In *Women Making Art* (2003), Marsh Meskimmon suggests that it is necessary to describe the methodologies and processes used when writing in order to facilitate new ways of critiquing and engaging text so as to "address meaningful variations of this history" (2003: 2). Meskimmon suggests that writers must be self-reflexive so as not to project a single view. Her statement implies that Miles should have contextualised her claims on the "white women promoters" to avoid such inconsistencies with Mgudlandlu's biography.

Media critics also play a role in the writing of artist biographies. Neville Dubow is believed to have been the first critic to review Mgudlandlu's first public exhibition, and arguably the first to write her biography in an article that appeared in the *Cape Argus* on September 25, 1961.[23] As his review appeared in a popular newspaper, it promoted and created attention for Mgudlandlu's work, which in turn promoted his own writing. Meskimmon observes: "Critics, theorists and historians also participate in this double play of materiality and agency" (2005: 4). This statement reflects Coullie, Meyer, Ngwenya and Olver's argument about agency in the construction of auto/biographical writing. The double play in the position of Dubow is also implicated here.

[23]Dubow, Neville. September 25, 1961. A first exhibition of paintings. The *Cape Argus*.

On the question of auto/biography, another writer featured in *Selves in Question*, Seyla Benhabibi, describes this as a "dialogical" – that by writing on another person (a biography) you are indicatively writing on yourself too; in other words, this also becomes what she also calls a "binary" construct. She states that "from the time of our birth we are immersed in a 'web of narratives', of which we are both the author and the object" (1992: 198). Benhabibi's argument speaks back to the need to understand the writer's position and how that influences the act of writing and our understanding of the position of that writer.

Similar to the case of Dubow, in relation to the binary and dialogical construct of his reviews, my work as a curator writing about artists and putting together exhibitions also forms part of these strategies. I therefore remained self-reflective in my engagement with this material and tried to be aware of how much of my curatorial agenda was coming through in the process of compiling and collecting information for the exhibition. This was to ensure that this agenda did not overshadow the strength and importance of the work. Methods of putting this exhibition together are further discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Further, on the question of autobiography, Dorian Haarhoff in an interview with Terence Zeeman, said: "Autobiography is a vital way of reconnecting to your identity, especially in an authoritarian society where identity has been suppressed in favour of the powerful official version of who you are (a race, gender or religious classification)" (2006: 256). Haarhoff's remarks reinforced the importance of my remaining critical in writing about Mgudlandlu. This critical consideration also reflects my motivation for writing about Mgudlandlu's archive: I am of the opinion that there is still a great lack of writing on black women artists and that there is therefore a great need to contribute towards writing about this history. Marion Arnold comments:

> As a woman I want to know my own history and my past; as a woman artist I want to know about the lives and creativity of other women. Without this knowledge I am powerless to position myself securely in the present and cannot claim my rights to the future (1996: np).

It is in this understanding of the role of the writer that one is able to analyse and critique a biography. The points made by the authors of *Selves in Question*, Arnold and Meskimmon reminds us that biographies are constructed by people with their own interests and that it is necessary to be constantly mindful of the position and context of the writer. The exploration of writing conventions and auto/biographical methodologies are therefore critical in this examination of Mgudlandlu's biography.

2.2. A Biography in the Public

This section explores the notion of 'definition' as a central and constant thread in Mgudlandlu's biography. The intention of this reading of her biography was to understand how this notion of 'being defined' was influential in the construction of a public position for her. I am interested in how Mgudlandlu is written by others as well as how she defines herself in text where her voice is inserted and how such locations of her demonstrate autobiographical strategies.

> Without detracting from her skill and sincerity as a painter, one can safely say that the amazing success of Gladys Mgudlandlu's exhibitions is as much due to her colourful and forceful personality as it is to the quality of her art. This huge and refreshingly vital African woman seems to draw people to her (B.B. *Gladys, The 'African Queen' of Nyanga, Does it Again*, 1963).

The overt emphasis on her personality evident in many of the articles suggests that it also played a role in how critics wrote about her exhibitions, so much so that in Miles' view "she commanded respect" (2002: 27). Miles notes how "Mgudlandlu's vibrant personality and pristine form of expressionism enchanted journalists, artists and art lovers" (2002: 7). It would seem that in as much as her works gained the interest of patrons, her personality equally attracted as much attention. Why was there such an interest in her personality? Did this have anything to do with her being racially different in these spaces or was it to do with her gender? According to Arnold, these press statements were "embarrassing and patronising" (1996: 13). What did it mean for writers to have such an interest in her personality and what was this information meant to address?

Marion Arnold, in her book *Women in Art (*2005), describes Mgudlandlu as a "celebrity" and wrote about how she changed perceptions by being the 'first' black woman to gain recognition as an artist (2006: 13). While it is known that Mgudlandlu's public career was not neglected in the ways some of her contemporaries were, her visibility can be understood in what Pumla Gqola calls "hypervisibility" (2010: 61). Gqola uses this term in her book *What Is Slavery to Me* (2010), where she describes Sarah Baartman's hypervisibility as a result of South Africa's racist history. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Mgudlandlu's visibility is made more pronounced by the constant reference to her "naive" painting skill. This emphasis on her skill (or perceived lack of skill) is coupled with references to her race and gender as something special, unique, extraordinary and out of the norm of what a "black woman" can and cannot do. The lack of critical reflections on the sociopolitical implication of this

"limited skill" is indicative of the perception created about her work and is suggestive of how the creations of early black artists were often framed as technically, intellectually and conceptually limited compared to those of white artists with academic training.

Recalling Head's opinion that Mgudlandlu was "performing a kind of service" in that she was being viewed and spectacled by the white audience raises questions about the relationship between "performing" and of being a celebrity. In her essay 'Becoming: The Art of Everyday Performativity' (2012), artist Sharlene Khan writes about the concept of "active identity performance practice" (2012:16), a strategy used to subvert identity categories in post-apartheid South Africa. She states:

> The emergence of apartheid narratives today evidence the many ways people *had* to manipulate discriminatory apartheid constructions through a range of everyday performances of identity and the notion of *fitting into* categories of race and ethnicity (in Stemberger 2012: 16).

She writes on how these strategies have manifested themselves in the visual arts. Although Mgudlandlu did not live in post- apartheid times, her 'identity performance' can be observed in her self-proclaiming statements where she is quoted saying, "As far as I know, I am the first African woman in the country to hold an exhibition" (*Cape Argus*, 1962). Many critics and fellow artists validated Mgudlandlu's self-proclamation. For example, George Pemba, a well-known early South African artist and a businessman from Port Elizabeth, is quoted as saying: "She is an honour to our womanhood, since they have always been regarded as useful only in the kitchen, for scrubbing floors and hoeing in the corn and mealie fields" (*Evening Post,* 1962: np). This statement suggests that she was not only performing a kind of service for whites, but that she was also performing the identity of an extraordinary black woman. In *Vision and Difference,* Griselda Pollock expands on this generalisation of women's roles in relation to art as follows:

> Men create art; women merely have babies. […] The sexual divisions embedded in concepts of art and the artists are part of the cultural myths and ideologies peculiar to art history. But they contribute to the wider context of social definition of masculinity and femininity and thus participate at the ideological level in reproducing the hierarchy between sexes (1988: 21-22).

Pollock's observation raises the broader issue of historical delineations of gender as a spectacled delineation. The underlying question of how Mgudlandlu's claim of being the 'first' African woman artist exhibiting work then speaks to the positioning of her as an artist

and as a black woman, both of which require close attention. This positioning of her as the 'first' also refers to the limited number of historians recording and critically reflecting on this history, which made it easy for anyone to make such claims. Mamphela Ramphele, in the book *A Life* (1995), problematises these appropriations as follows:

> It is not difficult to be a celebrity in a situation in which others sharing a similar history have been prevented from succeeding by a vicious discriminatory system. Being the *first* this, that or the other, though reflecting a personal accomplishment, should also be seen as an indictment of a society, which has denied many more black people the opportunity to excel. The double jeopardy of being black and woman compounds the problem for me (1995: 180-181).

Ramphele's statement compels us to think about the workings of the conditions in which Mgudlandlu lived, particularly what informed her drawing so much public interest. Ramphele's caution prompts us to think about how this could have been encouraged by the political system, as Mgudlandlu could have been seen as 'acting out' a role that was not within the patriarchal norms of what black women could do at the time. Attesting to this, Pollock argues that:

> In fact, to discover the history of women and art at all means accounting for the way art history is written, to expose its underlying way in which women artists are recorded and dismissed is nevertheless crucial to the concept of art and artists created by art history (1988: 24).

It is therefore important to be critical about such claims as it speaks about more than just exception accolades rather how gender and race are influences in how she is perceived today. As Esmé Berman, in the book *Art and Artists in South Africa* (1983), writes: "Gladys Mgudlandlu claimed – seemingly with accuracy – that she was the 'first African woman teaching artists in the republic"' (1983: 291). Berman use of the word "seemingly" suggests a sense of doubt about the information she is using. Recent scholarly research has shown that such acclaims are debatable. Historians such as Brenda Schmahmann, Elza Miles, Thomas McEvilley, Marion Arnold, Ivor Powell, Lize van Robbroeck and many others have also argued that such a claim cannot be accepted conclusively without analysing the effects of South Africa's political past.

Arnold states that "the West endorsed itself in discovering 'others' and positioning them in binary opposition" (1996:4). This was the case in how the press "discovered" and "promoted" Mgudlandlu. We should therefore question such monolingual claims because at the very least they imply that Mgudlandlu's self-proclamations could perhaps not have been

her own but were instead proclamations employed by the press to perpetuate her otherness. These media proclamations projected what was often instrumented through a Western and colonial perspective to generate a 'hypervisibility' of Mgudlandlu while at the same time creating particular views, values and levels of importance for this black artist. Sabine Marschall, in her essay 'Strategies of Accommodation: Towards an Inclusive Canon of South African Art' (2001), observes how Western measures created classification of "fine" or "high" against "craft" or "low" art, which was applied not only to the quality of art but was instrumented through racial delineations. She further states that because of apartheid:

> […] the South African historical legacy, vast aesthetical, technical and conceptual discrepancies have tended to differentiate the works of many self-taught artists from academically trained and internationally connected whites (2001: 51).

So to discover the 'first' black woman artists in the 1960s and to position her as such reinforces these Western desires of 'discovering', 'defining' and 'viewing'. These hasty, uncritical and unresearched claims affect how this kind of history is later written and why artists like Valerie Desmore remain unrecognised in the history of South African art. The placing of Mgudlandlu as the 'first' thus further canonises her and perpetuates a colonialist view. Powell describes this discrimination:

> Where, like all the other arenas of social life, the arts and culture were shot through with the separatist and discriminatory ideology of apartheid. Where art, like everything else, carried, both in its infrastructures and in its overt and covert content, the imprint of the political system (1995: 14).

In *Art and Discontent: Theory at the Millennium* (1991), Thomas McEvilley also attests to such discrimination in his description of Western constructions of separatism: "When one culture looks at the object of another, those objects are instantly incorporated into an alien mental framework" (1991: 286). This view offers an important understanding of Western perspectives on African objects. In another essay, 'Here Comes Everybody', he writes that "art and literature functioned in part as justification of demonstrations of European superiority" (in Powell 1995: 18). This statement is indicative of how South African history denied, selected and determined how black artists would feature in art history. As a result, many contributions of black artists were excluded from South African art history and they were thus not recognised or given due acknowledgement. Powell summarises this in his statement that "South African art lies in its connection with a much fetishised international art scene" (1995: 14). The framing of the *first* thus relates to the construction of how black artists were included and excluded from this historical canon.

2.3. Locating Artistic Genres in Biography

When considering the valuing of Mgudlandlu's work, the connections between the subject matter and style she used should be noted, as well as the ways patrons and the media gave credence to her work. As seen in Head and Kaluti's criticisms, Mgudlandlu's work was often referred to as being "naive" and "primitive". In fact, her work was for a long time only connected to these stylistic classifications, and it was only recently that it became discussed within the context of expressionism (Miles 2002: 35). In *Nomfanekiso*, Miles dedicates a chapter to describing Mgudlandlu's work within an expressionist framework. Miles compares Mgudlandlu's work titled *The Duck* (c1967) to Maggie Laubser's 1940 painting, *Ducks* (2002: 37). This comparison was meant to provide a different take on Mgudlandlu and suggested that it may not be necessary to discuss her work only under the banner of primitive classifications.

Before discussing new classification terms, it is important to understand why her works were for so long classified as primitive and naive. It could be argued that Mgudlandlu's work was considered primitive because of existing cultural definitions placed upon native people at the time. Van Robbroeck states:

> In the 19th and 20th centuries, the term 'primitive' was used in cultural and social discourse to define people who had no developed writing, and classless societies. The term 'primitive art' was therefore used to describe the cultural products of the peoples of Africa, Oceania and parts of Asia (2006: 69 -70).

Van Robbroeck further writes, "[…] the primitive had to be invented because progressing development requires a point of origin […] Europe's modernity could only be measured against a spatially and temporary distant 'primitive' other" (2006: 70). This statement begins to explain why in South Africa notions such as "limited skills" were often associated with black artists because of such cultural discourses that existed in the West, and in turn such classifications become part of selling this racialised framing.

In *Reframing Art*, editors Michael Carter and Adam Geczy argue that there is value in marketing and selling the cultural link to art: "The art object is a particular type of commodity – a cultural commodity [It has] three constituent dimensions – work, materials and visual codes" (2006: 99). Carter and Geczy suggest that art is sold in relation to these constituents. The "primitive" style itself becomes a cultural commodity. Although these authors were not referring to Mgudlandlu's work, it can be understood that this form of

thinking may also have contributed to the framing of her work as "primitive". Culture in this case becomes racialised and reinforces notions of otherness in what the so-called 'primitive' artist sets out to do.

In the case of Mgudlandlu's work, being classified as 'primitive' was in itself a form of valuing and can be seen as a strategy to market and position what was argued to be limited artistic abilities. In *Art in South Africa: Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Work Since 1900,* Friedrich Ludwig Alexander alludes to this perception of primitivism by writing about Mgudlandlu's so-called naive painting style:

> […] Gladys Mgudlandlu [...] draws like a gifted child of eight but charms us by her fine sense of colour, the strong rhythm of her line and also by the choice of her themes, which reflects her longing for her childhood home […] (1962: 30).

Alexander goes on to write about the synonymous relationship between "naive art" and "infantilism" (1962: 30). The comparison of Mgudlandlu with an eight-year-old child is a literal one. However, such literal comparisons do not apply to 'trained' artists who mimicked the untrained technical skills of primitives in creating work that resembled child-like scribbles. Such was the case with Douanier Rousseau, for example, whose use of a primitivist aesthetic is seen as metaphorical. As primitivism became an internationally acclaimed art movement, critics often made the comparison of Mgudlandlu's work to Rousseau's artist's style. It can be argued that this comparison was a way to create relevance and acceptance for her work under the primitivist classification. However there remains the implication that Mgudlandlu's primitive method came from what was perceived as an actual lack of artistic training and not just a mimicry of such a technical limitation.[24] Alexander's comment above' raises a number of questions around the issues of validation, curiosity, race, and class, as well as about those who sets these standards.

Another consideration to make around this classification is the valuing system associated with such terms. Such valuing systems were based on Western premise, which did not only dictate the ways in which black South African artists' work were 'looked' at but also had a bearing on the levels of importance. The extent to which such terms become applied to black artists shows the authority held by patrons and collectors. Coupled with how such systems of

[24]In an interview I conducted with Randolph Vigne in 2011, he admited that his first impression of Mgudlandlu's work reminded him if Rousseau and Grand Ma Moses', but he says he now understands how these works were produced from different context and that it was incorrect to make comparisons.

valuation were generated in the public through the media, a public perception of Mgudlandlu's work became established, which further reinforced her positioning as 'primitive'.

Terms such as 'primitive art' (as being different to the European classification of 'primitivism'), naive art, transitional art, township art, resistance art, protest art, black consciousness art, rural art and many others were applicable only to black artists and were frequently used in these artists' biographies. On the other hand, art classified as 'feminist art' and, to a certain extent, even the classification 'contemporary art', are terms not often used in connection with the art of black artists, particularly art made before the 1980s. Anitra Nettleton and Alexander Podlashuc, in the essay 'Icon and Authenticity: Perspectives on a New Paternalism', condemn such a term for its "patronising characteristics" (1989: 3).

The question to ask is what would have happened if such terms or classification were created and applied without the association of Eurocentric values? Would these values, readings and positions on the artists have been the same? The answer to this question is complex and relates to the way patrons operated at that time. While classification of art worked in favour of locating works within art history, this favour becomes negated when such classifications re-enforce problematic notions of difference, power and authority. The history of Mgudlandlu is exemplary to this phenomenon, and requires such questions to be asked in order to gain a better understanding of how these archival traces express the view of patrons and the media.
In later years these anomalies in art classifications and exclusions had become questionable and thus came a demand for enquiry into the way that the work of black artists was being framed. Questioning how artists like Mgudlandlu are framed allows for a critical reflection of how her work was previously labelled and classified and further reveals how these systems created and defined the black art narrative in the 'discovery' and 'viewing' of their works.

2.4. Mgudlandlu's Date of Birth in Question

I would like to end this chapter by looking at a troubling issue found in this biography, namely the discrepancy of Mgudlandlu's date of birth. This discrepancy serves as an example of why it is important to understand the context and the conditions of writing practices historically. This is even more important when these inaccuracies have persisted in this artist's biography even after attempts from historians like Miles and Emsé Berman to establish accurate data for this date. I examine how these errors have occurred, why attempts

at rectifying them have failed and why this error is important to our understanding of this artist's biography.

Recordings of Mgudlandlu's date of birth are often inconsistently documented, with a few dates that clash. The year 1925 was the most commonly used since 1967, but 1920 and 1923 have also been used (Miles 2002: 10).[25] Since 2006, 1917 has been the most commonly used, following Miles' publication *Nomfanekiso* in 2002.

In the book *Art and Artists in South Africa* (1983), Berman wrote a short biography on the artist, in which she stated that the biographical information used was taken from the artist's "own biographical account" (1983: 199). She writes that this information was completed by the artist for the South African Arts Association (SAAA) in 1968 for Mgudlandlu's exhibition at SAAA's gallery. In this biography, Mgudlandlu writes her date of birth as 1925. This clearly indicates that the discrepancy with her date of birth was not an irregularity that came up only in later publications. Berman's claim shows that there were inconsistencies even during the artist's time.

Press articles from 1961 to 1967 state her birth date as 1923, yet other articles published after 1967 used 1925 as her birth date. In her obituary published in the *Arts Calendar* of 1979, Eduard Ladan writes her date of birth as 1920, this is the only account that refers to this date of birth. Where did Ladan obtain this date? Why do such discrepancies about her birth date exist if the artist herself gave the correct date, as Berman claims? All of these questions about her date of birth evidently point to the fact that the writers and critics who covered stories during her time did not pay attention to this detail, and the artist's own lack attention to this detail further complicates the situation. Could this have been intentional or was it something the artist did not consider important? Attempts to retrieve the archive of the SAAA were not successful, as its archives contain only documents dating from 1971 and none from before.[26]

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[25] www.capetowntoday.co.za'Gladys Mgudlandlu Retrospective' accessed on 3/26/2011; www.vgallery.co.za/2001article12/vzine.htm 'the Early Pioneer Artists of South Africa' by Andries Loots; Artlook, a Neomark Publication, 1972. Pg 445 and pg 15. A short biography.'Gladys Mgudlandlu' by Lily Herzberg; S.A. Association of Arts newsletter (w. Cape region), 1967. Mgudlandlu, Gladys (a short biography); *Art and Artists in South African* by Esmé Berman (1983): pg 291; *Women Artists in South Africa* (1985) edited by Lyn McCleveland and Lucy Alexander; pg 32; *The Neglected Tradition* (1988) Lesley Spiro: pg 115. G. Ogilvie. 1998. The Dictionary of South African Painters and Sculptors, pg 445. In the *Cape Times* obituary September 1979 reprinted in *The Arts Calendar,* homage paid by Eduard Ladan, he writes her birth date as 1920. In *Land and Lives* Miles uses 1923, but she later changes this to 1917 in her recent book on the artist, *Nomfanekiso*; pg. 84.

[26] Visit to the Association of Visual Arts in July 2011.

In *Nomfanekiso,* Miles shows a scanned copy of the nurses probationers register of the South African Nursing Council (2002: 10). This entry was done in Alice, where she registered for a nursing course. This record shows a handwritten entry that is seemingly signed by the artist with her date of birth entered as 1917. This discovery suddenly presented another date of birth, yet Miles does not problematise this date of birth nor does she question all the previous dates. Instead, she uses this date as though it is original proof, and at the same time does not qualify why this record is more reliable than the others. Her lack of criticality into these discrepancies gives the impression of disinterest and confidence in her authority, or perhaps lack of self-reflexivity.

Christina Qunta, in the book *Women in Southern Africa* (1987), discusses the problem with Western ideologies and authority on writing about Southern African black women. She mentions that these ideologies present a generalised position of white scholars – one of authority in their continued efforts to write about black artists, that in their writings, such a history is written "with such consistency [that it is] transformed into 'fact'" (1989: 11). This can be related to Miles' position given that she has produced so much research on black artists.[27] This may also be the reason that Berman's discovery of Mgudlandlu's 1917 date of birth is unquestioned, yet the same can be said about her. The downplaying of the importance of this detail lessens critique and validity of this information around her biography, and speaks to the problem of selective and subjective engagement on the part of Miles.

If this research is in fact correct, it is interesting to see that there are still recent publications that use other dates of birth.[28] This could either imply a lack of research or simple lack of conviction in Miles' discovery of Mgudlandlu's 1917 date of birth. This shows a tendency not to question information, which then becomes assumed to be factual. There are, however, a few recent publications that have made a concerted effort to use 1917 as her official date of birth. I assume that they use this based on the fact the Miles' publication shows physical evidence.[29]

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[27] She has published *Artist's Birthday Calendar for Fuba Academy* (1993), *Ernest Mancoba* reference book 1994, *Land and Lives* (1997), *Nomfanekiso: Who paints at Night* (2002), and *Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre* (2004).

[28]The MTN Art Institute, newsletter, Volume 2, Issue 2 April 2001, used the year 1925 as Mgudlandlu's birth date.

[29]The catalogue *Sekoto to Sihlali: Nine Black Pioneers of South African Art,* published 2004, used the date 1917, as did the Reserve Bank book.

It can be argued that in South Africa, issues of naming and correct recording of birth registration dates were a construct of governing systems. In South Africa, the idea of recording dates of birth was introduced by the colonial system of control through the introduction of taxes and controlled labour forces. The apartheid regime's Enforced Group Areas Act, Natives Act (Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents) and Pass Act (Urban Areas) exercised across the country from 1923, which required all black people to carry a reference book, or what was known as the pass document. Marion Arnold, in her book *Women and Art* (2006), noted that the passbook was designed to control access to urban areas and in 1956 moves were made to implement this law and issued these documents to black women (2005: 6). In *We Now Demand* (1993), Julia Wells describes how such controls were intended to manage labour-seeker influx in urban areas. She analyses how these affected women and later became more intensified in different regions (1993: 6). Thinking about Wells' observation of these control systems, I would like to question the relationship between evidence and authenticity contained in these control papers (or 'passes') that black people had to carry in order to prove their identity, keeping in mind the challenge of language and culture.

Such documents were required for schooling or employment purposes. Usually when it came to that point of acquiring such documentation, precise dates of birth were either forgotten or guessed, as it was not customary to create certification of births, particularly in rural areas. In these areas, midwives, who usually assisted with childbirth delivery, were not registered medical practitioners at that time, and thus did not use systems similar to those used in formal medical hospitals of recording and certifying births. I relate this to my own family history about the dilemma of my grandfather's date of birth. My grandfather could not remember his date of birth because he registered it only when he was much older. Furthermore, rural hospitals for black communities were also very scarce, which meant that births were not documented consistently.

If Berman claims she wrote Mgudlandlu's biography based on Mgudlandlu's own written account, what does it mean when Mgudlandlu in the nurses probation register writes a different date? The date provided by Miles is also argued to be the artist's own handwriting but these dates of birth differ. Though the question can be asked of Mgudlandlu herself as she apparently provided the date, the other overarching question that should be asked is how authentic is all of this information when the artist herself is no longer alive to give those

answers? Can we simply take this scanned entry of the nurses probationers register as fact? Or can we take Berman's word for it? Why did the artist not remain consistent with the date of birth that she wrote down? The evidence is ambiguous and we are left with these contradictions in the archive.

What all of this suggests is that perhaps the date of birth is not crucial to Mgudlandlu's biography, although it may be seen as an important part of the Eurocentric conventions of biography writing as both writers (Berman and Miles) seem to have gone to some length of proving this date of birth. What these different dates therefore point to is the differing value given to certain information in the biography by these white women scholars. The auto/biographical need to conform to the Eurocentric conventions of biography writing and their attempts to 'fix' certain information about the date of birth have proven to have no value at all. This dismantles the very notion of trying to make an artist's date of birth an important part of their biography. The critical point is that perhaps a biography can also function without this information, and that perhaps writing this in the biography may require acknowledgement of the historical background of this information.

In conclusion, it is important to point out that the notion of art history itself around these times was also new. Those who were operating as historians around that time, such as Berman and Dubow, would have been excited to discover black artists. The questioning of 'who came first' would not have been a priority for them. The overlooked contributions of artists like Valerie Desmore are exemplary. It is important to emphasise that although in this chapter I argued against the patronising use of Mgudlandlu's position of being 'first', this designation also speaks to limitations in art during that time. The writing of Mgudlandlu's biography thus becomes critical in understanding the historical context and dynamics that played into its formation. The inaccuracies found in her biography remain in the archives till this day, leaving it with unresolved absences. My argument remains that current writing needs to acknowledge, question and work within the limits that these archives present as another form of analysing and understanding Mgudlandlu's contested histories.

Chapter 3

Black Women in Art and the Question of Racial and Gendered Identities

Introduction

This chapter sets out to do three things: first, to demonstrate how Mgudlandlu's biography has been omitted from feminist readings of South African art histories; second, to locate South African feminism within mainstream feminism; and third, to locate Mgudlandlu's biographical history within black feminism. In *Vision and Difference: Femininity and the Histories of Art*, Griselda Pollock remarks on the lack of critical writing on the work of black artists. She states:

> The position of Black artists, men and women, past and present, in all the cultural and class diversity of their communities and countries, needs to be analysed and documented. Race must equally be acknowledged as a central focus of all our analyses of societies, which were and are not only bourgeois but also imperialist, colonising nations. This remains a shadowy concern within this body of writings (1988:15).

In this book Pollock engages feminist readings on the work of a number of international artists, including Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt. Though her readings stem from a Western feminist perspective, I am interested in allowing for adaptations of these readings into a South African context, particularly in terms of a connection between Pollock's "shadowy concern within this body of writings" (1988:15) and the anomalies that existed with earlier writings of South African art history. Pollock's observation speaks directly to Van Robbroeck's comment referenced in the introduction about the invisibility of black women artists before the 1980s (2006:7). Pollock's statement also affirms Mokoena's reference to the racial implications surrounding the "privileged" nature of being written, as discussed in Chapter 1. As a result, the lacuna in writing about black women artists is linked to the fact that the privilege of being written about was not previously reserved for black artists, let alone black women artists.

To argue for a feminist reading of Gladys Mgudlandlu's work requires references to a contextualisation within local text and content. This has meant finding ways of identifying connections between Mgudlandlu's personal history and South African feminist writing. The challenge, however, is that even though Mgudlandlu's work was included in two feminist projects – the exhibition *Women Artists in South Africa (*1985) and the publication *Women in Art in South Africa* (1996) – there is little engagement with how her work fits into these

projects. By attempting to make such connections, I would like to examine the anomalies of historical writing found in both projects in relation to Mgudlandlu.

Feminism, as it was incepted America in the 1960s, was conceived as a movement of mobilising women's agency and subjectivity in order to overturn patriarchal oppression. I argue that this agency can also be relevant to the works of women who did not live in the geographical mainstreams of the movement. By virtue of the context in which most women lived, their very existence subjected them to similar oppressive contexts. In this chapter, I will situate Mgudlandlu's work within the context of mainstream feminism, feminism in the arts, feminism in South African art histories and black feminism.

Christina Qunta's book *Women in Southern Africa,* published in 1987, is a key reference for this study. Although published in 1987, Qunta's writing focuses on women in politics from the 1950s to the 1980s. It situates critical engagement about the position of women within a Southern African context and evidences a feminist discourse in South Africa as early as the 1950s. Further, with black scholars such as Qunta championing this kind of critical conversations about the feminism of the 1980s, this also signals that South Africa was already a part of the global feminist conversation. This also means that writing on these critical views about the position of black women artists only materialised after Mgudlandlu's time. I will discuss details of this book later on.

Although feminist discourse within South African artistic practices comes only after Mgudlandlu's time, there is much evidence that asserts sociopolitical, pro-feminist thinking, which indicates that 'the women discourse' already existed in her time. Such can also be argued around the political stance of the 1956 Women's March, which speaks to the changing political dynamics for women in South Africa. In the book *We Now Demand* (1993), Julia Wells also discusses how women's movements in South Africa became pronounced through politics from as early as 1913. In this book she looks at three case studies: the women's resistance against passes as demonstrated in Bloemfontein in 1913, then in Potchefstroom in 1930, and later in Johannesburg from 1954 to 1958 (this period is well known in relation to the 1956 Women's March in Pretoria). Wells argues that such political movements contributed to the creation of women's visibility and voice.[30] They marked what is

[30]She states: "The tradition of women's energetic struggles in the past has been held up as an inspiration and motivation for subsequent generations in their attempt to overthrow apartheid" (1996: npn).

understood today as the beginning of women's consciousness socially, culturally and politically (1993: 3).

For Mgudlandlu to gain such visibility and to be able operate within these times implies that there was much political awareness on the position of women and their agency during that time. The critical question in relation to Mgudlandlu is: to what degree was she aware of this agency and how did she use, assert or assume these feminist discourses within her own practice? One of the ways in which I attempt to address these questions is by employing a feminist reading on Mgudlandlu's biography and exhibition archive. Theories employed in writing this chapter borrow mainly from black feminist theoretical frameworks and strategies of auto/biography.

This chapter also engages the exploration of material on feminist readings that have been produced within conventions of a particularly politicised and racialised paradigm. As a way of contextualising the feminist position within Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive, I will examine the exhibition *Women Artists in South Africa* (1985) as a case study. I argue that this exhibition exemplifies the gendered and racialised location of Mgudlandlu's work. I am interested in examining how race, within gendered terms, has been marginally explored in relation to Mgudlandlu's work. This examination, I believe, fails to engage critically because of the double jeopardy of the discriminatory history around race and gender. Though it is obvious why such analyses have had little engagement with these notions within a South African context, particularly in texts published during the apartheid era, I am interested in how these terms have been treated in post-apartheid publications, in particular Marion Arnold's book *Women Artists in South Africa* (1996).

Arnold argues that "the major difficulty in discussing women and art in South Africa is that race invariably predicates the ways in which gender was and is constructed in this heterogeneous society" (1996: 3). This analysis draws upon circumstances and contextual issues in order to question these positions of black women artists in a broader context. These positions are concerned with notions of identity (race and gender), classifications of art practices (production and exhibitions), and history (archives) in relation to the writing of biography.

In order to unpack these questions, it is important to gain some understanding of what it meant to be a black woman artist living and working in South Africa in the 1960s. In Chapter

2 I discussed how for many years Mgudlandlu's work remained 'primitive' and how it was only recently that she became considered an expressionist (in Miles, 2002). I have also assessed how in South Africa, the use of such terms was not only based on the concepts of aesthetics and techniques, but that it was associated and applied to the artistic expression of particular racial groups. Understanding where such contextual background information comes from allows for an appreciation of the circumstances in which she lived and worked, and provides a contextual framing of how her work was previously studied and analysed.

Reflecting on her own writing and the history of art writing in South Africa, Lize van Robbroeck, in her PhD thesis *Writing White on Black,* states: "As such, this research participates in the current trend of self-reflexive writing, where historians and intellectuals are guided by curiosity about the genealogies of their respective disciplines and their collective intellectual heritages" (2006:1). This kind of a self-critical strategy allows for an important interrogation of past writings and offers strategies that can be used towards rewriting positions of artists such as Mgudlandlu. Understanding this construction of South African art history writing begins to explain why Mgudlandlu's work existed outside of the formal art disciplines such as feminism and modernism. The intention of this examination is therefore to find ways of linking these academic theories to Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive and biography.

The investigation of her exhibition archive serves as a basis for a cultural exploration of her intellectual contribution to both the past and the present art world. In addition to the feminist angle, the different writing tools such as auto/biography and curatorial strategies are also considered. Examining Mgudlandlu's biography provided a way of understanding how biography can be instrumental in analysing terms that are associated with the position of black women in the arts and also reveals ways in which art histories impose certain views of how black women artists' work continues to be 'looked at'. As a result, these identities or forms of branding art that are constructed through race and gender affect the valuing of artworks while simultaneously contributing to the invisibility of black women artists.

3.1. Early South African Feminist Strategies: *Women Artists in South Africa* (1985)

The exhibition *Women Artists in South Africa* (1985), curated by Lynn McClelland and Lucy Alexander at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town, is a good example of South African feminist strategies in exhibition practices and the writing of art history. The exhibition's intent was to "present art made by South African women" (Powel 1985: 5), which asserts an agency to locate contributions of women artists in South Africa. This is an important exhibition to look at in this chapter for two reasons. Firstly, this is the only women's show that included Mgudlandlu's work. Secondly, it is one of the first exhibitions in the 1980s that grouped women of different races and artistic training backgrounds in one show, and thereby records a time of changing exhibitions making patterns in South Africa's history. For the first time, public museums and galleries were beginning to make a concerted effort to include productions of black artists into important art exhibitions.[31]

In this exhibition, among a number of white women artists, Mgudlandlu and a collective of Ndebele women were the only artists of colour included. A catalogue accompanied the exhibition, which included three essays: 'Some Questions About the Art of Women in South Africa', by Ivor Powell; 'Feminist Issues and Art', by Diana Kenton; and 'Art Unframed: Aesthetic Expression among Black Women', by Patricia Davison. By way of examining Mgudlandlu's insertion into this exhibition, I have chosen to examine the catalogue, as it is the only most comprehensive record of this exhibition developed and produced by the curators. Within this catalogue, I look at Patricia Davison's essay particularly because of its focus on works of black women artists in the show.

To have an essay by Davison focusing on the work of black women shows a considered effort towards the changing dynamics of art practices of that time. The title of this essay, 'Art Unframed: Aesthetic Expression among Black Women', also says something about the dynamics of division that emerges when 'framing black women's art'. Even though the positioning of this essay in this catalogue alludes to an examination of black women's art inclusively, Davison chooses to write only about the work of the Ndebele women and makes

[31]Another key exhibition that took place around the same year and made a similar attempt to present the work of diverse racial groupings was *Tributaries* (1985), curated by Ricky Burnett. Although Mgudlandlu was not included in this exhibition, the reason I mention it is that it also presented a cross-racial inclusions of artists in one show, which was an anomaly in those days.

no mention of Mgudlandlu, who was the only other black artist included in this show.[32] This also meant that Mgudlandlu's work is not studied anywhere else in this catalogue, as the other essays equally make no mention of her. As I have mentioned, the location of her work within the frame of Western artistic scholarship, particularly feminism, is challenging. It is interesting that Mgudlandlu is absent even from an essay focused on black women's contributions to South African art.

This omission of Mgudlandlu suggests that Davison's essay is not focused on race but rather is an exploration of medium as a signifying factor of discussion. This begs the question: why did Davison mislead us in her essay title by using broad words, such as "black women"? Was she purposefully intending to deceive the reader or was this a way to catch the reader's attention by using words that were at the time unusual in these spaces? When we pay close attention to a statement used by Powell in his essay 'Feminist Issues and Art', we observe that "the creations of black people are coming out of the ethnological museums, and finding their niches in the galleries of art" (1985: 7).

Powell's comment relates to Sabine Marschall's analysis in the essay 'Strategies of Accommodation: Towards an Inclusive Canon of South African Art' (2001). In this essay, Marschall provides some understanding of what transformation meant with regards to the inclusion of black artists into mainstream art contexts. Marschall hints that these inclusions were a mere tool for "window dressing" and reinforcement of predetermined notions of "African Art" (2001: 52 -53). In this essay, Marschall analyses how the binary classifications of what she describes as "white art" and "black craft" gradually began to shift in the late 1980s (2001: 52). In this article, she articulates how these changes were "instrumented" to create notions of inclusiveness within artistic practice. She goes on to say that this change was more than a political change but also about social transformation.

It is also obvious that Davison's focus on the work of only the Ndebele women seems to suggest that this essay is not necessarily concerned about works of black women artists in broader terms, but only traditionally classified concepts of craftwork. These Ndebele women were represented through their embroidery work, which was at the time classified as craft and

[32]The only way that I was able to see that she was indeed included in this exhibition was from a listing of artworks from the exhibition, where her two works are also listed. The works are detailed as follows: *Honey bird* (undated) and *Table Mountain* (1961). There were images of these works also included on pages 32 and 47.

to a certain extent still is, and which was also essentially produced by rural women. The question to be asked here is: what was the purpose of Davison's focus on craft? It can be argued that perhaps such a focus was geared towards drawing attention to the fact that 'craft' in that period was undergoing a shift in classification and was beginning to be considered as 'fine art'. Or that the inclusion of black artists into the mainstream meant it catered only to those artists from rural areas. This focus by implication excludes other art mediums, but Davison does not give reasons why she makes this exclusive choice.

Not discussing Mgudlandlu's work implies that it was not part of this transition and development within artistic mediums. Davison's concern with works that were previously categorised as craft and ethnographic dismisses contextual and circumstantial issues of their living conditions and where they worked – for example, issues of geographical diversity, arts education, access to material, and other cultural issues. Such an analysis would have opened up other interesting observations of why these shifts were happening then, which would have somehow forced some consideration of Mgudlandlu's work, even if only on a comparative level. Davison's limited scope of reference does not engage the dynamic differences of art mediums used by other black women artists and thus misses the opportunity to discuss what having such a diverse exploration of mediums within one exhibition could have meant.

The question of interracial inclusion is, at least on one level, addressed in this exhibition by the inclusion of these black women artists. Yet on another level there seems to be a struggle to define notions of what South African 'fine art' is and where these women artists' work fits within this practice. Davison attempts to define the problem in this manner:

> The concept of 'fine art' comes from a European cultural tradition, as does the discipline of art history, equipped with its own vocabulary of discourse and criteria of distinction. To impose these criteria on the creative forms and expressions of an African culture would be an ethnocentric exercise. From an anthropological perspective, the more important analytical objective would be to establish the aesthetic criteria operating within the African society itself and to understand the vernacular forms of visual communication (1985: 1805).

The irony of this statement is that even though Davison seems to be acutely aware of the implications of this transforming concept of 'art', by commenting on this definition through the lens of Western ideology, she further reinforces issues of separatism. For example, the reference to ethnocentrism only criticises anthropological methods and is not reflective of the transformation of art mediums. Davison's failure to acknowledge that black women artists

were already making 'fine art' within the Western definition of art, such as in Mgudlandlu's case, is a direct example of how her work was overlooked and not analysed within a feminist reading. Furthermore, her exclusion in all the essays of this exhibition catalogue further reiterates this.

This exclusion of Mgudlandlu's work in this catalogue, particularly her exclusion in Davison's article, suggests both a denial of the complexities relating to the medium that Mgudlandlu was using and denies Mgudlandlu's identity as a black woman. Her absence from the exhibition catalogue also suggests a refusal to accept that her work was particularly suited to an art critique defined within Western notions. This lack of a critical lens shows a limited understanding, on the part of Davison in this instance, about the different contexts, conditions and cultural dynamics in which these women artists worked. By not critiquing these two modes of production and the rarity of having them exhibited together, Davison further perpetuates perceptions of what 'black art' is, or was, which seems to suggests that all black women's art can be viewed only as a progression from craft and ethnography. As Arnold observes: "Indeed, it [was] still weighted against black women, for 'craft' is seen as the appropriate creative activity for black women and a route to economic empowerment; 'art' is done by men" (1996: 14). In the case of this exhibition, the attempt to remove the ethnographic description on the Ndebele women's work is instead given greater importance and contradicts the very attempt of it, which was to challenge operating systems of cultural institutions by having an exhibition of women artists from different races. The issues of race, gender, class and geographical divides thus remains unresolved.

Annie Coombes, in her essay *'Inventing the 'Postcolonial'* (1998), says that "a curatorial project dedicated to a strategic reassessment of the relationship of the West and its 'Other', since both sites are subject to different institutional and disciplinary histories, are directly implicated in both capitalism and colonialism" (1998: 41). In other words by not acknowledging the difference in Mgudlandlu's work in her essay, Davison refuses to acknowledge that other black women artists were already operating within Western terms of art critique, but rather chooses to instil only a disempowered view of the work of black women artists.

This inclusion of black artists in exhibitions in the early to mid-1980s, in what Marschall calls an "interest in marginal cultures", further demonstrates why some artists have remained

visible and others have not (2001: 52). The fact that the Ndebele women are included as a collective and not as individual artists is questionable here. Was the inclusion of these women perhaps intended to fulfil the needs of 'window dressing', as they were still grouped and labelled within ethnographic practices by calling them "Ndebele women" artists? Ironically, Mgudlandlu was the only black women artist who is individually identified in this show, yet she is also the only one not critically analysed in the catalogue. This is, as Bedford writes, "[…] because meaning is located in the social networks of power relations which give society its form, [and] meaning is always political" (1992: 2). Although Bedford's quote may be understood as directed at women in general within a patriarchal society, in this instance it may also propagate a particular attitude set by this exhibition towards the work of black women artists. It may be true that the curators of this show had the power to represent the artists in the exhibition in ways that suited their curatorial agenda, which was less about who the artists were and more about what the artists and their work stood for in relation to the conceptual framework of this exhibition.

As Arnold writes, "The West endorsed itself in discovering others and positioning them in binary oppositions" (1996: 4). Ndebele women's cultural products still operate within such ethnographic groupings, and when grouped as such their individual identities remain unrecorded and anonymous. By not acknowledging these women's individuality within this exhibition, the curators further reinforced autonomy of giving and taking away 'privileges'. Even though products of the Ndebele ethnic group are well known, the names of these black women remain anonymous to this day, and provenance records of many galleries only recorded their work in this way. The curators of this exhibition thus systematically failed to distinguish the difference in the practice of ethnography museums to those of an art gallery that often deals with art from an individualised point of view.

The curators' attempt to be the "harbingers" (Coombes 1998:39) of postcolonial criticism within exhibition practices is not fulfilled as it failed to move away from colonialist ethnographic practices of 'discovering' and at the same time taking away the individualistic agency of these black women artists. Pollock usefully reminds us that, "power is not just a matter of coercive force but a network of relationships, of inclusions and exclusions, of domination and subordination" (1988: 33). It is important to note that even in an exhibition organised by women for women, these women curators do not critically challenge the 'politics of the art practice' (Pollock 1988: 33). Instead, they rely only on the gesture of

inclusion as the only fulfilment of this change within this exhibition and of feminist writing. This curatorial framing strategy reveals that such an exhibition was still operating within a Western hierarchal system. These women curators used hierarchy even in spaces where they claimed to defy the hegemonic nature of museums by putting together a show on women artists. Not acknowledging the differences in the works of black women reinforces separatism and authority. It also leaves me with a lack of critical understanding of why Mgudlandlu was included in this exhibition beyond the fact that it was an all-women show.

In his essay 'The Artists of South Africa: Separate and Equal' (1994), American writer and critic Andrew Solomon focuses on the ways that group exhibitions cluster works of artists from different races. He notes that this idea of inclusive exhibitions was not as perfect a situation as it seemed. He writes:

> But the fact that [white and black] artists were showing together did not mean they want the same things out of art, any more than the fact that blacks and whites will be listed together in the population register of the new South African Government means they will govern in commensurate ways or for reconcilable reasons (1994: 89).

Indeed this statement paints a very pessimistic view about South Africa's art society in 1994, but it was true about a very particular time in the history of South Africa. Such sceptical views were a result of the oppression and mistrust endured in this country. Solomon quotes artist Jane Alexander's response to a question of why there was a need to balance different races of artists in one exhibition. Alexander's response was that "a large part of the white population is trying to redress the inequalities as quickly as possible because they want to get it over with" (1994: 82). The question I would therefore ask is: could these have been the intentions of the curators of the *Women Artists in South Africa* exhibition? Another writer, Gavin Younge, in his book *Art of the South African Townships* (1988), states that by the 1980s "exhibition curators and museum administrators [made] every effort to include work by black artists, but mistrust and the fear that their participation will confer an appearance of legitimacy on existing establishment structures kept most black artists away" (1988: 13). The exclusion of Mgudlandlu's work in this catalogue is testimony to how her work was not engaged with in this feminist discourse, in spite of the fact that she is included in an exhibition that attempted to address feminism.

3.2. Writing feminism in South Africa

Christina Qunta's book *Women in Southern Africa* (1987) speaks to the location of feminism within a Southern African context. Challenging how African women were being perceived and written about by the West, she argues that even though the women's liberation movement records the courage of women in changing their environment, there is a problem in the way that African women are written about in relation to these events (1987:6). Qunta focuses on women in politics and her arguments speak to a condition that many black women in the Southern African region experienced from the 1950s to 1980s. This is the same period during which Mgudlandlu lived and worked as an artist in Cape Town. I make mention of Mgudlandlu in this instance as I would like to maintain the argument that even though she may have not lived within the environment of mainstream feminist discourses that it is important to remember that she was also actively exhibiting and producing work around same time.

In her book, Qunta argues that the notion of "self-definition" must be promoted, as it will assist in overcoming the defeated positions that Western literature projects about African women (1987: 6). She points out the problem with the position of African women in literature when she states:

> The African woman emerges as a victim of the African male and of traditional customs [...] the African women of the rural areas is portrayed as little more than a slave, who goes about her tasks with silent acceptance. She has no past and no future, given her inherent backwardness of her society. Her consciousness about her oppression is awakened only when she comes into contact with Western woman and she is surprised by the comparative freedom. She never speaks for herself but is always spoken about (1987: 6).

Here Qunta is pointing out that even though women operated in oppressive systems, their defiance was not always overt. This quote highlights how Western writing instilled a kind of framing that portrayed women as victims and reinforced stereotypes. It also alludes to the complex positions of urban and rural black women, particularly their differences in geographical localities, and how these complexities are not properly challenged in Western writing. Qunta continues:

> African womanhood has been an increasingly topical subject for writers in recent years. Unfortunately, however, the majority of them have not themselves belonged to the community of African women. This in itself is problematic, since the non-African who studies this rather complex issue is inevitably an observer rather than a

> participant. The limitation is further complicated by the fact that European authors tend to employ theoretical assumptions and methodology, which hamper or in some cases preclude a realistic assessment of the subject matter (1987: 14).

This quote calls upon the need for black women to be 'self-determined', that which is about black women to 'writing themselves' into history. Qunta's book is in itself an example of self-determination and demonstrates how she exercised this notion. It articulates an agency for black women, which was about writing black women's histories in order to give them a voice to speak for themselves while at the same time also reflected on her own position and critical voice as a black women writer. What such a book does is provide the beginnings of this critical consciousness on feminism within Southern Africa. Furthermore, it also legitimises that such thinking was already around in political spaces as early as the 1950s in its discussion of women from that time.

Even though Qunta's book evidences that some progress of feminist discourses had already begun that early, there is still limited exploration of women histories, particularly under the framework of feminism within South African visual arts. To date there are only three important books that speak to South African feminism in visual arts: *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996) by Marion Arnold; *Through the Looking Glass* (2004) by Brenda Schmahmann; and *Between Union and Liberation: Women Artists on South Africa 1910 – 1994* (2005), edited by Arnold and Schmahmann. Arnold, contextualising feminist writing, says:

> In South Africa we have not retrieved our female histories. As a result, writing confronts two problems: we must make women of the past visible and simultaneously we must present a contemporary post-colonial critique, cognisant of international theory, African circumstance and the new South African political dispensation (1996: np).

Arnold made this statement in 1996, a period when there was already an increasing interest in the work of women artists. This is also at the advent of democracy, a time when great political change was taking place following South Africa's first democratic election in 1994. Within the arts, such political changes also increased interest and writing on the cultural productions of women artists, and these books are evidence of the effort that was going into this research. Furthermore, attention was given to reporting on a generation of artists who had previously been neglected in South African art. This is, of course, notwithstanding the sporadic efforts of exhibitions held between 1980s to the mid-1990s that brought light to

women artists who were not well known, such as in the examples of exhibitions mentioned in Chapter 1 and in this chapter.

Arnold's book, *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996), was produced with the intention to pay tribute to the contributions of South African women artists. This increased attention towards the production of women artists' works also garnered a great sense of urgency to discover and give a platform to black women artists in this country. However, such writing remains limited when it comes to questions of historicising and theorising about the work of black women artists. Among the 61 South African women artists included in *Women and Art in South Africa* (1996), Arnold included only six black artists. This disproportionate ratio of black and white women artists indicates the lack of visibility of black women artists in the public domain even around this time. This situation has not changed much if we examine subsequent books to Arnold's on South African women artists. For example, in Schmahmann's *Through the Looking Glass* (2004), as well as in Arnold and Schmahmann's *Between Union and Liberation* (2005), the disproportionate ratio of black women artists to white ones still remains noticeable, with the latter dominating. Arnold points out that this has remained in this way because of patriarchy in gate-keeping its ideologies and strategies. She notes;

> In the West, the conceptual framework of 'art' – established by men in authority to suit their professional needs – has long governed art education, exhibition procedures, critical reception and media coverage. Until the Women's Movement called these issues into question, women were never partners in negotiating the meaning of 'art' or the conditions defining professional status. Such matters were decided by the patriarchal figures women encountered – the professors, teachers, dealers and critics who facilitated or impeded their progress. In South Africa, though [women] were not actively discouraged from being artists, women entered a system that did not endorse female assertiveness and independence or give them a voice in negotiating change (1996: 1).

Arnold's argument offers an important understanding of the contextual circumstances that confronted early South African early women artists. Arnold makes us aware of the complicated position in which women found themselves when entering the art environment. She further elaborates on how these circumstances were made even more complex by the sociopolitical conditions of the apartheid regime.

It is therefore important to also note that even within feminism there are different perspectives with differing degrees of association, which are usually determined by race, geography, education levels and social status. These differences are determined by sociopolitical circumstances, which in turn alters levels of agency and subjectivity for different groups of women. Speaking about this, Arnold states:

> 'Woman' is not a stable semantic concept; she is white, coloured or black woman, Afrikaner, English, Zulu or Tswana woman, urban or rural woman. Race gives women her appearance, language, and geographical locality. It also gave white women the vote (1996:3).

Although this statement was intended to highlight what she called "ironies of inclusion about the so-called moral conviction of gender equality from white men" (1996: 3), it also relates to the dynamics of power relations among women and attempts to explain why the levels of entry into the art scene were not similar for all women. Arnold suggests that the definition of 'women' needs to be more considered and must be understood in context, as it is not a "stable semantic concept". As a result, race, language and geographical locality positioned women in different circumstances in their negotiation for space in the art world. This is also made obvious in the exhibition *Women Artists in South Africa,* 1985, discussed earlier.

Thinking about the location of Mgudlandlu within a feminist framework, particularly within Arnold's book, Portia Malatjie, in her master's thesis 'Framing the Art of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle' (2011), observes that even though "Gladys Mgudlandlu was included in Arnold's book she was not discussed in the same scholarly rigour that is applied for her white women artist counterparts" (2011: 34). Malatjie points out that this difference in scholarly rigour is evident in number of ways. At first she explains that Arnold's discussion of other artists such as Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser, Maud Sumner and Dorothy Kay as modernist in their exploration of self-portraiture places these artists within critical discourses of art, but when it comes to discussing Mgudlandlu, she only places emphasis on her race and gender. She extracts Arnold's following analysis:

> The first exhibition of a black woman artist […] came from a Ciskei missionary family, had gained a teaching diploma and was a trained nurse. She was largely self-taught as an artist, but like many black children, she had played with clay forms and made designs for murals on huts (in Arnold, 1996: 12).

According to Malatjie, such analyses are problematic as she says "Arnold falls into the trap of placing importance on black artists' biographies" and not on the production of her work,

thereby guilty of "essentialising Mgudlandlu's womanness instead of engaging [with her work] critically" (2011: 35). In her book *Art Matters* (1995). bell hooks attests to Malatjie's criticism on the general lack of writing on black women artists when she says, "Often critiques of their [black women artists'] work are descriptive rather than critically interpretative" (1995; xv). By this analysis I am not implying that white writers are not able to write about black artists' circumstances and work, but the motion that is being argued here is of 'self-definition', that which attempts to avoid being limited to only these engagements with the work of black women artists. Agreeing with Malatjie, my view is that even though Arnold articulates an acute understanding of the complexities of feminism "not a stable semantic concept", she fails to contextualise Mgudlandlu's complex position in relation to her living and working environment, particularly through a feminist lens.

As a way of rectifying the contextual omission, in another publication, *Between Union and Liberation: Women Artists in South Africa 1910-1994 (2005),* Marion Arnold and Brenda Schmahmann discuss "black women [who] were hidden by interpretation of cultural production" (2005:9). They emphasise the need to understand the cultural context and the impact of this political history on women artists. The book included essays that looked at the impact of geography, gender and culture on the works of women artists, including a few black women artists. As a result, this research revealed many black women artists who were unknown at the time. Such unknown artists include Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Salphina Maluleke, Nesta Nala, Dinah Molefe, Laurentia Dlamini, Beauty Bathembile Ngxongo, Guilty Khoza, Rossinah Maepa – and Gladys Mgudlandlu. Though I will not delve into the details of arguments laid out in Arnold and Schmahmann's work, I mention this publication as another example that provides further feminist reading on the work of South African women artists.

It would also appear that younger scholars are pushing the agenda of feminism and offering new takes on feminism under the umbrella of black feminism with respect to the work of black women artists. In South Africa, most of the writing on black women is usually published in catalogues, magazines and journals, and such writing is not often written by black South African women working in the field of visual arts or art history. There is a very small number of black women scholars whose research and writing reflects on the works of

other black women artists. These scholars include Desiree Lewis (2010)[33], Pumla Gqola (2010 and 2012)[34] and Gabebe Baderoon (2005)[35], all of whom are working in fields outside of visual arts.

There are of course few exceptions, such as Jaqcueline Nolte (2000 and 2005)[36], who comes from a visual art history background, but now lives in Canada and does not often contribute to writing on South African art. Nomusa Makhubu (2012)[37] and Portia Malatjie (2011, 2012)[38], are newcomers in the field of visual art history writing, particularly on black women artists' work. This field of visual art history writing on black women is still dominated by white women scholars such as Marion Arnold, Brenda Schmahmann, Brenda Atkinson, Sue Williamson, Sabine Marschall, Lize van Robbroeck, Nessa Leibhammer, Jillian Carman, Anitra Nettleton and Elza Miles, among others. As Malatjie points out, "there remains an absence of black feminist theories and discourse that enable one to theorise and critique work by black women artists in that light [...] this problem is bound to occur when black women are absent from art history" (2011: 10).

Arguing for a black feminist position, she states:

> Giving voice to black women is one of the underlying motivations for black feminism. The movement advocates the mobilisation of their subjectivity, which is necessary if they are to inscribe themselves in history. Black women need to self-determine. They have for very long not been able to do this as both black and white patriarchies have determined their identities on their behalf (2011: 23).

Malatjie's study is important for three reasons. Firstly because is locates black feminist discourse within a South African context, offering itself as one of the few current academic

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[33] Lewis, D. 2010. *Embodied Powers and Resistance* in Ngcobo, G. Passages Reference and Footnotes. Johannesburg: Centre for the Historical Reenactment.

[34] Gqola, P. 2011. "Through Zanele Muholi's Eyes: Reimagining Ways of Seeing Black Lesbians", in Sylvia Tamale. ed. *African Sexualities: A Reader*. London: Fahamu.
Gqola, P. 2010. *What Is Slavery to Me: Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Wits University Press).

[35] Baderoon, G. 2005. *The Museum of Ordinary Life*. Cape Town: DaimlerChrysler.

[36] Nolte, J. 2000. The drawings of Bongi Bengu. *African Arts 33 (2): 91 – 102*.
Nolte, J. 2005 Narratives of Migration in the Work of Noria Mabasa and Mmakgabo Sebidi, in Arnold, M and Schmahmann, B. Between Union and liberation, Women Artists in South Africa 1910-1994. London: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

[37] Makhubu,N. 2012. *Thoughts on First-Wave Contemporary Performance Art in 'Post-Apartheid' South Africa,* in Stemberger, C. Alterating Conditions: Performing Performance Art in South Africa. Johannesburg: Bag Factory and Geothe-Institut.

[38] Malatjie, P. 2011. Framing the Art of Tracey Rose and Berni Searle. master's thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.
Malatjie, P. 2012. *Performing Gendered Identity: Tracey Rose, Mary Sibande and Nandipha Mntambo,* in Stemberger, C. Alterating Conditions: Performing Performance Art in South Africa. Johannesburg: Bag Factory and Geothe-Institut.

references on this issue in visual arts and in turn tackles the absence of black feminism in South African art history (2011:4). Secondly, it makes brief mention of Mgudlandlu's exclusion from the feminist discourse. Thirdly, her scholarship is exemplary of the emergence of young black women scholars who are entering a domain that has for a long time been overlooked and unchallenged because of the historical impact on black scholars when it came to accessing education. I discuss her paper further in the next section.

Although Malatjie has produced work responding specifically to the shortage of writing on black women artists and about their work, her scholarly work exists within a group of emerging scholars who are looking at their own work. More recently, a number of young black women artists have produced scholarly research in the form of unpublished (honour's and master's) theses on their own work as well as on the work of other women artists. Most of these black women emerged in the South African art scene starting from the late 1990s. These women have benefited from opportunities presented by the democratic rule in South Africa, as institutions of higher learning became more inclusive in their intake of black students. These artists include Berni Searle, Bongi Bengu, Tracey Rose, Donna Kukama, Reshma Chhiba, Gabriela Goliath, Senzeni Marasela, Nandipha Mntambo and a few others. There are also other black women writers such as Lerato Bereng, Gabi Ngcobo and Melisa Mboweni, whose work does not necessarily focus on the position of other women but who are participating in bridging of the gap of black women scholars. Important to note is that their contribution to writing, whether about their own work or the work of other black women artists, provides contemporary readings about the past and present history of black women in visual art.

3.3. Describing notions of Black Feminism in Mgudlandlu's biography

> Black feminism is an extension of feminism in general. While it broke away from the feminist movement, it retained the core tenets of feminist theory. The close relationship means that the strategies by black feminist do not necessarily differ from those used by other feminists. The difference is that black feminists employ those strategies and theories to discuss black women's experience instead of the experience of women in general. Black feminist theory advocates that black women need to assert themselves as speaking subjects in history (Malatjie 2011: 14).

In this statement, Malatjie speaks about the difference between black feminism and feminism in general. She asserts that the black feminist dimension can be "achieved in the form of self-insertion and self-determination" (2011:14). Malatjie makes reference to many black feminist scholars, such as Nkule Dabi, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks and Christina Qunta. In *Art Matters* (1995), the internationally renowned theorist and feminist bell hooks reveals a fundamental concern in black feminism that is to do with engaging the notion of "black self-definition". She argues that black self-definition is premised on paying attention to the subjectivity and agency of black women. Subjectivity and agency are negotiated and based on black women's scholarly, intellectual, creative, cultural and artistic productions. This theoretical undertaking is concerned with ideas, experiences and artworks as an integral part of their positioning, role, and contribution in society (1996: 9). She argues that the notion of self-definition or autobiography is an effective tool in questioning, challenging and overcoming all forms of domination that black women experience in society and in the field of art. The intent of my inclusion of this framework was to provide means of unpacking strategies of this notion of 'self-definition' within Mgudlandlu's biography. This rendition recognises that her subjectivity and agency speaks directly to the notion of 'self-definition' – in overcoming limits that prohibited black women from becoming professional artists – in that Mgudlandlu's biography is testimony to these attempt of this notion of 'self definition'.

In her book *Black Feminist Thought* (1999), Patricia Hill Collins argues that as much as there was a prejudicial system operated by white men through the "political dimension" (and in particular through an education system that fostered patterns of disenfranchisement), there is much to be investigated within feminism itself (1999: 6-7). Analysing ideologies of representation, she reveals conflicting opinions within feminism. Arguing this further, she states:

> Ironically, feminist theory has also suppressed black women's ideas. Even though black women intellectuals have long expressed a unique feminist consciousness about the intersection of race and class in structuring gender, historically we have not been full participants in white feminist organisation (1999:7).

She suggests that perhaps adopting the philosophy of black feminism is necessary in order to understand the sociopolitical circumstances that affected black women specifically. She also quotes historians like bell hooks (1981), Paula Giddings (1984) and Barbara Hilkert Andolsen (1986), who attest to these readings of feminism. She even uses the example of Alice Walker's 1983 paper in which Walker writes about her stint of sharing an office with a prominent white feminist who expressed superficial interest in black women's ideas, and yet compiled an anthology of women writers in which women of colour were noticeably absent. In researching a range of issues, this white feminist omits women of colour from this work, claiming that white women scholars are unqualified to understand the "black woman's experience" (1999: 7). Collins uses this example to reflect on the unwillingness of many white feminists to alter the paradigms and engage multiple voices within feminism, particularly those of black women. Though Collins speaks about an American context, this frame of thought and experience is not that different to the South African context because of the similar history of racial discrimination towards black people that existed in both countries. It is in such instances that black feminism becomes critical, as it allows black women's voices to emerge.

Even though she does not align herself with black feminist thought, Pollock agrees with these views when she says "it is imperative that the significant and complex differences between women, and not just between women and men, are acknowledged and made to signify in any reconceived histories of visual culture" (2003:2). Salah Hassan, in the essay '"Insertion": Self and Other' (2002) also defines this manner of self-definition as "the quest for self – representation and a negotiation of self-identity" (2002: 2). These are the fundamental values for black feminist thinking. As hooks explains, black self-definition should be understood in the context of subjectivity and agency of black women artists. Agency is reflected in Mgudlandlu's biography and the fact that she is a black South African women artist whose history is rooted in the societal struggle of patriarchy and gender and racial exclusions. One can observe her staking claim to these notions in the following statement:

> I think I can claim to be the first African woman in the country to hold an exhibition. As far as I know I am the only African woman who has taken up painting seriously. It has become my first love and there is nothing else I want to do (*Cape Times*, 15 August 1962).

This self-proclaiming statement speaks about the level of agency Mgudlandlu used to position and assert herself. Moreover, this claim also calls upon her gender, race and geographical location in her attempt to make herself visible. It is in such self-conscious representations that one is able to understand that the ways in which she presented herself in the public domain were in essence 'self-determined'. This further develops and posits the 'self' articulation for which black feminists argue.

It may be assumed that artists like Mgudlandlu did not present 'self-assertive' stances based on the lack of engagement with critical academic feminism in those years, yet such a statement subtly reveals a different annotation to the concept of 'self-determination'. This notion calls upon the need to understand other aspects of the notion of 'self-assertion' in the reading of her position. Hence, a re-examination of her work looking at feminist readings is necessary in order to begin understanding the self-assertive elements in her work and position. This is not to reduce the framing of her work by further reinforcing it within gender and racial classifications, but to analyse what such readings mean in relation to her position today. This space offers new readings of her biography as an active participant in the making of it and an awareness of her agency and subjectivity.

The portrayal of Mgudlandlu as a disengaged participant in politics, merely because "her work did not speak to politics so overtly" (Miles, 2002: 7), speaks to Qunta's comment that writers who did not come from the same communities often projected their particular understanding of black women's experience and position. Miles projects the idea that Mgudlandlu may have been a passive participant in society, which further reinforces the notion of Mgudlandlu as bystander and not a full participant in her own life and circumstances. However, black feminist thinking calls for a re-examination of her strategy as that of a negotiated space. Using this strategy offers other readings of how she managed to navigate through the systematic confines of the art world – that instead, those "childish scrawls" (1963: 109) that Head criticised may have had a deeper meaning and strategy in locating and expressing herself while remaining visible and creating a legacy for herself.

The lack of critical reviews about her work, gender and locality speaks to the lack of understanding of the complex position she occupied in South African art history. Understanding these complexities makes us aware that it is not a coincidence that Mgudlandlu makes no comment about her living conditions in the newspapers. It also implies and reveals another motive from critics such as Dubow in their disinterest in writing about these aspects of Mgudlandlu's life and that they did not create a space that allowed Mgudlandlu to assert her own position.

Understanding the position of the writers of Mgudlandlu's time explains the connection that Miles makes in her book *Nomfanekiso* (2002) when she aligns Mgudlandlu's artistic success to other women's patronage, saying "white women both promoted and bought her art [...] as a gesture of solidarity" (2002: 8). The fact that Miles does not speak about issues of feminism when associating these white women with Mgudlandlu dismisses the different sociopolitical concerns in which these women operated. She suggests an element of unanimity without unpacking the circumstantial difficulties and positions of both parties. If we are to understand Mgudlandlu's position to be located within the history of white women, then issues of political, economic and racial disproportions also need to be discussed.

Another assertion of 'self-definition' by Gqola, in her book *What Is Slavery to Me?* (2010), asserts that "self-definition is an ongoing attempt to refashion ways of dealing with historical consciousness of the past" (2010: 6). Gqola argues that postcolonial feminism:

> Privileges the subaltern composition and valuation of meanings…[this] orientation allows for this conceptual conversation across geography but in ways that illuminate South African expression in the 'now' rather than pre-empt them based on global trends and interactions with the local (the 'glocal') (2010: 201 - 204).

Both black feminism and postcolonial feminism centre on notions of 'self-definition' and locate a contemporary reading that instrumentalises a gaining of voice for the subalterns. They both offer a feminist assertion that connects a South African context to a global framework. The common denominator between postcolonial and black feminism is that of the notion of 'giving voice', which relates to my argument. I have therefore chosen to focus this reading on Mgudlandlu's biography and exhibition on black feminism as I feel it best describes Mgudlandlu's history, which is not located within the postcolonial feminist framing. The idea that knowledge is constructed through historical occurrences needs to be understood from a political standpoint, as argued by Peterson in his article 'The Archive and

Political Imaginary', speaks directly to these notions (2002: 33). This undertaking to re-examine Mgudlandlu's biography is premised on an understanding that, even though past writings have moulded a particular reading of her position, there are still many possibilities of articulating a different take on her history.

In conclusion, it is important to note that this artist's history does not speak only about her position, it relates to how art history writing at large had an impact on the history of other women artists in South Africa. This also means that art history needs to be constantly challenged and one of the ways that this can be achieved is by engaging the archive. In the case of Mgudlandlu questioning, studying and analysing the exhibition archive was an important strategy. As a result the revelation of the inaccuracies and discrepancies regarding the position of artists such as Mgudlandlu brought newer readings on her biography and archive. These have bearing on understanding the complexities and contradictions around the making and managing of the creation of meaning in her exhibition archives, and also offer a profound way of unpacking it. By examining them as such stimulates critical thinking and debate around the placing and positioning of this artist in South African art history. It is thus important to conclude this chapter by saying that writing on an artist such as Mgudlandlu contributes to the 'female histories' and addresses issues of neglect, and also provides an alternative way of writing about this history through the process of questioning and reframing. As Peterson points out, if "archivists have the courage to engage other spaces, communities and insights, not only will access be broadened by the notion of the archive itself, it will be enlivened by being redeployed in fresh ways in new contexts" (2002: 33).

Chapter 4

A Fragile Archive



Introduction

This chapter examines Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive drawing on curatorial and exhibition practices. It reflects on the exhibition *A Fragile Archive,* submitted as a partial fulfilment for this thesis. The exhibition was held at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) from January 29 to April 8, 2012. The exhibition focused mainly on the works of Gladys Mgudlandlu (1917-1979), displayed among works of six other South African black women artists. Constructed as a restaging of Mgudlandlu's first commercial exhibition held at the *Contact* magazine boardroom in Cape Town in 1961, *A Fragile Archive* also critically examined the construction of artists' biographies. This restaging questioned the position of black women artists from the 1940s to the 1980s, a period that records the emergence of South African black women visual artists. As a whole, this exhibition navigated the role of history, memory and archive in the positioning of artists in the public sphere. At the same time, it contributed towards the reporting on a generation of artists who still remain relatively unknown publicly and within South African art writing.

I have divided this chapter into four sections. The first section describes methodologies used to accumulate, analyse and present the 1961 exhibition archive within an exhibition format. The second section looks at the contextual and theoretical background of the exhibition concept. The third examines theories that deal with notions of restaging. And the fourth section is a visual illustration of this exhibition. For the rest of this introduction, I textually illustrate how the exhibition space was curated, as a way of giving some overview of how the exhibition was structured.

A Fragile Archive exhibition occupied five exhibition rooms on the ground floor of the left wing of the Lutyens building of the Johannesburg Art Gallery. These exhibition rooms presented different groupings of artworks, with each looking at a different narrative that embodied the notion of archive in the broader sense of the conceptual framing of this exhibition. It was displayed in a way that allowed the viewer to navigate a chronology of the visibility of these women artists within the history of South African art. These five rooms were designed as follows:

In the first room, four artworks by Valerie Desmore were exhibited. She was exhibited in the first room because of her historical position as an artist who appeared before Mgudlandlu. This room displayed what South African public institutions currently hold in their collections on this artist.

The second room displayed the restaging of Mgudlandlu's first exhibition. This room presented a set of artworks mixed with different archive material related to this exhibition. Distinctly painted grey, this room stood out as the central focus of this exhibition; the grey made reference to the colour many boardrooms were painted in the 1960s.

In the third and fourth rooms, a collection of works that are believed to be the artist's last collection was presented. It is believed that this was the first time these work were exhibited in public. This archive was grouped thematically, with themes such as landscape, still life, portraiture and birds/animals.

The fifth and final room displayed a collection of works by different black women artists. Most of these works were taken from the JAG collection, with the exception of Bongi Dhlomo's *Removal* print series, which was loaned from the Wits Art Museum (WAM). Displaying works of varying mediums, this room was intended to present examples of works by black women artists who became visibly noticed after the Mgudlandlu period. This selection was also specific to a group of artists that became well known in the 1980s. It documents trends of inclusion and sporadic appearances of these artists on the South African art scene. Other artists included in this room were Bonnie Ntshalintshali, Allina Khumalo, Eliza Xaba, Noria Mabasa and Helen Sebidi.

An important condition of the inclusion of other women artists in this exhibition was the fact that the majority of these works belong to JAG. This decision was aimed to highlight the role of this public institution in creating visibility for these artists. The decision to show these works also opens a critique of how this institution participates in a value-creation system that canonises these artists and their worth. It was as an assessment of how visible these artists are within such a public cultural institution.

The focus on history, memory and archive through this exhibition further foregrounded the question around the acclaim of Mgudlandlu as South Africa's 'first' black woman artist. Thus, this exhibition was a continuation of my enquiry into the historical context of this acclaim in relation to South Africa's political and cultural pasts. It touched on issues of Western ideologies in relation to image making in South Africa. As Gavin Younge, in the book *Art of the South African Townships* (1988), attests, the subjects taught in South African Bantu education school curriculum in the 1980s was based on gender. He states, "Boys were instrumented in the manipulation of simple tools and girls were taught cooking and simple domestic work" (1988: 18). This summarised historical background explains how women were constrained from pursuing artistic careers because of these predetermined notions of gender. This illustrates some of the limitations that Mgudlandlu's work may have encountered when entering the public space, such as the one illustrated in her inclusion in the *Women Artists in South Africa* (1985) exhibition.

Some of the key theories employed in writing this chapter include writing within acuratorial framework, biographical writing and feminist theories. These theories consider the conceptual, visual and structural aesthetic of the content included. The chapter also references discourses that consider curating of exhibitions as a strategy to engage current debates on exhibition making. In the book *What Makes a Good Exhibition* (2006), Paula Marincola states:

> Exhibitions are strategically located at the nexus where artists, their work, the arts institutions, and many different publics intersect. Situated so critically, they function as the prime transmitters through which the continually shifting meaning of art and its relationship to the world is brought into temporary focus and offered to the viewer for contemplation, education, and, not the least, pleasure (2006: 9).

This statement remarks on how exhibitions form part of the knowledge production systems and exhibition practice that have become topical in recent scholarly research. It also reveals how exhibitions have become integral parts of conducting research, eliciting new debates, reinterpreting or re-presenting works of art. Curated exhibitions, therefore, can operate as ways through which scholarly pursuit provides further analyses of artists' works and their biographies. The aim was therefore to engage current curatorial strategies in response to the idea of restaging, revisiting and reimagining an archive, in particular Mgudlandlu's 1961 exhibition. In essence, my curatorial strategy enters into a practical exploration of a revisionist methodology.

Continuing from what has been discussed in previous chapters around the conventions of writing, in this chapter I discuss how exhibitions operate as another form of writing. It offers another way of writing outside of formal conventions through the construction of space, grouping of artworks as well as the curatorial concept, therefore allowing for multiple interpretations of these artworks. As John Berger argues, "seeing comes before words […] we explain [the] world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it" (1972:7).

4.1. Exhibition Research Method

In 'The Archive and the Political Imaginary', Bhekizizwe Peterson *(*2002) states:

> Underlying the archive is the aim of ordering the past as inheritance. [...] We have to be critical of the methods that have gone into the acquisition, cataloguing and interpretation of material [...] the challenge is to find, assemble, catalogue and elucidate as much as possible of this material and to bring it into play in the public or institutional orbit (2002: 29 -31).

Peterson reminds us that engaging the past requires us to be critical of methods that we use to recuperate historical information. The task of curating *A Fragile Archive* followed a structured research method that was integral to the already applied methods of researching and writing this thesis. The method of examining this exhibition was thus not only about looking at Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive through the evidence provided, but also looked at the context in which this archive became accumulated and where it is placed now within the history of exhibition practices. Four different groupings and methods were applied:

The first was to look for the work of Valerie Desmore represented in public institutions and the visibility this artist has in South Africa. The Pretoria Art Museum, Unisa Art Gallery, South African National Gallery, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum, William Humphreys Art Gallery and the Durban Art Gallery were some of the institutions consulted on the works they have on this artist. I was able to find one other work from the South African National Gallery, as the JAG already had three of the works I included in this section.

Secondly, I looked for works exhibited in Mgudlandlu's 1961 exhibition. This room functioned as the main space of this exhibition, and exhibited the archive of this 1961 exhibition. Because the search for material to be included in this room functioned as an integral part of my thesis research, the investigation required for this section needed to be conducted in two parts. I first looked for the archive material on this exhibition, such as reviews, catalogue lists and so forth. At the outset of curating this I found very little information about Mgudlandlu's 1961 exhibition. The initial information I discovered was only a mention of this exhibition in three places – one in her biography, one in an announcement of the exhibition in *Die Burger* newspaper (September 1961), and in the *Contact* magazine before and after the exhibition. These press announcements gave me very little to work with in terms of imagining how this show was initially displayed.

It wasn't until I met Randolph Vigne and his contacts that I managed to obtain more information, such as the original catalogue of the 1961 exhibition, among other things. Such material informed the second part of this investigation, which was to look for actual artworks that appeared in the exhibition catalogue. This cross-referencing of material between writing the thesis and the sourcing of works assisted in shaping this exhibition. Based on the book *Nomfanekiso* and the exhibition catalogue, I was able to track down some of the works that were included in this exhibition. Other routes of sourcing works were through corporate and public collections.

By way of collecting information, I began by going through the Miles archive and museum and library archives while simultaneously searching for Desmore's works. I consulted individuals who had information on Mgudlandlu – Randolph Vigne, Aart and Val Bijl, and Judy Drewieka were some of the key people consulted. I came across this group by mere

coincidence when I visited the Wits Historical Papers library looking for the archive of *Contact* magazine. The librarian introduced me to Sylvia Neame, who was visiting the library that day. Neame explained that she was involved with the Liberal Party in those years, and put me in contact with Vigne, who now lives in London, over email. My conversations with him then connected me to a network of people who in 1961 were involved with the Liberal Party and witnessed Mgudlandlu's exhibition. Some of these people later became critical in the making of this exhibition. This was the case for Aart and Val Bijl. These conversations proved to be the most effective process of acquiring information on this exhibition, including uncovering some original documentation that I needed in order to begin understanding and visualising what the 1961 exhibition looked like, such as the exhibition catalogue that I discovered through Drewieka.

Drewieka's archive became my main reference for this section because of the list 'catalogue' (without images) of artworks that she provided. However, there were many challenges in using this list, as I had to try match this list of artworks with images of works made in 1961. Several methods of research emerged – the first was searching for work by year of production as another means of linking them to this exhibition. I created a list of all the works that I could find made in and before 1961. The challenge of linking this body of work to this exhibition based on production date was that there was no guarantee that they were indeed part of this exhibition in the first place. For instance, there was one other work that was dated 1957, which was considered on the basis that her first exhibition took place in 1961, so there is a high probability that it was included in this show. Also, as a verification measure, I used the 1962 list of artworks to compare which of the works produced in 1961 could have not been included in this exhibition.

For the second method I used the book *Nomfanekiso* to verify these images. Where the book linked works to public institutions, I was able to track those works easily. However, where the works were linked to private collectors, I had to use the Miles archive to track them. The challenge was that many of the contacts used for the Miles exhibition had changed and it became extremely difficult to locate the privately owned works. In fact, in most cases there was no contact information for those private collectors listed, and many of the works had been sold through art auctions since then. This meant that I also had to scan through the archives of auction houses between the period 2002 to the present to look for Mgudlandlu's

works that had been sold this way. It was difficult to find the contacts of new owners through auction houses because of the privacy policies of these companies.

The further complication with finding works for this room was that the majority of them had been renamed over the years. When the works reappeared at auction houses, new descriptive titles were given to them. This created a problem in comparing and linking the images to the original list of artworks displayed at that exhibition. There was only one out of the 31 works that had kept its original title. I resorted to working with both titles and image to see which made closer connections descriptively, as a way of working through these ambiguities. These titling ambiguities later became a strategy of display, as I sometimes used both titles so as to make these discrepancies obvious to the viewer. I also referred to the group of people I was consulting to verify whether they could remember these images in this exhibition.

Using this three-part system, I was able to create a rough list of works with images that could have been included in this show. This, however, was the first phase of re-creating this exhibition. The second phase involved actually finding and locating these works. I was able to locate 11 artworks out of the 31 works from the original show. There were an additional four works for which I only had image references (refer to figures 5 and 6 on pages 92 and 93), increasing the total number included in this room to 15.

It is also important to mention that of the 15 works, some were clustered in sections under one title, as there was no clear way of determining to which of the original titles each work belonged. This, however, happened only on one account based on the catalogue – where three works made in 1961 related to one title (refer to figure 7 on page 94). This also meant that two of those works could have either not been included in the show or could have been titled differently. As I have already mentioned, this section of the exhibition was not meant to replicate the original 1961 exhibition, but rather be a critique on the current state of this archive. Hence the method of collecting and presenting this archive depended more on the process than the final product.

I chose to not eliminate information from this accumulated archive, firstly because of the limited information available on this exhibition, and secondly because the main intention was to try to lay bare the archive in its true form. In essence, the method adopted for this exhibition was not about selection but more about presenting this archive in its actual state,

presenting what is absent and what has been uncovered during the process of conducting this research. This is not to say that Mbembe's critique of "process" as being subjective becomes neutralised, but that by engaging the archive in its 'raw' sense, it becomes a critique on issues of engaging this archive rather than on selection (2002: 23).

The third curatorial grouping was of Mgudlandlu's last archive. While doing research for the thesis I came across a collection of works owned by a Cape Town collector, during my first visit in Cape Town at the time of conducting research for this thesis. Because these works represented Mgudlandlu's last collection, I was compelled to think ways of incorporating it into this exhibition. I met with the collector to conduct an interview with him and to view the work so as to see what condition they were in and to determine how they would be inserted into the exhibition. Though the works were in very poor condition, I decided to include them on the basis that they spoke to the issues around history, archive, memory and preservation. Their poor condition also embodied the title in relation to notions of fragility. In this room I also included other archive material from Drewieka's archive and from this collector, such as letters, postcards, other exhibition catalogues, old cheques paid for Mgudlandlu's work and a photograph of her son Malvern Mgudlandlu. These materials were included so as to give another context to this fragile archive and to indicate that her archive still sits randomly in personal archives.

The fourth and final method was the inclusion of other women artists. For this section I used the JAG collection as the main focus. The method applied here was to select artworks of black women artists collected between the 1980s and the 1990s, looking specifically at the black women artists who had gained public visibility around this time. This inclusion of women artists who became known after Mgudlandlu and are represented in the JAG collection was intended to look at the public visibility of black women artist following Mgudlandlu's appearance. I found only five women artists. This was an indication of the lack of visibility of black women, especially since the JAG is considered to have the largest collection on black South African artists since the 1980s. Even though the JAG had most of the seminal works by these five artists I felt that the works the JAG had of Bongi Dhlomo were not a good representation of what has become known about her. I therefore borrowed the *Removal* print series from the Wits Arts Museum, which I felt was a better representation of her.

Using these varied methods represented in this exhibition was an attempt to be critical and self-reflective in the process of engaging the archive and to avoid the implication of 'selecting' information. This was done in order to remain cognisant of the subjective role of curators, historians and librarians alike when it comes to 'engaging' archives, in what Mbembe terms "the subjective act" (2002: 23). Each room represented the different methods of selecting, including and laying bare the archive in its entirety so as to accommodate the complexities of these archives. The overarching methods of searching in the archive and the excavation of the collections operated in parallel to offering immediate solutions of navigating the theoretical underpinnings and imagination of this exhibition.

4.2. The Exhibition Curatorial Concept and Contextual Background

In thinking about the conceptual framing of this exhibition, it was important to consider notions of absence and incompleteness as other central aspects. Calling the exhibition *A Fragile Archive* speaks on many levels to the idea of working with doubt, uncertainty or something that is delicate. The title also drew on the notion that despite the fact that they are repositories of evidence of events and contexts, archives are often incomplete and inconclusive. This speaks to the fragility of knowledge in relation to archives. As Peterson reminds us, the writing of history was systematically denied to black South Africans and this needs to be reflected upon when engaging archives today (2002: 29). The book *Contemporary Art and Ideas in an Era of Globalisation* included different conversational texts on archives by a group of arts practitioners. Kobena Mercer comments:

> [...] if you look at the history, at the archive, it's never clear-cut as inclusion and exclusion; there's always a revolving door – now you see it, now you don't – and that is what makes it worth studying [...] it's a much more nuanced approach that involves looking at the numerous points of ambiguity where stylistic choices are available to both expand and contract (2004: 258).

Though he speaks of artistic practice and strategies used by individual artists, this analysis is also applicable to curatorial strategies. Engaging the archive does not always imply you agree with what is in it. Rather, the task was to work with the ambiguities within it so that multiple readings of the archive challenged how archives have previously been understood to function. Gilane Tawadros, in the same book, explains that:

> Most people have an archive of some description: photographs, letters, papers that record personal histories. Mining the archive and retrieving histories have increasingly become the mainstay of many museums and galleries. Contemporary art

> organisations, curators, and critics are also delving deep into the archive of post-war contemporary culture to reclaim 'lost' artists and art histories. But reviving the past is full of pitfalls. It is easy to romanticise the past and gaze back through rose-tinted spectacles or to 'put a spin' on the past episodes only to serve current political ends (2004: 253).

In this statement, Tawadros explains how this idea of curatorial practice around the project of archive has become common and that this interest has become topical within creative industries. This can be observed locally with emergence of programmes that centralise the practice of engaging the archive, such as the Centre for Curating the Archive (situated at the University of Cape Town) and the archive on dance, A(R)T Archive (situated at the University of the Witwatersrand), among many others.

Tawadros' comment offers an analysis of engaging an archive within a creative sphere and speaks to the core idea of this curated exhibition. As Peterson points out, "As we know, colonial and apartheid authorities consistently denied the existence of any legacy among Africans worth preserving, an attitude borne out of their insistence that Africans had no history" (2002: 29). Here Peterson alludes to one of the major difficulties of dealing with the South African political past. Within the South African context, this is a result of colonial and apartheid histories.

In *Contemporary Art and Ideas in an Era of Globalisation,* Tawadros cites other examples of curatorial projects that deal with archives at the Institute of International Visual Arts in London. I refer to some of these projects in relation to issues that I was grappling with around this exhibition. Interestingly, Tawadros notes that these projects centralise the archive as part of museum practice. Although this exhibition was not initiated by the JAG, placing the exhibition in the setting of a public museum indicatively places the JAG in the realm of institutions that are using memory and archives in rethinking exhibition projects.[39] Towadros asks:

> Our view of the past is inevitably shaped by present concerns and perspective, but, is it possible to reshape the present by re-examining our histories? Can a search through the archive be more than a nostalgic rummage through history? (2004: 253).

[39] It should be noted that this exhibition was proposed and accepted at the JAG before I was appointed as a contemporary curator (2010 – 2012).

These questions are relevant considerations to the way in which I have examined this curated exhibition. During the run of this exhibition, a public panel discussion was held on February 18, 2012. Two guest speakers were invited – Khwezi Gule, the director of the Hector Peterson Museum, and Pumla Gqola, associate professor in the School of Languages, Literature and Media at Wits. At this panel discussion, Gqola spoke about the function of archives in current writings and commented that:

> If we attempt to understand the archive, we need to adopt a stance of questioning it […] that in fact a questioning stance, a pausing, a hesitance, and a reflection on what could be in some ways missing could aid a different reading into the archive (Gqola: 2012).[40]

She further stated that history and the archive are not as straightforward as we understand them, that in order to understand the archive we need to engage "the granularity of the archive". In so doing, Gqola 's comments relate to how this exhibition attempted to question the circumstances and the details found in Mgudlandlu's exhibition archive and at the same time reveals how these details have come to be what they are today. Gqola continued to highlight the importance of issues of acknowledging absence, neglect and gaps within written histories and archives.

Through curatorial strategies of restaging and contextualization, this exhibition further questioned the notion of the 'first' in what is now known to be unfounded. This conceptual framing, to use the idea of restaging rather than being an exact replica of the 1961 exhibition, thus became a set of accumulations of this archive, and was meant to stimulate critical thinking and debate around the placing and positioning of artists in South African history. By questioning the archive as the main concern - Mgudlandlu's position and the position og other artists is revisited in a critical manner and provides other means of re-engaging this history.

[40]Unless otherwise stated, all quotes attributed to Gqola and Gule are from the panel discussion that took place at the Johannesburg Art Gallery on February 18, 2012 as part of the public programmes around the exhibition *A Fragile Archive*.

4.3. Why a Restage?

Although the exhibition as a whole was not presented as a restage, the main conceptual framing was centred on the restaging of the Mgudlandlu's first exhibition held in 1961. It is therefore necessary to discuss in detail some of the considerations around the idea of restaging an exhibition. In so doing, in this section I discuss the example of Igor Zabel's restaged exhibition that was part of the 50th Venice Biennale so as to provide an understanding of the three fundamental concepts that relate to the ideas of a restage. Those concepts are: revisiting, rememorying and repetition. To restage is to repeat something that has happened before; it is also to reflect, remake, re-visit, re-imagine, re-tell, refashion, even to what Pumla Gqola calls "rememorying" (2010: 08). These other terms further display how this description of a restage carries other concepts of re-engaging history.

The curatorial strategy to restage Mgudlandlu's 1961 exhibition emerged out of a biographical study on her, as discussed in previous chapters. In writing this biography, the question of her position as the 'first' South African woman artist became a recurring question. It was therefore important to understand the context in which this acclaim originated – her exhibition at the *Contact* magazine boardroom in 1961. The extant archive on this artist was a key resource, not only for what it contained but also for what it was missing. This research revealed many uncertainties about the details of the event of Mgudlandlu's first exhibition. In turn, it presented a unique opportunity to examine this exhibition through a visual re-presentation of this archive.

From theories and strategies around writing auto/biography came a series of ideas to restage, re-narrate, and revisit Mgudlandlu's first exhibition. This restaging provided an alternative way of understanding the context of Mgudlandlu's acclaim. As a visual interpretation of the archive in its current state, the exhibition was a curation of the contradictions and contestations that make up this archive. I have mentioned-above, the process used to obtain and recuperate some of the archive and original works that were part of the this exhibition. Conversations with some of the people (mostly by email interview) who were involved with this first exhibition were also considered. As such, the room that showcased the restaging of 1961 was not meant to be read as an absolute or comprehensive representation of the original exhibition but rather as a new reading of the current archive.

In contextualising my idea around the restage, I have looked at the essay 'Once is Nothing: Thoughts on an Exhibition on an Exhibition' (2008) by Charles Esche and Maria Hlavajova. This essay is important for this study because it speaks directly to my ideas regarding the restage. Esche and Hlavajova's restage of Igor Zabel's *Individual Systems* allowed them to examine recurrence as a notion of modernity. Some of the questions they asked themselves in thinking about this restage were: "Would this enable us to recharge a show with different significance? What would it require to do so and how would these requirements be realised here and now?" (2008:111). They also attempted to answer these questions: "Unlike other temporary forms of artistic culture, there is no established protocol of notation, nor a literary genre through which exhibitions can be replayed. Unlike theatre, dance, music and storytelling, the exhibition has not developed its own specific forms of reconstruction" (2008:114).

The same kinds of questions emerged throughout my curatorial practice during the making and implementing of this exhibition. This directly affected how I began engaging the archive. That unless I found original records of this exhibition, there was otherwise no other way of recollecting this history. Esche and Hlavajova say that the restage is also a way of "preserv[ing] memory" (2008: 109). This idea relates to Pumla Gqola assertion on memory in her book *What Is Slavery to Me*, when she says:

> The relationship of historiography to memory is one of containment; history is always part of memory whilst delineates a certain kind of knowledge system within the terrain of memory. Put differently, whereas memory is a shadow always hovering and governing our relationship to the present and the future, history is the art of recording and analysing the consciousness of the past (2010: 8).

She bases her argument on the Kenny Anthony and Toni Morrisons' observation that the project of rememory invites the creative writer or artists to "journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply in order to yield up a kind of truth" (2010: 8). My project entered this revisionist method of history in a more visual sense, which allowed the viewer to engage the archive – which would have been otherwise in a file form – in both literal and metaphoric sense, and in a way that memory and archive could be manifested in a physical form.

By way of incorporating ideas around memory into this exhibition, I included a voice recording by Randolph Vigne, speaking about what he remembers about the 1961 exhibition.

This was included in the restage section. In the recorded interview, while he was remembering the exhibition, some details became vague, which touched on notion of "refusal for memory to be flattened or made linear", an idea that Gqola touches on in her book (2010: 8). What then becomes fragile is the slippery space of forgotten detail – in what he tries to recall – that these memories becomes so elusive that only the imagination will aid to complete the narrative. As Pumla says, "the project of creating new ways of seeing the past and inhabiting the present [...] invites a questioning of the relations between what is forgotten and what is remembered" (2010:10). By presenting the archive with all its contradictions, the ideas of loss, absence and recovery are addressed. There is also no pretence of the absolute. In that way, memory sits in those in-between spaces of truth and the imaginary. Gqola also argues that "connect[ing] imagined pasts with the contemporary resists the structure which posits a static concept of time and representation" (2010: 207).

The other notion in dealing with restage is the idea of repetition. Eva Hesse, in the essay 'Series: the Freedom of Artists to Repeat Themselves and the Creative Value of Repetition,' which was published *in Art.es International – Contemporary-Art (2012)* magazine, says:

> Repetition consists of […] a potentially infinite number of mirror discoveries, difference that don't add up to actual innovations […] pursue perfection and if perfection is unreachable or not even important it is necessary to take one after another while waiting an unexpected spark (2012: 34).

Though this essay speaks more directly to the idea of production in the making of art sense, similarly a restaged art exhibition touches on some level on the ideas of recreation and revision. This curated exhibition in essence explores some of these notions of repetition.

Going back to Esche and Hlavajova's concern with the idea of repetition, which is located with the ideas of rememorying, they say; "Repeating the exhibition allows [for a] consideration of structural change implication… [and] if we are concerned with memory, we also share a concern with how history of contemporary art is written and who takes responsibility for it" (2008:111). The shared relations of repetition in this stance are continual, and memory in relation to history speaks back to my previous chapters on biographical writing – that it centres the archive as the activator of writing and in this instance of making exhibitions. Esche and Hlavajova continue to say:

> This exhibition, however, did not attempt to resolve this uncertainty but rather to use it as leverage and a space to critique and question this very notion of certainty and history. By adopting this kind of strategy the hope is such that critical engagement

> with the object is contained invisible construction of context in which art is made publicly accessible by underlining the conditions of making. At the same time, it points to other conditions in which autonomy might be exercised… it exists most strongly in the imaginations of those experiencing [the exhibition] (2008:116).

In considering the archive, they also say that "the works of art are necessarily absent but we know that things do not loop back to where they started, and the surviving memories and documents for the exhibition may tell us much more than the physical presence of the artworks about the original viewing conditions (2008:115)". The concept of 'absence' in my exhibition related to this statement both in the element of the imaginary and contemporary curatorial strategies. These absences attest to Gqola's assertion of 'memory resistance' and the possibility of recovery of new and contemporary narratives of the past. The other 16 artworks that were missing in this restage, if ever found at a different time and for a different space, would give further and different meaning to the exhibition. As suggested by Esche and Hlavajova, "repetition of an exhibition has no prescription" (2008: 117). This is true particularly when the archive is so porous.

Thinking about the original exhibition, catalogue and the current information found in the archive, there will always exist some incoherent links to artworks and titles that no longer match because of the process of renaming that happened over time. The catalogue functioned as a primary resource, but also posed complications when works no longer carry the original titles. The fact that the original catalogue of this show has no images takes away its power. Even though the catalogue locates the original work and name, the accuracy remains fraught in the absence of visual references. The journey that artworks have gone through in the reselling and renaming also jeopardises any possibilities of coming closer to any truth. It is in this process that these objects sit further and further away from its original space. Speculation and imagination is all that is left for any form of recreation of this exhibition. What is left is not only a reflection of the past but also a reflection on the future.

To adopt this concept of a restage, therefore, was to explore of revisit and re-examine a past event. It allowed for contemporary adaptation and enquiry into the writing of biography and history today. Such an exercise does not only deal with challenging the past but imagining the future within this past, as well as reflecting on the present.

4.4. Illustrations of the exhibition installation

This section provides a pictorial narrative of the exhibition. Each image is accompanied by a description of what was displayed in each of the showrooms. The images follow the sequence of these rooms and exhibition layout. I included this section as a tool to illustrate what may not have been illustrated textually in giving a description of what the exhibition dealt with.



Figure 1. Foyer entrance to the exhibiton. As you entered the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the exhibition introduction text was located on the right hand side of the entrance foyer. The exhibition was located in the prime space of the gallery (the ground floor of the left wing of the Lutyens builidng), which made it easily accessible. This images illustrates how the text was laid out on the entrance wall, and also shows how this space and information led to the other exhibition rooms.

Room 1: The Valerie Desmore Room

A selection of Valerie Desmore's work currently held in public institutions was exhibited in the first room after the entrance foyer. The display mainly consisted of works from the JAG; other works came from the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. No other museum or gallery in this country represents this artist – an indication of her lack of visibility in public domain.



Figure 2. First room: Displaying Valerie Desmore's work. The entrance foyer led to this room and from this room the next space was the restage room.

Room 2: The *Restage*

The 1961 Gladys Mgudlandlu Exhibition



Figure 3. The restage displayed the archive of Mgudlandlu's 1961 exhibition. It incorporated both archive material such newspaper articles, artworks, other objects such as the table, image projections and a voice recording of an interview with the Randolph Vigne. The grey colour of the room and table were included as these were some of the objects that mirrored the aesthetic feel of the original exhibition, based on what was remembered by those who witnessed the original exhibition. As the room was used as a boardroom, Bijl Aart recalls that even though they removed all the chairs from this room in order to accommodate the exhibition and guests, she remembers that the table remained because it was too heavy to be carried out (personal interview 2012).



Figure 4. Detail of the Restage room: the headphones were playing a voice recording of an interview with Randolph Vigne, who played a major role in assisting Mgudlandlu realise her 1961 exhibition. The inclusion of Vignes' voice was intended to disrupt this notion of 'only women promoting Mgudlandlu', as characterised in Elza Miles' book, *Nomfanekiso,* and to also give credit to those who helped Mgudlandlu with her first exhibition, especially as Vigne is still alive to tell the story. The text on the right hand side of this image is the text about the first exhibition (with the same font) as inscribed in the original exhibition catalogue. It was to elicit the feel and aesthetic of the original exhibition and to add a further dimension to what is written textually – with a feel of 3 dimensionality.

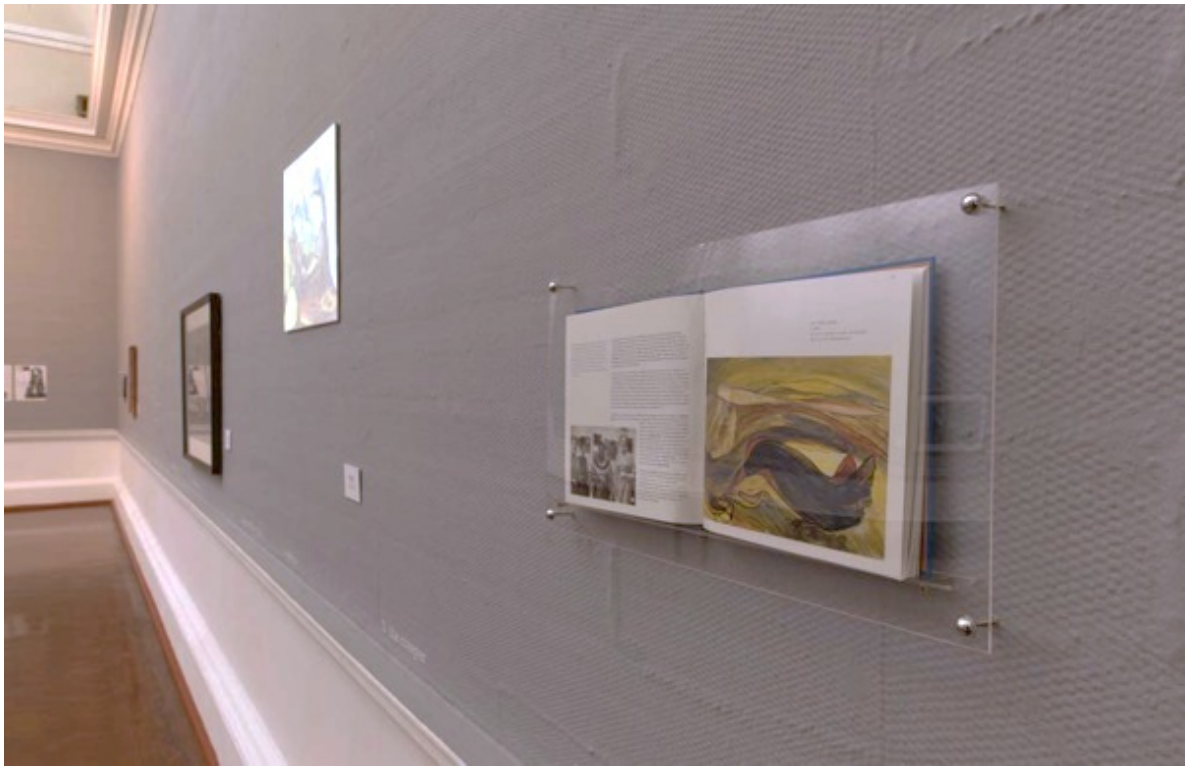


Figure 5. Detail of the Restage room: a close-up of the wall display, showing areas that had gaps and how these were addressed. You will observe that I used both card labels and viynl text – the card labels carried the current titles of the works and the old titles had viynl labels. This aimed to drawing the viewer's attention to the ambiguities of this information without it being too illustrative. Because of some of the difficulties of sourcing other works that I managed to connect to this exhibition, but had image illustrations of them from the book *Nomfanekiso*, I resorted to inserting these works through the display of the books opened to show the pages where these images were sourced. These book were displayed behind perspex cases, and these cases were designed to both protect the books and as a display aesthetic. The open books were also placed above the original titles of the works – making further suggestive links

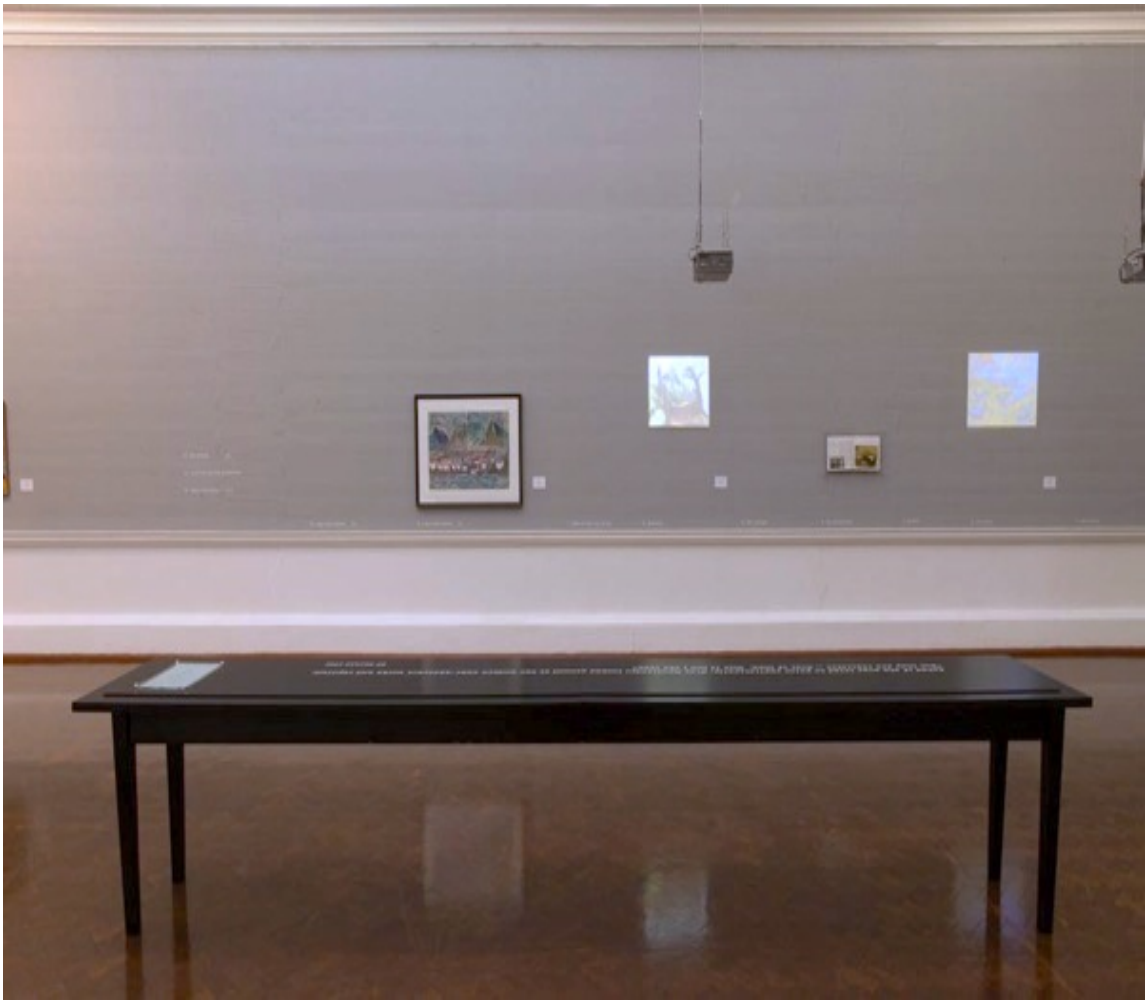


Figure 6. Detail of Restage room: The long table referenced a boardroom table that was in the original show. An original catalogue of this exhibition was displayed on the table: this catalogue was borrowed from Judy Drumweika's archive, which was given to her by her grandmother Marvis Corpen who attended the opening of this show. There were also other works that were not presented in a physical sense, but projected representations of them were included, such as the two works show on the back wall.



Figure 7. More detail from the Restage room: Wall text appeared in all the different rooms as a way to contextualise the artworks. The works on the right were displayed under the same title – landscape – because of the uncertainty over which of them works was associated with this title and or exhibited as part of this exhibition.



Figure 8. The table shown with a quote by Mgudlandlu vyniled on the table. The quote reads: "Asked if she ever tried to paint realistically, Miss Mgudlandlu looked around at her modern semi-abstract works and replied: 'But they are realistic ... most of them. That is how I see them" (EP Herald, 1962). Although this quote is dated 1962, it was incorporated in this room as a way of giving the artist a voice about how she perceived herself as an artist.

Rooms 3 and 4

Following the restage space was another space dedicated to a series of never-before exhibited drawings and paintings by Mgudlandlu. Her retrospective at the JAG in 2002, with its accompanying catalogue, presented the most important account of her life and work. This event sparked a new interest in the artist, and works that had been secluded away in storage and in private homes once more entered the public domain. The collection presented in this room didn't make it into that survey show. It was only after the 2002 retrospective that the importance of these works reached the attention of their owner. Sadly, because of poor storage conditions, many of the works on exhibition were in poor condition and deteriorated, adversely affecting their value and display quality. The collector of these works asked to remain anonymous.



Figure 9. This room exhibited previously unexhibited works that were recently rediscovered in the storeroom of a collector based in Cape Town. These were the last works owned by Mgudlandlu before she died and were inherited by her son Malvern Mgudlandlu, who then passed the works on to the anonymous collector. In the cabinets, original newspaper clippings and other personal items such as cheques, catalogues of Mgudlandlu's previous show and postcards were displayed. These items were obtained from Judy Dreweika, who inherited them from her grandmother, Marvis Orpen. It also contained other works from this collection that were too damaged for framing, as well as a photograph of Mgulandlu's son, Malvern.

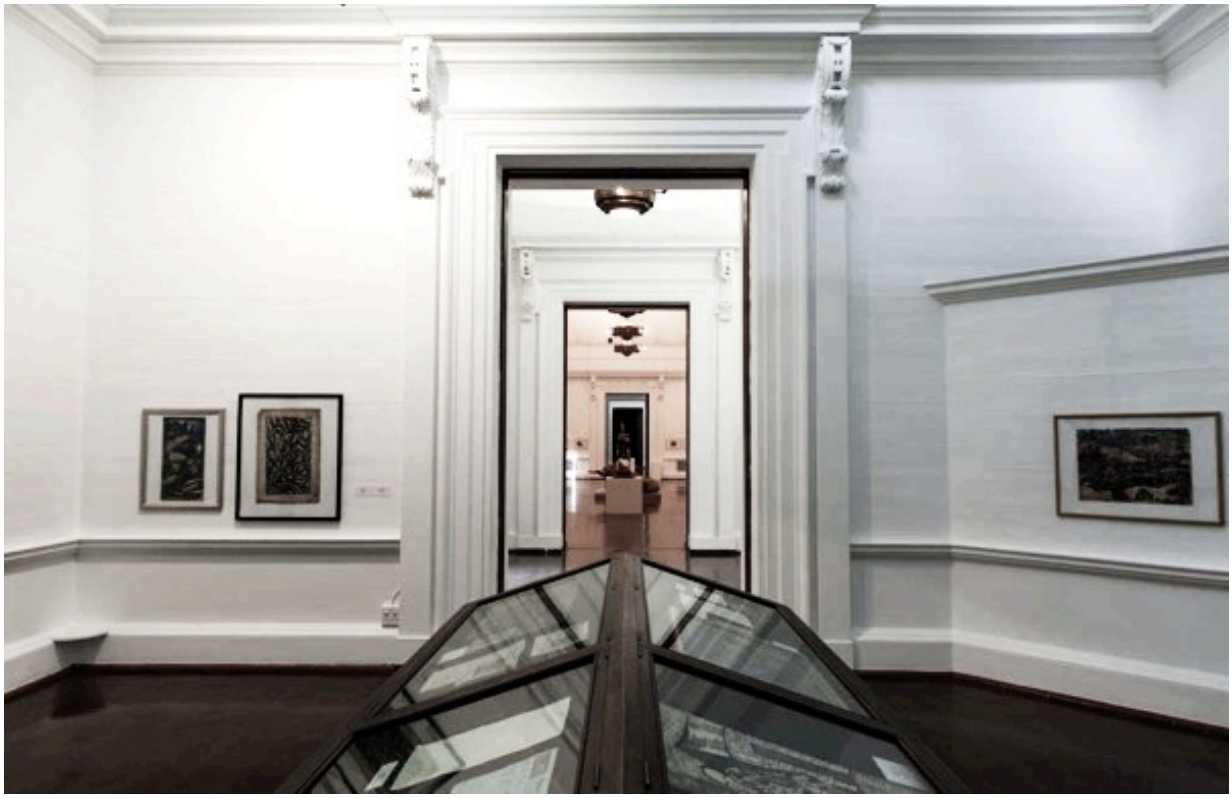


Figure 10. Room 3: this collection was displayed in two rooms (room 3 and 4), with each room displaying a different theme; for example room 3 displayed them of landscape and animals, and room 4 displayed illustrations of people and animals.

Room 5

Room 5 was the last space, displaying selected works by black women artists from the JAG's collection, as well as work by Bongi Dhlomo, which was loaned from the Wits Arts Museum (WAM). It presented artists who, since the time of Mgudlandlu's exhibitions, have become important figures in South African art history. The selection was intended to reflect on and present a further understanding of Mgudlandlu's archive. It was also meant to examine how institutions such as the JAG, with its authority and influence, contribute to the senses of value that, in turn, influence the writing and construction of art histories.



Figure11 Room 4: The Phillips gallery in Luyten's building displayed works from JAG and WAM. A variety of mediums were displayed – sculptures, prints, paintings and tapestries – by black women artists who came from both urban and rural areas. This was the last room of the exhibition.



Figure 12 *Another view of Room* ***5.*** Three of Noria Mabasa's sculptures and centres in this room. The sculpture on the extreme right of the image is a ceramic piece by Bonnie Ntshantshali.

In conclusion, until this exhibition, the idea of questioning Mgudlandlu's position as the 'first' black South African woman artist had not been done before. Even though Desmore reappears on the South African art scene in 1999 through the exhibition *Land and Lives,* the anomaly of Desmore's inclusion is not critically reflected. This lack on her positions further reinforces Mbembe's argument of the subjective act when engaging archives.

Since the advent of South Africa's democracy there have been many projects around archive and memory. All these investigations pose similar questions on the archive, particularly in relation to the political history of this country. How do we deal with the past in a contemporary context? How do we respond to the urgency to recollect what is in danger of being lost? In 2010, local galleries such as the JAG hosted two major exhibitions on photography and the archive, such as *The Ernest Cole Retrospective* and *100 Years of Photography*. Both of these projects sought to foreground a 'lost' history on the medium of photography by artists who have not been acknowledged in the cannon of South African art. These exhibitions operated within the realms of revision and repatriation, which had not been the focus of contemporary art exhibitions in South Africa. These two exhibitions are also among many other shows, too many to mention here, that have been about recovering this threatened history in art. I make mention of the two JAG showed because they are the most recent examples. Ian Baucom, David Bailey and Sonia Boyce, in their book titled *Shades of Black,* speak about the assembling of the Black Art Movement in 1980s Britain:

> […] the Black Arts Movement is to revisit something that has a sort of 'untimely', troubling, ghostly relation to the present, occasioning much debate for artists, curators and art historians unsure as to whether this particular disappearing / reappearing shade of 'black' or 'black British' should be recalled or dispelled. It is to that uncertainty, to that ambivalence about what to do with the spectra of black art haunting contemporary art history and art practice that this book seeks to respond (2008: 267).

Though these writers speak about the history of black art in the United Kingdom, South Africa is faced with a similar question, inherent to its racist history. In South Africa, it is this interest in history that creates the importance of revision. This exhibition merely participated in this continuing interest in the archive and history of South Africa.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have demonstrated how Gladys Mgudlandlu's biography can be critiqued through her exhibition archives. I have demonstrated that, upon close inspection, some areas of her biography become ambiguous. Mgudlandlu's biography is on the one hand exemplary of the concerted efforts by cultural institutions in overturning the exclusionary political systems during the apartheid years by creating opportunities to exhibit and elevate public visibility and importance. On the other hand, however, this historical registering of this artist lacks criticality of her position within this space. The overt contradictions in her biography exemplify these inconsistencies. This thesis criticises how these contradictions have to this day remained unchallenged. This criticism is also about laying bare the contextual background in which this artist lived and has in turn highlighted inequalities created by historical writings. This study has, at the same time, drawn on the usefulness of having her history recorded in the first place as a means of gaining insight about it. This examination therefore presents an opportunity to remedy and reshape past oversights and create newer readings of Mgudlandlu's position in the art world.

As Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michele Pickover and Graeme Reid articulate about the function of archives in the book *Refiguring the Archive*:

> For the archive is also always already being refigured; the technologies of creation, preservation and use, for instance, are changing all the time; physically the archive is being added to and subtracted from, and is in dynamic relation with its physical environment; organisational dynamics are ever shifting; and the archive is porous to societal processes and discourses – although at certain junctures, like the one South Africa finds itself now, formal conduits need to be put in place (2002: 7).

Similarly, Mgudlandlu's archive also participates in the evolution of archives. This is even more so when this archive is re-exhibited, such as was the case in the restage. The restage, which now becomes another layer of her exhibition archive, emerges as a response to a need to critically reflect on the history of artists whose position in history have for a long time been overlooked. As a result, this new reading of this archive is also placed back into this archive. There now exist two layers of this archive, the older version and newer version. Such an exercise allows for future exploration of history to be challenged from a perspective of art historical recording that changes over time. This examination has shown the continued function of archives and the institutions holding them. Foregrounding contextual issues within archiving practices enables an understanding of how certain positions, occupations

and theoretical analysis are applied. This thesis does not situate and fix this history to only then and now, but also invites future critical readings of this archive.

Although I did not delve much into other aspects of this archive in greater detail, such as the history of the public institutions (art museums) and the reading of actual artworks, the task of the thesis was limited to Mgudlandlu's biography as a way of understanding her public position and the creation of artists' biographies. I was interested in how this artist's biography speaks to my own position, visibility and agency. In this instance I align my thoughts with Arnold's declaration:

> As a woman I want to know my own history and my past; as a woman artist I want to know about the lives and creativity of other women. Without this knowledge I am powerless to position myself securely in the present and cannot claim my rights to the future (1996: np).

I am also exercising Qunta's motivation to 'self-determine', as situated through the history of Mgudlandlu. Before reaching the decision to conduct research on Mgudlandlu, I had two master's research proposals that were approved in two institutions but were never realised. The first was a proposal approved at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), titled 'Sociopolitical Influences on the Work of Selected Black Women Artists in South Africa, 1960 to 2008'. In this proposal I was interested in how sociopolitical aspects of the art of women are positioned. This proposal centred on the influence of South African sociopolitics on the works of black women artists. It was an attempt to investigate the extent to which South African politics, art trends, social and cultural circumstances influenced their work. It aimed to provide a chronological narrative on the development of black women's art from 1960 to 2008, looking at selected artists. The artists I was interested to include were Gladys Mgudlandlu, Noria Mabaso, Helen Sebidi, Bongi Dhlomo, Berni Searle, Tracey Rose and Bongi Bengu. By examining and analysing the work of these black women artists, I wanted to determine their contribution and influence in a contemporary art context.

Soon after this proposal was approved, I received a scholarship from the Ford Foundation to study full time. The Ford Foundation could not sponsor the continuation of this master's through DUT as the university was not one of the institutions the foundation had established a partnership with around this scholarship. I then opted to deregister and move to an institution where the Ford Foundation had partnerships. I chose the University of the

Witwatersrand. The other motivation for this decision was to use this opportunity to experience a different academic environment, as I had already received my undergraduate qualifications from DUT. At Wits I continued to pursue my initial research interest but shifted it slightly as I was beginning to realise how much bigger the scope of this research was than the first proposal. I then proposed a thesis titled 'Defining the Self: Examining Artistic Strategies in the Work of Black Women Artists in South Africa' (2010).

In this proposal I was to investigate select works of six South African black women artists. In the form of a thesis and a curated exhibition, this study was to reflect on artistic strategies these women artists employ in their work. On the one hand, it was to reflect on how these strategies critique social concerns such as gender, culture and race, while on the other hand advancing their operational position as creative and intellectual producers in the South African context. The premise of this study was to illuminate the neglected contribution of black women artists in the history of South African visual arts. Through black feminist theories that centre on autobiography and self-definition, the study was to provide a complex and reflective reading of black women artists' artistic strategies in the field of visual arts from the 1960s to the 2000s. My selected artists and works for this study included Gladys Mgudlandlu's *Cape Town City Bowl* (1967), Bongi Dhlomo's *Removals* (1982), Helen Sebidi's *Tears of Africa* (1988), Tracey Rose's *The Kiss* (2006), Nandipha Mntambo's *The fighters* (2006) and Zanele Muholi's *Aftermath* (2004).

I mention these two proposals to highlight the extent of my interest in this notion of 'self-determination'. As such, these research interests operate in locating myself through the history of other women artists, such as in Mgudlandlu's visibility. In retrospect, it is interesting to see how my curatorial work has over the years become more and more concerned with the position of women artists.

To reference literary works of black feminist such a hooks, Collins, Gqola, Baderoon, Dabi and Malatjie is both about declaring gained visibilities for women in the arts and about creating role models that are about creating discourses around black women's agency. Even though hooks and Collins come with views from the diaspora, these links show that the global can also be linked to the local, and that the local does not always have to try to associate itself with the global. The increasing number of South African women writers and

scholars also indicates that this area will one day eclipse black women's limited voice in the writing of art history. This makes me believe that the above artists whom I was not able to incorporate into this study are already beginning to receive critical attention within the academy in a manner that actualises their agency. Through exhibitions, catalogues and other platforms of knowledge production, these artists are increasingly becoming repositioned in ways that reassert their autobiographical strategies beyond the conditional limitation of context, thereby reassessing how context allows for newer readings of these artists. Through the dissertation and the exhibition, this re-narration and reinterpretation of Gladys Mgudlandlu's exhibitions reflects critically on her creative and intellectual strategies, as well as her contribution to the South African art practices and discourse.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLIC PROJECTS (1960-1979)

1960s	Murals of the Department of Bantu Education
1961	Solo Exhibition, *Contact* Magazine Boardroom, Cape Town, 26[1] September 1961 Room 404 (*Contact* Boardroom), 47 Parliament Street, Cape Town
1962	Solo exhibition, Rodin Gallery, Cape Town (Long street), 15 -29 August 1962 Solo exhibition, Arts Hall, Port Elizabeth, December 1962
1963	Group show, Durban Art Museum[1] Art SA Today, Durban (Award for etching) (30 Jul – 18 Aug) Solo exhibition, Rodin Gallery, Cape Town (19 November - 1 December 1963)
1964	Solo exhibition, Alder Fielding Galleries, Johannesburg, 14 October 1964 Solo exhibition, Rodin Gallery, Cape Town African Art. Attic Craft Gallery, January 1964 S A Association of Arts, August 1964
1967	Solo exhibition, Rodin Gallery, Cape Town (2nd – 19th August, 1967)
1968	Group show, Bantu Folk Art Exhibition, F. S. Malan Museum, University of Fort Hare (invited with the sculptor Michael Zondi)
1971	Group show, Association of Arts Gallery, Cape Town,1 February1971
1972	Solo Exhibition, King Williams Town Solo Exhibition, East London
1979	Group show, Contemporary African Art in South Africa (touring South Africa)[1]
	Gladys Mgudlandlu dies

1985	*Women Artists in South Africa*. South African National Gallery, Cape Town, (16.05 – 30.06. 85) Lynn McClelland and Lucy Alexander (curators).
1988	*The Neglected Tradition*, Johannesburg Art Gallery, Steven Sack (curator). Johannesburg
1990	*150 South African Paintings, Past and Present* (Lucy Alexander and Evelyn Cohen 1990), publication pg 118 (Mgudlandlu) – not sure if this was an exhibition as well.
1997	*Land and Lives*, Johannesburg Art Gallery , Elza Miles (curator), Johannesburg (travelling show – Nelson Mandela Museum, SANG)
1999	*Emergence; Standard Bank Art Collection*, Grahamstown Three South Africa Dealers, Recent Acquisitions', BCI Fine Art, Michael Stevenson. Sue Ollemans and Deon Viljoen (curators) (18 – 21 August 1999)
2000	*Stained Paper, South African Image in Watercolour*. Standard Bank Art Gallery. Keith Dietrich and Karin Skawran (curators). (15 April – 10 June 2000)
2002	*Nomfanekiso*, Retrospective on Gladys Mgudlandlu. Johannesburg Art Gallery. Elza Miles (curator). (Travelling show, Tatham Art Gallery, NSA - now KZNSA, Iziko Museum - June 2003, Oliewen Huis Art Museum 15 Jul – 17 Aug 2003)
2005	*Sekoto to Sihlali; Nine Black Pioneers of South Africa*. Warren Seibrits Modern and Contemporary Art, Johannesburg. (13 February) *New Beginnings*. Standard Bank Art Gallery. Barbara Fremantle (Curator). March – April 9, 2005
2010	*The Lie of the Land*. Representations of the South African Landscape. The Iziko Michaelis Collection, Old Town House. Michael Godby (curator). June – September 2010
2012	*A Fragile Archive*. Johannesburg Art Gallery. Nontobeko Ntombela (curator). 29 January – 8 April 2012

Appendix 2

Newspaper clippings

Invitation card 1942, Paintings and Drawings by Valerie Desmore. Argus Gallery, January.
Invitation card 1943, Paintings and Drawings by Valerie Desmore. Ashbey's Galleries, 16 – 30 Nov.
The Cape Times 1942,'Schoolgirl Exhibitor', 24 January.
The Cape Argus 1942, 'Young Artist's Work. Exhibition opened by Sir Herbert Stanley', 22 January.
The Cape Argus 1942, 'Child Artist's Work. Exhibition at the Argus Gallery' 19 January.
The Cape Argus 1942, 'Child Artist'sTalent and Spontaneity'.23 January.
Prebble, P1943 'Paint and Plastics. "Off with His Head"' *Trek,* 26 March, p18.
The Cape Times 1943, 'Student's Pictures,' 17 November.
The Cape Times 1943, 'Under the Arches,' 20 November.
The Cape Argus 1943, 'Valarie Desmore,' 16 November.
The Cape Times 1945,'Valerie Desmore,' 11 December.
The Cape Times 1945, 'Here and There,'7 February.
The Cape Argus 1947, 'Artists Assist Charities,' 5 June.
Matthys, B1959,'Good Start For A New Gallery',*The Cape Times*, 30 December.
Dubow, N1960,'Well-Chosen Works are Shown in New City Gallery',*The Cape Argus,* 5 January
Contact Magazine 1960,'Paton Condemns Lumumba',27 August, pg 2
Dubow, N 1961, 'Cafda to Sponsor Art Exhibition in City', *The Cape Argus*, 12 January.
Dubow, N 1961,'A first exhibition of paintings',*The Cape Argus*, 25 September.
Dubow, N 1961, 'African teacher has creative spark',*The Cape Argus*, 26 September.
Contact Magazine 1960,'Women, Children Sleep on Durban's Pavements', 22nd October, pg 2
Contact Magazine 1960, 'Government to Strike Hard at real Opponents',22 October, pg 2
Contact Magazine 1961, 'Now "Bantuized" Education for Coloureds?,' 5 October, pg 6
Contact Magazine 1961,'Successful Exhibition in "Contact" Boardroom', 19 October, pg 7
Contact Magazine 1961, 'Nobel Prize for a Great South African', 2November pg3
The Cape Argus 1962,'She has to paint... or her head hurts,'15 August.
The Cape Times 1962,'Exhibition by African Woman To-day'15 August.
Dubow, N 1962.'Gladys Mgudlandlu will Mean Something Soon,'*The Cape Argus*,16 August.
Adams, V 1962. 'Artist's First Pencils were Cut from Stone',*The Cape Times*,17 August.
Glaser, M 1962,'Charming Show by an African Woman Artist',*The Cape Times*, 20 August.
Bouhner C. A. 1962,'Gladys Mgudlandlu. Aardse Eenvoud Hou Haar by Waarheid', *Die Burger,* 22 August.
*Contact Magazine*1962, "Coloured Education" Fits the Apartheid Pattern', 23 August.
Eastern Province Herald 1962,'SA Art record for African',27 August.
The Cape Times 1962,'Even Art Critics Buy Her Work', *The Cape Times*, 31 August.
*The World*1962,'African women artists at Cape Sells R 1000 pictures',6 September.
*Eastern Province Herald*1962,'Only African Woman Artists for City', 27 October.
*The World*1962,'Woman to hold exhibition', 31 October, front page.
*Eastern Province Herald*1962,'Her Paintings come to city after Cape Success',7 November.
Eastern Province Herald 1962, 'Let Them Draw',24 November.
K. L. B. 1962,'Exhibition by African at Arts Hall,'*Eastern Province Herald*, 8 November.
Cilliers, A. 20 November 1962. Picture lead to soul searching. The Cape Times.
Evening Post 1962, ' Let Them Draw, She Says',24 November.
Eastern Province Herald 1962, ' Let Them Draw, She Says', 24 November.
*The Cape Times*Unknown writer. 9 May 1963. All Race Art Exhibition.
Dubow, N 1963,'New Talent on Horizon Seen in Exhibition by Polly Street Artists,' *The Cape Argus,* 4 July.
Cilliers, A 1963,'Work by Africans is Milestone in Our Country's Art,'*The Cape Times,* 6 June.
The Cape Times 1963, 'Prize Painting,' 30 July.
*The Cape Times*1963,'Art Judges in Row Over Exhibition', 20 July.
The Cape Argus 1963, 'Art of Nation' exhibition aims at better human relations,11 July.
The Cape Argus 1963,'Native Artist Entertains Consul's Wife,' 8 November
*The Cape Times*1963, 'Envoy's Wife Sees Nyanga Artist's Work,'9 November.
The Cape Argus 1963,'Broken Wrist Stops Gladys from Painting,' 13 November.
The Cape Argus 1963,'R105 work by Gladys sells in 3 Minutes,' 14 November.
Cilliers, A 1963,'Artist Offer A Vital Realism To be Savoured,'*The Cape Times*, 15 November.
The Cape Argus 1963, 'Crowds of People,' 15 November.
Fitzroy V. M. 18 November 1963. Those Angry Artists.*The Cape Argus*

Dubow, Neville. 19 November 1963. Mgudlandlu Exhibition: folk art finds new voice. *The Cape Argus*
The Cape Argus 1963, 'Native artist's success,'19 November.
The Cape Times 1963,'43 Pictures Sold: R 1 400. Native Artist's Success,'19 November.
Eastern Province Herald 1963,'Teacher Artist Praised in Cape',20 November.
Head, B 1963,'Gladys Mgudlandlu. The exuberant Innocent,'*The New African*, 30 November, pg 209
B. B. 1963,'Gladys, The "African Queen" of Nyanga, Does It Again',*The Cape Times,* 7 December.
*The Cape Times*1963, 'Time Off,'12 December.
*The Cape Times*1964, 'Two Exhibitions Opened',29 January
*The Cape Times*1964, "High Tea" for African Artist,'28 May
Cillie, D. P. 1964,'Uit my politieke pen,'*Die Burger*, 30 May
Die Transvaler 1964,'Bantoekuns in Goudstad,'9 June.
*The Cape Times*1964, 'On View at SA Association of Arts Salon,' 15 August.
Sunday Chronicle 1964, 'Kaffir beer for Gladys's Guests,'4 October.
The Star 1964, 'Ender Stove – her Paintings,'6 October.
The Cape Argus 1964,'Miss Mgudlandlu Finds Paintings under the Stove',6 October.
The Star 1964, 'Gladys Mgudlandlu – Painter',12 October.
*The Cape Times*1964, 'African Artist Flies to Rand To-day,'12 October.
The Star 1964, 'Pictures and beer arrive,'13 October.
The Cape Argus 1964, 'Gladys Mgudlandlu,'14 October.
The Cape Argus 1964, 'City Artist on Rand,' 14 October.
The Cape Argus 1964, 'Gay crowd was tonic to Gladys,'14 October.
Die Transvaler 1964,'Bantobier en sjerrie of Kunsuitstalling,' 14 October
Die Transvaler 1964,'Bantoebier – selfs met musiek – ongewild,'14 October.
The Star 1964,'Cape artist's show opens in Johannesburg,'14 October.
H. E. W. 1964, 'Uninhibited paintings,'*Rand Daily Mail*, 16 October.
Jewish Affairs 1964,'The crowd made Gladys Happy,' October.
De Beer, A 1965, 'Haar verfkwa laatlegendes lewe',*baNtu,* January .
Lamb. D. May 1965, 'The world of Glady Mgudlandlu,'*Perspective*.
Tema, S 1966, 'We're Culture Starved'*The World*, 17 March.
Kai. E. 1966,'Meet Six Artists of the Cape. Their work debunks the idea of a so-called 'Coloured Culture'', 4 June.
*The Cape Times*1967, 'Art Showing for Gladys Mgudlandlu,'3 August.
Dubow, N 1967, 'Mgudlandlu Crossroads,'*The Cape Argus*, 11 August.
The Cape Argus 1967,'Gladys Mgudlandlu's work fetches R 1000,'16 August.
The Natal Daily News 1967,'Xhosa Artist Sells Works', 16 August.
The Star 1967,'Success for Cape Xhosa Artist,' 18 August.
Alexander, F. L. 1967, 'Glady Mgudlandlu op Nuwe pad','*Die Burger*, 19 August.
News Check 1967,'A very good Week,'25 August.
The cape Argus 1968,'City Artists to Lecture at Fort Hare,' 14 September.
Eastern Province Herald 1968,'Artists honoured at Fort Hare', 25 September.
The Cape Argus 1971, 'Dreamer-Imaginist' To Have Another Exhibition', 26 January, p 18.
Green, E 1971,'African Artist has come a Long Way,' *TheCape Argus*, 2 February.
The Cape Argus 1971,'At the Opening,' 3 February.
King William's Town Mercury 1971,'What's on at the Museum,'15 April.
*The Cape Times*1971,'Gladys Mgudlandlu: Association of Arts,' Cape Times, 8 February.
Stock, J 1971,'Complementary Contrasts in African Art,'*TheCape Times*, 30 December, pg10.
The Daily Dispatch 1972, 'Arts and Crafts',29 January.
M. C. 1972,'Gladys Mgudlandlu – A Crude Chagall or Perhaps Kandinsky,' *The Daily Dispatch*, 19 January.
F. N. 1972, 'Works Breathe tribal spirit,' *Eastern Province Herald*, 19 January.
Kulati,G. T. 1972,'Mgudlandlu's art a real eye opener,'*Imvo Zabantsundu,* 22 January.
Die Burger 1973, "n Werk van Larry Scully...",16 May.
Sunday Chronicle 1974, 'When Gladys Smiles its' Because it Hurts'.16 October, p196.
*The Cape Times*1974,'Arts for Scholars fund,'3 October.
Ladan, E 1979,'Black Artist's death leaves a void in Cape Art Scene',*The Cape times*, 26 June.
The Arts Calendar September 1979.
Mullins, J 1972, 'There's an Art Boom on'. *ArtLook*.

Appendix 3



Gladys Mgudlandlu (1917-1979), *Poultry*, 1961, charcoal and gouache on paper

The Johannesburg Art Gallery invites you to the exhibition

A Fragile Archive

curated by Nontobeko Ntombela

Opening reception **29 January 2012 at 4pm**
29 January - 8 April 2012

A Fragile Archive is an exhibition on the works of a pioneering woman artist, Gladys Mgudlandlu (1917-1979). It examines the role of history, memory and archive in the positioning of this artist in public. The exhibition is centred around an installation that re-stages Mgudlandlu's first exhibition in 1961, and also includes works of other women artists selected from public collections.

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For exhibition information please contact Nontobeko at Nontobekon@joburg.org.za

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King George St, between Wolmarans and Noord St, Joubert Park, Johannesburg
Secure parking available

Appendix 4

PRESS COVERAGE: A Fragile Archive

Radio

SAFM, 3 February, 8pm, Michelle Constant's Friday show, prerecorded interview
SAFM, 16 February, 1pm, live interview

Online press

Historical perspective on women artists
(http://www.artlink.co.za/news_article.htm?contentID=29124)

Print press

19 January 2012, *The Beeld,* 'Baanbreker-Vroue Weer Bekyk in Groetpuit Stalling' pg 10
20 January 2012, The *New Age,* Sizwe Mathe,
30 January 2012, The *Sowetan,* Patience Bambele, 'New Take on History', pg 18
3 February 2012, *The Times,* Jackie May, the Big Review, 'A Tribute to Real Pioneers', pg 15
6 February 2012, *The Sunday Times,* Robyn Sassen, 'Gaps Show Void of Neglect of these Artists', *pg 6*
19 February 2012 *City Press, Percy Mabandu,* A Fragile Memory
Pancha, B. 2012. *Fresh Eyes* in Art South Africa. 60 (01): 18 - 19